

Yakir Garavelas  
HU090J/Frawley  
Illustrative essay

The painting “Café Terrace at Night” is definitely one of Vincent Van Gogh’s better art pieces. A remarkable and unique example of contrasts in a painting.

The painting is simply of a street café, with only the night shy shedding light over it. The painting is dark, with only the light from windows and the stars in the sky making the café come to life.

In the foreground, the cobblestones of the street that are dark with a cold blue but they are illuminated by the light from the café itself. The cobblestones lead our eyes to the main idea, the café itself. The street in the foreground is in perfect visual balance with the dark night skies above. While the cobblestones get the light from the café and only a bit of the dark blue color that they are made of is shown, the skies are dark with warm colored stars. There is a visual balance throughout the piece.



The middle ground shows a café. It draws the eyes of the observer and leads them right to the main idea of the piece. The eyes wander to the cobblestones, then to the right of the piece, to the tiny store that stands in the same line of the café. The tiny store that is made of light and warm colors is located in the dark street but on the left side of the piece, to the right of the café, a dark blue door that has the same value of the street. It resembles the skies as well by the blue color. It is another visual balance in the piece with light and dark and warm and cold colors.

The street is coming to life because of the café as it seems. Again, the warm color in it and the light shows it. The people who sit in the café are wearing dark cloths while the people in the middle of the piece wear bright cloths. There is a waiter in the middle of the café that wears

bright colored cloths. It seems as if the people that are just getting to the café bring life to the street.

The rest of the street, behind the people is all dark. There are few lights in the buildings in the background. That's the only indication that the street is not completely deserted. The bright color in those windows leads the eyes and shows depth in the piece. We can see a use of values in the buildings that create that depth.

Vincent's work was always precise and the drawing itself was probably done with a perspective frame. He would choose the center of the drawing always around the middle of the painting. Then he looked for strong vertical lines around that center. Those lines were drawn in warm colors. Afterwards he looked for other vertical lines and drew them with cold colors.

To get harmony he searched for horizontal lines. Vincent arranged them in tiny groups of horizontal lines. We can see that on the cobblestones and on the windows and the houses in the background. To get more intention to the center he drew in the foreground lines in the direction of that center. Again, we can see that in the cobblestones.

Vincent used a local color when he stayed in Arles but used charcoals when he stayed in Paris. He used tubes for this painting. For *Café Terrace at Night* Van Gogh used the following colors: Prussian blue and viridian and some carmine for the blue air and the door in the front. Yellows were only chrome lemon and for the orange he used the chrome lemon and geranium lake.

He made the painting in one rush in a rapid application of paint crossing the center. The white of the stars can be found in the tables. The orange of the windows can be found at the doors and so on. Vincent was attempting to create harmony, by intensifying of the colors themselves and by arranging them in their complementary and simultaneous contrasts.