

Bars, Cafés and Restaurants as Artists See Them

Artists are well known for hanging out in bars, restaurants and cafés. It's no wonder those places are featured in many important works of art. This is just a small sampling of some of the great works of art that showcase eating and drinking establishments.

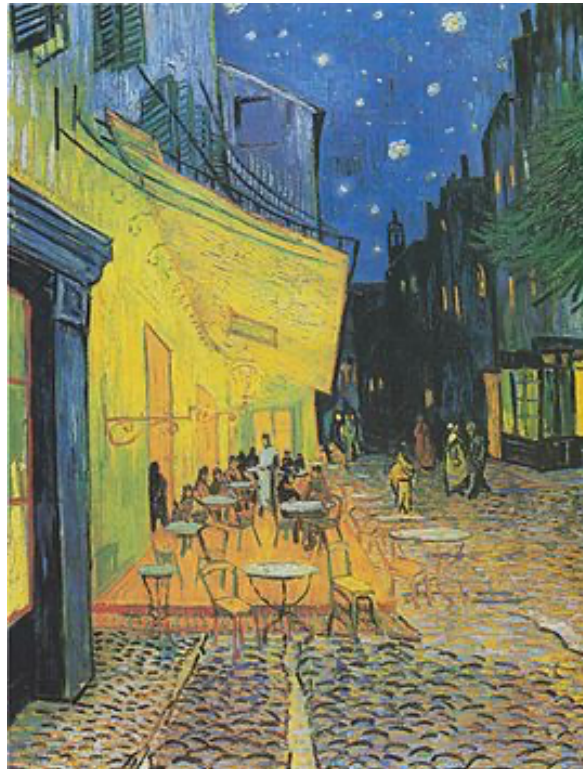
The last major work by French modernist artist, Édouard Manet (*Un Bar aux Folies- Bergère*, 1832-1833), is a scene depicting a barmaid conversing with a gentleman who can be seen in the mirror behind her. Critics long debated whether the perspective shown in the mirror was even possible. However, a reconstruction in 2000 demonstrated that, in fact, the scene could be reproduced as Manet had painted it.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the French Impressionist painter, used the Maison Fournaise at Chatou as the backdrop for *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1881). The canvas was one of the largest painted by Renoir; measuring 51 X 68 inches, the work took 16 months to complete. Part of it was painted *en plein air*; part was painted in the studio, where the 14 figures in the painting, mostly friends of Renoir, posed, never all at one time. The Maison Fournaise was a floating restaurant on the Seine; in Renoir's time, boaters could paddle up to the restaurant for lunch. The restaurant closed in 1906 and eventually became derelict. Purchased by the city of Chatou, it reopened as a museum and restaurant in 1990.



Vincent Van Gogh painted *Café, Le Soir* (alternatively known as *Café Terrace at Night* or *The Café Terrace on the Place du Forum*) when he was living in Arles. This was the first painting in which Van Gogh used a starry background (1888). *The Starry Night* would follow a year later. The positioning of the stars in the sky is apparently precise enough that one can tell within 48 hours what date the painting was rendered. The café in the painting is still in existence, now known as Le Café Van Gogh (which, unfortunately, TripAdvisor only gives 1 ½ stars). You can stand at the northeast corner of the Place du Forum where the artist set up his easel. Although Van Gogh never signed this painting, he mentioned it in three letters so experts are certain of its provenance.



In the same year, Van Gogh also painted *The Night Café*, where the five customers in the scene have been described as drunks and derelicts. The café in the painting is the Café de la Gare in the Place Lamartine in Arles. The sole standing figure in the painting is said to be the café proprietor, Joseph-Michel Ginoux. In a letter to his brother, Theo, Van Gogh joked that Ginoux had taken so much of his money that he'd told the cafe owner it was time to take his revenge by painting the place.



While Van Gogh was living in Arles, he invited Paul Gauguin to visit, to help develop an artists' community. While there, Gauguin and Van Gogh worked on painting the same subjects. Gauguin combined two of Van Gogh's paintings, *The Night Café*, pictured above, and *Madame Ginoux* (or *L'Arlésienne*), landlady of the Café de la Gare and wife of Joseph-Michel Ginoux. Gauguin's 1888 painting, *Night Café at Arles (Madame Ginoux)*, uses the café as the background for his portrait of Madame Ginoux.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was famous for his depictions of the flamboyant Paris nightlife, in particular Le Moulin Rouge. One of the best-known post-impressionist French painters, Toulouse-Lautrec had an unparalleled ability to capture the gaudy side of the nightlife in which he himself participated. Toulouse-Lautrec died of alcoholism at the age of 37. Despite his early demise, the artist left behind over 700 canvases, 363 prints and posters, over 5000 drawings and some ceramic and glass work.

The painting below, entitled *Monsieur Boileau at the Café* (1893), shows a somewhat glassy eyed bon vivant whose glass of green liquid undoubtedly holds absinthe. Absinthe (The Green Fairy or the Green Witch) was a favorite drink of artists and writers, including Toulouse-Lautrec, as it was known for its hallucinogenic properties.

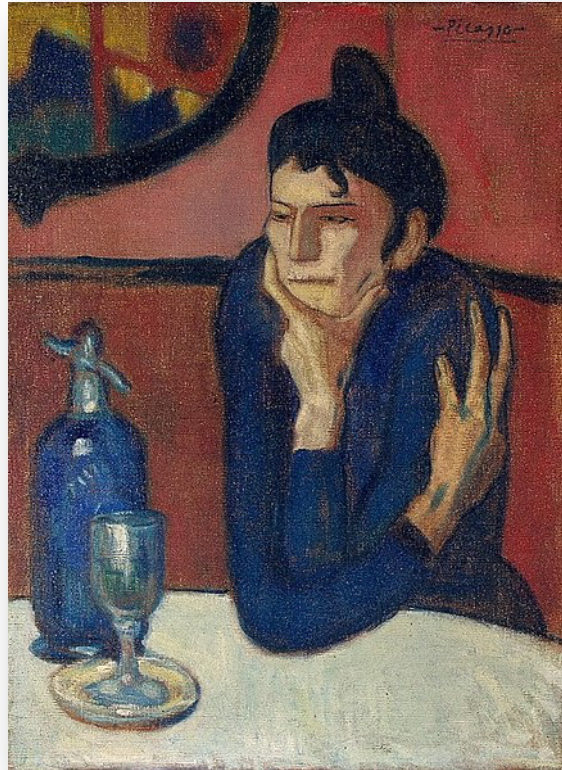


Absinthe is also featured in the Edgar Degas painting, *L'absinthe* (1876). Its original title was *In a Café*. The painting portrays a couple seated side by side in a café, looking the worse for wear. The café pictured in the painting, La Nouvelle Athenes in Place Pigalle, was a hangout for artists and intellectuals. Degas, a French impressionist painter and sculptor, frequented the café, along with the likes of Matisse and Van Gogh.

When first exhibited in both France and England, *L'absinthe* was panned by critics who called it “ugly and disgusting” and “degraded and uncouth”.



Absinthe is again a presence in Pablo Picasso's 1902 Blue Period painting *Femme au Café* (or *Absinthe Drinker*). In this painting, the Absinthe Drinker wraps herself in outsized hands, as if trying to occupy as little space as possible, conveying a sense of isolation and loneliness.



Edward Hopper's most famous painting, *Nighthawks* (1942), portrays four people in a diner late at night as seen through the establishment's glass window. An American realist painter, Hopper's career was significantly advanced by his relationship with Josephine Nivison, an accomplished artist in her own right. When the two started dating, Hopper hadn't sold a painting in years. Nivison convinced the curators of her then current show to feature his work alongside hers. When Nivison bequeathed a trove of his and her paintings to the Whitney upon her death in 1968, the museum kept most of his work and discarded much of hers. The couple had an eccentric lifestyle and a difficult marriage. The actress, Helen Hayes, said of Edward Hopper, "I had never met a more misanthropic, grumpy, grouchy individual in my life...".

Nighthawks seems to convey a sense of isolation in a big city. Hopper's wife Josephine was actually the model for the woman at the counter in the red dress.

