



# The Potato Eaters

Van Gogh's First Masterpiece

Bregje Gerritse

<b>ISBN</b>	9789493070394
<b>Publisher</b>	Exhibitions International
<b>Binding</b>	Paperback / softback
<b>Territory</b>	United Kingdom and Ireland
<b>Size</b>	240 mm x 170 mm
<b>Pages</b>	104 Pages
<b>Illustrations</b>	60 color
<b>Price</b>	£23.50

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*The Potato Eaters* is one of Vincent van Gogh's most famous works. The artist himself described it in 1887 as 'after all the best thing I did'. He completed it in the spring of 1885 while living with his parents in Nuenen after his brother Theo had asked him to paint a 'masterwork' for the Paris art market. Van Gogh's fascination for peasant life led him to choose as his subject a scene of a simple meal by lamplight. He was convinced that 'there's life in it', which was precisely what he was seeking. Bregje Gerritse, a researcher at the Van Gogh Museum, describes in this book how meticulously Van Gogh went about preparing *The Potato Eaters*. Through his preliminary studies and letters, we get to know an ambitious painter working constantly to improve his skills. We discover the details of his location, make the acquaintance of the figures in the painting and read how his friends and critics responded to a work that Van Gogh wanted so badly to be his artistic breakthrough.

The author **Bregje Gerritse** is a researcher at the Van Gogh Museum and curator of the exhibition *The Potato Eaters: Mistake or Masterpiece?* She has previously contributed to the exhibition and publication *On the Verge of Insanity: Van Gogh and His Illness* and she is currently one of the authors working on the forthcoming collection catalogue *Vincent van Gogh: Paintings 3: Arles, Saint-Rémy and Auvers*