

## Two of a Kind



### VISIT THE BMA

and see where the paint  
is especially thick and  
especially thin.

### *A Pair of Boots* Vincent van Gogh

We all expect our right and left shoes to look the same, aside from a scuffmark or two. But these two boots look completely different from each other. By turning one of the pair upside down, Vincent van Gogh reveals twice as much about how the boots look.

The dark leather boot on the right appears a bit beaten up. The toe is scuffed, the tongue is askew, the edges are worn, and the leather laces are all undone. Nonetheless, this high hobnail boot stands up straight and holds its shape, battered though it may be. Leaning against the sturdy, rough-looking boot is its upside-down counterpart: an orange sole with patches of green and an array of metal hobnails that catch the light. Perhaps the close, almost tender arrangement of the two boots suggests the dependence of the fiery but unstable Vincent on his more responsible brother, Theo, who was helping Vincent regain his health at the time he was painting this picture.

We know that Vincent purchased workman's boots (once owned by a street peddler) from a flea market. Perhaps he wore them himself as he tramped along muddy roads, perhaps not. In any case, it seems that Vincent found their rough appearance appealing and used them in his painting to express his feeling of solidarity with hardworking, downtrodden peasants and laborers

#### Challenge for Students

Draw or paint a "portrait" of a pair of shoes with one shoe right side up and the other shoe upside down..

Print the image on page 2 for your students.

# THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART



Vincent van Gogh. *A Pair of Boots*. 1887. Oil on canvas. The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Cone Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland, BMA 1950.302