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Film of Van Gogh allegedly discovered

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — Photography was still young and celluloid film had scarcely been invented when Vincent van Gogh committed suicide in 1890. Yet a team of Dutch filmmakers claimed Monday it has made a documentary about a snippet of film shot that year in which the artist allegedly appears.

The Van Gogh film will be shown in his native village of Zundert next Saturday as part of celebrations marking the 150th year of his birth, even though the record of Van Gogh's work and the lack of other evidence appeared to cast doubt on the claim that a grainy passer-by in the film was the brilliant but troubled painter.

According to Lumineus Film Productions producer Jeroen Neus, Van Gogh was attending a welcoming party for a new pastor in Zundert when he was coincidentally captured on film for a few seconds by an early film enthusiast.

The image of a bearded man wearing a hat, apparently a frame from the film, is shown next to a Van Gogh self-portrait on the Lumineus Web site.

The film supposedly lay for almost a century in a damp attic before it was discovered in 1984 and restored.

Bob de Graaff, the restorer, said Van Gogh was identified by comparing his face to the few known photographs of him and his many self-portraits; by his reddish beard which appears gray in the black-and-white film; and by his strange gait, allegedly a sign of Van Gogh's mental illness.

If the sequence is genuine, it would be one of the earliest films ever discovered in the Netherlands. An early patent was granted for a rudimentary celluloid camera in Britain in 1889, but the first recorded public showing anywhere of a movie wasn't until 1895, five years after the film was claimed to be shot.

The precise date of the film was not known. Van Gogh fatally shot himself in July 1890 in Auvers, north of Paris. Throughout 1890 the prolific painter produced a constant stream of work, including 77 paintings in the last three months of his life.

Evelien Lafaille, a spokeswoman for the Van Gogh Museum, said the artist was living in southern France for most of 1890. There is no written confirmation he visited the Netherlands

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and no known painting from what would have been a lengthy trip north.

However, Neus said Van Gogh hinted he was planning a trip home in a letter to a friend.

The old film was allegedly discovered by Belgian historian Theo Vandeneijnden and made into a documentary by American-born filmmaker Jerry Nasa, with funding from Zundert's cultural society.

In a statement about the film, the society said Vandeneijnden is affiliated with the Catholic University of Leuven, but a university spokesman said no one by that name was on the faculty.

Vandeneijnden and Nasa couldn't be reached for comment.

Neus said his company is in talks with Dutch television to sell the rights to broadcast the documentary.

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