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the preface, the typography, the printing technology, the identity of the author, the book's shape, its distribution channel and early reception, and the marginalia its pages collect from a reader all reflect its place and impact in history. To a time traveller from elsewhere, a meme from today would reveal the same information.

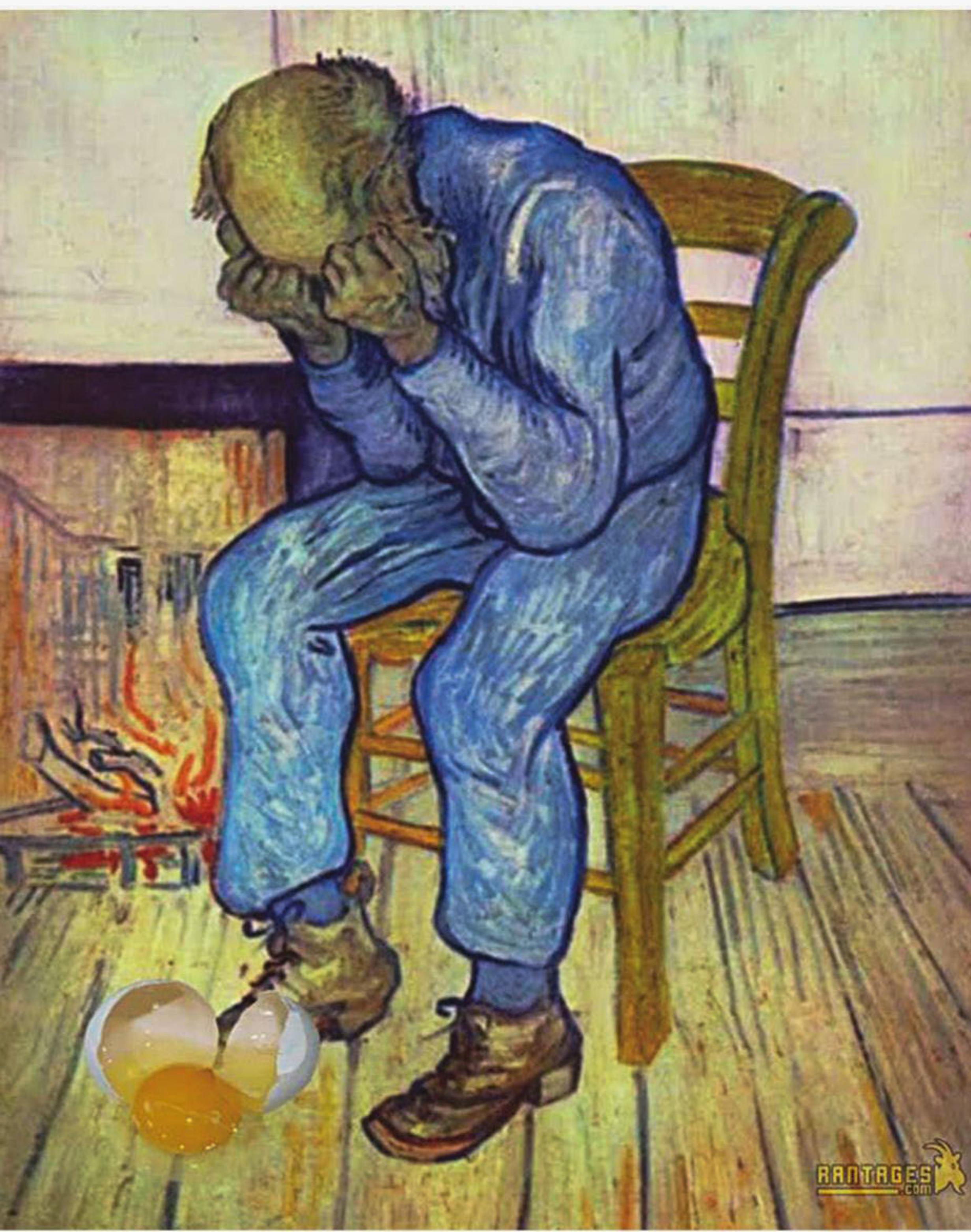


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Certain memes take classical art and turn them into accessible images.

This is what was going on in 2019, it will convey. This is what politicians were saying, how classical art was being made contemporary, how cats and babies were reacting to the world around them. This is what was considered funny. This is the medium through which such humour was shared.

It will also reveal the way that the very shape of communication has evolved over the years and where it stands now—from linear lines and pages of text once, to non-linear, multi-dimensional images containing entire networks of information today. What would have taken entire speeches and transport across oceans once is conveyed to strangers around the world in a few seconds today.

Of course, you can't talk reproduction of images without bringing in Walter Benjamin. Reflecting on the developments in art in the 20th century in his essay "The Work of Art in



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the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", the German philosopher and critic wrote how reproduction of art "permits the reproduction to meet the beholder in his own particular situation [and] reactivates the object reproduced." Memes are the perfect example of such replication. Certain memes take classical art, movie stills, and even news updates and turn them into such easily-recognisable images, such common currency, that the audience is forced to revisit the original

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time and time again. Hence people the world over become familiar with Michaelangelo's fresco *The Creation of Adam*, with *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and with the developments of DUCSU elections in Dhaka. Such contact lifts the barrier between high and low culture, between international news and dinner table conversations. It makes far-off parts of the world relatable.

In addition to being a simile, a metaphor, and a mirror of culture, therefore, a meme is also a democratising device. It pools in the same medium social commentary on film, religion, celebrities, world leaders, teen culture, and animals doing hilarious things. It takes a rare Donald Trump and splits him into infinite jokes through infinite reproductions. As autocracy spreads its reach across the world under various guises, policing what you can say and who you can point a finger at on public platforms, a meme at once liberates and protects, offers a platform for expression as well as a safety filter. You don't need to explicitly mention which event or personality you're commenting on. Through mere allusion and a tiny mishmash of text and image, you dispatch into the world an opinion, and get nods of approval, agreement, or even dissent from countless others. It is what communication and expression can be, if not how it ought to be.

us on /Sandalina