

My dear Theo,

Your kind letter did me good today, honestly – so now here's for St. Rémy. But I tell you once more, if on consideration and after consulting the doctor it should perhaps be either necessary or simply advisable and wise to enlist, let's give it the same consideration as everything else and have no prejudice against it. That's all! You must put aside any idea of sacrifice in it. The other day I again wrote our sister that all through my life, or at least most of it, I have sought something other than a martyr's career, for which I am not cut out.

If I find trouble or cause it, honestly, I am aghast at it. Certainly I should respect, I should heartily admire martyrs and the like, but you must know that in Bouvard et Pécuchet, for instance, there's something very different which accords better with these little lives of ours.

And now I am packing my trunk, and probably M. Salles will go over with me as soon as he can.

Ah! what you say about Puvis and Delacroix is damn true, those two have indeed demonstrated what painting could be, but don't let's confuse things that are worlds apart. Now I as a painter shall never amount to anything important, I am absolutely sure of it. Suppose all were changed, character, education, circumstances, then this or that might have been. But we are too positive to get confused. I sometimes regret I did not simply stick to the Dutch palette with its grey tones, and brush away at landscapes of Montmartre without any fuss. I am also thinking again of beginning to draw more with a reed pen, which, like last year's views of Montmajour for instance, costs less and distracts my mind just as much.

Today I made a drawing of that sort, which has turned out very dark and rather melancholy for one of spring, but anyhow whatever happens to me and in whatever circumstances I find myself, it's something which will keep me occupied enough and in some fashion might even make me a sort of livelihood.

After all, for you as well as for me, in the long run what is having a little more or a little less to contend with to us?

Certainly you enlisted a good deal sooner than I, if we come to that, at Goupils', where, indeed, you had some pretty bad moments often enough, and didn't always get much thanks for them.

And, indeed, you did it with zeal and devotion, for just then Father was somewhat broke with that big family, and everything had to be kept going, and you threw yourself into it body and soul – during my illness I have been thinking of all these old things with a good deal of emotion.

And after all, the main thing is to feel our closeness to one another, and that is not yet shaken.

I have a sort of hope that with what on the whole I know of my art, the time will come when I shall produce again, even in the asylum. What use would the more artificial life of an artist in Paris be to me? I should never be more than half taken in by it, and so should lack the initial enthusiasm indispensable to starting me off.

It is amazing how well I am physically, but it isn't enough to be the basis of any hope for its being the same with me mentally.

I would willingly, once I am a little known there, try to become a hospital orderly little by little, in short, to work at something and have some occupation again – whatever presents itself.

I should be terribly in need of old Pangloss if in the natural course of things I should happen to turn amorous again. After all alcohol and tobacco have so much good or bad – it's rather relative – that they are anti-aphrodisiacs, if one might call it that, I think. Not always to be despised in the exercise of the arts. Well, well, that's going to be the test, and one mustn't wholly forget to poke fun at things. For virtue and temperance, I am only too afraid, will again lead me into those parts where the compass is apt to go overboard pretty quickly, and where this time I must try to have less passion and more good humour.

The passionate factor is no great matter to me, as long as the power remains, as I dare hope, of feeling affection for the fellow creatures with whom one must live.

How is old Tanguy? – you must remember me to him.

I see in the papers that there are some good things at the Salon.

Listen – do not become completely and exclusively impressionist; after all, if there is good in anything, don't let's lose sight of it. Certainly colour is progressing primarily under the influence of the impressionists, even when they go astray, but already Delacroix had reached more completeness than they.

And confound it all, Millet, who has hardly any colour, what work it is!

Madness is salutary in that one becomes less exclusive.

I am not sorry that I wanted to go into this question of the theories of colour rather technically.

As an artist you are only a link in a chain, and whatever you find or whatever you do not find, you can find comfort in it.

I have heard of an interior all in green with a woman in green at the Salon, which was well spoken of, also of a portrait by Mathey and another by Besnard, "The Siren." They also say that there is something extraordinary by someone called Zorn, but they did not say what, and that there was a Carolus Duran, "Triumph of Bacchus," bad. Nevertheless I still think his "Lady with a Glove" in the Luxembourg very good; after all, there are some

© Copyright 2001 R. G. Harrison

not-too-serious things which I like very much, such as a book like *Bel Ami*. And the work of Carolus is a little like that. However, our period has been like that, and all Badinguet's ¹ period as well. And if a painter paints as he sees, he always remains somebody.

Ah, to paint figures as Claude Monet paints landscapes! That still, in spite of everything, remains to be done, unless one is to see only Monet in all the impressionists. For after all, in figure Delacroix, Millet, and several sculptors have done far better work than the impressionists and even J. Breton. In short, my boy, let's be fair, and, while withdrawing: I tell you whenever we think we are getting too old to class ourselves with the younger men, let us remember that in our time we have loved Millet, Breton, Israëls, Whistler, Delacroix and Leys. And I'm quite sure that for my part I am pretty well convinced that I shall see no future beyond that, nor desire one.

Now society being what it is, we naturally cannot wish that it should conform to our personal needs. And so, though I am very, very glad to be going to St. Rémy, nevertheless it would be really fairer to men like myself to shove them into the Legion.

We can do nothing about it, it's more than likely that they would turn me down, at least here where what has happened to me is too well known, and above all exaggerated. I say this very, very seriously; physically I am better than I have been in years and years, and I could quite well be a soldier. Let's think this over again, even though I'm going to St. Rémy.

A good handshake for you and your wife.

Ever yours, Vincent

When I wrote that one must not forget to appreciate what is good in those who are not impressionists, I didn't mean exactly that I wanted to urge you to an unbounded admiration of the Salon, but I was thinking of a lot of men like Jourdan for example, who has just died at Avignon, of Antigna, Feyen-Perrin, all the people we used to know so well when we were younger. Why forget them or why attach no importance to their equals? Why aren't Daubigny and Quost and Jeannin colourists, for instance?

So many distinctions in impressionism have not the importance that people have chosen to see in them.

Crinolines had something pretty about them and consequently good, but in the end the fashion was fortunately short-lived for all that. Not for some people.

And thus we shall always keep a sort of passion for impressionism, but I feel that I return more and more to the ideas that I already had before I came to Paris.

Now that you are married, we don't have to live for great ideas any longer, but, believe me, for small ones only. And I find that a wonderful relief, and don't complain of it at all.

In my room I have the famous "Portrait of a Man" – the wood engraving which you know – a "Tangerine" by Monorobu (the big plate in Bing's sketchbook), the "Blade of Grass" (from the same book), the "Pietà" and the "Good Samaritan" by Delacroix, and the "Reader" by Meissonier, and then two big reed pen drawings. Just now I am reading Balzac's *Médecin de Campagne*, which is splendid; there is a character of a woman in it, not mad but too sensitive, which is very attractive; I will send it to you when I have finished it. They have lots of room here in the hospital, there would be enough to make studios for a score or so of painters.

I really must make up my mind, it is only too true that lots of painters go mad, it is a life that makes you, to say the least, very absent-minded. If I throw myself fully into my work again, very good, but I shall always be cracked.

If I could enlist for five years, I should recover considerably and be more rational and more master of myself. But one way or the other, it's all the same to me.

I hope that there will be some canvases in the batch I have sent you which may give you some pleasure. If I go on being a painter, then sooner or later I shall probably be in Paris again, and I promise myself in that case to give some old canvases a good overhaul.

What is Gauguin doing? Am putting off writing him again until I am quite normal, but I often think of him and I should so much like to know if everything is going comparatively well with him.

If I had not been in such a hurry, if I had kept my studio, then this summer I should have touched up all the canvases I sent you. Of course, so long as the impasto isn't dry all the way through, you cannot scrape at it.

You will see that the expressions of the two women are different from the expressions one sees in Paris.

Is Signac back in Paris yet?

1. Nickname for Napoleon III.