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Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh

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LETTERS—LETTRES

Readers' comments are welcomed on articles published in Leonardo. In general, short letters stand best chance of publication; and all letters may be cut to some extent. Letters should be written in English or French.

In our first issue we publish letters by Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh, to encourage artists to take to the pen.

La Rédaction de Leonardo invite ses lecteurs à lui faire parvenir de courtes commentaires sur les articles parus dans la revue. Toutefois, elle se réserve le droit d'abrégé toute lettre en cas de nécessité.

Dans ce premier numéro, nous publions, à titre d'exemple, deux lettres, de Paul Gauguin et de Vincent van Gogh, afin d'encourager d'autres artistes à prendre la plume.

A MAURICE DENIS

Sans date.

(Paris, début mars 1895.)

Cher Monsieur,

A propos de Séguin, vous venez d'écrire dans la Plume un excellent article. Je pourrais en discuter certains détails, je m'en garderai bien n'étant moi-même préoccupé que de manifestations artistiques.

Pour conclure, mes sincères félicitations.

Ce qui me fait vous écrire, c'est que j'ai plaisir à voir les peintres faire eux-mêmes leurs affaires. Il y a déjà pas mal d'années vous avez écrit dans la Revue Indépendante, je crois, mais ce fut tout, ce fut peu de chose.

Depuis quelque temps, surtout depuis mon projet de m'enterrer aux îles du Pacifique, j'ai senti cette nécessité qui s'imposait à vous jeunes peintres, d'écrire raisonnablement sur les choses de l'Art. Cette préface de Séguin correspond en somme à un désir antérieur.

Bientôt je vais disparaître, mais j'ai bon espoir que l'oeuvre commencée s'achèvera, je ne puis donc pas vous féliciter de votre bonne intention. Continuez tous à combattre soit avec le pinceau soit avec la plume, c'est dans me retraite mon fervent désir.

Agréer, Monsieur, l'expression de mes meilleurs sentiments.

PAUL GAUGUIN

St. Rémy, 11 February 1890.

Dear Mr. Aurier,

Many thanks for your article in the *Mercure de France*, which greatly surprised me. I like it very much as a work of art in itself, in my opinion your words produce color, in short, I rediscover my canvases in your article, but better than they are, richer, more full of meaning. However, I feel uneasy in my mind when I reflect that what you say is due to others rather than to myself. For example,

Monticelli in particular. Saying as you do: 'As far as I know, he is the only painter to perceive the chromatism of things with such intensity, with such a metallic, gemlike luster,' be so kind as to go and see a certain bouquet by Monticelli at my brother's—a bouquet in white, forget-me-not blue and orange—then you will feel what I want to say. But the best, the most amazing Monticellis have long been in Scotland and England. In a museum in the North—the one in Lisle, I believe—there is said to be a very marvel, rich in another way and certainly no less French than Watteau's 'Départ pour Cythère.' At the moment Mr. Lauzet is engaged in reproducing some thirty works of Monticelli's.

Here you are: as far as I know, there is no colorist who is descended so straightly and directly from Delacroix, and yet I am of the opinion that Monticelli probably had Delacroix's color theories only at secondhand; that is to say, that he got them more particularly from Diaz and Ziem. It seems to me that Monticelli's personal artistic temperament is exactly the same as that of the author of the *Decameron*—Boccaccio—a melancholic, somewhat resigned, unhappy man, who saw the wedding party of the world pass by, painting and analyzing the lovers of his time—he, the one who had been left out of things. Oh! he no more imitated Boccaccio than Henri Leys imitated the primitives. You see, what I mean to say is that it seems there are things which have found their way to my name, which you could better say of Monticelli, to whom I owe so much. And further, I owe much to Paul Gauguin, with whom I worked in Arles for some months, and whom I already knew in Paris, for that matter.

Gauguin, that curious artist, that alien whose mien and the look in whose eyes vaguely reminded one of Rembrandt's 'Portrait of a Man' in the Galerie Lacaze—this friend of mine likes to make one feel that a good picture is equivalent to a good deed; not that he says so, but it is difficult to be on intimate

terms with him without being aware of a certain moral responsibility. A few days before parting company, when my disease forced me to go into a lunatic asylum, I tried to paint 'his empty seat.'

It is a study of his armchair of somber reddish-brown wood, the seat of greenish straw, and in the absent one's place a lighted torch and modern novels.

If an opportunity presents itself, be so kind as to have a look at this study, by way of a memento of him; it is done entirely in broken tones of green and red. Then you will perceive that your article would have been fairer, and consequently more powerful, I think, if, when discussing the question of the future of 'tropical painting' and of colors, you had done justice to Gauguin and Monticelli before speaking of me. *For the part which is allotted to me, or will be allotted to me, will remain, I assure you, very secondary.*

And then there is another question I want to ask you. Suppose that the two pictures of sunflowers, which are now at the *Vingtistes'* exhibition, have certain qualities of color, and that they also express an idea symbolizing 'gratitude'. Is this different from so many flower pieces, more skilfully painted, and which are not yet sufficiently appreciated, such as 'Hollyhocks,' 'Yellow Irises' by Father Quost? The magnificent bouquets of peonies which Jeannin

produces so abundantly? You see, it seems so difficult to me to make a distinction between impressionism and other things; I do not see the use of so much sectarian spirit as we have seen these last years, *but I am afraid of the preposterousness of it.*

And in conclusion, I declare that I do not understand why *you* should speak of Meissonier's 'Infamies'. It is possible that I have inherited from the excellent Mauve an absolutely unlimited admiration for Meissonier; Mauve's eulogies on Troyon and Meissonier used to be inexhaustible—a strange pair.

I say this to draw your attention to the extent to which people in foreign countries admire the artists of France, without making the least fuss about what divides them, often enough so damnably. What Mauve repeated so often was something like this: 'If one wants to paint colors, one should also be able to draw a chimney corner or an interior as Meissonier does.'

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Meanwhile, dear Sir, accept my gratitude for your article. When I go to Paris in the spring, I certainly shall not fail to call on you to thank you in person.

VINCENT VAN GOGH