

Dear M. Aurier

Thank you very much for your article in the Mercur de France, which surprised me a good deal. I admire it very much as a work of art in itself, it seems to me that you paint with words; in fact, I encounter my canvases anew in your article, but better than they are in reality, richer, more meaningful. Reflecting, however, that what you say would be more relevant to others than to myself, I feel uneasy. Monticelli in particular is a case in point. Since you say that "he is, so far as I know, the only painter who perceives the range of colour of things with this intensity, with this metallic, gem-like quality," please go to see, at my brother's, a certain bouquet<sup>1</sup> by Monticelli – a bouquet in white, forget-me-not blue & orange – and then you will understand what I mean. But for some time now the best, the most wonderful Monticellis have been in Scotland and England. There should still be a marvellous one of his in a gallery in the North – the one in Lille, I think – as rich and certainly no less French than *Le départ pour Cythère* by Watteau. At this moment M. Lauzet is in the process of reproducing about thirty Monticellis. As far as I know, there is no colourist who stems so directly from Delacroix, and yet it is probable, in my opinion, that Monticelli knew of Delacroix's colour theories at second-hand only; he had them in particular from Diaz and Ziem. Monticelli's artistic temperament seems to me exactly the same as that of the author of the *Decameron* – Boccaccio – a melancholy, rather resigned, unhappy man, watching the fashionable wedding party and the lovers of his time pass him by, painting them and analysing them – he, the outsider. Oh! He no more imitated Boccaccio than Henri Leys imitated the primitives.

Anyway – what I am trying to say is that things seem to have mistakenly become attached to my name that you would do better to link to Monticelli, to whom I owe so much. I also owe a great deal to Paul Gauguin, with whom I worked for several months in Arles, and whom, moreover, I already knew in Paris.

Gauguin, that curious artist, that strange individual, whose demeanour and look vaguely recall Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Man at the Galerie Lacaze* – that friend who likes to make one feel that a good picture should be equivalent to a good deed, not that he says so, but it is in fact difficult to be much in his company without being mindful of a certain moral responsibility.

A few days before we parted company, when my illness forced me to go into an asylum, I tried to paint "his empty place."

It is a study of his wooden armchair, brown and dark red, the seat of greenish straw, and in place of the absent person, a lighted candle in a candlestick and some modern novels [F 499, JH 1636]. Should the opportunity arise, do please take another look at this study by way of a reminder of him. It is done throughout in broken tones of green and red.

You may realize now that your article would have been fairer and – it seems to me – consequently more powerful, if, when dealing with the question of the nature of 'tropical painting' and the question of colour, you had – before speaking of me – done justice to Gauguin and Monticelli. For the role attaching to me, or that will be attached to me, will remain, I assure you, of very secondary importance.

Besides, I should like to ask you another question. Let us suppose that the two canvases of sunflowers which are at present at the *Vingistes* [F 456, JH 1561; F 458, JH 1667] have certain qualities of colour, and that they also symbolize "gratitude." Are they any different from so many other pictures of flowers, more skilfully painted, which are not yet appreciated enough – the *Roses premières* and the *Iris jaunes* by old Quost, the magnificent bunches of peonies which Jeannin produces in such abundance. You see, I find it very difficult to make a distinction between impressionism and other things. I do not see any use for much of the sectarian thinking we have seen these last few years, but the absurdity of it frightens me.

And in conclusion, I confess I do not understand why you should vilify Meissonier. It may have been from the excellent *Mauve* that I have inherited a boundless admiration for Meissonier; *Mauve* was tireless in his praise of Troyon and Meissonier – a strange combination.

I say this in order to draw your attention to how much people from other countries admire the artists of France without attaching the slightest importance to what, unfortunately, so often divides them. An often-repeated saying of *Mauve*'s was something like, "If one wants to use colour, one should also be able to draw an *inglenook* or an interior like Meissonier."

If you will do me the pleasure of accepting it, I shall include a study of cypresses for you in the next batch I send to my brother, in remembrance of your article. I am still working on it at the moment, as I want to put a small figure into it. The cypress is so characteristic of the Provence landscape. You will feel it, and say, "Even the colour black." Until now, I have not been able to do them as I feel them; the emotions that come over me in the face of nature can be so intense that I lose consciousness, and the result is a fortnight during which I cannot do any work. However, before leaving here, I mean to have one more try at tackling the cypresses. The study I intend for you represents a group of them in the corner of a wheat field during the *mistral* on a summer's day. It is thus a kind of black note in the shifting blue of the flowing wide sky, with the vermilion of the poppies contrasting with the note of black. You will see that it forms something like the combination of tones found in

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those agreeable Scottish tartans of green, blue, red, yellow and black, which seemed so charming to you and to me at the time, and which, alas, we hardly see any more these days.

In the meantime, dear Sir, please accept my grateful thanks for your article. If I come to Paris in the spring, I certainly shall not fail to thank you in person.

Vincent v. Gogh

It will be a year before the study I am going to send you will be thoroughly dry, particularly the impasto – I think it might be a good idea to give it a good coat of varnish.

And in the meantime, it should be washed several times with plenty of water to get the oil out completely. This study is painted in pure Prussian blue, that much-maligned colour which Delacroix nevertheless used so much. I think that once the tones of Prussian blue are quite dry, you will, by varnishing, get the black, the very black tones that are needed to bring out the various dark greens.

I am not quite sure how this study should be framed, but since it makes one think of those much-esteemed Scottish fabrics, I have noticed that a very simple flat frame in BRIGHT ORANGE LEAD gives the desired effect along with the blues of the background and the black-green of the trees. Without that there might not be enough red in the canvas, and the upper part would seem rather cold.

1. Adolphe Monticelli, *Vase with Flowers*.