

Amice Rappard,

I sent a basket containing birds' nests to your address today. I have some in my own studio too. They are nests of the thrush, the blackbird, the golden oriole, the wren and the finch. I hope they will arrive safe and sound. Do you know much about Eugène Delacroix? I read a splendid article about him by Silvestre. To write down a few words for you that occur to me right now, the article ended thus: "Ainsi mourut presqu'en souriant Eugène Delacroix peintre de grande race qui avait un soleil dans la tête et un orage dans le coeur – qui – des guerriers passa aux saints – des saints aux amants – des amants aux tigres – et des tigres aux fleurs." [Thus died, almost smiling, Eugène Delacroix – painter of noble race – who had a sun in his head and a thunderstorm in his heart – who – passed from warriors to saints – from saints to lovers – from lovers to tigers – and from tigers to flowers.] These words struck me, as the whole article demonstrated that the atmosphere of the colours and the tone in his pictures was identical with their meaning – the contrast of the colours, the broken effect, the reciprocal reacting of black to white, of yellow to violet, of orange to blue, of red to green.

And further, Delacroix writes to a friend, "La chapelle où j'ai peint ma Pietà était tellement obscure que je n'ai pas su d'abord comment peindre pour faire parler mon tableau, – j'ai été obligé de peindre dans le cadavre du Christ les ombres avec du bleu de Prusse, les lumières avec du jaune de chrome pur." [The chapel where I painted my Pietà was so dark that I did not know at first how to paint so as to make my picture speak – I was forced to paint the shadows of the corpse of Christ with Prussian blue, the light parts with pure chrome-yellow.] To this the author adds, "Il faut être Delacroix pour oser cela." [One would have to be a Delacroix to dare do this.]

Then I read somewhere else, "Lorsque Delacroix peint – c'est comme le lion qui dévore le morceau." [When Delacroix paints – it's like a lion devouring a piece (of meat).]

And this last is the very thing Silvestre's article is full of.

What amazing fellows those French painters are – a Millet, Delacroix, Corot, Troyon, Daubigny, Rousseau, and a Daumier or a Jacque – not forgetting Jules Dupré especially! A new one of the same breed is Lhermitte.

Another thing about Delacroix. He had a discussion with a friend about the question of working absolutely after nature, and he said on this occasion that one must get one's studies from nature but that the ultimate picture ought to be made from memory. That friend was walking with him on the boulevard when they were having this discussion - which had already become pretty vehement. When they parted company, the other one still wasn't entirely convinced. Delacroix let him toddle on for a bit after he took his leave, and then (using his two hands as a speaking trumpet) he roared after him in a lusty voice, to the consternation of the respectable citizens passing by, "Par coeur! Par coeur!" [From memory!]

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading this article, as well as another one about Delacroix by Gigoux. I have read besides a fine book by Bracquemond, the etcher, Du Dessin et de la Couleur.

Another thing about Delacroix, writes Silvestre, "On dit que Delacroix ne dessine pas – dites que Delacroix ne dessine pas comme les autres." [they say that Delacroix does not draw – they ought to say that Delacroix does not draw like others.]

How truly, my friend, one might say the same in denial of the assertion that Mauve, Israëls, Maris do not draw. Another thing – the painter Gigoux comes to Delacroix with an antique bronze and asks his opinion about its genuineness. "Ce n'est pas de l'antique, c'est de la renaissance" [it is not from antiquity, it is from the renaissance] says D. Gigoux asks him what reason he has for saying this – "Tenez, mon ami, c'est très beau, mais c'est pris par la ligne et les anciens prenaient par les milieux (par les masses, par noyaux)." [Look here, my friend, it is very beautiful, but it is starved from lines, and the ancients started from the central things (the masses, the nuclei.) And he adds, "Look here a moment," and draws a number of ovals on a piece of paper – and he puts these ovals together by means of little lines, hardly anything at all, and out of this creates a rearing horse full of life and movement. "Géricault and Gros," he says, "have learned this from the Greek – to express the masses (nearly always egg-shaped) first tracing the contours and the action from the position and the proportions of these oval shapes." And I say that this was first pointed out to Delacroix by Géricault.

Now I ask you, isn't this a superb truth?

But...does one learn it from the plaster-of-Paris artists or at the drawing academy? I think not! If it were taught in this way, I should be pleased to be an enthusiastic admirer of the academy, but I know only too well that such is not the case.

I sent Wenkebach an article about the Salon by Paul Mantz with a request to let you read it too. Have you got it? I thought it excellent.

I thought that you might like the birds' nests as much as I do myself, for really and truly birds – such as the wren and the golden oriole – rank among the artists too. At the same time they are beautiful stuff for still lifes.

Good-by, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

