

My dear Bernard,

I feel impelled to apologize to you for having left you so abruptly the other day. So I do so herewith without delay. I recommend to you to read Tolstoi's Russian Legends, and I shall also let you have the article on Eug. Delacroix I spoke of.

All the same, I myself went to see Guillaumin, but in the evening, and I thought that perhaps you did not know his address, which is 13 Quai d'Anjou. I believe that Guillaumin as a human being has sounder ideas than the others, and if all were like him they would produce more good things, and would have less time and inclination to fight each other so furiously.

I persist in believing, not because I have given you a piece of my mind, but because it will become your own conviction too – I persist in believing that you will discover that in the studios one not only does not learn much about painting, but not even much good about the art of living; and that one finds oneself forced to learn how to live in the same way one must learn to paint, without having recourse to the old tricks and eye-deceiving devices of intriguers.

I do not think your self-portrait will be either your last or your best, although on the whole it is terribly you. Listen now, what I tried to explain to you the other day amounts roughly to this. In order to avoid generalizations, allow me to take an example borrowed from reality. If you have quarreled with a painter, and consequently say, "If Signac exhibits in the place where I exhibit, I shall withdraw my pictures," and if you slander him, then it seems to me that you are not acting as well as you might. For it is better to look at things for a long time before judging so categorically, and to think things over; for in case of a quarrel, reflection shows us as many wrongs on our own part as on the other's – and that the latter has as much *raison d'être* as we would claim for our own.

So if you have already thought that Signac and others who use pointillism quite often do very fine things for all that, instead of slandering them you must respect them and speak sympathetically of them, especially if there has been a quarrel. Otherwise one becomes a sectarian, narrow-minded oneself, and the equal of those who utterly despise all others and believe themselves to be the only just ones.

This even extends as far as the academicians; take, for example, a picture by Fantin-Latour, especially his work as a whole. Well, here is one who never revolted, but does this prevent him from having that something, whatever it may be, of calm and fairness that makes him one of the most independent characters alive?

Furthermore I wanted to say a few words about the military service which you will have to perform. From now on you must absolutely attend to that – directly in order to find out in the first place what steps can be taken in such a case to safeguard your right to work, to be able to choose your garrison, etc., but indirectly in order to take care of your health. You must not go there in too anemic or enervated a condition, if you set a value on coming out of it stronger.

I do not consider it a great misfortune for you to be obliged to be a soldier, but rather as a very serious trial from which you will emerge – if you emerge at all – a very great artist.

Until then do your utmost to fortify yourself, for you will need plenty of vigour. If you work a lot during that year, I think you might end up by having a certain stock of pictures, some of which we shall try to sell for you, as we know you will need ready money to pay for models.

I shall be glad to do all I can to make a success of what we began in the café, but I think that the primary condition on which success depends is to set aside all petty jealousies, for only union is strength. Surely the common interest is worth the sacrifice of that selfishness of every man for himself.

With a hearty handshake,  
Vincent