

My dear comrade Bernard,

The package you and Gauguin sent arrived almost simultaneously with the forwarding of my studies. I was very much amused; it warmed my heart greatly to see those two faces again. As for your portrait, you know, I like it very much. As a matter of fact I like everything you do very much, as you know, and possibly there has not been anybody before me who liked what you do as much as I.

I strongly urge you to study portrait painting, do as many portraits as you can and don't flag. We must win the public over later on by means of the portrait; in my opinion it is the thing of the future. But don't let's lose our way in hypotheses now.

And now that I have started thanking you, I thank you furthermore for the batch of sketches entitled "At the Brothel." Bravo! It seems to me that the woman washing herself and the one saying, "There is none other like me when it comes to exhausting a man," are the best; the others are grimacing too much, and above all they are done too vaguely, they are too little living flesh, not built up sufficiently. But no matter, these other ones too are something quite new and interesting. At the brothel! Yes, that's what one ought to do, and I assure you that I for one am almost jealous of the damned fine opportunity you will have of going there in your uniform, – which these good little women dote on.

The poem at the end is really beautiful; it stands more firmly on its own feet than certain figures. What you want to express and what you say you believe, you say well and sonorously.

Let me know when you will be in Paris. The fact is that I have already written you a thousand times that my night café isn't a brothel; it is a café where night prowlers cease to be night prowlers, because they flop down at a table and spend the whole night thus without prowling at all. It may happen that a whore brings her fellow along.

But going in one evening I came upon a little group, a pimp and his whore making up after a fight. The woman pretended to be indifferent and haughty, the man was wheedling. I got busy painting it for you from memory on a little canvas, [F 478, JH 1599] size 4 or 6. So if you are leaving soon, I will send it to you in Paris; if you are staying on, let me know; it was not dry enough to be included in the package. I won't sign this study, for I never work from memory. There is some colour in it which will please you, but once again, I have painted a study for you which I should have preferred not to paint.

I have mercilessly destroyed one important canvas – a "Christ with the Angel in Gethsemane" – and another one representing the "Poet against a Starry Sky" – in spite of the fact that the colour was right – because the form had not been studied beforehand from the model, which is necessary in such cases. As for the study I am sending you in exchange, if you do not like it, you will only have to look at it a little longer.

I had a devil of a job doing it during a pestering mistral (just like the study in red and green). And look, although it is not painted as fluently as the "Old Mill," it is more delicate and intimate. You will see that all this isn't in the least impressionistic; dear me, all the worse then. I am doing what I am doing, surrendering myself to nature, without thinking of this or that. Of course, if you should prefer another study in this batch to the "Men Unloading Sand," you can take it and erase the dedication, if someone else will have it. But I think you will like this one, once you have looked at it a bit longer.

If Laval, Moret and the other one¹ want to exchange with me, splendid! But for my part I should be particularly delighted if they would paint their portraits for me.

You know, Bernard, I feel sure that if I wanted to do studies of brothels, it would cost me more money than I have; I am no longer young and my body is not attractive enough to women to get them to pose for me free for nothing. And I cannot work without a model. I won't say that I don't turn my back on nature ruthlessly in order to turn a study into a picture, arranging the colours, enlarging and simplifying; but in the matter of form I am too afraid of departing from the possible and the true.

I don't mean I won't do it after another ten years of painting studies, but, to tell the honest truth, my attention is so fixed on what is possible and really exists that I hardly have the desire or the courage to strive for the ideal as it might result from my abstract studies.

Others may have more lucidity than I do in the matter of abstract studies, and it is certainly possible that you are one of their number, Gauguin too ... and perhaps I myself when I am old.

But in the meantime I am getting well acquainted with nature. I exaggerate, sometimes I make changes in a motif; but for all that, I do not invent the whole picture; on the contrary, I find it all ready in nature, only it must be disentangled.

You will probably think these studies ugly. I don't know. In any case neither you, nor I, nor anybody else should

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make an exchange unwillingly. My brother writes me that Anquetin is back in Paris, I should like to know what he has done. When you see him, remember me most kindly to him.

My house will seem to me more lived-in now that I am going to see the portraits in it. How delighted I should be to see you yourself in it this winter! It is true that the journey is rather expensive. But all the same, can't one risk these expenses and recoup oneself by means of one's work? In winter, in the North, work is so difficult! Here too perhaps – I have hardly had any experience of it yet, and so I must wait and see; but it is a damned useful thing to see the South – where so much more of life is spent in the open air – in order to understand the Japanese better. And then a certain quality of loftiness and nobility which can be found in some of the spots here will be very profitable to you.

The sun in the "Red Sunset" should be imagined higher up, outside the picture, let's say on a level with the frame. In this way, an hour or an hour and a half before sunset, the things on earth still keep their colour. Later on the blue and violet make them look blacker, as soon as the sun sends its rays more horizontally. Thanks again for your package, which has warmed my heart greatly, and a cordial handshake in thought. Write me the date of your departure, so that I shall know when you will be in Paris; your Paris address is still 5 Avenue Beaulieu, isn't it?

Sincerely yours, Vincent

1. Ernest Chamaillard.