

My dear Vincent,

It is a very, very long time since I ought to have written you a letter, but I have not been able to formulate my thoughts. There are moments when one's feelings are clear, but sometimes it is difficult to form an idea of what has taken shape in one's thoughts and what is still in a state of vagueness. I am also not sure of being able to write you in the way I should like to today,<sup>1</sup> but my letter will be sent off anyway, if only to let you know that we think of you often, and that your last pictures have given me much food for thought on the state of your mind at the time you did them. In all of them there is a vigour in the colours which you have not achieved before – this in itself constitutes a rare quality – but you have gone further than that, and if there are some who try to find the symbolic by torturing the form, I find this in many of your canvases, namely in the expression of the epitome of your thoughts on nature and living creatures, which you feel to be so strongly inherent in them. But how your brain must have laboured, and how you have risked everything to the very limit, where vertigo is inevitable!

For this reason, my dear brother, when you tell me that you are working again, in which from one point of view I rejoice, for by this you avoid lapsing into the state of mind which many of the poor wretches who are taken care of in the establishment where you are staying succumb to, it worries me a little to think about it, for you ought not to venture into the mysterious regions which it seems one may skim cautiously but not penetrate with impunity before you recover completely. Don't take more trouble than necessary, for if you do nothing more than simply tell the story of what you see, there will be enough qualities in it to make your pictures last. Think of all the still lifes and the flowers which Delacroix painted when he went to the country to stay with George Sand. It is true that after that he had a reversal, when he did the "Education of the Virgin," and who can tell whether you will not produce a masterpiece later if you do as I say? But arrange your work in such a way that you do not overexert yourself. As you know, there is an exhibition at a café à l'exposition<sup>2</sup> where Gauguin and some others (Schuffenecker) are exhibiting pictures. At first I had said you would exhibit some things, too, but they assumed an air of being such tremendous fellows that it made one sick. Yet Schuffenecker claims that this manifestation will eclipse all the other painters, and if they had let him have his way, he would have paraded all over Paris adorned with flags of all manner of colours to show he was the great conqueror. It gave one somewhat the impression of going to the Universal Exhibition by the back stairs. As always, there were exclusions. Lautrec, who had exhibited with a Centre, was not allowed to be in it, and so on. The other day a sketch by Rembrandt was sold at a public auction; I wish you could have seen it. It is the figure of the Angel Gabriel, standing, as he is in the heaven of his etching "The Annunciation to the Shepherds." What a marvel! The colour has remained quite clear; perhaps originally it was all yellow. The shadows were much more coloured than was his habit, and were probably a very pronounced blue, green and violet, but the general effect and the harmony are exquisite.

Those who hold out best at the big exhibition are Corot, Manet, Delacroix, Millet, Ricard, and especially Daumier. They had hung Degas too, but he has had his pictures removed.

Gauguin went off to Pont-Aven two weeks ago, so he has not seen your pictures. Isaäcson thinks very highly of your last consignment. I shall send you back the bedroom, but you must not think of retouching this canvas if you can repair the damage. Copy it, and then send back this one, so that I can have it re-canvassed. The red vine is very beautiful; I have hung it in one of our rooms. I am also very fond of that vertical portrait of a woman. I had a visit from a certain Polack, who knows Spain and the pictures there well. He said it was as fine as one of the great Spaniards.

Good health and a handshake from Jo and Theo.

1. See Vincent's letter 595.
2. A café where painters were allowed to exhibit their work.