

Letter T20  
Paris, 16 November 1889

My dear Vincent,

Enclosed I am sending you a letter from Gauguin which he sent me for you. The forest he speaks of in this letter has arrived too. What an excellent workman he is! This one has been executed with a care which must have cost him an enormous amount of labour. The figure of the woman especially, in polished wood, is very fine, whereas the surrounding figures are in rough coloured wood. It is obviously bizarre, and does not express a very sharply defined idea but it is like a piece of Japanese work, whose meaning, at least for a European, is equally difficult to grasp, but in which one cannot but admire the combination of the lines and the beautiful parts. The general effect has a very "sonorous" tone. I should very much like you to see it. You would undoubtedly love it.

This week I went to see Bernard, who showed me what he had done recently. In my opinion he has made much progress. His drawing is less definite, but it is there for all that. There is more suppleness in his stroke. There is a more direct influence of the Primitives in him; for instance, he did a kneeling figure surrounded by angels. The ground is covered with large tiles, and the figures are distributed as on a chessboard, but there is one figure of an angel which really has nobility. He has also done a Christ in the olive grove.<sup>1</sup> Christ with red hair and a yellow angel.

It is very difficult to understand, and the search for a style often lends the figures a ridiculous quality, but perhaps something good will come of it. If one sees a great many pictures, so many that now and then one wishes not to see any for some time, those which satisfy one most under those circumstances are the wholesome, true things without all that business of schools and abstract ideas.

Perhaps you will tell me that every work of art must of necessity be the result of a great number of complicated combinations. That is true, but for the painter too there must come moments when he is so inspired by his subject or theme that he renders it in such a way that one can know, or at least feel, it like a thing you are simply confronted with. I feel this when I stand before many of your canvases. At the moment there is one in the show window at Tanguy's, a view of the countryside in spring with poplars that run across the canvas in such a way that one can see neither the bottoms nor the tops of the trees. I am enormously fond of it. Truly this is pure nature.

A letter came for you this morning from the "XX" at Brussels. I have put your address on it. A note from Maus, which I received at the same time, tells me that they will be happy if you will send in things, paintings and drawings. When he came here he liked the apple trees in bloom [F 516, JH 1685] very much, but Van Rysselberghe knew better what you are after in your more recent things, the portrait of Roulin, the sunflowers, etc. It is necessary for you to tell me what you think of the exhibition, and what you would like to send. I think there are from 5 to 7 meters of ledge length. For this year they invited Puvis de Chavannes, Bartholomé, Cézanne, Dubois, Pillot, Forain, Signac, L. Pissarro, Hayet, Renoir, Sisley and de Lautrec, and you. However bad the exhibition of the Independents was, the "Irises" [F 608, JH 1691] was seen by a lot of people, who now talk to me about them every once in a while. It would be a good thing if we could have a regular exhibition in Paris of the works of artists who are not well known to the public but it is almost unavoidable that this should be a permanent exhibition. The places here are so expensive that this will always be an obstacle. Pissarro wrote me that his wife and he have been looking around the country for a boardinghouse for you, but he tells me he thinks that it will be better for you to go stay with that doctor in Auvers. He will have to go to him very soon. I am pleased to hear that you are feeling better; the stronger you are physically, the better. Please tell me what the condition of your clothes is. Don't you want something warm?

Fortunately Jo is well, she gives you her kind regards; winter is beginning to make itself felt here already.

Does the mistral blow at St. Rémy as it does in Arles?

A cordial handshake and

All yours, Theo

1. See Vincent's letters 615 and B21.