

Letter 643

Auvers-sur-Oise, c. 17 June 1890

[An unfinished letter found among his papers]

My dear friend Gauguin,

Thank you for having written to me again, old fellow, and rest assured that since my return I have thought of you every day. I stayed in Paris only three days, and the noise, etc., of Paris had such a bad effect on me that I thought it wise for my head's sake to fly to the country; but for that, I should soon have dropped in on you.

And it gives me enormous pleasure when you say the *Arlésienne's* portrait [F543, JH 1895], which was based strictly on your drawing, is to your liking. I tried to be religiously faithful to your drawing, while nevertheless taking the liberty of interpreting through the medium of colour the sober character and the style of the drawing in question. It is a synthesis of the *Arlésiennes*, if you like; as syntheses of the *Arlésiennes* are rare, take this as a work belonging to you and me as a summary of our months of work together. For my part I paid for doing it with another month of illness, but I also know that it is a canvas which will be understood by you, and by a very few others, as we would wish it to be understood. My friend Dr. Gachet here has taken to it altogether after two or three hesitations, and says, "How difficult it is to be simple." Very well – I want to underline the thing again by etching it, then let it be. Anyone who likes can have it.

Have you also seen the olives? Meanwhile I have a portrait of Dr. Gachet with the heart-broken expression of our time. [F 753, JH 2007]. If you like, something like what you said of your "Christ in the Garden of Olives" not meant to be understood, but anyhow I follow you there, and my brother grasped that nuance absolutely.

I still have a cypress with a star from down there, a last attempt – a night sky with a moon without radiance, the slender crescent barely emerging from the opaque shadow cast by the earth – one star with an exaggerated brilliance, if you like, a soft brilliance of pink and green in the ultramarine sky, across which some clouds are hurrying. Below, a road bordered with tall yellow canes, behind these the blue Basses Alpes, an old inn with yellow lighted windows, and a very tall cypress, very straight, very sombre. [F 683, JH 1982]

On the road, a yellow cart with a white horse in harness, and two late wayfarers. Very romantic, if you like, but also Provence, I think.

I shall probably etch this and also other landscapes and subjects, memories of Provence, then I shall look forward to giving you one, a whole summary, rather deliberate and studied. My brother says that Lauzet, who does the lithographs after Monticelli, liked the head of the *Arlésienne* in question.

But you will understand that having arrived in Paris a little confused, I have not yet seen your canvases. But I hope to return for a few days soon.

I'm very glad to learn from your letter that you are going back to Brittany with De Haan. It is very likely that – if you will allow me – I shall go there to join you for a month, to do a marine or two, but especially to see you again and make De Haan's acquaintance. Then we will try to do something purposeful and serious, such as our work would probably have become if we had been able to carry on down there.

Look, here's an idea which may suit you, I am trying to do some studies of wheat like this, but I cannot draw it – nothing but ears of wheat with green-blue stalks, long leaves like ribbons of green shot with pink, ears that are just turning yellow, lightly edged with the pale pink of the dusty bloom – a pink bindweed at the bottom twisted round a stem. [F 767, JH 2034]

After this I would like to paint some portraits against a very vivid yet tranquil background. There are the greens of a different quality, but of the same value, so as to form a whole of green tones, which by its vibration will make you think of the gentle rustle of the ears swaying in the breeze: it is not at all easy as a colour scheme.