



# Van Gogh in Paris

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Bullard died in New York City 13 October 1853, too soon after the completion of his panorama for him to take it out West as he had planned. In the hundred intervening years it has disappeared, and is probably no longer in existence. Appropriately enough, the latest notice of it that has come to light returns us to Amherst. A huge three-column advertisement in the *Hampshire and Franklin Gazette* for 10 September 1858 shows that Bullard's death had not halted its peregrinations. Indeed, a biographical sketch of Bullard in the same issue blandly refers to the artist as still living. However, Albert Norton, formerly agent for Bullard, now appears as the 'gentlemanly, enterprising and honest proprietor,' both in the advertisement and in an accompanying news note.

Many of the nine hundred portraits which Bullard is said to have painted must have survived to this day. Yet thus far, the Dickinson portraits, five portraits of the Boltwood family of Amherst, and two historical paintings recently traced in the New York art

market<sup>9</sup> are his only identified works. Judging from the Dickinson portraits, his style is more individual, and his work more skillful, than that of the average nineteenth-century itinerant artist. With these portraits as samples, others scattered throughout New England and New York State should now be attributable to his hand.

No reference has been found in Emily Dickinson's writings either to the family portraits themselves or to the circumstances of their painting. However, among her original manuscripts now at Harvard one may read the following:

Portraits are to daily faces  
As an evening west  
To a fine, pedantic sunshine  
In a satin vest.<sup>10</sup>

BARBARA N. PARKER

<sup>9</sup> *The Arrest of Nathan Hale* (Plaza Art Galleries, Inc., auction 1 February 1945) and *The Daughter's Appeal* (collection Jacob Reder; photograph in Frick Art Reference Library).

<sup>10</sup> Included in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Martha D. Bianchi and Alfred L. Hampson (Boston, 1935), p. 28, and printed here with the permission of the publishers, Little, Brown, and Company.

## Van Gogh in Paris

*There is but one Paris . . .*

**O**F the many tragedies in Vincent van Gogh's life, one of the greatest was the shortness of time. Fate gave him only ten years in which to paint, from the first clumsy experiments to the ultimate achievements of color and form. Of these years, there were less than two in Paris, so vital to him aesthetically and emotionally, and then only two

more for all the great paintings of Arles and Auvers, from the pale pink peach-trees in bloom to the apocalyptic crows in the storm, as through hard work, starvation, and despair he passed into folly and death.

The years in Paris were determinative. When Vincent arrived in February 1886 (characteristically without warning to his brother Theo) he had been painting for six years — mostly

in grays and browns; when he left Paris for Provence in February 1888 (again without Theo's knowledge), his mature style had been created.<sup>1</sup> In Paris, the impact on his sensibility of new thoughts and techniques, the revelation of the newer French schools of painting, the reading of Zola, Gauguin's friendship, the long walks in Montmartre, Chatou, or Suresnes, the feeling of 'the French air' developed in the artist a new self-assurance; there is no doubt that from that period Van Gogh had an unfailing knowledge of what he wanted to accomplish and of his own worth. In Paris he recognized the first unmistakable signs of his genius and, although he acknowledged the importance of Delacroix and admired the Impressionists, he knew that he was not one of them, and that he had to be, all through the rest of his life, only himself, Vincent.

Through the correspondence with his brother, we have in general an incomparable record of the artist's almost daily thoughts and methods of work. But just because Vincent was living with Theo during the Paris years, there has been an almost total gap in the direct evidence: only two letters to Theo (when the latter was on his yearly holiday trips home), one letter to young Emile Bernard, met at Cormon's studio; none to Van Rappard, for whom Van Gogh had no patience left.

In consequence, the letter printed below, aside from its intrinsic biographical interest, carries special sig-

<sup>1</sup> Vincent had been in Paris for a few days in 1873, for a few months in 1874, and for nearly a year in 1875-76—in the latter two instances as a member of the staff of Goupil's gallery—but all this was long before he had turned to art as his life work.

nificance as contributing to our scanty knowledge of the crucial period in Van Gogh's career. This letter, apparently unpublished, and forming part of a collection on deposit in the Harvard College Library, is written from Paris to a fellow student at the Academy in Antwerp, an Englishman named Lievens, who seems otherwise to be known only through a water-color sketch of Van Gogh published in 1893.<sup>2</sup> Vincent had come to Paris from Antwerp, where, nearly starving and in wretched health, he had spent a brief period studying under Verlat and Sibert.

The letter bears no date. A cover accompanying it is inscribed, apparently by Lievens: 'A letter received in Antwerp from Vincent van Gogh about 1886. H. v. L.' It is perhaps possible to be a little more precise. After his arrival in Paris in late February 1886, Vincent stayed with Theo in the Rue Laval until June, when the brothers moved to larger quarters at 54 Rue Lepic, the address given in the letter. Further, Vincent tells Lievens that he had been in Cormon's studio for three or four months but has left, and has been working alone long enough to think that he feels more himself. Accordingly, the later summer or early autumn of 1886 would seem a likely date.

The letter comprises a sheet and a half of now brownish letter-paper, forming six pages (each 134 x 206

<sup>2</sup> In *Van Nu en Straks*, No. III. The original has disappeared, according to M. E. Tralbaut, *Vincent van Gogh in zijn Antwerpsche Periode* (Amsterdam, 1948), p. 137; Dr Tralbaut reproduces the sketch as Plate VIII. Of other students mentioned in Van Gogh's letter two are identifiable in Dr Tralbaut's book: the Dutch painter Briette (pp. 139, 223) and the Belgian Ernest Durand (Plate VII).

There is much to be seen here  
- for instance Delacort



to name ~~one~~ <sup>one</sup> mention  
I did not even know  
what the impressions were  
now I have seen them and  
though not having one of the club  
yet I have much admired certain  
impressions - Dr. Gas  
impregnate - Claude mineral background

And now for what regards what I  
myself have been doing I have  
lacked money for paying models  
else I had actively given myself to  
figure painting but I have a  
series of covers studies

~~study~~ on painting simple flowers  
red ~~flowers~~ poppies blue corn flowers  
and myosotis white and rose roses  
yellow chrysanthemums - leaving  
appositions of blue with orange  
red & green yellow and violet  
leaving leostomus rompiss red neutric

to harmonize brutal atrocities

PLATE 13

And look here of I know  
you had leavings for the  
same ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> might combine

I felt ~~them~~ <sup>them</sup> at the time that  
you ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> thorough concern  
and since I saw the impressions  
I assure you that neither you  
could not mine as it is developing  
itself is exactly the same as  
their theories but so much

more I say we have a chance  
and a good one of fining friends  
I hope your health is all right  
I was rather low down in health when  
in Antwerp but got better here

Write to me in any case remember  
me to Street Frank Durand but I have  
not so often thought on any of them as I  
did think of you - almost daily  
Shaking hands cordially

my present address is  
Mr Vincent van Gogh

54 Rue Leprieux  
Paris

Vincent

PLATE 14



mm.) all of which are covered with writing. The second and fourth pages are reproduced in the accompanying Plate I. It is possible that the missing half of the second sheet contained a drawing, such as may so often be found in Van Gogh letters, though there is no allusion to a drawing in the letter as we have it.

Written in English, it is one of the few examples of expression in that medium by Van Gogh as artist that have as yet come to light.<sup>3</sup> He was in England for considerable periods between 1873 and 1876, first with Goupil and later as a schoolteacher, and acquired a fair command of the language, as is evidenced here, though his English never achieved the fluency of his French.

But the basic importance of the letter rests in the fact that here for the first time Van Gogh puts into words the ideals and aims that were to be realized in the great contribution of the coming years: 'seeking LES TONS ROMPUS ET NEUTRES to harmonise brutal extremes. Trying to render intense COLOUR . . . the true drawing is modelling with colour.' All the lengthy disquisitions to Theo and to Emile Bernard were to come later; here, seemingly, is the manifesto of the new art.

Throughout the letter, also, one can feel Vincent's great character, his dignity and kindness. He mentions with reserve the hard life he is having: 'If poor one has to suffer many things,' and adds shyly, between two dashes, 'As you may imagine.' His inexhaustible generosity appears here to a man

<sup>3</sup>Two later letters in English, to the Australian painter John Russell, have been published by Henry Thannhauser in the *Burlington Magazine*, LXXIII (1938), 96-98.

he addresses only as 'Mr': 'I will if you like share my lodgings and studio with you so long as I have any.'

Striking also is the reference to the South of France, 'the land of the blue tones and gay colours,' characterized by Vincent before he had seen it. Thus early in his Paris experience his thoughts were turning toward the South that was to provide the setting both for fulfillment and disintegration, although the fateful move did not come for more than a year.

As in other letters of Van Gogh, variations in the handwriting closely parallel the rapid changes in direction of thought and degree of emotion, ranging from the careful control of the opening through a number of minor peaks of intensity to the climax of 'LES TONS ROMPUS ET NEUTRES,' with the violent triple underscorings, where the writing nearly turns to drawing, and then subsiding through another series of minor peaks to the quiet of the close.

A transcription of the letter follows:

My dear Mr Levens,

Since I am here in Paris I have very often thought of yourself and work. You will remember that I liked your colour your ideas on art and literature and I add most of all your personality. I have already before now thought that I ought to let you know what I was doing where I was. —

But what refrained me was that I find living in Paris is much dearer than in Antwerp and not knowing what your circumstances are I dare not say. Come over to Paris without warning you that it costs one dearer than Antwerp and that if poor one has to suffer many things. — As you may imagine — But on the other hand there is more chance of selling

There is also a good chance of exchanging pictures with other artists

In one word with much energy with a sincere personal feeling of colour in nature I would say an artist can get on here notwithstanding the many obstructions And I intend remaining here still longer.

There is much to be seen here — for instance Delacroix to name only one master In Antwerp I did not even know what the impressionists were now I have seen them and though *not* being one of the club yet I have much admired certain impressionist pictures — DE GAS nude figure — Claude Monet landscape

And now for what regards what I myself have been doing I have lacked money for paying models else I had entirely given myself to figure painting but I have made a series of colour studies in painting simply flowers red poppies blue corn flowers and myosotys white and rose roses yellow chrysanthemums — seeking oppositions of blue with orange red & green yellow and violet seeking LES TONS ROMPUS ET NEUTRES to harmonise brutal extremes Trying to render intense COLOUR and not a GREY harmony

Now after these gymnastics I lately did two heads which I dare say are better in light and colour than those I did before —

So as we said at the time in COLOUR seeking LIFE the true drawing is modelling with colour

I did a dozen landscapes too frankly *green* frankly *blue*

And so I am struggling for life and progress in art

Now I would very much like to know what you are doing and whether you ever think of going to Paris —

If ever you did come here write to me before and I will if you like share my lodgings and studio with you so long as I have any. In Spring — say February or even sooner I may be going to the South

of France the land of the *blue* tones and gay colours

And look here if I knew you had longings for the same we might combine I felt sure at the time that you are a thorough colourist and since I saw the impressionists I assure you that neither your colour nor mine as it is developing itself is *exactly* the same as their theories but so much dare I say we have a chance and a good one of finding friends I hope your health is all right I was rather low down in health when in Antwerp but got better here

Write to me in any case remember me to Allen Briet Rink Durand but I have not so often thought on any of them as I did think of you — almost daily.

Shaking hands cordially.

Yours truly

Vincent

My present address is  
Mr Vincent van Gogh  
54 Rue Lepic  
Paris

What regards my chances of sale look here they are certainly not much but still *I do have* a beginning

At this present moment I have found four dealers who have exhibited studies of mine And I have exchanged studies with several artists

Now the prices are 50 francs Certainly not much but — as far as I can see one must sell cheap to rise and even at costing price And mind my dear fellow Paris is Paris there is but one Paris and however hard living may be here and if it became worse and harder even — the french air clears up the brain and does one good — a world of good —

I have been in Cormons studio for three or four months but did not find that so useful as I had expected it to be. It may be my fault however any how I left there too as I left Antwerp and since I worked alone and fancy that since I feel my own self more —

Trade is slow here the great dealers sell Millet Delacroix Corot Daubigny Dupre a few other masters at exorbitant prices They do little or nothing for young artists The second class dealers contrariwise sell those but at very low prices If I asked more I would do nothing I fancy. However I have faith in colour even what regards the price the public will pay for it in the longer run—

But for the present things are awfully hard therefore let anyone who risks to go over here consider there is no laying on roses at all

What is to be gained is *progress* and

what the deuce that it is to be found here I dare ascertain Anyone who has a solid position elsewhere let him stay where he is but for adventurers as myself I think they lose nothing in risking more Especially as in my case I am not an adventurer by choice but by fate and feeling nowhere so much myself a stranger as in my family and country— Kindly remember me to your landlady Mrs Roosmalen and say her that if she will exhibit something of my work I will send her a small picture of mine—

ADRIANA R. SALEM

## News of the Libraries

### PERSONNEL

**T**HE following appointment, in addition to those announced in the Autumn 1951 issue of the *BULLETIN*, was voted by the President and Fellows of Harvard College, with the consent of the Board of Overseers, to take effect 1 July 1951:

William B. Ernst, Jr, Assistant in charge of Reference in the Lamont Library.

### BAROQUE BOOK ILLUSTRATION

**D**URING the autumn there was published by the Harvard University Press *Baroque Book Illustration*, by Philip Hofer, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College Library. This work, devoted to a hitherto neglected period, illustrating nearly 150 different books, is based upon the collections of the Graphic Arts Department. Copies may be obtained from the Harvard

University Press, the Graphic Arts Department, or regular booksellers. The list price is \$7.50.

### GRAY HERBARIUM BOOKS DEPOSITED IN HOUGHTON

**I**N October the Gray Herbarium placed approximately 330 of its pre-Linnaean botanical works on deposit in the Houghton Library, where they joined similar collections transferred from the Arnold Arboretum and the Museum of Comparative Zoology in 1948 and 1949.<sup>1</sup> As with the other collections, these Gray Herbarium books are shelved as a unit, and may be recalled at any time for use at the Herbarium, although they are also fully available for consultation through the Houghton Reading Room. Duplicate check-lists are maintained at Houghton and at the Herbarium.

<sup>1</sup>See *HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN*, II (1948), 271, and III (1949), 449.



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