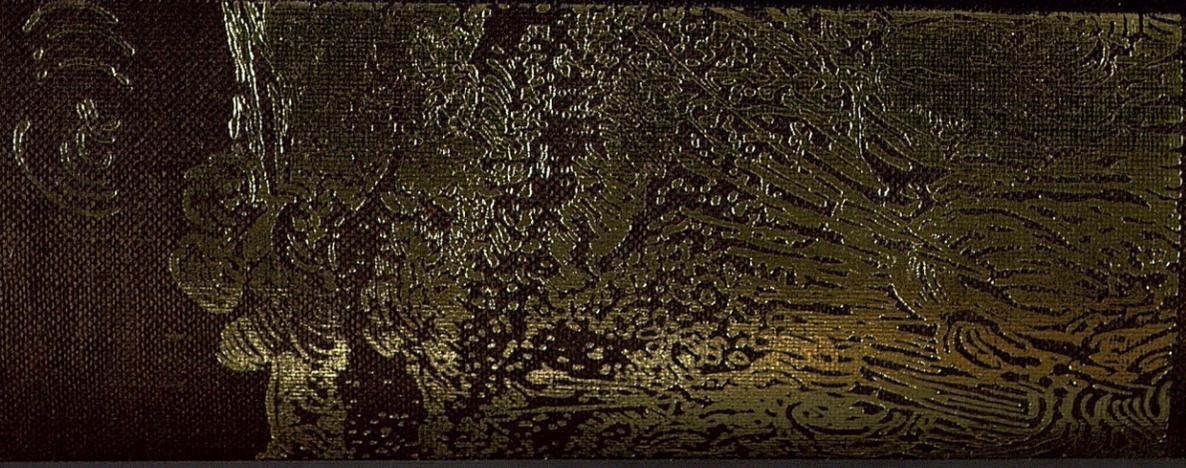
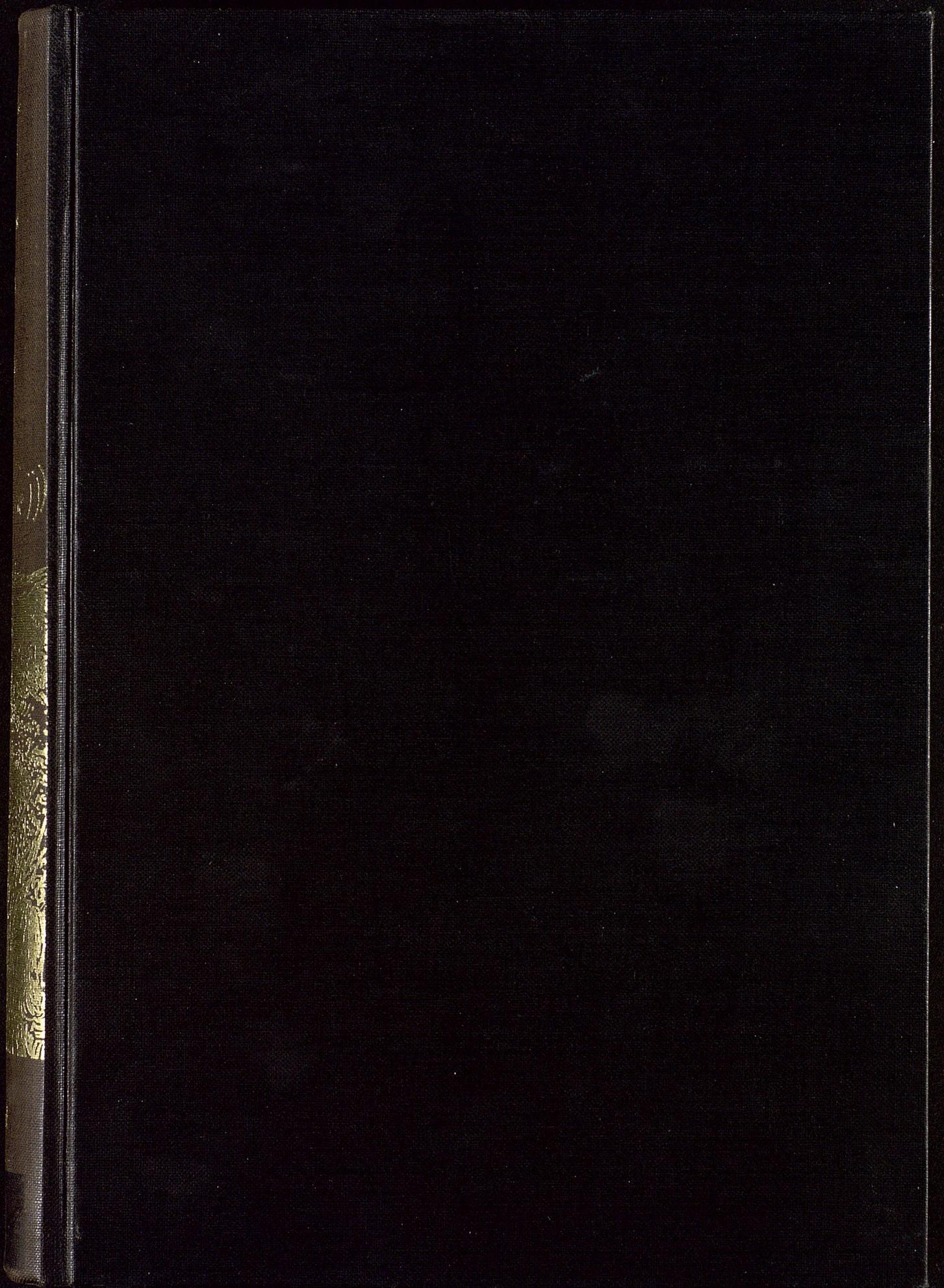
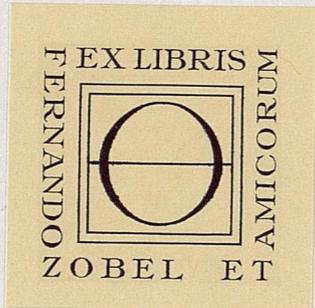


1842
Complete
Letters
of
Vincent
van
Gogh
Volume
I



New York
Graphic
Society



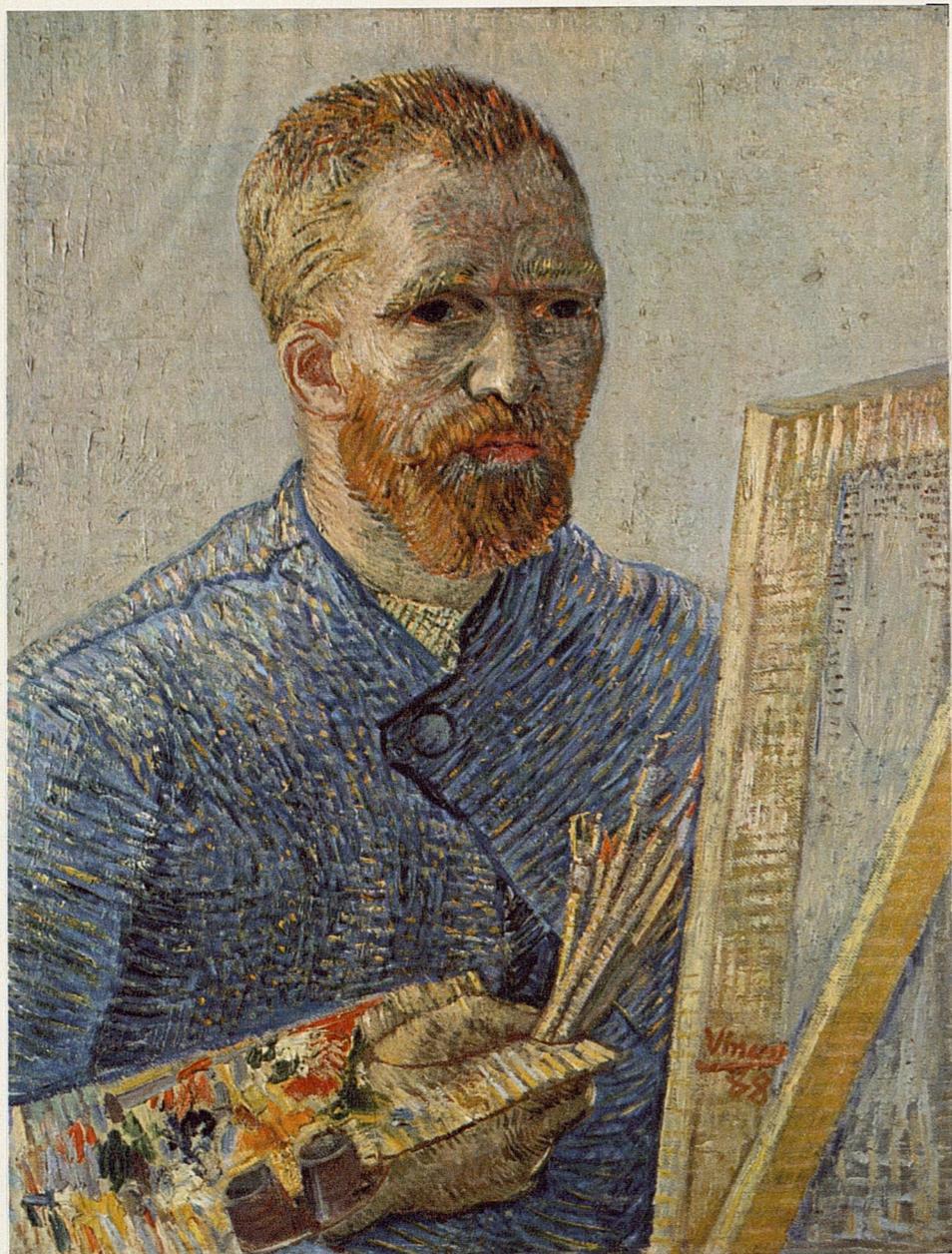


First complete edition in English

(T1146)

50^{ms}

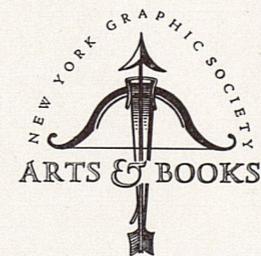
dupes



THE COMPLETE LETTERS
OF
VINCENT VAN GOGH

*with reproductions of all the drawings
in the correspondence*

VOLUME ONE



PUBLISHED BY
NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY
GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT, U.S.A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Publisher wishes to acknowledge his gratitude and thanks for the assistance and cooperation the following individuals and institutions so freely have given in the preparation of these volumes: Mrs. Robert Amussen, New York, corrector, and her assistants Mrs. Emanuel S. Chill and Mrs. Kenneth Luetzow; Mr. Maurice Chapelan, Éditions Bernard Grasset, Paris; Mr. G. Charensol, Paris; Mr. S. C. H. Coebergh and Mr. A. A. Verhoef, Nederlandsche Rotogravure Mij, Leiden; Mr. C. de Dood, Amsterdam, translator and corrector; Mr. Eugene M. Ettenberg, The Gallery Press, New York; the Baroness Goldschmidt-Rothschild, Paris; Mr. Gerard Proost, J. Brandt en Zoon, Amsterdam, binders; Mr. W. J. H. B. Sandberg, Director of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and his staff; Mr. Justin K. Thannhauser, New York; Mr. Harry E. Smeets and Mr. F. Mildner, Smeets Lithographers, Weert; Mr. P. J. van Zee, Drukkerij G. J. Thieme, Nijmegen.

CONTENTS

Publisher's Foreword	
Introduction by V. W. van Gogh	IX
Preface by Mrs. J. van Gogh-Bonger	XIII
Memoir of Vincent van Gogh by Mrs. J. van Gogh-Bonger	XV
Some Additional Notes to the Memoir of Vincent van Gogh by V. W. van Gogh	LIV
Memoir of J. van Gogh-Bonger by V. W. van Gogh	LIX
LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH TO HIS BROTHER THEO	
<i>The Hague</i> - August 1872-May 1873	I
<i>London</i> - 18 June 1873-18 May 1875	7
<i>Paris</i> - May 1875-March 1876	27
<i>England (Ramsgate and Isleworth)</i> April 1876-December 1876)	51
<i>Vincent's Sermon</i>	87
<i>Dordrecht</i> - 21 January 1877-30 April 1877	92
<i>Amsterdam</i> - 9 May 1877-July 1878	115
<i>Etten - Brussels - Borinage - Brussels</i> - July 1878-April 1881	172
<i>Etten</i> - April 1881-December 1881	232
<i>The Hague</i> - December 1881-March 1883	294

The former, namely publications, are things which I would certainly not undertake without consulting you, and for the present, I do not think of it; and besides, as you know, I only busy myself with the drawings and the artistic side of the work, that's all. These experiments I make are certainly part of this, however, and it is quite natural that I work on them.

Some time ago Rappard, for instance, made similar experiments with etchings, which also had to be printed; but the printing an artist does is not publishing—it has nothing to do with business, being quite a private affair. This seems to me as clear as daylight, but, as I told you, last night (as I had not received a letter from you) I was worrying about it, lest you take it for quite a different kind of action.

Well, I hope it will soon become apparent that I had no need to worry. I hope, on the contrary, that you succeeded in getting information about the same matter, namely that you can tell me something about the processes.

On what was left of the printing paper, I made another trial last week with the little figure "Sorrow." Just now when I said that I was afraid you would suspect from my last letter something that was not my intention, I was remembering that I said something like: "This is what I should like: to have some of these sheets printed at our own expense, which would give us more prestige with the editors of the magazines."

Now, my idea is by no means that either you or I should handle the business part if we undertook the printing at our own expense. I did not and should not think of that for a moment. I just think that when one applies for a job, it is well to have some work to show. It saves words and is more practical.

I don't think it improbable that some time I shall make things which will come into the public's hands, but it leaves me rather cold, and I don't consider it a pleasure at all.

Two reasons would force me to it. In the first place, if I became employed by a magazine, then of course I should have to do what is required. In the second place—something which may come later, but which I have certainly thought about already—if sooner or later I should have something which forms a whole and has a purpose and expresses something, I would certainly publish it; but never without consulting you or letting you know, and only if I could not find anyone else to do it for me.

Such a thing would probably cost me money rather than bring money in; it would be for art's sake, not primarily for profit. If ever I did it, I should let you know everything, and in no respect, neither as to the work nor as to the publication, would it be dishonest—otherwise, of course, I would never do it.

So, if there were anything that you might consider as my undertaking a step toward publication (I don't suppose there is, but in my nervousness, as I could find no other reason, I thought of that sentence in my letter), rest assured that this means nothing more than experiments which anyone who etches or lithographs, or reproduces his drawings in some way or another, *must* make in order to learn the process and the effect of black and white. If some sheet or other succeeds and the maker prints a certain number of copies, it would be—at least

for me, and for most artists who do such a thing—something of an absolutely artistic nature, without any relation to commercial publication. If I didn't know from experience that misunderstandings may arise about matters such as showing drawings (and showing printed copies is similar), and it is often considered



ing them—inevitably, he is a mesmeric storyteller—with descriptions of their new home awaiting them in the jungles of Madagascar. “Don’t tremble!” he roars, as the train begins to move. “The children...are under the Elder’s protection. You share his immunity!” Then he jumps off.

There is resistance to Trumpelman, but it fails to stop him. There is a strike, organized by a handful of devoted socialists, as the ghetto workers try to halt the awful spiral of rising Nazi production quotas and progressive cuts in their microscopic wages. There is a cell of armed ghetto fighters, at once heroic and absurd, who fail to assassinate Trumpelman and are finally left

to their fate at German hands by the advancing Russians. There is even a macabre Shakespeare production, in the presence of the Elder and his wife, through which the actors strive to show the audience that it is the Trumpelmans who are Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. But the evening ends with the irruption of the SS and ghetto police, and the round-up of the audience for the next transport. Whatever happens, Trumpelman never loses his authority. And it is an authority that even his Jewish enemies, standing before him, gun in hand, find they cannot deny.

The portrait of Trumpelman has great power. He is indeed a “King of the

Jews.” But the novel around him, vivid and engrossing as it is, remains a feat of pastiche. Epstein has drawn from the Jewish fiction of Eastern Europe, Yiddish or vernacular, the qualities of combined farce and horror, of stifling claustrophobia, and exaggerated them so that to turn for a moment to a page of Isaac Bashevis Singer or of Bruno Schulz is a relief, a contrast in its lucidity and even its calm. The introversion of the dying ghetto is heightened. Although these events are taking place in the midst of a large Polish industrial city, the Poles feature only in the occasional apelike shadow of a passing anti-Semitic peasant. The Polish resistance does not appear at all. And the Soviet

failure to relieve the Warsaw Rising is transformed and transferred into a deliberate Russian plan to let the Jewish partisans of Lodz be wiped out before the Red Army arrives in the city.

Epstein is in no way trying to make light of what took place; there is no question about his grief and passion—or of his talent. Satire was probably the only possible medium for his task. But finally one’s conviction in the work stays suspended. Yes, but was it really that way? And Trumpelman/Rumkowski...is it possible, after all, that he was not a tragic figure but, like those whose orders he obeyed in the Final Solution, a demon whose moral features were banal? □

The Words of Van Gogh

The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh

New York Graphic Society, vol. 1: 624 pp., vol. 2: 632 pp., vol. 3: 632 pp., \$60.00 (the set)

Letters of Vincent van Gogh, 1886-1890:

A Facsimile Edition with an introduction by V. W. van Gogh.

Scolar Press (London), in association with Moulenhoff International BV (Amsterdam), two volumes, 1,100 pp., £180 (the set)

John Russell

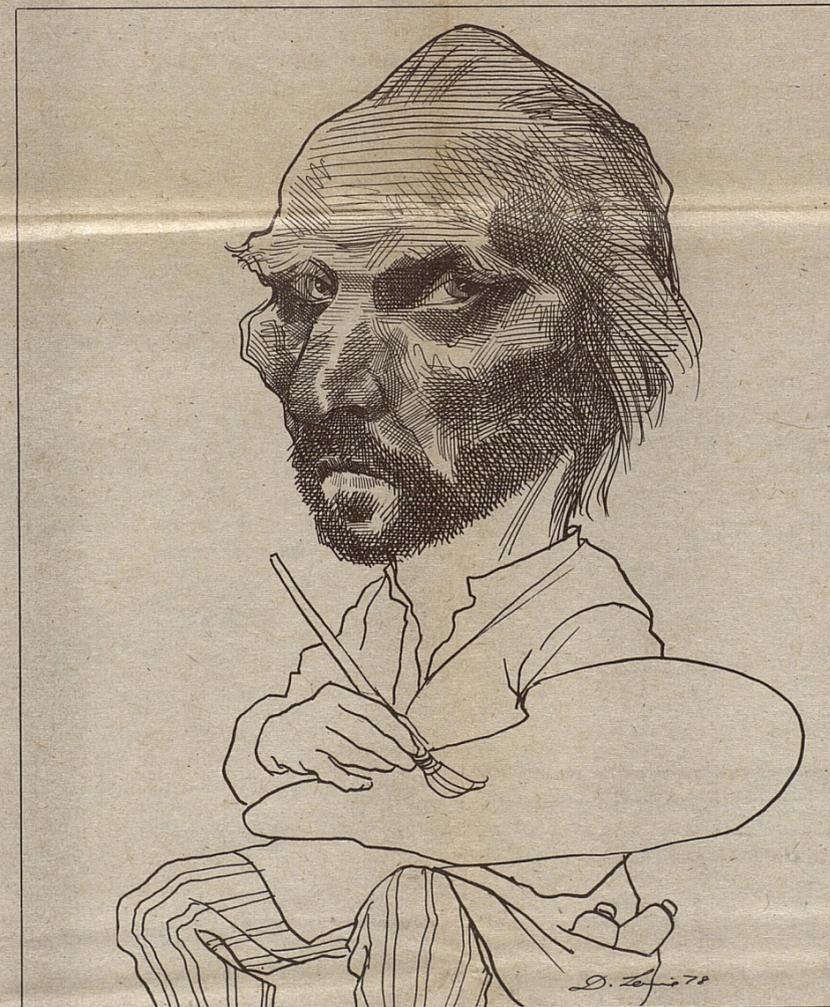
Flaubert is not Flaubert until we have read his letters to Louise Colet. Yet Flaubert died in 1880, whereas the full text of those letters did not appear until 1926. There will always be such cases. By comparison, the editing and publishing of the complete letters of Vincent van Gogh gave no trouble at all. Nearly all of them (some 650 out of 750) had been written to Vincent’s brother Theo and were lovingly preserved. As a young bride, and later as a young widow, Madame Theo did all that could be asked of her in the way of archiving, and until his death a few months ago her son V. W. van Gogh (born 1890) proved himself an exemplary guardian of the flame. In 1953 the centenary of the birth of Vincent van Gogh was marked by the publication of all the letters then known to have survived, together with reproductions of all the drawings with which the correspondence was truffled.

It was a family affair, that publication. Madame Theo (Johanna van Gogh-Bonger) had sorted the letters, put them in order, and written the long biographical foreword that is still a prime source for the facts of van Gogh’s life. Roughly two-thirds of the English translation had been done by her before her death in 1925, and the rest was done by a Dutchman, C. de Dood, in whom she had confidence. (Certain concessions to American usage were made for the New York Graphic Society’s edition). V. W. van Gogh had a clear run in preparing the centenary edition, in that all previous editions of the letters were out of print, and he included all the surviving letters from Theo van Gogh to Vincent and a whole batch of reminiscences of Vincent that had appeared—mostly in Dutch—in out-of-the-way periodicals.

To a reader who has no Dutch there would seem to be an instinctive plain

rightness about the renderings of the 450 and more letters which were written in Vincent van Gogh’s first language. Mrs. van Gogh-Bonger’s brief preface raises some doubts about her command of English, in that the archaic form “ere” is used twice within the space of eight lines for “until.” When she writes, moreover, that “many dates failed” we know what she means—that many of the letters were undated—but the Ger-

manism sits very awkwardly in English. But as we read through the letters themselves we come to believe in her implicitly. The final effect is, indeed, not so much that of a professional translation as of a family conference on which we are privileged to intrude.



manism sits very awkwardly in English. But as we read through the letters themselves we come to believe in her implicitly. The final effect is, indeed, not so much that of a professional translation as of a family conference on which we are privileged to intrude.

Collected letters are almost as difficult to keep in print as they are to assemble—the correspondence of Eugène Delacroix, for instance, is one of the great unread books of the world—and when the English-language edition

The letters of Vincent van Gogh differ from most collections of their kind in that for almost their entire length they form a seamless discourse between one human being and another. Such indeed was the symbiotic relationship between Vincent and Theo that these are not so much letters in the ordinary sense as a diary that happened to get mailed. Vincent committed his whole self to them, without reservation. They were at once the locus of his deepest feelings and the source of a stability that he

found nowhere else in his life. So far from being an agreeable garnish to an existence that was already being lived to the full, they were life itself for Vincent.

Letters also survive from Vincent to one or two fellow-painters, and in the last three years of his life (1887-1890) he often wrote to his youngest sister. But there are no letters whatever of the kind that give variety and a change of pace to other collected letters. There are no love letters, for example, no instances of relaxed social exchange, no comfortable journeys for pleasure, no casual inquiries made or replied to, no practicalities disposed of in an amusing or revealing way, none of the marginalia of “a full life.” In so far as Vincent functioned at all in a social setting he did so as an outcast among outcasts. Only when he put pen to paper did he make some headway in the struggle against estrangement that gives his Collected Letters their universal significance.

For it was not a fantasy of his that society conspired to block the power of communication that was within him and grew stronger every year. He got nowhere as an art dealer, though it was a profession in which more than one member of his family had excelled. Nor did he succeed as a schoolmaster, as an evangelist, or as a rather elderly theological student. (“Is this dative or ablative, van Gogh?” his teacher asked. “I really don’t care, sir,” was the answer.) He got nowhere as a suitor of eligible young ladies and nowhere, commercially, as an artist. If he had clothes, he gave them away. If he made friends, he soon lost them. And yet, as he wrote to Theo in August 1879, when he was twenty-six, “Like everyone else, I feel the need of family and friendship, affection and friendly intercourse. I am not made of stone or iron, like a hydrant or a lamp-post.” It was in letters, and in letters only, that that need could be assuaged.

Contrary to legend, Vincent van Gogh did not come from nowhere and was not at all a predestined outcast. Though himself the son and grandson of Protestant pastors who lived simply and carefully, he had two uncles who became generals in the Dutch army and a third who attained the highest rank in the Dutch army. His art-dealing uncles made money and took it for granted that there were fine flowers and rare fruit on the table, that wine came by the case, and that when the Dutch winter got too bleak they could take the train

“...it's a
thriller...”

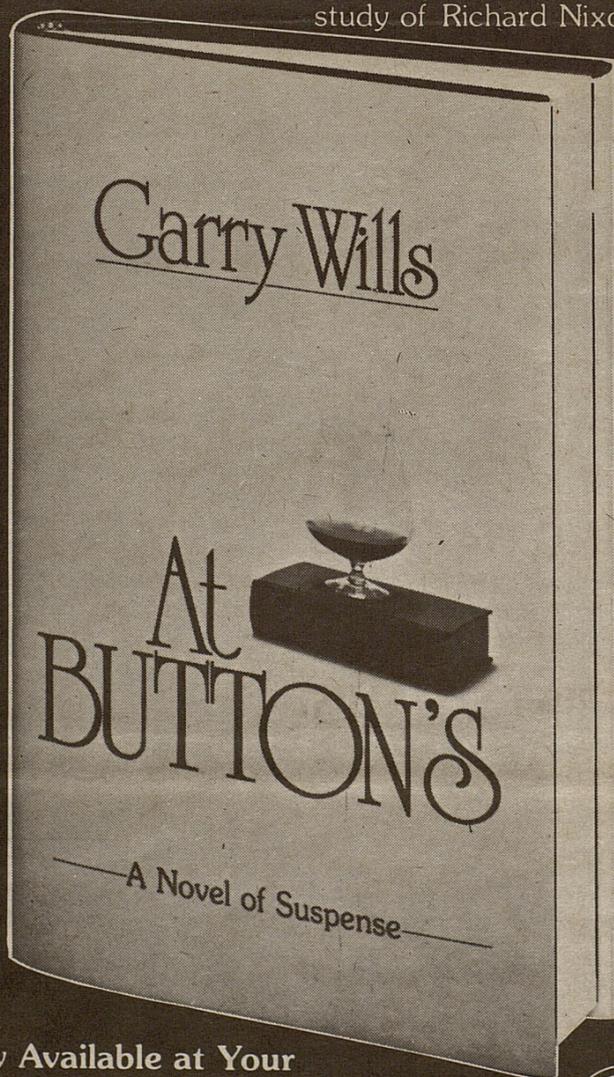
— BALTIMORE SUN

“...cerebral
and thrilling...”

— PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

Garry Wills, winner of the 1978 National Book Critics Circle Award, is back with his first work of fiction, “*At Button's*.”

Garry Wills, the author of the best-selling *Nixon Agonistes*, uses the same brilliance of style in his first venture into fiction. *At Button's* is a sinister tale of deception and deceit written with the same mastery of prose that critics acclaimed in Wills' study of Richard Nixon.



\$8.95
(cloth)

Now Available at Your
Bookseller or Order Direct

Andrews and McMeel, Inc. 6700 Squibb Road, Mission, Kansas 66202
A Universal Press Syndicate Company



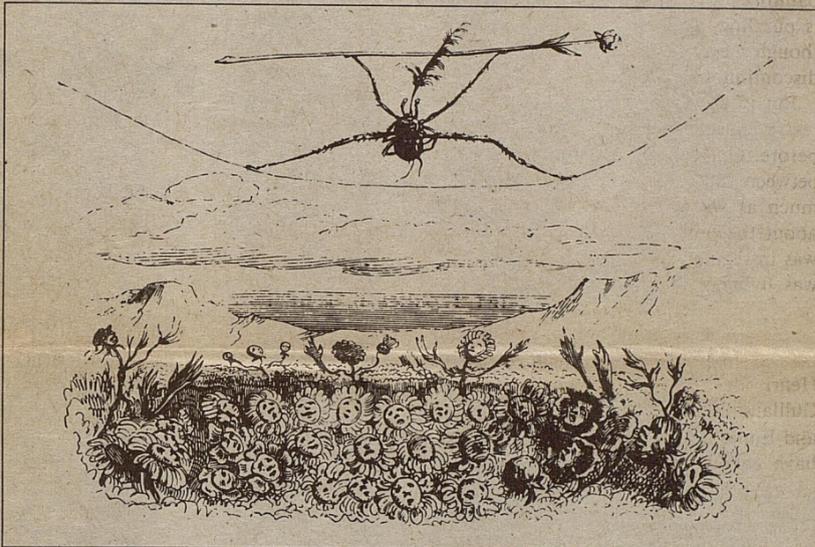
to Nice or Mentone.

It is also clear from Vincent's letters that as a young man he enjoyed society in a modest way, was careful of his dress, liked boating and sightseeing, and had exceptional gifts as a maker of images. At that time and in that setting, words did all the work. But what words! Vincent could set a scene as deftly as any of the great nineteenth-century novelists. When he was an aspirant schoolmaster in Ramsgate, England, he wrote to Theo:

Did I tell you about the storm I watched recently? The sea was yellowish, especially near the shore; on the horizon a strip of light, and above it immense dark gray clouds from which the rain poured down in slanting streaks. The wind blew the dust from the little white path on the rocks into the sea and bent the blooming hawthorne bushes and wallflowers that grow on the rocks. To the right were fields of young green corn, and in the distance the town looked like the towns that Albrecht Dürer used to etch. A town with its turrets, mills, slate roofs, and houses built in Gothic

was living as a free-lance evangelist in the coal-mining district of the Borinage, he would go many miles on foot to see a countryside that interested him: around Courrières, for instance, which he knew from the paintings of Jules Breton, he took a mole's-eye view of "the brown earth or almost coffee-colored clay, with whitish spots here and there where the marl appears." It was on the way back from this journey (in September 1880) that he made a crucial decision: henceforth he would be neither teacher nor preacher ("the only two possible professions," he had said in 1876) but a full-time artist. Thereafter he drew continually; fifteen months later he produced his first paintings; and for the rest of his life he saw himself as one thing and one only—a man who made art.

That he would ever make good art seemed unlikely to others. Even his brother Theo, who lived by selling art, could not persuade his clients that Vincent's work was of any interest. Theo was not, of course, a demon salesman. When he showed a painting to a potential buyer his bearing—so one observer remembered—was that of "a beggar



style, and below, the harbor between two jetties which project far into the sea.

A year later, he was in Amsterdam. "Twilight is falling," he wrote to Theo,

and the view of the yard from my window is simply wonderful, with that little avenue of poplars—their slender forms and thin branches stand out so delicate against the gray evening sky; and then the old arsenal building in the water—quiet as the "waters of the old pool" in the book of Isaiah—down by the waterside the walls of that arsenal are quite green and weather-beaten. Farther down is the little garden and the fence around it with the rosebushes, and everywhere in the yard the black figures of the workmen, and also the little dog. Just now Uncle Jan with his long black hair is probably making his rounds. In the distance the masts of the ships in the dock can be seen, in front the Atjeh, quite black, and the gray and red monitors—and just now here and there the lamps are being lit. At this moment the bell is ringing and the whole stream of workmen is pouring towards the gate; at the same time the lamp-lighter is coming to light the lamp in the yard behind the house.

What Vincent saw, he seized. Even in the darkest days of his youth, when he

humbly proffering his bowl." What Vincent sent from Holland between 1880 and 1886 was disingratiating in the highest degree. It looked exactly what it was: the end result of a long hard slog through subject matter that Parisian connoisseurs considered to be both tedious and repulsive.

Vincent was starting late in life and also in his beliefs. In the heyday of French impressionism, for instance, he thought that "one of the highest and noblest expressions of art" was represented by such living British artists as Millais and Herkomer and Frank Holl. Living in The Hague in the early 1880s, he wrote that "up to Millet and Jules Breton there was always progress. But to surpass those two—don't even talk about it." In 1885, when he was living in the little village of Nuenen where his father was the Protestant pastor, he wrote, "There is a school—I believe—of Impressionists, but I know very little about it." It would be difficult to con-

¹*Vincent Van Gogh: Drawings* (Overlook, \$12.95) includes 100 illustrations in black and white, four in color, and some examples of comparative material. The text is by Evert van Uitert, a Dutch scholar who specializes in van Gogh. The reproductive process tends to make all the drawings look both coarse and dark, but the selection is intelligent and unhackneyed, and we are given a glimpse of the English black-and-white illustrators who meant much to van Gogh.

test the proposition that until he arrived in Paris in 1886 at the age of thirty-three Vincent van Gogh knew nothing of the advanced art of the period (and that for one reason or another Theo van Gogh had not chosen to enlighten him).

However, Vincent's was not a hurrying nature. In no way did he share the current belief in the importance of being at the center of things. The impressionists might have outlawed black, for instance, some years earlier, but Vincent went on thinking that Frans Hals's command of twenty-seven different kinds of black was one of the most wonderful things that had ever happened in painting. "Is it true for *me*?" was his only criterion; and if it wasn't, he went on as before.

Anyone else might have gone underground in these matters. Painting full-time takes all a man's energies. What is talked about rarely gets done. Cézanne in his great years never wrote a letter if he could avoid it. Pissarro wrote to his son Lucien because Lucien was in England and Pissarro didn't want him to get out of touch. Degas's letters are tantalizing fragments from the hand of one of the best and most mischievous of recorded talkers. We love the letters of these men; but unless we know their paintings well there is a great deal that is puzzling. And the letters in question, though everywhere fascinating, are discontinuous.²

But in the case of van Gogh the narrative is as seamless after 1880 as it was before. Only during his sojourn in Paris between 1886 and 1888 is there a hiatus; much as we should like to know more about the only period in which Vincent was in regular contact with his peers, he was living with Theo at that time. Not only did he at last see the gamut of recent French painting at first hand, but he was in touch with Camille Pissarro, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Armand Guillaumin, Paul Gauguin, Paul Signac and Emile Bernard, contacts which must have called for a prodigious effort of assimilation. With so much to talk about and so many gifted people to talk to, van Gogh in Paris did not need to write letters. At all other times the correspondence was as rich as ever in self-sufficing statements which can be lifted out of the context of art and prove ideally applicable to our general concerns. Every reader will make his own choice among them—as Edmund Wilson said, "No two people read the same book"—but here are some examples, taken at random:

Admire as much as you can; most people do not admire enough.

A man may have a great fire in his soul, and yet have no one ever come to warm himself at it. The passers-by see only a wisp of smoke come through the chimney as they go on their way.

²*Degas's Letters* is available in an English translation from Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., Los Angeles, for \$7.95, and a revised and enlarged edition of *The Letters of Camille Pissarro to his Son Lucien* is published in English translation by Paul P. Appel, Mamaroneck, New York, at \$22.50. There is a new and enlarged edition of the correspondence of Cézanne in the original French. Like its predecessor (first published in 1937) this has been edited by John Rewald. It is published by Grasset in Paris, costs sixty-five francs, and includes 233 letters, as against 207 in the earlier edition. It is also notably richer in its annotations.

How rich art is! A man who can remember what he has seen need never be without food for thought or feel himself truly lonely.

There are no more unbelieving, hard-hearted and worldly people—with some exceptions—than clergymen and, especially, clergymen's wives.

The "men of the day" are the men of *one* day. But the man who has so much faith and love for what he is doing that he actually takes pleasure in what other people find dull—that man will ripen, slowly but surely.

Painters are like a family—a fatal combination of people with conflicting interests, each one of them opposed to the rest. If two or more of them are of the same mind, it's

only because they want to annoy the others.

I am always greatly drawn to English draftsmen and English authors because of their Monday-morning-like soberness, and their studied simplicity and solemnity and keen analysis. There is in them something solid and strong that can help us in the days when we feel weak.

In the end we shall have had enough of cynicism and skepticism and humbug, and want life to be more like music.

We cannot but be aware of nothingness, emptiness, and the betrayal of what is desirable, beautiful and good. Yet in spite of that we allow ourselves to be eternally deluded by the charm that things outside ourselves exert on our six

senses. It is as if we could not distinguish between objective and subjective. Fortunately for us, we never give up that particular stupidity, that particular hope.

Faced with passages such as these, we remember what van Gogh wrote to Emile Bernard, the young painter who had made friends with van Gogh and Gauguin and was later to make friends with Cézanne:

So many people, especially among our painter-colleagues, imagine that words are nothing. But the contrary is true: to say something well is as interesting (and as difficult) as to paint it.

As may by now be clear, Vincent van Gogh rarely said an ambiguous thing. Lucidity was his aim, and if it took him to the very frontier of platitude he

2 major American writers

Robert Penn Warren

WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME

Malcolm Cowley called this story of a young man who falls in love with a woman he has never seen "the richest of Warren's novels." \$4.95

NIGHT RIDER

Warren's first novel — still considered one of his best — about a young lawyer's tragic involvement in the conflict between Kentucky's tobacco growers and buyers in the early days of this century. \$4.95

Eudora Welty

THE EYE OF THE STORY

Selected Essays and Reviews

Named by the *N.Y. Times Book Review* one of the most important books published in 1978 and nominated for the Book Critics Circle Award, these brilliant essays on the art of fiction "make the relationship between reading and writing extraordinarily close."—*N.Y. Times Book Review* \$4.95

LOSING BATTLES

This story of a large family reunion is "a major work of the imagination and a gift to cause general rejoicing... Eudora Welty possesses the surest comic sense of any American writer alive."—*N.Y. Times Book Review* \$2.45

THE OPTIMIST'S DAUGHTER

Eudora Welty won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction with this novel about a daughter's struggle to come to terms with her father's death. "The best book she has ever written... Extraordinary."—*N.Y. Times Book Review* \$2.50



now in **Vintage** paperback

A division of Random House

John Leonard calls him
"an extraordinary writer"
 and **"a genius"**

STANISLAW LEM

Reviews of fifteen books that were never written—but too easily might have been—provide the occasion for internationally famed novelist and essayist Stanislaw Lem to offer wonderfully witty and perceptive reflections on the absurdities of our alarming civilization with its fads and escalating silliness.

"With delightful leaps of the imagination, Lem outdistances nearly all of the most popular star trekkers."

—R.Z. Sheppard, *Time Magazine*



A PERFECT VACUUM

Perfect Reviews
 of Nonexistent
 Books
 By Stanislaw Lem

\$8.95 at bookstores



A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book
HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVI



Violence and Oppression

James C. Dick

Are oppressed people ever justified in resorting to deadly violence? James Dick sheds new light on this moral dilemma by examining four instances of violence on the part of the oppressed in American history: the Battle of Alamance (North Carolina, 1771), Nat Turner's slave uprising (Virginia, 1831), the Battle of Homestead (Pennsylvania, 1892), and the violence following the Ludlow Massacre (Colorado, 1914). \$12.00

Japan's Political Revolution under MacArthur

A PARTICIPANT'S ACCOUNT

Justin Williams, Sr.

Having held a key post on General MacArthur's staff during the occupation of Japan, Justin Williams had an inside view of the process of Japan's democratization. His account of this experience presents a picture of MacArthur that runs counter to other recent portrayals of the man. \$16.50

The University of Georgia Press

ATHENS 30602

didn't care. He was not writing with big-city people in mind—Parisians in particular struck him as "faithless and changeable as the sea" and as "unnatural, foul, and sad"—but in language that would be accessible to the peasants of the Brabant for whom his father had given all that he had to give.

Intermingled with maxims of universal application there are of course passages beyond number in these letters that relate to art. Many of them now seem both timeless in their validity and remarkably prescient in their general outlook. Before how many great paintings of our own century could we not recall that van Gogh said: "The painter of the future will be a colorist such as there has never been before"? And when van Gogh wrote in 1885 that "Color expresses something by itself" (and was not, that is to say, a mere badge of identity) he said something that was fundamental to Matisse, to Munch, to Kandinsky, and to many of their successors (not least in the United States).

It was van Gogh, likewise, who unriddled what for the layman has always been one of the more bothersome aspects of modern art: distortion. When a fellow-artist complained that the figures in his *Potato Eaters* were distorted, van Gogh said,

Tell him that I should be in despair if my figures were "correct," in academic terms. I don't want them to be "correct." Real artists paint things not as they are, in a dry analytical way, but as they feel them. I adore Michelangelo's figures, though the legs are too long and the hips and backsides too large. What I most want to do is to make of these incorrectnesses, deviations, remodelings, or adjustments of reality something that may be "untrue" but is at the same time more true than literal truth.

Here a great part of twentieth-century art is foreshadowed in something Vincent van Gogh said before he knew anything at all about the progressive art even of his own day.

Van Gogh also argued for a new openness and candor in the movement of the brush. As against the crafty and rhetorical methods of the past, he stood for "brushwork that would cut out stippling and the rest and offer simply the varied stroke." With the help of remarks such as these it would be easy to present Vincent van Gogh as a proto-modernist: a man who knew exactly in which directions art should go and was able to put them into words.

But that is not how van Gogh saw himself. It was not in his nature to race toward the future. The Provençal cypress seemed to him "as beautiful, in line and proportion, as an Egyptian obelisk." Even when he came to know the founding fathers of modern art at first hand he insisted that "a man must be blind not to think that Meissonier is an artist—and a first-rate one." When people vaunted the scenery of Provence as unique and without parallel he broke it down, color by color, and said,

You will see that it constitutes something like the color-combinations in those pretty Scottish tartans—green, blue, red, yellow, black—which, alas, one hardly sees any more nowadays.

When people carried on about the painting of the future, he said,

Well, I must say what I so often told Gauguin—that others have done it already. I for one cannot forget all those beautiful paintings of the Barbizon school. It seems hardly possible that anyone will do better, and in any case it's unnecessary.

One consequence of the close and loving family connection that was maintained throughout the lifetime of V.W. van Gogh may be that we are as far as ever we were from having, as distinct from an authentic text, a critical edition of Vincent's letters that would bring out connections between his letters and his painting. It is as if posterity in general were engaged in a conspiracy of expiation which made it unthinkable to say that van Gogh ever painted a bad picture or said a silly thing.

Before he died however, Vincent's nephew saw through the press a two-volume set of facsimiles of nearly all the letters that van Gogh wrote between his arrival in Paris in March 1886 and his death in July 1890. As far as possible, the letters are reproduced actual size, and certain datings have been revised in the light of Dr. J. Hulsker's researches.

What might seem to some severe natures no more than a very expensive souvenir album of material that is already available in full is in fact a venture of genuine historical importance. Quite apart from the poignancy of seeing (for instance) the exact look of the note in which Vincent announced his arrival in Paris ("I shall be in the Louvre from noon onwards. Please let me know at what time you could join me in the square gallery"), the facsimiles offer invaluable evidence both of the state of mind in which Vincent wrote each letter and to the points which he wished to emphasize in ways that cannot be mimicked in print.

Above all, they make us intimately aware of the prodigious effort of self-observation with which van Gogh strove to keep his illness under control. Karl Jaspers and Meyer Schapiro³ have written on that point; for confirmation of it we have only to turn to the letters in facsimile. For much of his life van Gogh wrote in a regular, open, and self-evidently generous hand that was the very antithesis of what we think of as an "inspired" or "visionary" script. "With a rare lucidity," Meyer Schapiro wrote in 1946, "he watched his behavior to foresee the attacks [of madness] and to take precautions against them, until in the end his despair destroyed him." In the facsimiles of his letters we see that watchfulness made visible, over and over again.

Only in the facsimiles, in fact, do we see exactly how van Gogh gave an ordered majesty even to a straightforward listing of colors and could lay out page after page, quite unselfconsciously, with every word given room to breathe and every individual letter within each word set down as a loved object. For him, the written word was an object like any other object, a "real thing" (as he used to say). "I love things that are real, things that are possible," he once wrote. Objects were for van Gogh, as Meyer Schapiro put it, "a symbol and guarantee of sanity." And among those objects a letter ranked high: just how high is clear from every page of *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. □

³Meyer Schapiro's "On a Painting of Van Gogh" is included in his *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, a collection of essays published by George Braziller and priced at \$20.00.

THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

SIR FRANK STENTON, GENERAL EDITOR

A beautiful Phaidon Press volume which has been out of print for a number of years. "A superbly produced volume. . . . The book is no mere picture book. It includes authoritative chapters on the historical background of the tapestry, its technique and history, the arms, armour and dress of its personages, and its inscriptions." *The London Times Literary Supplement*

14 color plates, 150 illustrations. Bibliography, notes and index. 182 pages. 9 x 12 inches. Cloth.

A Phaidon Press Publication

New revised edition 1965 \$12.50

A CATALOGUE OF EARLY FLEMISH, DUTCH AND GERMAN PAINTINGS

BY HARRY B. WEHLE AND
MARGARETTA SALINGER

First published in 1947, in paperback, this hardbound edition illustrates and describes the pictures in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection. Detailed references and biographies of all artists represented make this catalogue useful to both the casual visitor and the art historian.

251 pp., 169 illus., end paper maps. 6½ x 9½ in. Cloth.

A Metropolitan Museum of Art Publication.

Hardcover reprint, June 1966 \$7.50

AMERICAN NEGRO ART

BY CEDRIC DOVER

The only available complete history of the visual arts of the American Negro. Cedric Dover, a British anthropologist who lived for some years in the United States, has related painting, sculpture and crafts to the changing role of the Negro in American life. "An exceptional survey both in text and illustrations, of the American Negro artist from colonial times to the present." *Library Journal*

390 illustrations. 8 color plates. 186 pages. 7 x 9½ inches. Cloth. LC 60-51364.

Third edition 1965 \$12.00

FINE ART REPRODUCTIONS:

Old and Modern Masters

EDITED BY ANTON SCHUTZ

A completely revised edition of the catalogue of all reproductions published by the New York Graphic Society, with many new color prints. This remarkable volume, with its wealth of picture material from all schools and periods, is a valuable work of reference as well as a buying guide. The new edition has been rearranged for ease in reference use.

Over 2000 reproductions, entirely in color. 528 pages. 9½ x 12½ inches. Cloth. LC 65-9117.

Completely revised edition 1965 \$25.00

MASTERPIECES OF GREEK ART

BY RAYMOND V. SCHODER, S.J.

A new and completely revised edition of one of the most beautiful and popular books on the entire span of Greek art. The author has revised chronology and has rewritten many of the descriptive and historical comments to incorporate the most recent scholarly studies. A completely new scholarly research bibliography has been added.

"By far the best pictorial presentation of Greek art that has been published." *Archaeology*.

112 color plates. Bibliography, maps and chronological charts. 224 pages. 8½ x 10 inches. Cloth. LC 60-8922.

New revised edition 1965 \$13.50

SELECTED BACKLIST . . .

NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY

ARTS OF MAN. Eric Newton. An anthology and interpretation of 174 great works of art. 117 color, 57 black and white ills. 320 pp. 6 x 8 in. Cloth. 1960. LC 60-8920. \$5.95

THE DESERT KINGDOMS OF PERU. Victor W. Von Hagen. Reconstruction of the exotic Mochica and Chimú civilizations through the writings of the early Spanish explorers and the famous effigy ceramics. 19 color plates. 120 photographs. Line drawings and maps. Notes and bibliography. 284 pp. 7 x 9 in. Cloth. 1965. LC 65-10432. \$10.00

THE FAUVES. Jean-Paul Crespelle. A vivid personal account of the dramatic "wild-beast" rebellion. 100 full-page color plates. 366 pp. 10 x 14 in. Boards. 1962. LC 62-18719. \$25.00

INDIAN ART IN AMERICA. *The Arts and Crafts of the North American Indian.* Frederick J. Dockstader. A lavishly illustrated book, the only full, authoritative treatment of the subject. 70 color plates, 180 black and white ills. 224 pp. 10 x 11 in. Cloth. 1961. LC 60-8921. \$25.00

INDIAN ART IN MIDDLE AMERICA. *Pre-Columbian and Contemporary Arts and Crafts of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.* Frederick J. Dockstader. 70 color plates. 180 black and white ills. 224 pp. 10 x 11 in. Cloth. 1964. LC 64-21815. \$25.00

THE COMPLETE LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH. The definitive and only complete edition of the van Gogh letters ever published in the English language. 194 tipped-in facsimile reproductions of all the drawings and watercolors in the original correspondence, 21 in color, plus 41 half-tones. 1888 pp. 6½ x 9½ in. Cloth. Three volumes, boxed. *Second edition 1959.*

Three volume set \$50.00

MAILLOL. Waldemar George. 24 tipped-in color plates. Bibliography, catalogue and index of works. 238 pp. 10 x 11½ in. Cloth. 1965. LC 65-14124. \$25.00

ROMAN ART: *A Modern Survey of the Art of Imperial Rome.* George M. A. Hanfmann. 52 color plates, 145 black and white ills. Chronological charts, end paper maps and extensive bibliography. 320 pp. 8½ x 10 in. Cloth. 1964. LC 64-21814. \$15.00

SCHOOL OF PARIS: *The Painters and the Artistic Climate of Paris since 1910.* Raymond Nacenta. 477 biographies of contemporary artists. 110 color plates. 110 ills. 368 pp. 9 x 12 in. Cloth. 1960. LC 59-9329. \$30.00

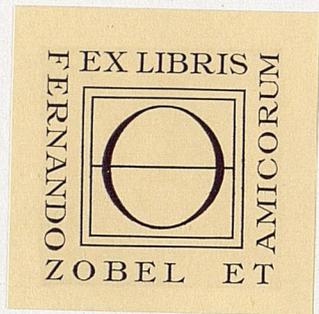
TUTANKHAMEN. Christiane Desroches Noblecourt. A magnificently illustrated story of the death of a Pharaoh. 75 color plates. 114 ills. 312 pp. 7½ by 10 in. Cloth 1963. LC 63-15145. \$15.00

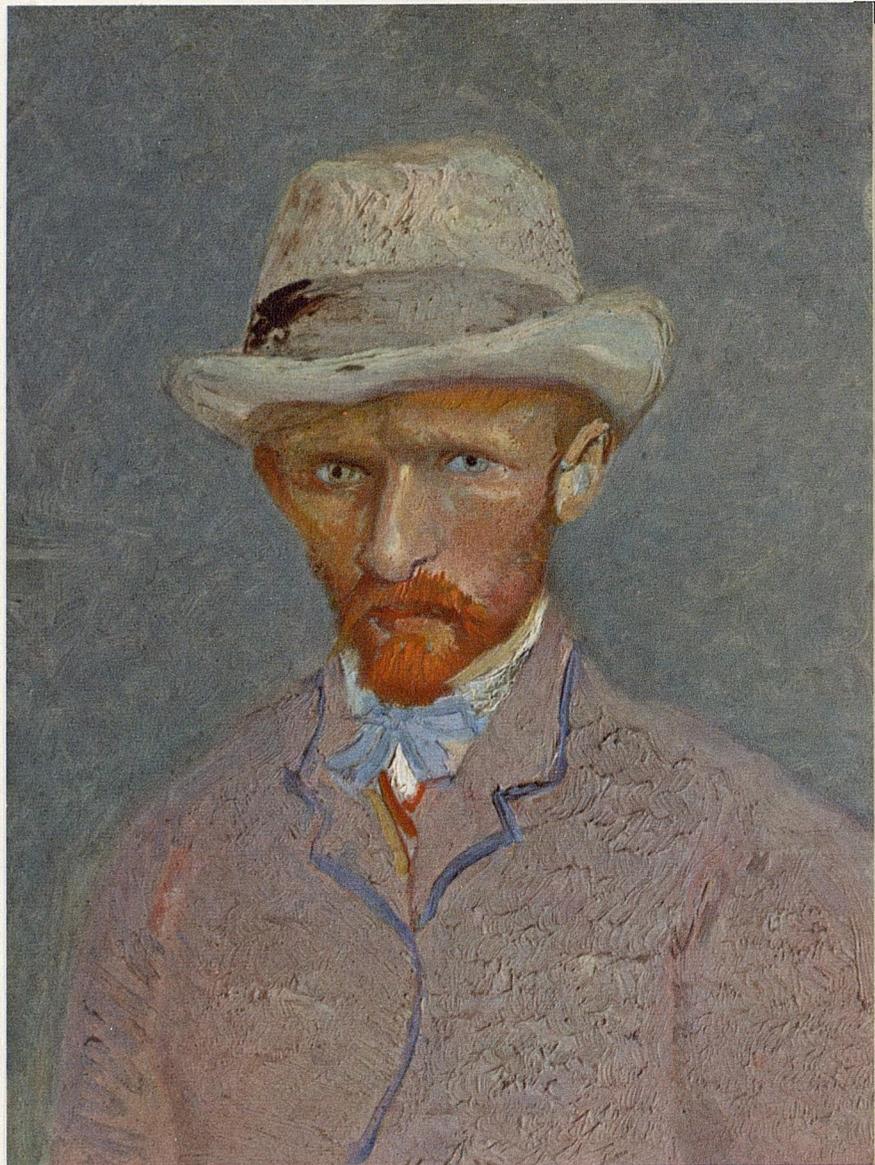
UNESCO WORLD ART SERIES. A distinguished series of volumes, each containing 32 color plates with introductions by internationally known authorities. 13½ x 19 in. Boards with cloth spine. 22 volumes in print, most recently: POLAND, *Paintings of the 15th Century*, and AUSTRIA, *Medieval Wall Paintings.* EACH \$22.00

MUSEUM OF PRIMITIVE ART

SENUFO SCULPTURE FROM WEST AFRICA. Robert Goldwater. A monograph which discusses the use and meaning of Senufo sculpture, its employment in religious ritual, and its connection to the dominant secret society of the Senufo. 186 ills. 128 pp. Boards. 1964. \$8.95

TECHNIQUE AND PERSONALITY IN PRIMITIVE ART. Three lectures by Margaret Mead, Junius Bird and Hans Himelheber. Discussion of the relation of traditional technique to the development of style and the expression of the individual artist. 37 ills. (2 in color). 110 pp. 91 text figures. Boards. 1963. LC 63-19321. \$5.00

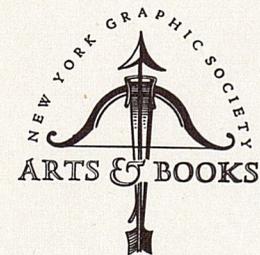




THE COMPLETE LETTERS
OF
VINCENT VAN GOGH

*with reproductions of all the drawings
in the correspondence*

VOLUME TWO



PUBLISHED BY
NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY
GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT, U.S.A.

No part of this book, including any of the illustrations, may be reproduced without the written permission of New York Graphic Society, to whom all applications so to do should be addressed.

CONTENTS

LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH TO HIS BROTHER THEO

<i>The Hague (continued)</i> – March 1883–September 1883	I
<i>Drenthe</i> – September–November 1883	138
<i>Nuenen</i> – December 1883–November 1885	223
<i>Antwerp</i> – End of November 1885–End of February 1886	450
<i>Paris</i> – March 1886–20 February 1888	511
<i>Arles</i> – 21 February–August 1888	525

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS
BY N.V. DRUKKERIJ G. J. THIEME, NIJMEGEN

say very fine, two negro women talking, it is one of those he did at Martinique. McKnight told me he had seen at Marseilles a picture by Monticelli, flowerpiece.

Very soon I intend sending over some studies to Paris and then you can, if you like, choose one for our exchange.

I must hurry off this letter for I feel some more abstractions coming on and if I did not quickly fill up my paper I would again set to drawing and you would not have your letter.

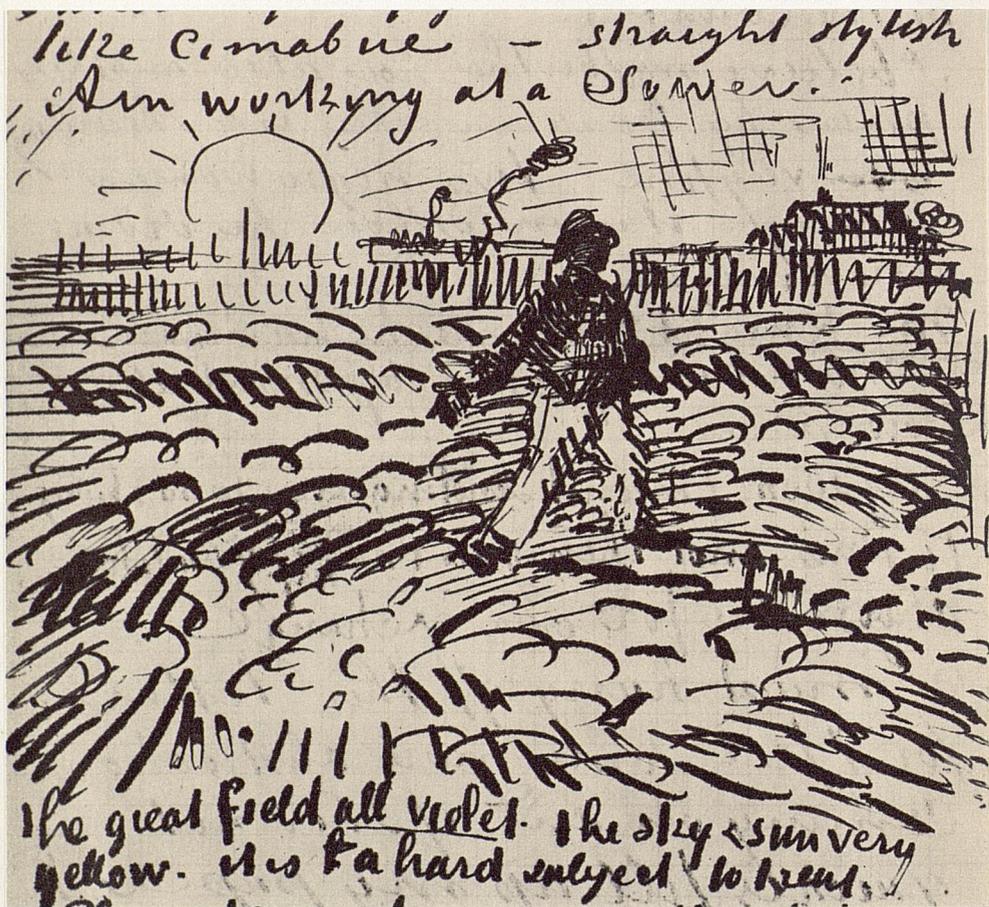
I heard Rodin has a beautiful head at the salon.

I have been to the seaside for a week and very likely am going thither again soon. Flat shore sands—fine figures there like Cimabue—straight stylish.

Am working at a Sower: the great field all violet the sky & sun very yellow, it is a hard subject to treat.

Please remember me very kindly to Mrs. Russell—and in thought I heartily shake hands.

Yours very truly, Vincent



501b

[Letter from Russell to Vincent van Gogh; see letter 514.]

Belle-Ile-en-Mer

Morbihan.

My dear Vincent,

July 22nd [1888]

Excuse not answering your letter of some weeks or two ago. I've been much worried by the changing to this island, packing up and other things.

It is most good of you to give Monsieur Goguin [*sic*] a leg up. Not knowing the man I can't say if he deserves it. I hope it for your sake.

I would like to help you. But how? There is but one legitimate way *i.e.* By purchasing one of his works. The very last day in Paris I tried to fetch Boussod, Veladon & Cie in to see the picture you speak of "niggers etc." but failed through want of time. For others I saw, that big one of yours unfortunately swamps in my *opinion*. So I am in a fix.

Young Bernard invites me from Ste Briain [note, the name is hard to read—might be Briain or Briauc].

Complains much of the weather interfering with his work.

Before I left Paris I lunched with M. Rodin (who has finished a fine head of my wife) and M. Claude Monet, saw ten of M. Monets pictures done at Antibes. Very fine in colour and light of a certain richness of envelop. But like nearly all the so called impressionist work the form is not enough studied. The big mass of form I mean. The trees too much wood in *branches* for the size of the *trunk* and so against fundamental law of nature. A lack of construction everywhere. He is undoubtedly a remarkable colorist, and full of courage in attacking difficult problems. We should all do the same. 'T is the only way to get strong. Luckily here in Belle-Ile I am forced to try all things, figures, landscape, sea, cattle etc., etc. otherwise would

[The end of the letter is missing.]

502

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, and the 50-fr. note enclosed. I did not know that the article on Claude Monet was by the same person as the one on Bismarck. It does one good to read things like that, more than most of the stuff the decadents write, with their passion for saying the most obvious things in the most wildly contorted phrases.

I am very dissatisfied with what I have been doing lately, because it is very ugly. But all the same, figure is interesting me more than landscape.

Anyway, I shall send you a drawing of the Zouave today. In the end making studies of figures so as to experiment and to learn will be the shortest way for me to do something worth while.

Bernard has got to the point. Today he sent me a rough sketch of a brothel, which I am sending you enclosed to hang beside his clowns, which you already

F. Zobel

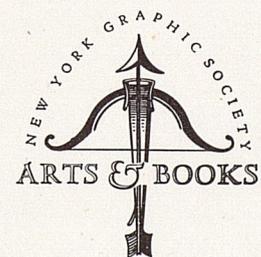




THE COMPLETE LETTERS
OF
VINCENT VAN GOGH

*with reproductions of all the drawings
in the correspondence*

VOLUME THREE



PUBLISHED BY
NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY
GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT, U.S.A.

No part of this book, including any of the illustrations, may be reproduced without the written permission of New York Graphic Society, to whom all applications so to do should be addressed.

CONTENTS

LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH TO HIS BROTHER THEO

<i>Arles (continued)</i> – August 1888–8 May 1889	1
<i>St. Rémy</i> – May 1889–May 1890	169
<i>Auvers-sur-Oise</i> – 21 May–29 July 1890	273
<i>Letters to Anthon G. A. Ridder van Rappard</i> – (R 1–R 58a)	303
<i>Letters to Vincent's youngest sister Wilhelmina J. van Gogh</i> – (W 1–W 23)	425
<i>Letters to Émile Bernard</i> – (B 1–B 22)	473
<i>Letters from Theo van Gogh to his Brother Vincent</i> – (T 1a–T 57)	528
<i>Additional documents</i> – (A 1–A 16)	592
<i>Index</i>	610

In 1938 there appeared an English translation of Vincent's letters to Bernard, translated and edited by Douglas Lord. He revised the sequence, and in an appendix gave a list of the omissions and alterations perpetrated in the original text of 1911 for the purpose of "purifying" it somewhat.

Here (*i.e.* in the Dutch edition) the letters are reprinted completely and in their original form (at least as far as the material is at my disposal, as I am not in possession of the originals).

Letter B 19a is added, which letter I received from Mrs. Mahé-Williams at Aix, a cousin of Albert Aurier. The sequence coincides with the English edition, so that the numbering is the same. However the Roman figures are replaced by ordinary ones, preceded by the letter B. The numbers of the French edition of 1911 are added (in italics) between brackets in order to facilitate comparison. For the sake of orientation every letter is provided with a footnote referring the reader to a letter of Vincent's to Theo.

V. W. VAN GOGH

B 1 [7]

[Paris Summer 1887]

My dear comrade Bernard¹,
54 Rue Lepic
I feel impelled to apologize to you for having left you so abruptly the other day. So I do so herewith without delay. I recommend to you to read Tolstoi's *Russian Legends*, and I shall also let you have the article on Eug. Delacroix I spoke of.

All the same I myself went to see Guillaumin, but in the evening, and I thought that perhaps you did not know his address, which is 13 Quai d'Anjou. I believe that Guillaumin as a human being has sounder ideas than the others, and if all were like him they would produce more good things, and would have less time and inclination to fight each other so furiously.

I persist in believing, not because I have given you a piece of my mind, but because it will become your own conviction too—I persist in believing that you will discover that in the studios one not only does not learn much about painting, but not even much good about the art of living; and that one finds oneself forced to learn how to live in the same way one must learn to paint, without having recourse to the old tricks and eye-deceiving devices of intriguers.

I do not think your self-portrait will be either your last or your best, although on the whole it is terribly *you*.

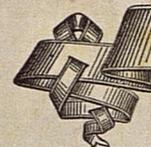
Listen now, what I tried to explain to you the other day amounts roughly to this. In order to avoid generalizations, allow me to take an example borrowed from reality. If you have quarreled with a painter, and consequently say, "If Signac exhibits in the place where I exhibit, I shall withdraw my pictures," and if you slander him, then it seems to me that you are not acting as well as you might. For it is better to look at things for a long time before judging so cate-

¹ Vincent wrote, "*Mon cher copain Bernard.*" "*Copain*" means either *schoolmate* or *comrade*, and he would never have called Bernard his "schoolmate." Vincent looked upon some of the painters as his "comrades-in-arms" in the great struggle for the recognition of what Vincent called "*l'art véridique*" (veracious art), and Bernard was one of them.

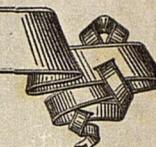
8^e volume.

N^o 390 — 10 c.

Un an : 6 fr.



LES HOMMES D'AUJOUR'HUI



TEXTE ET DESSIN D'EMILE BERNARD

Bureaux : Librairie Vanier, 19, quai Saint-Michel, Paris.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

