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# Van Gogh's Sunflowers

by CHARLES L. MEE

Vincent Van Gogh is alone, with a canvas and an easel in front of him.

He is holding a brush and a palette.

As the piece goes from beginning to middle to end  
the small curtains close extremely slowly from both right and left.  
And, at the end,  
when the curtains are completely closed,  
and we can no longer see Van Gogh,  
we see the full painting of sunflowers on the curtains  
as the lights fade.

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VINCENT

This morning I saw the countryside from my window  
a long time before the sunrise  
with nothing but the morning star,  
which looked very big.

There are lots of flowers and color effects.

The flowers will be short-lived  
replaced soon by the yellow wheat fields.

I think of you, Theo, my dear brother,  
you must absolutely stop worrying about me now.  
When you send me the new canvas and the colors,  
I'll go out a bit more to see the countryside.

When you receive the canvases I've done in the garden,  
you'll see that I'm not too melancholy here.

When I first arrived,  
the garden that was planted with tall pines gave me enough work,  
and I didn't go outside very much.  
But, the landscape of St-Rémy is beautiful,  
and little by little I'm going to make more and more trips into it.

I have a wheat field,  
very yellow and very bright,  
perhaps the brightest  
canvas I've done.

Here are the colors I need to have you send me now:

large tubes  
3 emerald  
2 green  
2 cobalt  
1 ultramarine  
1 orange lead  
6 zinc white

Of course, I still have remorse,  
and enormously when I think of my work.  
I hope that in the long run I will do better things,  
but we aren't there yet.

#### THEO'S VOICE

Vincent, my dear brother,  
I'm pleased that your journey to St-Rémy went well,  
and that you feel more calm there than you did in Arles.  
All the same,  
I hope that your stay will only be for a short length of time.  
Having these mad people as your neighbors can't be agreeable.

What I would like is that we could discover some people  
somewhere  
who would take care of you while allowing you your entire freedom.

But tell me:

what is the establishment like that you are now in?  
How are you treated,  
is the food sufficient,  
and how are the people with whom you have to deal?  
Do you see something of the country?  
Above all, don't wear yourself out,  
for it's better that at present you do all you can to regain your strength.  
The work will come afterwards.

VINCENT

Theo, I *assure* you that I'm very well here.  
I have a little room with grey-green paper  
with two water-green curtains  
with designs of very pale roses  
enlivened with thin lines of blood-red.

These curtains,  
probably the leftovers of a ruined, deceased rich man,  
are very pretty in design.  
Probably from the same source comes a very worn armchair  
covered with a tapestry flecked with red-brown,  
pink, creamy white, black,  
forget-me-not blue and bottle green.

Through the iron-barred window  
I can make out a square of wheat in an enclosure,  
above which in the morning I see the sun rise in its glory.

With this —  
as there are more than 30 empty rooms —  
I have another room in which to work.  
[[[[[A guy enters with a pushcart  
with all the stuff of a household on it--

four chairs, a blanket, a towel, suitcase,  
random clothes, a pillow.  
And more.  
A huge amount of stuff.  
He parks it, steps back, looks at it,  
thinks about it,  
and then takes one of the chairs off it,  
puts the chair on the ground,  
and sits down  
and, sitting there, just looks straight out.]]]]]

THEO'S VOICE

And the food?

VINCENT

The food is so-so.  
It smells naturally a little musty,  
as in a cockroach-ridden restaurant in Paris or a boarding school.  
As these unfortunates do absolutely nothing  
(not a book,  
nothing to distract them but a game of boules and a game of draughts)  
they have no other daily distraction than to stuff themselves  
with chickpeas, haricot beans, lentils  
and other groceries and colonial foodstuffs  
by the regulated quantities and at fixed times.  
As the digestion of these commodities presents certain difficulties,  
they thus fill their days in a manner as inoffensive as it's cheap.

But joking apart,  
the fear of madness passes from me considerably  
upon seeing from close at hand those who are affected with it,  
as I may very easily be in the future.

Although there are a few people here who are seriously ill,  
the fear,  
the horror that I had of madness before I arrived  
has already been greatly softened.

And although one continually hears shouts and terrible howls  
as though of the animals in a menagerie,  
despite this the people here know each other very well,  
and help each other when they suffer crises.

Although there are some here who howl or rave,  
here there is much true friendship that they have for each other.

If someone has some crisis the others look after him,  
and intervene so that he doesn't harm himself.

The same for those who have the mania of often getting angry.  
Old regulars of the menagerie run up and separate the fighters,  
if there is a fight.

It's true that there are some who are in a more serious condition,  
whether they be filthy, or dangerous.  
These are in another courtyard.

[[[[[An extremely tall skinny naked guy with caked blood on his head  
and his entire body charcoal black---  
burned from head to toe--  
enters doing butoh walking  
but seems genuinely to have mobility issues.  
He walks, stumbles, shuffles, lurches on his tiptoes,  
falls over to the side,  
goes into a crouch,  
goes to the ground,  
writhing  
and finally just lies there.]]]]]

THEO'S VOICE

And you yourself?

VINCENT

Now I take a bath twice a week,  
and stay in it for 2 hours,  
then my stomach is infinitely better than a year ago.

I think I've done well to come here,  
first, in seeing the reality of the life  
of the diverse mad or cracked people in this menagerie,  
I'm losing the vague dread, the fear of the thing.  
And little by little  
I can come to consider madness as being an illness like any other.  
Then the change of surroundings is doing me good, I imagine.

It's possible that I'll stay here for quite a long time,  
never have I been so tranquil as here  
to be able to paint a little at last.  
Very near here there are some little grey or blue mountains,  
with very, very green wheatfields at their foot,  
and pines.

I think of  
Egyptian art:  
what makes it extraordinary,  
is it not that those calm, serene kings,  
wise and gentle, patient, good,  
seem unable to be other than they are;  
eternally farmers who worship the sun.

The Egyptian artists thus have a faith,  
and so,  
as they work from feeling and instinct,  
they express all these intangible things:  
goodness, infinite patience, wisdom, serenity,  
with a few masterly curves and marvellous proportions.

When the thing depicted  
is stylistically absolutely in agreement

and at one with the manner of depiction,  
isn't that what creates the quality of a piece of art?  
I think so.

And now, too,  
at last,  
I have a landscape with olive trees,  
and also a new study of a starry sky.

#### THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

Proper attire  
Think about it  
If you want respect

In the park  
what used to be a water fountain —  
now a birdbath

#### THEO'S VOICE

Ah Vincent,  
really,  
the view from your window must be very beautiful;  
in Paris one sometimes yearns to see the real countryside  
as you draw a fragment of it.  
One never sees peasants in the surroundings of Paris,  
and truly I no longer know when the wheat or potatoes are harvested.  
And so  
a painting of the real countryside does one good.

A few days ago  
I received your last consignment in perfect condition....

#### VINCENT

And you thought?

#### THEO'S VOICE

And I thought it was extremely beautiful —  
the little sower with the tree,  
the baby, the starry night,  
the sunflowers and the chair with the pipe and the tobacco.  
And the Fields with the gardens in springtime....  
Really beautiful.  
I think you choose wonderful subjects for paintings,  
those tufted trees full of freshness and bathed in the light of the sun  
are so beautiful.

In your canvases  
there's a remarkable vigor  
and certainly they'll be appreciated one day.  
If we see that Pissarros, Gauguins, Renoirs, Guillaumins don't sell,  
one must be almost pleased not to have the public's favor,  
since those who have it now  
won't always have it.

#### THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

Anger management  
Anger management

#### VINCENT

People say —  
and I'm quite willing to believe it —  
that it's difficult to know oneself —  
but it's not easy to paint oneself either.  
I'm working on two portraits of myself at the moment —  
for want of another model —  
because it's time that I did a bit of figure work.  
I'm working from morning till night.

Here I am again.  
I'm not letting go.  
I'm trying again on a new canvas.  
I could almost believe that I have a new period of clarity ahead of me.

The countryside here is so beautiful.  
What happens in the autumn is  
a large field turns entirely purple and red,  
and next to it a square of yellow  
and a little further on a patch that's still green.

All that beneath a sky of magnificent blue,  
and lilac rocks in the distance.

The cicadas are singing fit to burst,  
a strident cry ten times louder than that of the crickets,  
and the scorched grass is taking on beautiful tones of old gold.  
And the beautiful towns of the south  
which were once so lively  
now slowly dying in the lovely autumn  
while in the downfall and the decline of things,  
the cicadas dear to good old Socrates have remained.  
And here, certainly, they're still singing old Greek.

At the moment  
I'm working on a painting of a path between the mountains  
and a small stream that works its way between the stones.  
The rocks are solid lilac grey or pink,  
with bushes here and there:  
box and a sort of broom, that have all sorts of colors,  
green, yellow, red, brown, because of the autumn.  
And the stream in the foreground white and foaming like soapsuds,  
and further up reflecting the blue of the sky.

## THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

The septic tank  
I think from ten years ago  
Time to change the septic tank

## THEO'S VOICE

Vincent,  
today I safely received the three rolls of paintings that you sent.  
I agree with you when you say that you want to work like a cobbler.  
Certainly that won't prevent you from doing canvases  
that hold their own alongside those of the masters.  
What I consider what modern times have done for art  
is that nowadays each person can do as he intends  
and he isn't forced to work according to rules established by a school.  
This being the case,  
it's permissible to do a piece of nature simply as one sees it,  
without being obliged to cut it like this or like that.  
The fondness the artist has for certain lines and certain colors  
will cause his soul to be reflected in them in spite of himself.

But, then, too,  
I must say  
your latest paintings have given me a great deal  
to think about  
about your state of mind when you made them.  
All of them have a power of color which you hadn't attained before,  
which in itself is a rare quality,  
but you have gone further,  
and if there are people who occupy themselves  
seeking the symbol by dint of torturing the form,  
I find it in many of your canvases  
through the expression of the summary of your thoughts  
on nature and living beings,  
which you feel are so strongly attached to it.  
But how hard your mind must have worked  
and how you endangered yourself

to the extreme point where vertigo is inevitable.  
With regard to that, my dear brother,  
when you tell me that you're working again,  
which gladdens me on the one hand,  
because in it you find a means of avoiding the state  
into which many of the unfortunates fall  
who are cared for in the establishment where you are,  
I think of it with a little anxiety,  
for before your complete recovery  
you mustn't put yourself at risk in these mysterious regions,  
which it appears one can touch lightly but not enter with impunity.  
Don't give yourself more trouble than is necessary,  
for if you give only a simple account of what you see,  
there are sufficient good qualities for your canvases to last.

[[[[[a wreck of a guy lying in a flattened wheelchair  
is wheeled out  
and  
after a few moments looking around  
he rolls up his pant leg  
puts his naked foot up in the air  
and paints it ten different messy colors with oil paint.]]]]]

VINCENT

A French writer says that all painters are mad to some degree,  
and although there's a great deal to be said against that,  
I've sometimes imagined that if I abandoned painting  
and had some hard life or other,  
as a soldier going to the east, say,  
that would make me better.  
But it's already too late for that,  
and I'm afraid they'd turn me down.

So I want to live by the day —  
trying to get from one to the next.  
And for that matter my fellow painters also often complain  
that the profession makes one so powerless.  
Or that it's the powerless who practise it.

The relatively superstitious ideas people have here about painting  
make me melancholy,  
because there's always basically some truth in it  
that as a man a painter is too absorbed by what his eyes see  
and doesn't have enough mastery of the rest of his life.

A painting mustn't be despised,  
and if it's my duty to do this,  
I mustn't wish for something else.

These days, to think that that fellow  
whatshisname  
wept as he started painting,  
that Giotto, that Angelico painted on their knees,  
Delacroix so utterly sad and moved... almost smiling.  
Who are we Impressionists to act like them already?

Thinking like this,  
the desire comes over me to remake myself  
and try to have myself forgiven for the fact that my paintings are,  
however,  
almost a cry of anguish  
while symbolizing gratitude in the rustic sunflower.

THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

The leaves will turn  
You can count on it

[silence]

The truth is, Theo:  
perhaps you would write a line to Dr. Peyron  
to say it is quite necessary for me to work on my paintings  
for my recovery.  
This is an urgent matter just now, because  
I'm not able  
for some reason  
to get into the room he allocated to me for doing my painting  
and so  
without anything to do  
these days have become almost intolerable to me.

For many days I've been absolutely distraught,  
and it's to be presumed that these crises will recur in the future.  
I haven't been able to eat for 4 days,  
as my throat is swollen.

This new crisis,  
my dear brother,  
came upon me suddenly  
when I was outside in the fields,  
and when I was in the middle of painting on a windy day,  
and I realized I couldn't go back inside to continue working.

I no longer see any possibility for courage or good hope.

THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

Acid in my stomach  
I think from all the anxiety  
Now I have acid in my stomach

THEO'S VOICE

My poor brother,  
I have just spoken to Dr. Peyron.  
I'm infinitely sorry that things aren't going as they should.  
Fortunately,  
the previous times this didn't last long,  
and so we hope with all possible fervor  
that you may soon be better this time too.

[a brief silence]

VINCENT

And now, suddenly,  
since I last spoke to you  
I'm feeling better.

I have a room to work in.

And yesterday I started working again a little —  
a thing I see from my window —  
a field of yellow stubble which is being ploughed,  
the opposition of the purplish ploughed earth  
with the strips of yellow stubble,  
background of hills.

Work distracts me infinitely better than anything else,  
and if I could once really throw myself into it with all my energy  
that might possibly be the best remedy.

There are moments between times when nature is superb,  
autumnal effects glorious in color,  
green skies contrasting with yellow, orange, green vegetation,  
earth in all shades of violet,  
burnt grass  
where the rains have nevertheless given a last vigor to certain plants,  
which again start to produce little violet,  
pink, blue, yellow flowers.

I'm working on a painting at the moment, women picking olives.  
These are the colors:  
the field is violet  
and further away yellow ochre,  
the olive trees with bronze trunks have grey-green foliage,  
the sky is entirely pink,  
and 3 small figures pink also.  
The whole in a very discreet range.  
It's a canvas I'm working on from memory  
after the study of the same size done on the spot,  
because I want a far-off thing like a vague memory softened by time.  
There are only two notes,  
pink and green,  
which harmonize, neutralize each other, oppose each other.  
I'll probably do 2 or three repetitions of it,  
for in fact it's the result of a half-dozen studies of olive trees.

[[[[[Someone brings in  
a dress mannequin  
on a stand with wheels  
and hanging from the sides  
a pitchfork and a big cane harvesting knife  
--and he works on it as a piece of art,  
fixing its clothing,  
stepping back to look at it,  
doing another fix,  
looking at it,  
doing another fix,  
etc.

While he works,  
a guy with a cubist face and body  
enters with  
a surrealistic woman,  
painted with swirls of crimson and green and blue  
with one immense eye for a head

(the pupil in the center of a blue sky with puffy white clouds).

They see the painter working.  
They watch him for a few moments,  
and then the woman begins to sing--  
through the pupil in her eye:

she sings  
--beautifully.]]]]]

VINCENT

I'm going to work some more outside,  
the mistral's blowing.  
It usually dies down by the time the sun's about to set,  
then there are superb effects of pale citron skies,  
and desolate pines cast their silhouettes into relief against it  
with effects of exquisite black lace.

At other times the sky is red,  
at other times a tone that's extremely delicate,  
neutral,  
still pale lemon but neutralized by delicate lilac.

It often seems to me that if Gauguin had remained here  
he wouldn't have lost anything,  
for I clearly see, also in the letter he wrote me,  
that he isn't entirely at the top of his form.  
And I know well the cause of that —  
they're too hard up to find models,  
and living as cheaply as he thought possible at the beginning  
won't have lasted.

However,  
with his patience, next year will perhaps be dazzling.

I definitely reckon myself below the peasants.  
Anyway, I plough on my canvases as they do in their fields.

I shall count myself very happy  
if I manage to work enough to earn my living,  
for it makes me very worried when I tell myself  
that I've done so many paintings and drawings  
without ever selling any.

#### THEO'S VOICE

Yesterday  
Gauguin came to Paris  
and he asked a lot of questions about you.  
He has come here to see if he can find a position  
to do anything at all to earn his living,

I do like Gauguin's talent  
and I'm well aware of what he wants,  
but I haven't managed to sell anything of his,  
and I have all kinds of things by him.  
The public is most rebellious  
towards things that aren't done in perfect order.  
And it's evident that Gauguin, who is half Inca, half European,  
superstitious like the former  
and advanced in ideas like certain of the latter,  
can't work every day in the same way.  
It's most unfortunate that we can't find something he can live from.

These latest paintings are less saleable than last year's.  
He wrote to me last week that one of his children fell out of a window  
and was picked up almost dead.  
There is hope, though, of saving it.  
He'd do anything to obtain a little money,  
but I can't procure any for him.

#### THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

Feed the birds  
Feed the birds  
They don't eat

[he throws his paper bag full of crackers to the ground  
and stomps on it over and over and over again,  
and leaves it there]

#### VINCENT

No matter what one does,  
the question of money is always there  
like the enemy before the troops,  
and one can't deny it or forget it.

To succeed,  
to have lasting prosperity,  
one must have a temperament different from mine,  
I'll never do what I could have  
and ought to have wanted and pursued.

I am very,  
very discontented with my work,  
and the only thing that consoles me  
is that experienced people say that one must paint for 10 years for nothing.  
But what I've done  
is only those 10 years of unfortunate studies that didn't come off.

Now a better period could come,  
but I'll have to strengthen the figure work,  
and I must refresh my memory by very close study of Delacroix, Millet.  
Then I'll try to sort out my drawing.  
Yes,  
every cloud has a silver lining,  
it gives one more time for study.

Reckon on 10 years needed to learn the profession,  
anyone who gets through 6, say,  
and pays for them  
and then has to give up,  
if you knew how miserable that is  
and how many there are like that.  
And the high prices one hears about,  
paid for work by painters who are dead  
and weren't paid like that in life,  
it's a sort of tulip mania  
from which the living painters get more disadvantage than advantage.  
And it will also pass like tulip mania.  
One can reason, however,  
that although tulip mania is long gone and forgotten,  
the flower growers have remained and will remain.  
And so I regard painting in the same way,  
that what remains is a sort of flower growing.  
And as to that  
I reckon myself fortunate to be in it.

And anyway,  
when one's taken the trouble to become master of the brush,  
one can't stop painting.

Because I have dizzy spells so often,  
I can only live in a situation of the fourth or fifth rank.  
While I clearly sense the value and originality and  
superiority of Delacroix, of Millet, for example,  
then I make a point of telling myself,  
yes I am something,  
I can do something.

But I must have a basis in these artists,  
and then produce the little I'm capable of in the same direction.

A naked guy enters.

He is painted red,  
with a white face, red lips  
black all around the eyes  
red and black streaks on his face.

he dances

he dances

he dances

he dances

he dances

he dances

he dances —

and the woman who sang before, sings again for him  
to dance to her singing

he dances while she sings

he dances

==not well.

VINCENT

Compared with others

I'm still among the fortunate ones,  
but just imagine what it must be like  
when someone starts in the profession  
and has to give it up before he's done anything,  
and there are many like that.

#### THEO'S VOICE

My dear Vincent,  
at the World Exhibition there was a little painting by Manet.  
It shows a young woman in a white dress  
sitting against a green knoll  
beside a little carriage with a child inside.  
The father is lying nonchalantly on the grass behind the woman.  
This is certainly one of the paintings that aren't only the most modern,  
but also in which there is the highest art.

The Corots, Millets etc.  
didn't sell their painting for high prices,  
but they nevertheless ended up selling.  
One must have patience.

#### THE GUY COVERED WITH CHARCOAL SPEAKS

Le Rhin?  
Qui coule?  
Un train?  
Qui roule??  
Des nixes blanches?  
Sont en prièr?  
Dans la bruyère??  
Toutes les filles?  
À la fontaine?  
J'ai tant de peine??  
J'ai tant d'amour?  
Dit la plus belle?  
Qu'il soit fidèle??  
Et moi je l'aime?

Dit sa marraine?  
J'ai la migraine??  
À la fontaine?  
J'ai tant de haine

VINCENT

I'm working furiously,  
because of the very fact that I know  
that the opportunities to work don't come back.

After almost half a year now  
of absolute sobriety in eating, drinking, smoking,  
with two two-hour baths a week recently,  
this must clearly calm one down a great deal.  
So it's going very well,  
and as regards work,  
it occupies and distracts me —  
which I need very much.

I'm finding things that I've sought in vain for years,  
and feeling that I always think of those words of Delacroix,  
that he found painting when he had neither breath nor teeth left.  
I myself with the mental illness I have,  
I think of so many other artists suffering mentally,  
and I tell myself that this doesn't prevent one  
from practising the role of painter as if nothing had gone wrong.

I know quite well that recovery comes,  
if one is brave,  
from inside,  
through the great resignation to suffering and death,  
through the abandonment of one's own will and one's self-love.  
But it's not coming to me,  
I love to paint,  
to see people and things  
and everything that makes up our life —

artificial — if you like.  
Yes, real life would be in something else,  
but I don't think I belong to that category of souls  
who are ready to live  
and also at any moment ready to suffer.

These last few weeks I've been perfectly well as far as my health goes,  
and I work almost without stopping from morning till night,  
day after day,  
and I lock myself up in the studio to have no distractions.  
So it continues to be a great comfort to me  
that the work is progressing rather than going backwards,  
and I do it with perfect calm,  
and my thoughts in this respect are entirely clear and self-assured.

And so compared with others here,  
who can't do anything,  
I certainly have no reason to complain.

Above all, in my case,  
where a more violent crisis may destroy my ability to paint forever.  
In the crises  
I feel cowardly in the face of anguish and suffering —  
more cowardly than is justified,  
and it's perhaps this very moral cowardice which,  
while before I had no desire whatsoever to get better,  
now makes me eat enough for two,  
work hard,  
take care of myself in my relations with the other patients  
for fear of relapsing —  
anyway I'm trying to get better now  
like someone who,  
having wanted to commit suicide,  
finding the water too cold,  
tries to catch hold of the bank again.

Since I'm above all ill at present,  
I'm trying to do something to console myself,  
for my own pleasure.

I place the black-and-white by Delacroix or Millet in front of me  
as a subject.

And then I improvise color on it  
but, being me, not completely of course,  
but seeking memories of their paintings —  
but the memory,  
the vague consonance of colors that are in the same sentiment,  
if not right —  
that's my own interpretation.

Heaps of people don't copy.  
Heaps of others do copy —  
for me, I set myself to it by chance,  
and I find that it teaches  
and above all  
sometimes  
consoles.

So then my brush goes between my fingers  
as if it were a bow on the violin  
and absolutely for my pleasure.

#### THEO'S VOICE

My dear Vincent,  
how pleased I would have been  
if you'd been there at the Independents' exhibition.  
Your paintings are well placed and look very well.  
Many people came up to ask me to give you their compliments.  
Gauguin said that your paintings are the key to the exhibition.

Monet said that your paintings were the best in the exhibition.

#### THE PUSHCART GUY SPEAKS LOUDLY TO NO ONE

I want to be there in that number  
when the saints go marching in

VINCENT

Theo, my dear brother,  
the more my health returns to normal  
the more my mind is capable of reasoning very coldly,  
the more to do painting that costs us so much and doesn't bring in anything,  
not even the cost of producing them,  
seems madness to me,  
a thing completely against reason.

Then I feel utterly sad,  
and the bad thing is that at my age  
it's difficult to start again with something else.

My illness makes me work with a pent-up fury —  
very slowly —  
but from morning till night without respite —  
and —  
this is probably the secret —  
work for a long time and slowly.

If I think rationally at present about my condition  
then certainly I tell myself that I mustn't have the *idée fixe* of being ill.  
But that I must continue my little career as a painter firmly.

There are very beautiful fields of olive trees here,  
which are grey and silvery in leaf like pollard willows.  
Then I never tire of the blue sky.  
I like to see a vineyard as much as a wheatfield.  
Then the hills here,  
full of thyme and other aromatic plants,  
are very beautiful,  
and because of the clarity of the air  
one can see so far from the heights.

A guy throws a dozen wine bottles into a big wooden box,  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles

throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
throws the bottles  
shattering them as they land in the box,  
and then he leans down into the box,  
his hands on the edges of the box,  
and stands on his head inside the box.  
After a couple minutes,  
he emerges from the box  
and, while we were all expecting some miraculous trick  
to avoid being cut,  
he stands up with a bleeding, lacerated forehead.

At the end,  
the bottle thrower sits down discouraged.

[a long silence]

My dear mother,  
my dear mother,  
I've been working a lot and quickly;  
by doing so  
I'm trying to express the desperately swift passage of things  
in modern life.

Life and the why of parting and passing away  
and the persistence of turmoil,  
one understands no more of it than that.

Yesterday in the rain  
I painted a large landscape  
viewed from a height in which there are fields as far as the eye can see,  
different types of greenery,  
a dark green field of potatoes,  
between the regular plants the lush, violet earth,  
a field of peas in flower whitening to the side,  
a field of pink-flowered lucerne with a small figure of a reaper,  
a field of long, ripe grass, fawn in hue,  
then wheatfields, poplars, a last line of blue hills on the horizon.

On the road  
a little carriage  
and white houses with stark red roofs beside this road.  
Fine rain streaks the whole with blue or grey lines.

I'm wholly absorbed in the vast expanse of wheatfields against the hills,  
large as a sea,  
delicate yellow,  
delicate pale green,  
delicate purple of a ploughed and weeded piece of land,  
regularly speckled with the green of flowering potato plants,  
all under a sky with delicate blue, white, pink, violet tones.

[And now, the curtains are completely closed,  
and we can no longer see Van Gogh.  
We see the full painting of sunflowers on the curtains  
as the lights fade.]

All the others have wandered out  
at one time or another.

But the guy with the pushcart is still sitting there in his chair.

And the guy covered in charcoal is still lying on the ground.

And the bottle throwing guy still sits there.

And the one who is painting the mannequin  
continues to work

as the lights fade.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

The text for *Van Gogh's Sunflowers* is taken from the Van Gogh Museum's  
Vincent Van Gogh Letters Project.

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher  
and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.