

Saint-Tropez, Friday, 8 October 1909

FRIEND FERRER,

My anguish, my suffering, my pain of every sort when I heard you have fallen victim of such unjust accusation and that you could be facing a death sentence for the crime of rebellion. It is ludicrous. This is a judicial crime, perfidiously planned by vengeful enemies of your school. How can I contact your lawyer? I want to place my testimony before the court and do everything at my reach. Dear Francisco, accept the help of he who declares himself to be your entirely devoted friend and tell me how to proceed.

There can be no doubt that the revolution of the Neo-Impressionists is peaceful, as is yours. We are not interested in violence or anarchy as a means of revolt. We want instead to imagine a dreamed-of age of happiness through our paintings, and to depict scenes where there are no hierarchies, where there is no private property and people live a more natural form of existence, sharing all the means of production while having an individual autonomy within the collective. This is the real progress we want to achieve.

My heroic friend, I repeat that I am an affectionate supporter of the Modern School and await anxiously your freedom.

P. SIGNAC

From Paul Signac to Francisco Ferrer Guardia
Saint-Tropez, Friday, 8 October 1909

Barcelona, Monday, 2 September 1901

DEAR MRS. MEUNIER

I can assure you that your funding for The Modern School will be well used. We are ready to open the doors at Calle de Bailén 56, all rooms with fantastic natural light, even a small garden at the back where the children can run freely. So far we have 68 students registered. For the time being I believe it is important to keep it to this modest number so that we can properly develop the content of the courses.

I have devised a programme containing the main ideas for the school, which I am planning to publish soon. This will serve as the guideline for the teachers and possibly to other schools opening abroad. We will also replace all current educational books used for the state curriculum with our own publications - so far we have published *Theory of Evolution* and *Patriotism and Colonization*, which focuses on the evils of nationalist sentiments, colonisation and slavery. We will also publish *Free World* by Jean Grave and a critical book on private property by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. In this rational and scientific school, far from any dogmatic teaching, our children will be well educated!

To a new generation of freethinkers — to a better future!

F. FERRER

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From Francisco Ferrer Guardia to Ernestina Meunier [trustee]
Barcelona, Monday, 2 September 1901

DEAR FERRER,

I'm sending you the sketch you requested for the book of *Aesthetic Education of the Modern School*. It's my ugliest yet. I entitled it *Étude pour le Café de Nuit* and it's an equivalent to the potato eaters. I've tried to express the terrible human passions with the red and the green.

If I were to give advice to your students it would be to search and paint humanity, humanity and again humanity. To not fall on the decorative for the decorative sake. A thousand times over, one must, even if it's studies of cabbages and salad, represent reality without sacrificing to conventions of beauty or artistry. To create emotions so strong that one might not survive them. To make very ugly paintings.

Ever yours,

VINCENT

—

Saint-Tropez, Wednesday, 10 August 1904

DEAR FERRER,

Paul Signac — I believe him to be a friend in common — has invited me to spend this summer with him under the spell of Saint-Tropez to compete with each other in some joyous painting *competitions*. For that reason your letter arrived late to me, but I'm glad to finally hear news of your school. It is admirable that the school is rooted in a search for reason and truth. But I should warn you that *there are no new truths*. The role of the artist, like that of the teacher, consists of seizing current truths often repeated to them, but which will take on new meaning for them and which they will make their own when they grasp their deepest significance.

I remain much obliged to you for your most friendly invitation to come to the Modern School to lecture about my work, but I will have to regrettably decline, or at least on the terms you propose. I do not believe an artist should reveal their ideas on painting to the public. People often assume painting as appendage of literature with specific narrative ideas - this really distresses me. As a matter of fact, I am fully convinced that a painter's best spokesperson is their work.

Instead of coming to teach I would rather send a painting. I have recently completed *Luxe, Calme et Volupté*, in which I have followed the technique of pointillism akin to Signac — I will send you this. At an appropriate moment, invite the students to spend time with the painting and let the work speak for itself. Choose a classroom full of light and provide the students with suitable seating for the viewing, something comfortable, even the floor can be attractive provided you arrange pillows and carpets.

You see what I am after, above all, is expression in terms of arrangement — not the expression of the brush. In a painting every part will play its appointed role: the place occupied by the figures, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, composition — if there is anything that is not useful, then it is harmful to the artwork.

Please send the painting back to Signac, he is expecting to buy it,
Truly yours,

MATISSE

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From Henri Matisse to Francisco Ferrer Guardia
Saint-Tropez, Wednesday, 10 August 1904

Mongat, Barcelona, Tuesday, 22 June 1909

MONSIEUR KUPKA

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am very pleased with your promise of designing a front cover for our next book by Élisée Reclus. This will allow us to print it by the end of July. I have no idea for the design, I prefer to leave that to you.

Maybe we could also have a drawing for the first chapter. If you have time, of course.

I will engrave your name in the book as an artist and above all as a revolutionary, I insist! The edition we are going to make is worthy of our aim to orient the people on the right path.

Yours faithfully,

F. FERRER

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Madrid, Friday, 5 March 1904

DEAR MR. FERRER,

I would like to organise a visit with your students to the General Exposition in Madrid, where I'm exhibiting the painting *La Carga, Barcelona 1902* [The Charge]. I would like to have a lively discussion around this work with the students, to bring to the surface awareness and questioning about the crimes being enacted on all citizens of this state, and the authoritarian and violent hand of the police towards its people.

It is through information that change will be possible, and to start with this at a young age is of utmost importance.

Let us make visible these ills so that future progress becomes possible.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

R. CASAS

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From Ramon Casas to Francisco Ferrer Guardia
Madrid, Friday, 5 March 1904

Barcelona, Monday, 4 April 1904

DEAR CLÉMENCE,

I regret that I will no longer be able to teach at the Modern School since I am moving to Paris. The art scene in Barcelona is stagnant and I do not feel energised by this city anymore. Of all that I will leave behind my contact with the school will be the most difficult to give up.

I had always been averse to school when I was a child, I even had fits of rage and panic! For me school seemed like a dead place, and only between my pencils, drawing and looking out the window did I find some consolation. But when I first visited the Modern School I was engulfed by excitement! The absence of coercion, punishment and exams made the children play and learn so freely. Dear Clémence, I felt for the first time in the school I had always dreamed!

I was so delighted when you asked me to teach painting at the Modern School. And I'm equally touched by your caution that this would withdraw precious time from my own creations, but it was perfectly compatible to spend an hour a week without affecting other artistic and worldly commitments. In fact, the contact I had with the children gave me a lot in return, something immaterial but incredibly rich. At times I almost see three of the students coming alive in my paintings - Vincente Bonacasa, Carlos Turrez and Arturo Boada?! What talented little devils they were.

I regret leaving this behind. Clémence, please visit me when you are next in Paris, it would be a pleasure. I'm at Rue de Ravignan 13.

From your friend,

PICASSO

—

From Pablo Ruiz y Picasso to Clémence Jacquinot
Barcelona, Monday, 4 April 1904

Barcelona, Thursday, 10 May 1906

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sorry for not replying to you before, but things here are going down hill. Ferrer is having an affair. I can no longer hold it in. I know this is nothing to do with me, but Leopoldine is my friend and this other woman? I hear she is an anarchist and will teach at the Modern School next year. Mary, do you think it would be the right thing to intervene, even in some small way? I am very torn.

Most of my essays are not being approved by Ferrer anymore. He is so stubborn. He cannot see that any school or institution is an authoritarian agency no matter what, and the proof is that these students are being deprived of an education relating to the language and culture of the community they are part of [Catalonia]. "Let's teach in Esperanto" — Ferrer said the other day!

I firmly believe education should be neutral and not dogmatic in anyway, I thought that was the purpose of this school.

I'm being too hard perhaps.

My friend, I hope you don't take me wrong, but I've been feeling so tired. I think it is time to depart from here.

Yours,

C. JACQUENET

—

From Clémence Jacquenet to Mary Cassatt
Barcelona, Thursday, 10 May 1906

Paris, Wednesday, 16 May, 1906

DEAR CLÉMENCE,

I can completely understand your reasons to leave the Modern School, it seems no longer what you had hoped for. It is very true that even well meaning ideologies can have ill effect. And the affair - a respectable and caring woman like you should not be involved in such gossip, I advise you dear to stay removed from the situation. I do understand it is time for change. I confess though, I saw you with such admiration when you became the director of the Modern School.

Here in Paris things could be better. Women are still not welcome in the cafés frequented by artists, and if it wasn't for my dear friend Edgar Degas I would be feeling completely alienated. For that reason too, in my art, I choose to depict domestic settings: the world which I inhabit. Is it of less value to paint a domestic scene as opposed to the locals of a Parisian café? I feel a defiance in this act and it is here I have found a space in which I can move.

Here, I'm sending you this small print to warm you a little *Under the Horse Chestnut Tree*. That this scene with a mother and child, deprived from any sense of divinity and holiness, tenderly observed yet largely unsentimental, be a light for your future endeavours. Don't be sad my dear friend, more exciting projects will come ahead.

Yours sincerely,

MARY

From Mary Cassatt to Clémence Jacquenet
Paris, Wednesday, 16 May, 1906

Paris, Tuesday, 7 September, 1909

DEAR FRIEND,

I am sending a brief update about the text I'm preparing for the book of *Aesthetic Education of the Modern School*. It will be around seven pages and focus on the painting method of *pointillism*.

I believe this to be the highest contribution I can offer to your students' artistic education. It is a scientific method of painting and enables us to apply logic and reason to aesthetic emotion. It fights slavish imitations of nature and any kind of spectacle of the painter's abilities. As Eugène Delacroix said: "Young people are infatuated solely by the skill of the hand. Perhaps there is no greater obstacle to any sort of real progress than this universal mania to which we have sacrificed everything."

Are you alright Francisco? I hope you are keeping safe and that you are able to stay occupied and satisfied by your work. It will only be a matter of time before you are released, I am sure.

I include a rough draft. Send me your comments — they would be greatly appreciated.

For a future of real progress,

SIGNAC

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Paul Signac to Francisco Ferrer Guardia
Paris, Tuesday, 7 September, 1909

Barcelona, Thursday 2 September, 1909

DEAR SOLEDAD,

Do not be distressed or uneasy. I worry that my abrupt departure was difficult for you but rest assured, my beloved, my heart remains with you. I will soon return. This place I have come to cannot hold me.

Sabes te quiere de veras tu

FERRER

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