

NOAH BUCHANAN

The Melancholic Painter, 2018
Oil on linen, 34 x 35 in



DAVID DENNY

Gauguin's Razor

December 23, 1888, Arles, France

Neighbors

The entire nasty interlude with Monsieur Van Gogh came to a head the day the other crazy drunk stepped off the train—the one they call Gauguin. More than once the constable was called to escort the pair from Ginoux's café back to the butter-yellow house of Place Lamartine, from which erupted all manner of threats and accusations and fistfights.

Only later did we discover that Van Gogh had wooed him here with promises of sunflowers and tobacco, women and booze. Perhaps, like all advertisement, it was merely artful exaggeration. Yet Gauguin swallowed the bait and allowed himself to be reeled in.

There is no need for us to overstate our case. Any reasonable person would object to their flagrant disrespect for the law. Oh, there were a few days there at the start when the two of them gleefully lugged their easels to the edge of the fields and returned at dusk with bright splotches of paint in their beards. Those days seemed peaceable enough for all concerned.

They were not to last. Perhaps it should be said that one cannot really blame Gauguin, who grew weary, as did we, of Van Gogh's moods—the brooding clouds of anxiety and obsession, the lightning strikes of jealousy and anger. Let us be frank, where Monsieur Van Gogh is concerned, it is much easier to live with the pictures than with the man himself.

All praise to the distant brother for keeping him in oils and brushes. His daily bread, however, came from us. The women of Arles fed him the way you would a caged animal—to keep him from striking.

We were not surprised when on that December night one of them dripped blood through the streets. No one knows exactly what happened. To this day, most of us think Gauguin drew his razor. It would not have been out of character. But young Rachel received the wounded matador's offering, spreading the tall tale of self-mutilation.

The tragedy was followed by three days of hard rain. Within the yellow walls we heard weeping and splintering wood. When Gauguin boarded the train for Paris, we prayed Van Gogh would follow. Yes, we signed the petition