



❖ A painting by Vasudeo S. Gaitonde

V.S. Gaitonde (1924-2001) is an Indian artist. Considered by many as one of the finest 'abstract expressionists' (- a term that Gaitonde never approved of)

❖ Excerpts from ‘ Letters to a young poet’ By Rainer Maria Rilke

Rilke (1875-1926) was Bohemian-Austrian poet. He is widely recognized as one of the most lyrically intense German language poets. These excerpts are taken from a set of ten letters that Rilke wrote to a young officer cadet, who sought Rilke’s advice about quality of his own poetry and about choosing poetry as a field of work.

.... I cannot discuss your verses; for any attempt at criticism would be foreign to me. Nothing touches a work of art so little as words of criticism : they always result in more or less fortunate misunderstandings. **Things aren’t all so tangible and sayable as people would usually have us believe; most experiences are unsayable, they happen in a space that no word has ever entered, and more unsayable than all other things are works of art, those mysterious existences, whose life endures beside our own small, transitory life**

...You ask whether your verses are any good. You ask me. You have asked others before this. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are upset when certain editors reject your work. Now (since you have said you want my advice) **I beg you to stop doing that sort of thing. You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now. No one can advise or help you — no one. There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple “I must,” then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your while life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse. Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you see and feel and love and lose.** Don’t write love poems; avoid those forms that are too facile and ordinary: they are the hardest to work with, and it takes great, fully ripened power to create something individual where good, even glorious, traditions exist in abundance. So rescue yourself from these general themes and write about what your everyday life offers you; describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty — describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, when you express yourself, use the Things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember. If your everyday life seems poor, don’t blame it; blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is not poverty and no poor, indifferent place. And even if you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world’s sounds—wouldn’t you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond all price, that treasure house of memories? Turn your attentions to it. Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance. — And if out of this turning-within, out of this immersion in your own world, poems come, then you will not think of asking anyone whether they are good or not. Nor will you try to interest magazines in these works: **for you will see them as your dear natural possession, a piece of your life, a voice from it. A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity.** That is the only way one can judge it. So, dear Sir, I can’t give you any advice but this: **to go into yourself and see how deep the place is from which your life flows; at its source you will find the answer to the question whether you must create. Accept that answer, just as it is given to you, without trying to interpret it. Perhaps you will discover that you are called to be an artist. Then take the destiny upon yourself, and bear it, its burden and its greatness, without ever asking what reward might come from outside. For the creator must be a world for himself and must find everything in himself and in Nature, to whom his whole life is devoted.** But after this descent into yourself and into your solitude, perhaps you will have to renounce becoming a poet

(if, as I have said, one feels one could live without writing, then one shouldn't write at all). Nevertheless, even then, this self-searching that I as of you will not have been for nothing. Your life will still find its own paths from there, and that they may be good, rich, and wide is what I wish for you, more than I can say.

... What else can I tell you? It seems to me that everything has its proper emphasis; and finally I want to add just one more bit of advice: to keep growing, silently and earnestly, through your while development; you couldn't disturb it any more violently than by looking outside and waiting for outside answers to question that only your innermost feeling, in your quietest hour, can perhaps answer.

... Read as little as possible of literary criticism — such things are either partisan opinions, which have become petrified and meaningless, hardened and empty of life, or else they are just clever word-games, in which one view wins today, and tomorrow the opposite view. **Works of art are of an infinite solitude, and no means of approach is so useless as criticism. Only love can touch and hold them and be fair to them.** — Always trust yourself and your own feeling, as opposed to argumentations, discussions, or introductions of that sort; if it turns out that you are wrong, then the natural growth of your inner life will eventually guide you to other insights. **Allow your judgments their own silent, undisturbed development, which, like all progress, must come from deep within and cannot be forced or hastened. Everything is gestation and then birthing. To let each impression and each embryo of a feeling come to completion, entirely in itself, in the dark, in the unsayable, the unconscious, beyond the reach of one's own understanding, and with deep humility and patience to wait for the hour when a new clarity is born: this alone is what it means to live as an artist: in understanding as in creating. In this there is no measuring with time, a year doesn't matter, and ten years are nothing. Being an artist means: not numbering and counting, but ripening like a tree, which doesn't force its sap, and stands confidently in the storms of spring, not afraid that afterward summer may not come. It does come. But it comes only to those who are patient, who are there as if eternity lay before them, so unconcernedly silent and vast. I learn it every day of my life; learn it with pain I am grateful for: patience is everything!**

... I don't want you to be without a greeting from me when Christmas comes and when you, in the midst of the holiday, are bearing your solitude more heavily than usual. But when you notice that it is vast, you should be happy; for what (you should ask yourself) would a solitude be that was not vast; there is only one solitude, and it is vast, heavy, difficult to bear, and almost everyone has hours when he would gladly exchange it for any kind of sociability, however trivial or cheap, for the tiniest outward agreement with the first person who comes along, the most unworthy. . . . But perhaps these are the very hours during which solitude grows; for its growing is painful as the growing of boys and sad as the beginning of spring. But that must not confuse you. What is necessary, after all, is only this: solitude, vast inner solitude. **To walk inside yourself and meet no one for hours — that is what you must be able to attain.** To be solitary as you werewhen you were a child, when the grown-ups walked around involved with matters that seemed large and important because they looked so busy and because you didn't understand a thing about what they were doing. And when you realize that their activities are shabby, that their vocations are petrified and no longer connected with life, why not then continue to look upon it all as a child would, as if you were looking at something unfamiliar, out of the depths of your own solitude, which is itself work and status and vocation? **Why should you want to give up a child's wise not-understanding in exchange for defensiveness and scorn, since not-understanding is, after all, a way of being alone, whereas defensiveness and scorn are participation in precisely what, by these means, you want to separate yourself from.** Think, dear Sir, of the world that you carry inside you, and call this thinking whatever you want to: a remembering of your own childhood or a yearning toward a future of your own — only be attentive to what is arising within you, and place that above everything you perceive around you. **What is happening on your innermost self is**

worthy of your entire love; somehow you must find a way to work at it, and not lose too much time or too much courage in clarifying your attitude toward people...

... But this is what young people are so often and so disastrously wrong in doing they (who by their very nature are impatient) fling themselves at each other when love takes hold of them, they scatter themselves, just as they are, in all their messiness, disorder, bewilderment. . . . : And what can happen then? What can life do with this heap of half-broken things that they call their communion and that they would like to call their happiness, if that were possible, and their future? And so each of them loses himself for the sake of the other person, and loses the other, and many others who still wanted to come. And loses the vast distances and possibilities, gives up the approaching and fleeing of gentle, prescient **Things in exchange for an unfruitful confusion, out of which nothing more can come; nothing but a bit of disgust, disappointment, and poverty, and the escape into one of the many conventions that have been put up in great numbers like public shelters on this most dangerous road.** No area of human experience is so extensively provided with conventions as this one is: there are live-preservers of the most varied invention, boats and water wings; society has been able to create refuges of very sort, for since it preferred to take love-life as an amusement, it also had to give it an easy form, cheap, safe, and sure, as public amusements are. It is true that many young people who love falsely, i.e., simply surrendering themselves and giving up their solitude (the average person will of course always go on doing that —), feel oppressed by their failure and want to make the situation they have landed in liveable and fruitful in their own, personal way — **For their nature tells them that the questions of love, even more than everything else that is important, cannot be resolved publicly and according to this or that agreement; that they are questions, intimate questions from one human being to another, which in any case require a new, special, wholly personal answer —**. But how can they, who have already flung themselves together and can no longer tell whose outlines are whose, who thus no longer possess anything of their won, how can they find a way out of themselves, out of the depths of their already buried solitude? They act out of mutual helplessness, and then if, with the best of intentions, they try to escape the conventions that is approaching them (marriage, for example), they fall into the clutches of some less obvious but just as deadly conventional solution. For then everything around them is — convention. Wherever people act out of a prematurely fused, muddy communion, every action is conventional: every relation that such confusion leads to has its own convention, however unusual (i.e., in the ordinary sense immoral) it may be; even separating would be a conventional step, an impersonal, accidental decision without strength and without fruit. Whoever looks seriously will find that neither for death, which is difficult, nor for difficult love has any clarification, any solution, any hint of a path been perceived; and for both these tasks, which we carry wrapped up and hand on without opening, there is not general, agreed-upon rule that can be discovered. **But in the same measure in which we begin to test life as individuals, these great Things will come to meet us, the individuals, with greater intimacy. The claims that the difficult work of love makes upon our development are greater than life, and we, as beginners, are not equal to them. But if we nevertheless endure and take this love upon us as burden and apprenticeship, instead of losing ourselves in the whole easy and frivolous game behind which people have hidden from the solemnity of their being, — then a small advance and a lightening will perhaps be perceptible to those who come long after us.** That would be much ...

The only sadnesses that are dangerous and unhealthy are the ones that we carry around in public in order to drown them out with the noise; like diseases that are treated superficially and foolishly, they just withdraw and after a short interval break out again all the more terribly; and gather inside us and are life, are life that is un-lived, rejected, lost, life that we can die of. If only it were possible for us to see farther than our knowledge reaches, and even a little beyond the outworks of our presentiment, perhaps we would bear our sadnesses with greater trust than we have in our joys. **For they are the moments when something new has entered us, something unknown; our feelings grow mute in shy embarrassment, everything in us withdraws, a silence arises, and the new experience, which no one knows, stands in the midst of it all and says nothing. The quieter we are, the more patient and open we are in our sadnesses, the more deeply and serenely the new presence can enter us, and the more we can make it our own, the more it becomes our fate; and later on, when it “happens” (that is, steps forth out of us to other people), we will feel related and close to it in our innermost being.** And that is necessary. It is necessary — and toward this point our development will move, little

by little — that nothing alien happen to us, but only what has long been our own. People have already had to rethink so many concepts of motion; and **they will also gradually come to realize that what we call fate does not come into us from the outside, but emerges from us.** It is only because so many people have not absorbed and transformed their fates while they were living in them that they have not realized what was emerging from them; it was so alien to them that they have not realized what was emerging from them; it was so alien to them that, in their confusion and fear, they thought it must have entered them at the very moment they became aware of it, for they swore they had never before found anything like that inside them. Just as people for a long time had a wrong idea about the sun's motion, they are even now wrong about the motion of what is to come. **The future stands still, dear Mr. Kappus, but we move in infinite space.** How could it not be difficult for us? And to speak of solitude again, it becomes clearer and clearer that fundamentally this is nothing that one can choose or refrain from. **We are solitary. We can delude ourselves about this and act as if it were not true. That is all. But how much better it is to recognize that we are alone; yes, even to begin from this realization. It will, of course, make us dizzy; for all points that our eyes used to rest on are taken away from us, there is no longer anything near us, and everything far away is infinitely far.** A man taken out of his room and, almost without preparation or transition, placed on the heights of a great mountain range, would feel something like that: an unequalled insecurity, an abandonment to the nameless, would almost annihilate him. He would feel he was falling or think he And about feelings: All feelings that concentrate you and lift you up are pure; only that feeling is impure which grasps just one side of your being and thus distorts you. Everything you can think of as you face your childhood is good. Everything that makes more of you than you have ever been, even in your best hours, is right. Every intensification is good, if it is in your entire blood, if it isn't intoxication or muddiness, but joy which you can see into, clear to the bottom. Do you understand what I mean?

... And your doubt can become a good quality if you train it. It must become knowing, it must become criticism. **Ask it, whenever it wants to spoil something for you, why something is ugly, demand proofs from it, test it, and you will find it perhaps bewildered and embarrassed, perhaps also protesting. But don't give in, insist on arguments, and act in this way, attentive and persistent, every single time, and the day will come when instead of being a destroyer, it will become one of your best workers — perhaps the most intelligent of all the ones that are building your life.**

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❖ Claude Debussy's 151st Birthday : A Google Doodle

<http://www.google.com/doodles/claude-debussys-151st-birthday>



Google celebrated the 151st anniversary of the birth of French composer Achille-Claude Debussy on 22 August 2013, with an animated doodle set to one of his best-known pieces, Clair de lune (Moonlight). Click on the highlighted link above to hear the beautiful tune and see the wonderful animation.

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About 'Treasures'

It's a compilation that I put together every once in a while, of things that I have found to be beautiful and meaningful.

Do share it with others who you think will enjoy it.

Drop me an email at shaileshd.email@gmail.com if you want to add someone to the circulation list.

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Special thanks to Sonika for sharing with me the beautiful Debussy Google Doodle! 😊