

The Light of Cézanne*

(Errancy into the Sun)

Gino Zaccaria

1. *Ardour*

Paul Cézanne's painting *Le grand pin*—a work which brings out the flagrancy of the colour green in an unforgettable way—may echo a passage from the first letter that the artist wrote to his friend Émile Zola on April 9th, 1858:

Do you remember that pine tree, planted on the banks of the Arc, which soared with its crowny top above the gaping abyss at its feet? That pine which, with its leaves, protected our bodies from the ardour of the sun—ah! may the Gods preserve it from the baleful assault of the logger's axe!

The artist most certainly has nothing against lumberjacks. He simply recalls the difference between the eye of the painter, for which the indoles of the pine is no mere indifferent, general concept, but rather the retracted origin of the uniqueness and singularity of *this* or of *that* tree, and that of the common vision which is imposed by utility, according to which pine trees belong to the stock of so-called natural resources, and which shows *a priori* the character of being transformable into timber and firewood. The logger's axe cannot perceive the richness understood as flagrancy of the green colour in its contrast, on one hand, with the ardour of the sun and the celestial azure, and, on the other, with the darkness of the terrestrial abyss—a richness that is profusion and copiousness of truth. The axe sees, as per its constitution, only the potential of the useful, useable and employable—the “substance” and the “profit”. The painter thus invokes the Gods that they might save *the* pine tree—exactly that one—from the assault of return and of value; that they might absconce it, that they might make it seem *useless*.

We must therefore think of the painting *Le grand pin* as a way of letting go of the useable tree in order that the tree of flagrancy might be free, that it might clear—with all due respect to lumberjacks. The painting—which is not a “reproduction” of a pine tree nor, much less, its “representation”, but rather an *entruing of its being*—imposes a transformation of the common vision (the eye of the “lived impact” and of contingency) in *pictorial seeing*: that seeing which refers and is

* The passages cited in this chapter are all from Paul Cézanne, *Correspondance*, recueillie, annoté et préfacée par John Rewald. Paris: Grasset, 1978. (English edition: Paul Cézanne, *Letters*, edited by John Rewald, translated by Marguerite Kay. New York: Da Capo, 1995). The English translations are original.

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