

*The Letters*

## LETTER 01

### THE CANVAS HAS AN *IDIOTIC STARE*

Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

2 October 1884

*It wasn't until his thirties that Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh found his calling as an artist. Born in Zundert in 1853, his early years saw him flit from job to job, his only real focus being a deepening dedication to religion. In 1879 he took a missionary post in Belgium where he lived in poverty and squalor. His family, who had supported him for years, were losing patience; at one point his father even tried to have him committed to an asylum. In 1881, with financial backing from his younger brother, Theo, Vincent began to paint, and for the remainder of his life spent much of his time creating the work for which he is now known. In 1884, aged thirty-one, he wrote this letter to his brother. It would be six years later, in Auvers-sur-Oise, that Vincent, deeply depressed, would take his own life.*

‘SUCCESS IS SCIENCE;  
IF YOU HAVE THE  
CONDITIONS, YOU GET  
THE RESULT.’

– *Oscar Wilde*

## LETTER 02

### FUCK THE ART WORLD PRESSURES

Lucy R. Lippard to a Young Woman Artist

1974

*In 1974 Miriam Schapiro, co-founder and director of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, encouraged seventeen of her female students to write to women in the art world with a request: to reply with a letter of advice to a 'Young Woman Artist'. These invaluable pieces of correspondence were then to be compiled in Anonymous Was a Woman, a book to be published as part of that year's Women's Art Festival. Before long, letters arrived from seventy-one of the women, including Lucy R. Lippard, a highly respected and influential writer, curator, art critic and feminist whose achievements are rivalled by very few.*

## THE LETTER

March 6, 1974

138 Prince St.

NYC 10012

To a Young Woman Artist,

I'm sorry this has to be so short, because I have a lot I'd like to talk about with you, but try to read between the lines. I hope you're angry but get it over with fast and use it while you've got it. I hope you don't stop being angry now and then until things are better for all women, not just artists; I hope you're working from yourself and know how to fuck the art world pressures when you get out there; and I hope you're working for everybody else too; I hope you'll be the one to figure out a way to keep art from being used the wrong way and for the wrong things in this society; I hope you make your art accessible to more people, to all women and to everybody; I hope you think about that now and aren't waiting till you make it, because that's likely to be too late. I hope you remember that being a feminist carries with it a real responsibility to be a human. I hope and I hope and I hope . . .

love,

Lucy Lippard