

Letter B03
Arles, 9 April 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

Thanks for your kind letter and for the enclosed sketches of your decoration, which I think very funny. Sometimes I regret that I cannot make up my mind to work more at home and extempore. The imagination is certainly a faculty which we must develop, one which alone can lead us to the creation of a more exalting and consoling nature than the single brief glance at reality – which in our sight is ever changing, passing like a flash of lightning – can let us perceive.

A starry sky, for instance – look, that is something I should like to try to do, just as in the daytime I am going to try to paint a green meadow spangled with dandelions. So much in criticism of myself and in praise of you.

At the moment I am absorbed in the blooming fruit trees, pink peach trees, yellow-white pear trees. My brush stroke has no system at all. I hit the canvas with irregular touches of the brush, which I leave as they are. Patches of thickly laid-on colour, spots of canvas left uncovered, here or there portions that are left absolutely unfinished, repetitions, savageries; in short, I am inclined to think that the result is so disquieting and irritating as to be a godsend to those people who have preconceived ideas about technique. For that matter here is a sketch, the entrance to a Provençal orchard with its yellow fences, its enclosure of black cypresses (against the mistral), its characteristic vegetables of varying greens: yellow lettuces, onions, garlic, emerald leeks [F 554, JH 1388].

Working directly on the spot all the time, I try to grasp what is essential in the drawing – later I fill in the spaces which are bounded by contours – either expressed or not, but in any case felt – with tones which are also simplified, by which I mean that all that is going to be soil will share the same violet-like tone, that the whole sky will have a blue tint, that the green vegetation will be either green-blue or yellow-green, purposely exaggerating the yellows and blues in this case.

In short, my dear comrade, in no case an eye-deceiving job.¹

As for visiting Aix, Marseilles, Tangier, no fear of that. If notwithstanding this I should go there, it would be in search of cheaper lodgings. Otherwise I am convinced that even if I were to work all my life, I should not be able to do one half of all that is characteristic in this town alone.

By the way, I have seen bullfights in the arena, or rather sham fights, seeing that the bulls were numerous but there was nobody to fight them. However, the crowd was magnificent, those great colourful multitudes piled up one above the other on two or three galleries, with the effect of sun and shade and the shadow cast by the enormous ring.

I wish you a good journey – a handshake in thought.

Your friend, Vincent

1. By this Vincent meant “photographic deadness,” for to him photography with its one dead eye produced an optical illusion.

[Sketch “Orchard with Cypresses JH 1390 was enclosed with letter]