

Letter 490  
Arles, 19 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I read a notice in *L'Intransigeant* that there is to be an exhibition of impressionists at Durand Ruel's – there will be some of Caillebotte's pictures – I have never seen any of his stuff, and I want to ask you to write me what it is like, there are sure to be other remarkable things.

Today I sent you some more drawings, and I am putting in another two. These are views taken from a rocky hill, from which you see the country towards Crau (very good wine comes from there), the town of Arles and the country towards Fontvieilles [F 1419, JH 1430; F 1475, JH 1435]. The contrast between the wild and romantic foreground, and the distant perspective, wide and still, with horizontal lines sloping into the chain of the Alpines, so famous for the great climbing feats of Tartarin P. C. A., and of the Alpine Club – this contrast is very striking. The two belated drawings that I am adding now will give you an idea of the ruin that crowns the rocks [F 1423, JH 1433; F 1417, JH 1434]. But is it worth the trouble to make frames for this Dordrecht exhibition?

It seems idiotic to me, and I would rather not be in it.

I should like to think that Bernard or Gauguin will exchange drawings with us, so that the Dutch will see nothing.

Have you met the Dane, Mourier Petersen? He will have brought you two more drawings.

He has studied medicine, but I suppose he was discouraged by the student's life, and by the other fellows and the professors as well. He never said anything to me about it though, except once when he stated, "It's the doctors that kill people."

When he came here, he was suffering from a nervous disorder, which had been brought on by the strain of the examinations. I do not know how long he has been painting – he certainly hasn't gone very far as a painter – but he's a good fellow to knock around with, and he observes people and often sums them up very accurately.

Do you think it would work if he were to come and stay with you? I think that in intelligence he would be very much preferable to that L., of whom – I don't know why – I have a very poor opinion. You certainly don't want sixth-grade Dutch and worse about you, the sort that will say and do idiotic things when they go home. Unfortunately, a picture dealer is more or less a public character. Not that it matters much.

The Swede [This is referring to Mourier, who was Danish. Vincent makes the same odd mistake in letter 498] comes from a good family, he has a sort of decency and orderliness in his way of life and as a man; he reminds me of the kind of character you find in Pierre Loti's books. With all his stolidity, he has some heart.

I expect to be drawing a lot more. It's good and hot already, I can tell you.

I must add an order for colours to this, though in case you'd rather not get them at once, I can do a few more drawings and it will not be time wasted. Also, I divided the order in two, according to what is more or less urgent.

What is always urgent is the drawing, and whether you do it straight off with the brush or with something else, say a pen, you never get enough done.

I am trying now to exaggerate the essential, and purposely leave the obvious things vague.

I am very glad that you have bought the book on Daumier, but if you could make a complete job of it by buying some more of his lithographs, it would be all to the good, for in the future the Daumiers will not be as easy to get hold of.

How are you? Have you seen old Gruby again? I rather think that he exaggerates the heart trouble, a little to the detriment of the drastic treatment that you need for your nerves.

But in the end he will come to see it in proportion as you follow his treatment; with Gruby you will survive, but unfortunately for us, it is more than the old boy will do himself, for he is aging, and when the time comes when we shall need him most, he won't be there.

I feel more and more that we must not judge of God from this world, it's just a study that didn't come off. What can you do with a study that has gone wrong? – if you are fond of the artist, you do not find much to criticize – you hold your tongue. But you have the right to ask for something better. We should have to see other works by the same hand though; this world was evidently slapped together in a hurry on one of his bad days, when the artist didn't know what he was doing or didn't have his wits about him. All the same, according to what the legend says, this good old God took a terrible lot of trouble over this world-study of his.

I am inclined to think that the legend is right, but then the study is ruined in so many ways. It is only a master who can make such a blunder, and perhaps that is the best consolation we can have out of it, since in that case we have a right to hope that we'll see the same creative hand get even with itself. And this life of ours, so much criticized, and for good and even exalted reasons, we must not take it for anything but what it is, and go on hoping that in some other life we'll see something better than this.

With a handshake for you and Koning.

Ever yours,

Vincent

I am hoping to hear from you tomorrow; if not, I'll be in rather a bad way, since I have only enough money for tomorrow, Sunday. Have you at long last received the case? I am not much surprised in a way at its going slowly, seeing that it had to be taken from one station to another, but all the same!