

Letter W09¹
Arles, c. 16 November 1888

My dear sister,

It gave me much pleasure to receive a reply from Mrs. Mauve at last. As I want to write her a letter one of these days, kindly send me her present address at once and without fail. Her letter was dated from The Hague, but she does not say whether she is going to stay there; my impression was that she was going to stay at Laren. She told me that she had received a nice letter from you.

I received the letter dated from Middelharnis, and I thank you very much for it. It is a very good thing that you have at least started to read *Au bonheur des dames*, and so on. There are a lot of things in it – as in *Guy de Maupassant* too, for that matter.

I have already answered you that I don't like Mother's picture enormously.

I have just finished painting, to put in my bedroom, a memory of the garden at Etten [F 496, JH 1630]; here is a sketch of it. It is a rather large canvas.

Here are the details of the colours. The younger of the two ladies who are out for a walk is wearing a Scottish shawl with green and orange checks, and a red parasol. The old lady has a violet shawl, nearly black. But a bunch of dahlias, some of them citron yellow, the others pink and white mixed, are like an explosion of colour on the somber figure. Behind them a few cedar shrubs and emerald-green cypresses. Behind the cypresses one sees a field of pale green and red cabbages, surrounded by a border of little white flowers. The sandy path is of a raw orange colour; the foliage of the two beds of scarlet geraniums is very green. Finally, the interjacent plane, there is a maid-servant, dressed in blue, who is arranging a profusion of plants with white, pink, yellow and vermilion-red flowers.

Here you are. I know this is hardly what one might call a likeness, but for me it renders the poetic character and the style of the garden as I feel it. All the same, let us suppose that the two ladies out for a walk are you and our mother; let us even suppose that there is not the least, absolutely not the least vulgar and fatuous resemblance – yet the deliberate choice of colour, the somber violet with the blotch of violent citron yellow of the dahlias, suggests Mother's personality to me.

The figure in the Scotch plaid with orange and green checks stands out against the somber green of the cypress, which contrast is further accentuated by the red parasol – this figure gives me an impression of you like those in Dickens's novels, a vaguely representative figure.

I don't know whether you can understand that one may make a poem only by arranging colours, in the same way that you can say comforting things in music.

In a similar manner the bizarre lines, purposely selected and multiplied, meandering all through the picture, may fail to give the garden a vulgar resemblance, but may present it to our minds as seen in a dream, depicting its character, and at the same time stranger than it is in reality.

I have also painted "Une Liseuse de Romans," the luxuriant hair very black, a green bodice, the sleeves the colour of wine lees, the skirt black, the background all yellow, bookshelves with books. She is holding a yellow book in her hands [F 497, JH 1632].

So much for today. But remember I have not told you that my friend Paul Gauguin, an impressionist painter, is now living with me, and that we are very happy together. He strongly encourages me to work often from pure imagination.

Give my kindest regards to Mother, and do not fail to send me Mrs. Mauve's address by return mail.

I embrace you in thought, Mother and you.

Yours, Vincent

1. Written in French.