

My dear Theo,

I have just brought back a canvas on which I have been working for some time, representing the same field again as in the "Reaper." Now it is clods of earth and the background of parched land, then the rocks of the Alpines. A bit of green-blue sky with a little white and violet cloud. In the foreground a thistle and some dry grass. A peasant dragging a truss of straw in the middle [F 641, JH 1795]. It is again a harsh study, and instead of being almost entirely yellow, it makes a picture almost entirely violet. Broken violet and neutral tints. But I am writing you because I think this will complement the "Reaper" and will make clearer what that is. For the "Reaper" looks as though it were done at random, and this will give it balance. As soon as it is dry, I shall send it along with the copy of the bedroom. I earnestly beg you to show them together if anyone sees the studies, because of the contrast of the complementaries.

Then this week I have also done the "Entrance to a Quarry," which is like something Japanese [F 635, JH 1767]; you remember there are Japanese drawings of rocks with grass growing on them here and there and little trees. From time to time there are moments when nature is superb, autumn effects glorious in colour, green skies contrasting with foliage in yellows, oranges, greens, earth in all the violets, heat-withered grass among which, however, the rains have given a last energy to certain plants, which again start putting forth little flowers of violet, pink, blue, yellow. Things that one is quite sad not to be able to reproduce.

And skies – like our skies in the North, but the colours of the sunsets and sunrises more varied and clearer. Like in a Jules Dupré or a Ziem.

I also have two views of the park and the asylum, where this place looked very pleasing. I tried to reconstruct the thing as it might have been, simplifying and accentuating the haughty, unchanging character of the pines and cedar clumps against the blue.

Anyway – if it should be that they remember me, which is a matter of indifference to me – there will be something in colour to send to the Vingtistes. But I am indifferent to that. What I am not indifferent to is that a man who is very much my superior, Meunier, has painted the "Scôneuses" of the Borinage and the shift going to the pits, and the factories, their red roofs and their black chimneys against a delicate grey sky – all things that I have dreamed of doing, feeling that it had not been done and that it ought to be painted. And still there is an infinity of subjects there for artists, and one ought to go down into the mine, and paint the light effects.

If you have not yet sent off the canvas and the paints, I must tell you that at present I have absolutely no canvas. And I was going to ask you, in case you find it difficult to send the total of what I owe M. Peyron at once, if it were possible to send me a money order for 15 francs or so, so I could go to Arles one of these days.

I often think that Gauguin would have lost nothing by staying here, for I can see clearly in the letter he has written me that he is not altogether at the top of his form either. And I know quite well what that is due to – they are too hard up to get models, and can't have been living as cheaply as they first expected. However, if he has patience, next year may perhaps be splendid, but then he will not have Bernard with him, if he is in the army. Don't you feel now that the figures by Jules Breton and Billet and others will remain? Those men overcame the difficulty of models, and that is a great deal. And a picture by Otto Weber of the good period (not of the English) will certainly hold its own too. One swallow doesn't make a summer, and a new idea does not destroy finished and perfect work. That is the terrible thing about the impressionists, that the development of the thing hangs fire, and for years they remain held up by obstacles which the previous generation triumphed over, the difficulty of money and models. And so Breton, Billet and others might well make a joke of it and say in surprise, "But look here, when shall we see these country men and women of yours?" As for myself, I feel a disgrace and a failure.

I have copied that "Woman with a Child Sitting by a Hearth," by Mme. Dumont Breton, almost all in violet [F 644, JH 1805]. I am certainly going on copying, that will give me a collection of my own, and when this is large and complete enough, I shall give the whole to a school. I can also inform you that in the next package you'll become better acquainted with good Tartarin's Alpines than you are now. Apart from the canvas of the "Mountains," you have not seen them yet except in the background of the canvases.

I have a sterner study than the previous one of the mountains. A very wild ravine where a small stream winds its way along its bed of rocks [F 645, JH 1803]. It is all violet. I could certainly do a whole series of these Alpines, for having seen them for a long time now, I am more up to it. You remember that fine landscape by Monticelli which we saw at Delarebeyrette's, of a tree on some rocks against a sunset? There are many effects like that just now, only I can never be outside at the hour of sunset, but for that I should have tried one of them.

Is Jo's health still good? I think that altogether this year has been happier for you than the previous ones. As for me, I am feeling well just now. I think M. Peyron is right when he says that I am not strictly speaking mad, for my mind is absolutely normal in the intervals, and even more so than before. But during the attacks it is terrible – and then I lose consciousness of everything. But that spurs me on to work and to seriousness, like a miner who is always in danger makes haste in what he does.

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Mother and our sister will be getting ready to move.

I am enclosing a few words for Isaacs, Bernard and Gauguin. There is no hurry of course about sending it on to them, the first time they come to see you will do. In the evening I am bored to death. Good Lord, the prospect of winter isn't very cheery.

I hope you have received the canvases I sent off about ten days ago in good order.

I am going to make a long trip into the mountains to look for likely spots. Goodbye for now – above all, send the paint and the canvas if it hasn't already been sent off, for I have no more canvas at all, nor zinc white.

Many kind regards to Jo.

Ever yours, Vincent