

Arles, 30 March 1888

Dear Sister,

In order not to leave your letter unanswered, I will write at once after receiving your letter and Mother's, and the good wishes of you both.

I want to tell you that I should be happy to write to you more often if it were not that a pretty considerable number of things contribute to my not being master of my own time, and you should not imagine that I am doing exactly what I like, and not doing what I should prefer to leave undone. Work has got me in its grip now, and I think forever, and though this is not something to be unhappy about, yet the mental picture I have of happiness is different.

In the first place, it pleased me enormously that Theo and Mr. Tersteeg have entered into business relations in order to make the work of the painters here who are called impressionists known in Holland too.

Further, I don't regret coming here, for I think the scenery here extremely beautiful.

I shall have to produce an enormous number of things against next year – when the World's Fair will be held – seeing that my friends will not fail to have many interesting things on hand by then. Not that I myself or any of the painters I hold regular or special intercourse with are going to exhibit along with the others, but it is to be expected that there will be a free exhibition besides the official one. Now, for instance, I am working on six pictures of fruit trees in bloom. And what I brought home today would probably please you – it is a dug-up square of earth in an orchard with a fence of rushes and two peach trees in full bloom. Pink against a scintillating blue sky with white clouds, and in the sunshine. It is possible you will see it, for I have finally decided to set it aside for Jet Mauve. I have written on it "Souvenir de Mauve, Vincent and Theo." [F 394, JH 1379]

Of course I know very well that I could have found a similar subject elsewhere, but if I take into consideration that many painters will paint the same thing, I do not think it a matter of indifference to work in the midst of a scenery which, although in general similar to ours, is undoubtedly richer and more colourful as subject matter and motif.

And then people here are picturesque too, and whereas in our country a beggar looks more like a hideous phantom, he becomes a caricature here. Because – as you will observe when you read Zola and Guy de Maupassant – what they absolutely insist on is a great richness and a great gaiety in art – even though this same Zola and Guy de Maupassant have said perhaps the most poignantly tragic things that have ever been said – this same tendency is beginning to be the rule in the art of painting too.

So I can imagine, for instance, that a present-day painter should do something like what one finds described in Pierre Loti's book *Le mariage de Loti*, in which a picture of nature in Otaheite is drawn. A book which I warmly recommend to you to read.

You will understand that nature in the South cannot be painted with the palette of Mauve, for instance, who belongs to the North, and who is, and will remain, a master of the grey. But at present the palette is distinctly colourful, sky blue, orange, pink, vermilion, bright yellow, bright green, bright wine-red, violet. But by intensifying all the colours one arrives once again at quietude and harmony. There occurs in nature something similar in what happens in Wagner's music, which, though played by a big orchestra, is nonetheless intimate. Only when making a choice one prefers sunny and colourful effects, and there is nothing that prevents me from thinking that in the future many painters will go and work in tropical countries. You will be able to get an idea of the revolution of painting when you think, for instance, of the brightly coloured Japanese pictures that one sees everywhere, landscapes and figures. Theo and I have hundreds of Japanese pictures in our own possession. You see I wrote only about my work, and I have to stop now, and I don't know if I shall be able to write anything more.

Best wishes to you and Mother, and thanks for your letters.

Vincent

It is my own duty to congratulate you on your birthday; as I should very much like to give you something of my work that will please you, I have set aside a little study of a book for you [F 393, JH 1362], and also, on a somewhat larger scale, a flower, with a lot of books with pink, green and bright red bindings [F 359, JH 1332] – they were my set of seven Parisian novels, the same subject – Theo will take them along for you – I have a study for Jet Mauve too.