

Letter 512
Arles, c. 19 July 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, which gave me great pleasure, arriving just exactly at the moment when I was still dazed with the sun and the strain of wrestling with a rather big canvas.

I have a new drawing of a garden full of flowers [F 1455, JH 1512], and two painted studies as well.

I must send you a new order for paints and canvas, rather a heavy one. Only it is not at all urgent. What really might be urgent is the canvas, because I have a batch of stretchers that I have taken the studies out of, and I ought to be putting new canvas on them between times.

You will see from this sketch the subject of the new studies. There is one vertical [F430, JH 1510] and another horizontal [JH 1511] of the same subject, size 30 canvases. There really is a subject for a picture in it, as in other studies that I have. And I truly can't tell if I shall ever paint pictures that are peaceful and quietly worked out, for it seems to me it will always be headlong.

Have you had any news of Gauguin? I wrote him myself last week to ask how his health was and how the work was going. No reply from Russell, who cannot be in Paris according to what McKnight says; he has returned with Bock. Still a frosty silence about my work when they come.

It is true enough what you say about Prinsenhage, that it's the same story all over again, but when at long last the good soul isn't there any more, it will be one more gap and desolation for our small circle. And indeed, we shall feel it ourselves, for there is something poignant in having been influenced by him. And then to see someone whom you have always seen on the go reduced to such a condition of suspicious helplessness and continual suffering, it certainly doesn't give one a pleasant or cheery idea of human existence or heighten one's zest for life. Our mother in Breda must be getting very old too. Involuntarily – is it the effect of this Ruysdael country? – I keep thinking of Holland, and across the twofold remoteness of distance and time gone by these memories have a kind of heartbreak in them.

What you write about Reid isn't very cheering either. At times he would talk so much about turning painter and going off to an aunt in the country that it is just possible he may be in the act of carrying this plan out. What does Maria say? but perhaps she has disappeared too.

All the same, I think that the continual wind here must have something to do with the haggard look the painted studies have. Because you see it in Cézanne too.

What must make it easy for the Japanese to cram their works of art into drawers and cupboards is that the kakemonos can be rolled up, but our paintings cannot, for they would end up by scaling off. Nothing would help us to sell our canvases more than if they could gain general acceptance as decorations for middle-class houses. The way it used to be in Holland.

Down here in the South it would do one's heart good to see pictures on the white walls. But go and look – everywhere great coloured Julien medallions – horrors. And alas, we can do nothing to change this state of affairs.

However – there are the cafés – perhaps later on we'll get to decorate them.

Good-by for now – with a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent