

Letter 525
Arles, 15 August 1888

My dear Theo,

You will have got my wire telling you that 2nd lieutenant Milliet will arrive in Paris on Friday morning; he will arrive at the Gare de Lyon at 5:15 in the morning and go from there straight to the Cercle Militaire in the Avenue de l'Opéra. It would be simplest for both of you if you went to see him there at 7 o'clock sharp in the morning.

Of course you could also meet him at the Gare de Lyon itself, but to begin with that is farther off, and then you would have to get up very early. He has been very nice to me, particularly these last few days. He will return to Paris for a week, but he is spending the greater part of his leave in the North.

I am very glad to have these pictures sent off, and in this way our sister will see my studies, and that makes a difference to me, for by this she will share in something that is essentially part of our life in France, crude and casual as it may be. I mean, she will see painting in the raw. But to do me a great favour, show her one or two studies put on stretchers and framed in white. You can take some of the earlier ones out of their stretchers and frames. Don't let my stuff take up too much room, so don't get encumbered with stretchers and frames for my sake. For the comrades will see well enough what it is like just as it stands, and you even more. Later on – when the hundred are done – we will choose ten or fifteen of them to be framed. I have kept the big portrait of the postman [F 432, JH 1522], and the head [F 433, JH 1524] which I included was done at a single sitting.

But that's what I'm good at, doing a fellow roughly in one sitting. If I wanted to show off, my boy, I'd always do it, drink with the first comer, paint him, and that not in water colours but in oils, on the spot in the manner of Daumier.

If I did a hundred like that, there would be some good ones among them. And I'd be more of a Frenchman and more myself, and more of a drinker. It does tempt me so – not drinking, but painting tramps. What I gained by it as an artist, should I lose that as a man? If I had the faith to do it, I'd be a notable madman; now I am an insignificant one, but you see I am not sufficiently ambitious for that fame to set a match to the powder. I would rather wait for the next generation, which will do in portraiture what Claude Monet does in landscape, the rich, daring landscape à la Guy de Maupassant.

But then I know that I am not – not their equal – but didn't the Flauberts and Balzacs make the Zolas and Maupassants? So here's to – not us, but to the generation to come. You are a good enough judge of painting to see and understand what I may have of originality, and also to see the uselessness of presenting what I am doing to the modern public, because the others surpass me in clearness of touch. That is more the fault of wind and circumstances, compared to what I could do without the mistral and without the fatal conditions of vanished youth and comparative poverty. For my part I am in no way set on changing my condition, and I count myself only too happy to be able to go on as I do.

No answer from friend Russell, and Gauguin certainly deserved one.

I have put in this package a drawing [F 1462, JH 1556] after a picture which I am working on now – the boats with the man unloading sand. If some studies are not quite dry, so much the worse for them. They must be left to dry out, then washed with plenty of water, and retouched if necessary. But they cannot come to much harm, and it was a good opportunity for sending them.

A good handshake, and I do hope to hear from you by Friday or Saturday.

Ever yours, Vincent