

Letter 548
Arles, 9 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Yesterday I sent you a wire asking you for another 20 francs, I shall have nothing but that for my food all the week, but I have my frames at last and some stretchers.

Only don't let the next letter come later than Sunday, for it is a close, very close siege these days. But we will hold out, and I feel quite calm amid all the commotions we are passing through.

At the very moment I was writing these words, I received notice of the arrival of Tasset's canvas. Great! The walnut frames go well with the studies. And I think that the next batch will be decisive, and that as for selling, we are getting very hot.

Let's be sensible, and not forget for a minute that not only for our own sake but also for the success of this studio, we must get back the money spent during the unproductive years. We shall if we keep calm; besides, it is our due and we have suffered enough for it.

But I beg you to try to make it up with the Bagues. What I mean is, we are getting too old to fight against the existing businesses, and the best policy will probably be to go on quietly accepting the realities of today. It costs a great deal to found another business, and to use the existing ones cost nothing at all. So then, if you see Bague, explain to him that coming to a country quite new to me, I began to do studies right and left, and sent you two batches of them, but that if there are any pictures among them, there are only two or three at the most, such as the "White Orchard" and the "Harvest" with a ruin in the background.

At the moment, however, I am able to concentrate. And as for the new things – ah, these are costing us dear, and we must not be too easy-going in selling them, they must bring what they are worth.

Let's hope that we shall not be too much on the rocks. With patience it won't be too difficult for us to do as Mauve and Mesdag did, who were able to wait and force the price up a little, and still got sold. We are sparing nothing to get a certain richness in colour. And I believe that the thought of gaining something as much for the comrades as for ourselves will give us confidence. And even if we have no fixed plan in business, everything we do will be based on our deep conviction of the injustice which the artists we know are now suffering under, and on the desire to change all this as much as we can. With that conviction we can work on calmly and with a will, and after all we have nothing to fear from anyone.

I am working on a portrait of Mother [F 477, JH 1600], because the black-and-white photograph annoys me so. Ah, what portraits could be made from nature with photography and painting! I always hope that we are still to have a great revolution in portraiture.

I am writing home for Father's portrait also. I do not want to have black photographs, but I do want to have a portrait. That of Mother, a size 8 canvas, will be ashen grey, against a green background, the dress carmine.

I do not know if it will be like her, but anyhow I want to give the impression of a blonde colouring. You will see it one day, and if you like, I will make one for you too. It will again be in very thick impasto.

Well, my dear Theo, about your next letter, let me have it on Sunday. It will be all right, I venture to think, for we are getting very near selling and the stuff I am getting ready now will put us in the way of making some show when the exhibition is on. It will be a year of hard work, but we shall have good times afterward, and even in the meantime I am doing a brothel study from memory for Bernard. Did you see that drawing of mine which I put in with Bernard's drawings, representing the house? You can get some idea of the colour. I have a size 30 canvas after that drawing.

With a handshake, and many thanks for the canvas; now for the attack, once again. I stick to this, that when these decorations that I am working on are finished, they ought to be worth ten thousand; whether it is easy for me to do or not, that is my fixed and steady aim; we have spent money and we must get it back.

Ever yours, Vincent