

My dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find an order for paints to replace the one in my last letter. We have had some glorious days and I have set even more canvases going, so that there are twelve size 30 canvases in prospect. Two studies of cypresses of that difficult bottle-green hue; I have worked their foregrounds with thick layers of white lead, which gives firmness to the ground.

I think that very often the Monticellis were prepared like this. You put other colours on that. But I do not know if the canvases are strong enough for that sort of work.

Speaking of Gauguin and Bernard, and that they may well give us painting of greater consolation. I must however add what I have also said many a time to Gauguin himself, namely that we must not then forget that others have done it already. But however it may be, outside Paris you quickly forget Paris, when throwing yourself into the heart of the country, your ideas change; but I for one cannot forget all those lovely canvases of Barbizon, and it seems hardly probable that anyone will do better than that, and unnecessary besides.

What is André Bonger doing; you have not mentioned him in the last two or three letters.

As for me, my health remains very good and work distracts me. I have received – probably from one of our sisters – a book by Rod, which is not bad, but the title *Le Sens de la vie* is really a little pretentious for the contents, it seems to me.

It certainly is not very cheering. I think the author must be suffering a good deal from his lungs and consequently a little from everything.

Anyway, he admits that he finds consolation in the companionship of his wife, which is all to the good, but after all, for my own use he teaches me nothing about the meaning of life, whatever is meant by it. For my part I might well think him a little trite and be surprised that he has had a book like that published these days and gets it sold at 3.50 fr. Altogether I prefer Alphonse Kair, Souvestre and Droz because they are a bit more alive than this. It's true that I am perhaps ungrateful, not even appreciating Abbé Constantin and other literary works, which gave lustre to the gentle reign of the naive Carnot. It seems that this book has made a great impression on our good sisters. At least, Wil had mentioned it to me, but good women and books are two different things.

I have reread with much pleasure *Zadig ou la destinée* by Voltaire. It is like *Candide*. Here the mighty author gives at least a glimpse of the possibility that life may have some meaning, though it is agreed in conversation that things in this world do not always go as the wisest wish!

As for me, I do not know what to wish, to work here or elsewhere now seems to come to very much the same thing, and being here, staying here seems the simplest thing to do.

Only I have no news to tell you, for the days are all the same; I have no ideas, except to think that a field of wheat or a cypress is well worth the trouble of looking at close up, and so on.

I have a wheat field, very yellow and very light, perhaps the lightest canvas I have done [F 617, JH 1753].

The cypresses are always occupying my thoughts, I should like to make something of them like the canvases of the sunflowers, because it astonishes me that they have not yet been done as I see them.

It is as beautiful of line and proportion as an Egyptian obelisk. And the green has a quality of such distinction. It is a splash of black in a sunny landscape, but it is one of the most interesting black notes, and the most difficult to hit off exactly that I can imagine.

But then you must see them against the blue, in the blue rather. To paint nature here, as everywhere, you must be in it a long time. Thus a Monthénard does not give me the true intimate note, for the light is mysterious, and Monticelli and Delacroix felt that. Then Pissarro used to talk very well about it in the old days, and I am still a long way from being able to do what he said would have to be done.

It would of course be a pleasure to me if you sent me the paints, if possible, soon, but above all do only what you can do without too much worry. So if you would rather send them to me at two different times, it will do just as well.

I think that of the two canvases of cypresses, the one I am making this sketch of will be the best. The trees in it are very big and massive. The foreground, very low with brambles and brushwood. Behind some violet hills, a sky green and pink with a crescent moon. The foreground especially is painted very thick, clumps of brambles with touches of yellow, violet and green [F 613, JH 1746]. I will send you the drawings of it with two other drawings that I have done too [F 1525, JH 1747].

That will keep me busy these days. The great question here is to find occupation for the day.

What a pity one cannot shift this building here. It would be splendid to hold an exhibition in, all the empty rooms, the large windows.

I should have very much liked to see that picture by Rembrandt which you spoke of in your last letter.

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Some time ago I saw in Braun's window a photo of a picture which must belong to the fine last period (probably in the Hermitage series). In this were great figures of angels, it was "Abraham's Meat," five figures I think. That was extraordinary too. As moving as the "Men of Emmaus," for instance.

If later on there should ever be a question of giving something to M. Salles – for the trouble he has taken – we should give him Rembrandt's "Men of Emmaus."

Is your health good? A handshake for you and your wife, I hope to send you some new drawings next week.

Ever yours, Vincent