

My dear friend Bernard,

My brother wrote me the other day that you were going to see my pictures. So I know you are back, and I am very pleased that you should have thought of going to see what I have done.

On my part I am extremely eager to know what you have brought back from Pont-Aven.

I am hardly in the right mind for writing a letter, but I feel an aching void because I am no longer informed at all of what Gauguin, you and others are doing.

But I must necessarily be patient.

I have another dozen studies here which will probably be more to your liking than this summer's, which my brother will have shown you.

Among these studies there is an "Entrance to a Quarry" pale lilac rocks in reddish fields, as in certain Japanese drawings [F 635, JH 1767]. In the design and in the division of the colour into large planes there is no little similarity to what you are doing at Pont-Aven.

I have been more master of myself in these last studies, because my health has steadied. For instance, there is also a size 30 canvas with ploughed fields, broken lilac, and a background of mountains rising to the very height of the picture; so nothing but rough fields and rocks, with a thistle and dried grass in a corner, and a little fellow, violet and yellow [F 641, JH 1795].

This will prove to you, I hope, that I have not got soft yet.

My God! it is a very bad sort of country here; everything in it is difficult to do with regard to disentangling its inner character and avoiding making it a vaguely apprehended thing instead of the true soil of Provence. Now in order to get this right, one must toil hard, I tell you, and then of course it becomes somewhat abstract; for the great thing is to give the sun and the blue sky their full force and brilliance, and the scorched – and often melancholy – fields their delicate aroma of thyme.

The olive trees here, old man, would be the very thing for you. I haven't had much of a chance to get them right this year, but I intend to return to the charge; they are silver against a soil of orange and violet hues, under the large white sun. Good Lord, I have seen things by certain painters, and by myself too, which did not do justice to the subject at all. In the first place there is something of Corot in that silvery grey, and this especially no one has done yet, whereas several painters have got their apple trees, for instance, and their willows right.

For the same reason there are relatively few pictures representing vineyards, which nevertheless have such an ever-changing beauty.

So there is still plenty for me to work on here.

You know, there is something I am very sorry not to have seen at the Exhibition; it is a series of dwellings of all the peoples. I think either Garnier or Violet le Duc organized it. Now look here, could you, since you have seen it, give me an idea and especially a coloured sketch of the primitive Egyptian house. I think it is very simple, a plain cube on a terrace – but I should like to know its colouration too.

I read in an article that it was blue, red and yellow. Did you pay attention to it? Please be sure to give me the information. You must not confuse it with Persian or Moroccan dwellings; there are said to be some that are nearly the same, but not the real thing.

As for myself, however, the most admirable thing I know in the domain of architecture is a rural cottage with a moss-covered thatched roof and a blackened chimney. So I am very hard to please.

I saw a sketch of ancient Mexican dwellings in one of the illustrated papers; they too seem to be primitive and very beautiful. Ah, if only one knew the things of those times, and if only one could paint the people of those times, who lived in the midst of them, it would be as beautiful as the work of Millet; I don't say in the matter of colour, but with regard to character, as something significant, something one has a firm faith in.

Now what about your military service – are you going?

I hope you will go see my canvases again, when I send my autumn studies in November; and if possible let me know what you have brought back from Brittany, for I attach great value to knowing which of your things you think best yourself. So I shall write again soon.

I am working on a large canvas of a "Ravine"; it is quite the same motif as your study with a yellow tree, which I still have: two bases of extremely solid rocks, between which there flows a rivulet; a third mountain blocking the ravine [F662, JH 1804].

Such subjects certainly have a fine melancholy, but then it is fun to work in rather wild places, where one has to dig one's easel in between the stones lest the wind should blow the whole caboodle over.

A handshake.

Sincerely yours, Vincent