

Letter T21
Paris, 8 December 1889

My dear Vincent,

We received the three rolls of canvases as well as your letter today. Among the pictures there are some in which the harmony is sought in less glaring tones than you generally use; for all that there is a great deal of air in them.

Though I fully agree with you when you say in your last letter that you want to work like a cobbler, surely this will not prevent you from turning out canvases which will hold their own beside those of the masters. What I approve of in modern times is that they have done that much for art that nowadays everyone can work in his own way, and is not forced to do things according to the rules laid down by some school. This being the case, it is permissible to do a piece of nature exactly as one sees it, without being obliged to cut it down in this way or that. The sympathy an artist feels for certain lines and for certain colours will cause his soul to be reflected in them. At the Universal Exhibition there is a small picture by Manet, which perhaps you saw at Portier's when you were there. It represents a young woman in a white dress, sitting against a background of a little green hill, by her side a carriage with a child in it. The father is sprawled carelessly on the grass behind the woman.¹

This is decidedly not only one of the most modern pictures, but there is also the highest form of art in it. I am of the opinion that the researches of symbolism, for instance, need go no farther than that picture, and besides, the symbol is not premeditated forcedly.

Tangui has been exhibiting a great many of your pictures recently; he told me he hopes to sell the bench with the ivy. It was a fine choice that you made for Brussels. I have ordered the frames. For the sunflowers I am leaving the narrow wooden rim which is around it, and then I shall add a white frame. For the others, white frames or frames in natural wood. You did not say whether you want to exhibit drawings. When Maus was here he greatly admired them, and urgently requested them to be sent in. Perhaps it is possible to send a number of them in one frame. At the time you used to say that they ought to publish a book on Monticelli. Well, I have seen a score of very fine lithographs after his pictures, done by a certain Lauzet.² There will also be an accompanying text. The artist is going to have a look at our pictures to see whether there are any he might want to reproduce. He is especially well up on the English and Scotch painters. The lithographs are printed in different tones, and, with regard to the process used, are more or less like the etchings on stone which Marvy did in his time; the man who made them is a true artist. That friend of Bernard's named Aurier looked me up, you know, the one who came to see me once in the Rue Lepic.³ He is very interested in what you are doing, and he showed me a little paper which he edits, and in which he wrote about Tangui's shop, on which occasion he mentioned your pictures.

Here we are having the dead of winter, and there is snow on the roofs. How is the weather in your neighbourhood? I wrote a letter to Mr. Peyron to tell him that you would probably be obliged to work in a room, and I asked him to be so kind as to allow you to light a fire and to add the cost to my account. I rejoice to hear that you are feeling well. As for the future, who can foretell anything? But above all don't worry more than necessary. Better days will come to you eventually, and we shall be seeing each other more often at any rate. The Corots, Millets, etc., didn't sell their paintings for a high price, but for all that they sold them in the end, but one must have patience.

Jo gives you her kindest regards; we received quite a batch of little things for the baby from Amsterdam. You will do its portrait as soon as you are here. Wil probably will come in January to lend a helping hand. She enjoyed herself thoroughly at Leyden.

Be of good heart!

Sincerely yours, Theo

1. Edouard Manet, "Under The Trees," 1878, oil on canvas 65 x 81 cm, private collection, Paris.
2. See Vincent's letter 617.
3. See the letter of Albert Aurier, T55a.