

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your last letter. I am very glad that you and Jo are well and I think of you very often. What you tell me about a publication of coloured lithographs with a text on Monticelli is very interesting. Frankly, it gave me very great pleasure, and I shall be very curious to see them someday. I hope that they will reproduce in colour the bouquet of flowers you have, for as to colour, that is a thing of the first order. Someday I should very much like to do a plate or two in this style myself, from my canvases. For instance, I am working on a picture this moment, women gathering olives, which would lend itself to that, I think.

These are the colours: the ground is violet, and farther off, yellow ochre; the olives with bronze trunks have grey-green foliage, the sky is entirely pink, and three small figures pink too. The whole in a very discreet colour scheme [F 654, JH 1868].

It is a canvas done from memory after the study of the same size made on the spot, because I want something far away, like a vague memory softened by time. There are only two notes of pink and green, which harmonize together, neutralize each other, and form a contrast too. I shall probably do two or three copies, for after all it is the result of half a dozen studies of olives.

I think that probably I shall hardly do any more things in impasto; it is the result of the quiet, secluded life that I am leading, and I am all the better for it. Fundamentally I am not so violent as all that, and at last I myself feel calmer.

Perhaps you will also see it in the canvas for the Vingtistes, which I sent off yesterday; the Field of wheat at sunrise. You will get the "Bedroom" at the same time. I put in two drawings as well. I am curious to know what you will say about the "Wheat Field"; perhaps it needs to be looked at for some time. However, I hope you will write me soon whether it has arrived in good condition, if you find half an hour to spare next week.

I am quite resigned to staying here next year, because I think that my work is getting on a little. And because of my long stay, I feel the country here differently than I should some other place – good ideas are beginning to germinate a little now, and we must let them develop. And then I should not have strayed so far from my idea of looking for something in the country of Tartarin. I have a great wish to do the cypresses again and the Alps, and when making long trips in all directions I have often carefully noted some subjects, and I know good places for when the fine weather comes. Then if I leave here, I think there would be hardly any advantage from the point of view of expense, and the success of my work is even more doubtful if I leave. I have had a letter from Gauguin, again very nice, a letter steeped in the nearness of the sea; I think he ought to do some fine things, a bit wild.

You tell me not to worry too much and that better days will yet come for me. I must tell you that these better days have already begun for me, as soon as I get a glimpse of the possibility of completing my work in some way or other, so that you would have a series of really sympathetic Provençal studies, which will somehow be linked, I hope, with our distant memories of our youth in Holland, and so I am giving myself a treat by doing the "Women Gathering Olives" again for Mother and our sister.

And if I could one day prove that I have not impoverished the family, that would comfort me. For now I am still full of remorse at spending money with no return. But as you say, patience and work are the only chance of getting away from that.

However, I often think that if I had done as you did, if I had stayed with Goupils', if I had confined myself to selling pictures, I should have done better. For in business, even if you yourself do not produce, you make others produce. Just now so many artists need support from the dealers, and only rarely do they find it.

The money which M. Peyron had is used up, and he even advanced me 10 francs some days ago, and in the course of the month I shall surely need another 10, and I think it is right to give something to the servants here and to the porter at New Year's, which will make another 10 francs or so.

As for winter clothes, I haven't got anything much, as you will understand, but they are warm enough and then we can wait till spring for that. If I go out, it is to work, so I put on what is most worn, and I have a velvet jacket and trousers for wearing here. In the spring, if I am here, I intend to go and do some pictures in Arles as well, and if I get something new at about that time, it will be enough.

I am enclosing an order for canvas and paints, but I still have some, and it can wait till next month if this is already too much.

I remember the picture by Manet you speak of. The "Portrait of a Man" by Puvis de Chavannes has always remained the ideal in figure to me, an old man reading a yellow novel, and beside him a rose and some watercolour brushes in a glass of water – and the "Portrait of a Lady" that he had at the same exhibition, a woman already old, but exactly as Michelet felt, There is no such thing as an old woman. These are consoling things, to see modern life as something bright, in spite of its inevitable griefs.

Last year around this time I certainly did not think that I should ever get over it as much as this.

Give kind regards to Isaäcson if you see him, and to Bernard.

© Copyright 2001 R. G. Harrison

I am sorry not to be able to send the "Olive Trees" just now, but it is drying so badly that it must wait. I think that it would be a good idea to send for our sister in January. Ah, if she should get married, it would be a good thing.

I shake your hand in thought. I am again going to work a little outside: there is a mistral. Toward sunset it generally grows a little calmer, then there are superb sky effects of pale citron, and the mournful pines with their silhouettes standing out in relief against it with exquisite black lace effects. Sometimes the sky is red, sometimes of an extremely delicate neutral tone, and again pale citron, but neutralized by a delicate lilac.

I have an evening effect of another pine tree against pink and greenish-yellow. Anyway, you will soon see those canvases, the first of which – the "Wheat Field" – has just started. Goodbye, I hope for only a little while.

Kindest regards to Jo.

Ever yours, Vincent