

Letter 469
Arles, c. 14 March 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for your letter, which I had not dared to expect so soon, as far as the 50-fr. note which you added was concerned.

I see that you have not yet had an answer from Tersteeg. I don't think that we need press him in another letter. However, if you have any official business to transact with B. V. & Co. in The Hague, you might mention in a P. S. that you are rather surprised that he has in no way acknowledged the receipt of the letter in question.

As for my work, I brought back a size 15 canvas today. It is a drawbridge with a little cart going over it, outlined against a blue sky – the river blue as well, the banks orange coloured with green grass and a group of women washing linen in smocks and multicoloured caps [F 397, JH 1368]. And another landscape with a little country bridge and more women washing linen. [F 396, JH 1367]

Also an avenue of plane trees near the station [F 398, JH 1366]. Altogether twelve studies since I've been here.

The weather here is changeable, often windy with murky skies, but the almond trees are beginning to flower everywhere. I am very glad that the pictures should go to the Independents. You are right to go to see Signac at his house. I was very glad to see from your letter of today that he made a better impression on you than he did the first time. In any case I am glad to know that after today you will not be alone in the apartment.

Remember me kindly to Koning. Are you well? I am better myself, except that eating is a real ordeal, as I have a touch of fever and no appetite, but it's only a question of time and patience.

I have company in the evening, for the young Danish painter who is here is a decent soul: his work is dry, correct and timid, but I do not object to that when the painter is young and intelligent. He originally began studying medicine: he has read Zola, de Goncourt, and Guy de Maupassant, and he has enough money to do himself well. And with all this, a very genuine desire to do very different work from what he is actually producing now.

I think he would be wise to delay his return home for a year, or to come back here after a short visit to his friends.

But, old boy, you know, I feel as though I were in Japan – I say no more than that, and mind, I haven't seen anything in its usual splendour yet.

That's why – even though I'm vexed that just now expenses are heavy and the pictures worthless – that's why I don't despair of the future success of this idea of a long sojourn in the Midi.

Here I am seeing new things, I am learning, and if I take it easy, my body doesn't refuse to function.

For many reasons I should like to get some sort of little retreat, where the poor cab horses of Paris – that is you and several of our friends, the poor impressionists – could go out to pasture when they get too beat up.

I was present at the Inquiry into a crime committed at the door of a brothel here; two Italians killed two Zouaves. I seized the opportunity to go into one of the brothels in a small street called "des ricolettes." That is the extent of my amorous adventures among the Arlésiennes. The mob all but (the Southerner, like Tartarin, being more energetic in good intentions than in action) – the mob, I repeat, all but lynched the murderers confined in the town hall, but in retaliation all the Italians – men and women, the Savoyard monkeys included – have been forced to leave town.

I should not have told you about this, except that it means I've seen the streets of this town full of excited crowds. And it was indeed a fine sight.

I made my last three studies with the perspective frame which you know I use. I attach some importance to the use of the frame because it seems not unlikely to me that in the near future many artists will make use of it, just as the old German and Italian painters certainly did, and, as I am inclined to think, the Flemish too. The modern use of it may differ from the ancient practice, but in the same way isn't it true that in the process of painting in oils one gets very different effects today from those of the men who invented the process, Jan and Hubert van Eyck? And the moral of this is that it's my constant hope that I am not working for myself alone. I believe in the absolute necessity of a new art of colour, of design, and – of the artistic life. And if we work in that faith, it seems to me that there is a chance that we do not hope in vain. You must know that I am actually ready to send some studies off to you, only I can't roll them yet. A handshake for you. On Sunday I shall write to Bernard and de Lautrec, because I solemnly promised to, and shall send you those letters as well. I am deeply sorry for Gauguin's plight, especially because now his

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health is shaken: he hasn't the kind of temperament that profits from hardships – on the contrary, this will only exhaust him from here on, and that will spoil him for his work. Goodbye for the present.
Ever yours, Vincent