

Letter 473  
Arles, c. 2 April 1888

My dear Theo,

I'm in a fever of work since the trees are in blossom and I want to do a Provençal orchard full of enormous brightness. To write with a clear head presents serious difficulties. Yesterday I wrote some letters which I destroyed later. I keep on thinking that we must do something in Holland, and that we must set about it with the vigour of sans-culottes, with a French gaiety and worthy of the cause we are pleading.

Here is a plan of attack which will cost us several of the best pictures you and I have made between us, and certainly worth at least several 1000 franc notes<sup>1</sup>. In any case they cost us money and a good piece of our lives.

But it would be an answer in a clear voice to certain heavy insinuations, treating us as though we had already died, and a revenge for your trip last year, when the welcome that they made you lacked heat. Enough.

Suppose therefore that first of all we gave to Jet Mauve the Souvenir de Mauve [F 394, JH 1379]. Suppose I dedicate a study to Breitner (I have one [F 379, JH 1341] exactly like the study which I exchanged with L. Pissarro [F 378, JH 1340] and the one Reid has, of oranges, [F 395, JH 1363] foreground white, background blue.)

Suppose we gave another study to our sister.

Suppose that we gave the Modern Museum in The Hague, since we have many memories of The Hague, the two views of Montmartre exhibited at the Independents, [F 350, JH 1245; F 316, JH 1246].

One thing remains not so easily settled. Since Tersteeg has written you, "Send me some impressionists, but only those pictures that you yourself judge to be the best," and on your part you sent a picture of mine in that consignment, I find myself in the not very easy position of having to convince Tersteeg that really I am a true impressionist of the Petit Boulevard, and that I intend to keep this position. Oh well, he will have a picture of mine in his own collection – I have been turning it over in my mind these days and I have found an odd thing, not like what I do every day.

[Written in the margin] Believe me, Tersteeg will not refuse the picture; I have made up my mind that this one, and the one for Jet Mauve, must go to Holland

It is the drawbridge with the little yellow cart and the group of washerwomen, a study in which the ground is bright orange, the grass very green and the sky and water blue [F 397, JH 1368].

It only needs a frame specially designed for it in royal blue and gold, in this fashion the mount blue, the outside moulding gold; if necessary the frame could be in blue plush, but it would be better painted.

I think I can assure you that the work I do here is superior to than in the Asnières country last spring. In the whole plan there is nothing absolutely fixed except the dedication Souvenir de Mauve, and the dedication to Tersteeg. I have not yet succeeded in writing a few words to explain it to him, but I will find them when the painting is done, they will come to me of themselves; but you well understand that we have the strength in us to make them talk about us if we choose, and we can go on with the work of launching the impressionists with the utmost calm and assurance.

If you see Reid again, it would be good to tell him that we don't have a great deal of confidence in the success of ambitious people, and that we would like them better if they did good work, that we were surprised at his way of doing things which ended up being inexplicable and that since then we don't know what to think of him.

[Written in the margin] For my part, I won't write to Tersteeg directly. If there is anything I will send the letter to you with the paintings.

I believe that Russell is trying to reconcile me with Reid, and that he wrote the letter expressly for that purpose. I shall certainly write to Russell and tell him that I told Reid frankly that he made a foolish mistake in loving dead pictures and to count for nothing living artists. That moreover I hoped to see him change, at least in that respect.

I had to spend almost the whole amount on colours and canvas as soon as your letter came, and I wish you could manage as soon as possible to send me something soon. The painting of the garden with the lovers [F

314, JH 1258] is at the Théâtre Libre. Boyer, the framer, still has a lithograph of mine: the old man with the bald head [F 1662, JH 268].

I should like it if what I am going to send you reached you before Tersteeg goes to Paris, and if you could put the blooming apple trees in your room. I'm very glad that it is working out all right with Koning and that you are not alone. What a pity about Vignon. I am sure M. Gendre was behind it, and I wish him, M. Gendre, the bad luck that he has brought on other people. It is a sad end for father Martin.

I can't yet manage to write you the kind of letter I want to, the work absorbs me completely.

But this is especially to tell you that I want to do some studies particularly for Holland, and after that we'll leave Holland alone for ever.

The last few days I have been more moved than was reasonable perhaps, thinking about Mauve, and J. H. Weissenbruch, Tersteeg and Mother, and Wil; and it steadies me to tell myself that there'll be some pictures going down there. Then afterwards I shall forget them, and probably think only of the Petit Boulevard.

[The end of the letter is missing]

1. Vincent makes a play on words here: "Blusiers pillets de mille vrans", transposing the first letters of "Plusiers billets" and writing "francs" with 'Dutch' spelling.