

Letter 516  
Arles, 31 July 1888

My dear Theo,

So at last our uncle's sufferings are over. I received the news this morning from our sister. It appears that they were more or less expecting you to be at the funeral, so perhaps you will indeed be there.

How short life is and how like smoke. Which is no reason for despising the living, on the contrary.

So we are right to care more for the artists than for the pictures.

I am working hard for Russell, I thought that I would do him a series of drawings after my painted studies; I believe that he will look upon them kindly, and that, at least I hope so, will help to bring him to make a deal.

McKnight came again yesterday to see me, and he also liked the portrait of the girl [F 431, JH 1519], and said besides that he liked my Garden. I really do not know if he has money or not.

I am now at work with another model, a postman in a blue uniform trimmed with gold, a big bearded face, very like Socrates [F 432, JH 1522]. A violent Republican like Tanguy. A man more interesting than most. If we prod Russell, perhaps he will take the Gauguin that you bought, and if there is no other way of helping Gauguin, what should be done?

When I write him, sending the drawings, it will of course be to urge him to make up his mind.

I shall say to him – Look here, you all like our picture, but I believe that we shall see still better work from the artist; why don't you do as we do, who have faith in the whole man such as he is, and admire everything he does? Then I want to add that certainly it is all one to us to give up the big picture if necessary, but since Gauguin will often be in want of money, it is in his interest that we do not keep it until his prices have trebled or quadrupled, a thing which we believe will happen.

If after this Russell likes to make a real definite offer, my word...we shall see! And Gauguin in this case must say that if he sold it to you as a friend at such a price, he is determined that it should not be sold to another collector at that same price. Anyway, let's finish the drawings – I have 8 and shall do 12 – and let's wait to hear what he says.

I am very curious to know whether or not you have been able to go to Holland. I shall not write any more for the moment.

The change I am going to try to make in my painting is to do more figures.

Altogether it is the only thing in painting that excites me to the depths of my soul, and which makes me feel the infinite more than anything else. The seventeenth of this month my friend the 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant of Zouaves is going to Paris. He offered to take charge of the parcel I have for you, and I think I shall accept; in this way you will get it on the eighteenth without having to pay carriage.

I am writing our sister today; their grief will be great.

Did Bernard's sketches reach you?

As our sister said, from the moment people are gone, you remember only their good moments and their good qualities. But the great thing is to try to see these while they are still with us. It would be so simple and would account so much for the terrible things in life, which now amaze and wound us so, if life had yet another hemisphere, invisible it is true, but where one lands when one dies. To those who make this interesting and solemn journey, our best wishes and sympathy.

If you go to Holland, many kind messages from me to our mother and sister.

With a handshake,  
Ever yours, Vincent

This week will be pretty tough, because of my having to pay the rent and the model. I hope to do these sketches after the studies for you as well. You will see that they have something of a Japanese air.

I must thank you again for yesterday's 50-fr. note, and answer your letter.

It was a good thing to send the paints and canvases, as my stock was exhausted all along the line.

About Bing, as for being in a hurry, no, but far from breaking off relations with him, we must have another deposit of pictures as soon as we can settle up.

I saw a magnificent and strange effect this evening. A very big boat loaded with coal on the Rhône, moored to the Quay. Seen from above it was all shining and wet with a shower; the water was yellowish-white and clouded pearl gray; the sky, lilac, with an orange streak in the west; the town, violet. On the boat some poor workmen in dirty blue and white came and went carrying the cargo on shore. It was pure Hokusai. It was too late to do it, but one day when that coal boat comes back, I must give it a try. I saw it in a railway coalyard, a spot I have just found, and where there will be plenty of other things to do.

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With a handshake, because if I want to write to Holland too, I must make haste.  
I shall have difficulty getting through this week. But I hope to get the series of figures going.