

Letter 540  
Arles, c. 22 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and the 100-fr. note it contained. Milliet also came this morning, bringing me the package of Japanese stuff and other things. Among them I very much like the cabaret in two sheets, with the line of violet girl musicians against the yellow lighted wall – I did not know that print, and there are several others which were unknown to me; there is one, a woman's head, which must belong to a good school.

I have just bought a dressing table with everything necessary, and my own little room is complete. The other one, Gauguin's or another lodger's, still needs a dressing table and a chest of drawers, and downstairs I shall need a big frying pan and a cupboard.

There is no hurry for this, and already I can see myself earning enough to be safe for a long time to come. You cannot think what peace of mind it gives me, I am so set on making an artist's home, but one for practical use, and not the ordinary studio full of knick-knacks.

I am also thinking of planting two oleanders in tubs in front of the door.

After all we shall probably spend several times fewer hundreds of francs than Russell, for example, will spend thousands. And truly, even if I could choose between the two, for my own part I should rather have the hundred-franc method, so long as every piece of furniture is solid and big.

But the room where I shall put up anybody who comes this way will be like a boudoir, and when it is finished, you will see that it will not be a haphazard production, but a deliberate creation.

The text of Bing's Japon is rather dry, and leaves something to be desired; he says there is a great individual art, but though he gives a few scraps of it, he gives you no real impression of the character of that art.

Have you read Madame Chrysanthème yet?

The sense of tranquillity that the house has bought me mainly amounts to this – that from now on I feel I am working to provide for the future, so that after me another painter will find a going concern. I shall need time, but I am obsessed with the idea of painting such decorations for the house as will be worth the money spent on me during the years in which I was unproductive.

Mother's photograph gave me very great pleasure, because you can see that she is well, and because she still has such a lively expression. But I do not care for it at all as a real likeness; I have just painted my own portrait, in the same ashen colouring, and unless we are painted in colour, the result is nowhere near a speaking likeness. Just because I had taken a terrific amount of trouble to get the combination of ashen and grey-pink tones, I could not like the portrait in black and white. Would Germinie Lacerteux really be Germinie Lacerteux without her colour? Obviously not. How I would like to have painted portraits of her own family.

For the second time I have scraped off a study of Christ with the angel in the Garden of Olives. You see, I can see real olives here, but I cannot or rather I will not paint any more without models; but I have the thing in my head with the colours, a starry night, the figure of Christ in blue, all the strongest blues, and the angel blended citron-yellow. And every shade of violet, from a blood-red purple to ashen, in the landscape.

I have been to get five size 30 stretchers, so I have even more ideas. I'm having the pictures that I'm keeping here framed in oak and walnut.

It will take time, but you'll see later on.

I hope that you will give me some details of your visit to Maurin. I like the drawing of the two women in the carriage tremendously.

Even if it is some time before anyone comes here to stay with me, it won't make me change my mind about this step being urgent and being useful in the long run. This art that we are working in, we feel it has a long future before it, and one must be quietly settled, like steady people, and not like decadents. Here my life will become more and more like a Japanese painter's, living close to nature like a petty tradesman. And that, you well know, is a less lugubrious affair than the decadent's way. If I can live long enough, I shall be something like old Tanguy.

After all, we don't really know anything about our own personal future, but we nevertheless feel that impressionism will last. Good-bye for the present and good luck, and many, many thanks for all your kindness. I think that I shall put the Japanese things downstairs in the studio. A handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent