

Letter 541
Arles, c. 27 September 1888

My dear Theo,

I know quite well that I have already written you once today, but it has been such a lovely day again. My great regret is that you cannot see what I am seeing here. Since seven o'clock this morning I have been sitting in front of something which after all is no great matter, a clipped round bush of cedar or cypress growing amid grass. You already know this clipped bush, because you have had a study of the garden. Enclosed also a sketch of my canvas, again a square size 30. The bush is green, touched a little with bronze and various other tints.

The grass is very, very green, yellowish veronese green, the sky is very, very blue.

The row of bushes in the background are all oleanders, raving mad; the blasted things are flowering so riotously they may well catch locomotor ataxia. They are loaded with fresh flowers, and quantities of faded flowers as well, and their green is continually renewing itself in fresh, strong shoots, apparently inexhaustibly. [F1465, JH 1583]

A funereal cypress is standing over them, and some small figures are sauntering along a pink path.

This makes a pendant to another size 30 canvas of the same spot, only from a totally different angle, in which the whole garden is in quite different greens, under a sky of pale citron. [F468, JH 1578]

But isn't it true that this garden has a fantastic character which makes you quite able to imagine the poets of the Renaissance, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, strolling among these bushes and over the flowery grass? It is true that I have left out some trees, but what I have kept in the composition is really there just as you see it. Only it has been overcrowded with some shrubs which are not in character.

And to get at that character, the fundamental truth of it: that's three times now that I've painted the same spot.

It happens to be the garden just in front of my house. But this corner of the garden is a good example of what I was telling you, that to get at the real character of things here, you must look at them and paint them for a long time.

Perhaps you will see nothing from the sketch except that the line is now very simple. This picture is again painted very thickly, like its pendant with the yellow sky.

I hope to work again with Milliet tomorrow.

Today again from seven o'clock in the morning till six in the evening I worked without sitting except to take some food a step or two away. That is why the work is getting on fast.

But what will you say of it, and what shall I think of it myself, a little while from now?

I have a lover's insight or a lover's blindness for work just now.

Because these colours about me are all new to me, and give me an extraordinary exaltation.

I have no thought of fatigue, I shall do another picture this very night, and I shall bring it off.

If I tell you that it is very urgent for me to have:

6 large tubes of chrome yellow, 1 citron

6 " " malachite green

3 " " Prussian blue

10 " " zinc white

A big tube like the zinc white and flake white

Then that will be deducted from yesterday's order

And 5 meters of canvas, too

I can't help it, I feel my brain is lucid, and I want as far as possible to make sure of enough pictures to hold my own when the others are making a great show for the year '89. Seurat with two or three of his enormous canvases has enough for an exhibition of his own, Signac is a good worker and has enough as well, and Gauguin and Guillaumin too. So, whether we exhibit or not, I do want to have the series of studies Decoration for the same time.

In this way we shall be absolutely original, for the others will not be able to think us pretentious when we have only that.

But you may be quite sure that I shall try to put style into them. Milliet today was pleased with what I had done – the "Ploughed Field"; generally he does not like what I do, but because the colour of the lumps of earth is as soft as a pair of sabots, it did not offend him, with the forget-me-not blue sky flecked with white clouds. [F 574, JH 1586] If he posed better, he would give me great pleasure, and he would have a more

distinctive portrait than I can manage now, though the subject is good – the matte pale tints of his face, the red soldier's cap against an emerald background. [F 1465, JH 1576] Oh, how I wish you could see all that I am seeing these days. I can only let myself go with so many lovely things in front of me, especially as I think that the work is getting somewhat better than the last batch, only it was the studies in the last batch that have prepared me to work with so much assurance these days that are free of wind.

Why is it that our good old Thomas won't lend me anything on my studies? He is making a mistake if he doesn't, and I hope he will.

I am afraid of overburdening you, and yet I would like to order quite 200 franc's worth of paints, and canvas, and brushes. It is not for anything else, it is for that. The whole autumn may be fine, and if I polish off a size 30 canvas every two or three days, I shall make several thousand francs on it. I still have a kind of concentrated power, which only asks to spend itself in work. But I am bound to begin by using up a lot of paint, and that is why I need Thomas's help.

If I go on working as I am doing these days, I shall have my studio full of good sound studies the way Guillaumin's is. Guillaumin is sure to have some fine new things. I don't doubt it, and I would very much like to see them.

The studies now are really done with a single coat of impasto. The touch is not much divided and the tones are often blended, and altogether I can't help laying it on thick in Monticelli's manner. Sometimes I think I really am continuing that man's work, only I have not yet done the figures of lovers as he did.

And probably I shall not do it without some serious studies from life. But there is no hurry for that, and now I have quite made up my mind to work hard until I have surmounted all the difficulties.

If I want to get this letter off, I must hurry. Have you heard from Gauguin? I keep expecting a letter from Bernard, which will probably follow the sketches. Gauguin must certainly have another combination in mind, I have felt that for weeks and weeks.

He has a perfect right to, of course.

For the time being solitude does not worry me, and later on we shall find someone to keep me company, and perhaps more than we want.

Only I think we must say nothing unpleasant to Gauguin if he does change his mind, and take it absolutely in good part. If he has joined forces with Laval, it is only fair, since Laval is his pupil, and they have already kept house together. As a matter of fact, they might really both come here, we could find some way of putting them up.

As for the furnishing, even if I had known beforehand that Gauguin was not coming, I should have wished all the same to have two beds in case I had to put someone up. So of course he is quite free. There will always be someone with a longing to see the South. What has Vignon done? After all, if everything takes a turn for the better, everyone will be sure to make great progress, and I too. If you can't see these lovely days here, you shall see the pictures of them. And I am trying to express more than the others.

A handshake from

Ever yours, Vincent