

Letter 499
Saintes-Maries, 1 or 2 June 1888

My dear Theo,

I am at last writing to you from Stes-Maries on the shore of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean has the colours of mackerel, changeable I mean. You don't always know if it is green or violet, you can't even say it's blue, because the next moment the changing light has taken on a tinge of pink or gray.

A family is a queer thing – quite involuntary and in spite of myself I have been thinking here between whiles of our sailor uncle, who must have seen the shores of this sea many a time.

I brought three canvases and have covered them – two marines, a view of the village, and then some drawings which I will send you by post when I return to Arles tomorrow.

I have board and lodging for 4 francs a day and they began by asking 6.

As soon as I can, I shall probably come back again to make some more studies.

The shore here is sandy, neither cliffs nor rocks – like Holland without the dunes, and bluer.

You get better fried fish here than on the Seine. Only fish is not available every day, as the fishermen go off and sell it in Marseilles. But when there is some, it's frightfully good.

If there isn't – the butcher is not much more appetizing than the fellah butcher of M. Gérôme's – if there is no fish, it is pretty difficult to get anything to eat, as far as I can see.

I do not think there are 100 houses in the village, or town. The chief building, after the old church and an ancient fortress, is the barracks. And the houses – like the ones on our heaths and peat bogs in Drenthe; you will see some specimens of them in the drawings.

I am forced to leave my three painted studies here, for of course they are not dry enough to be submitted with safety to five hours' jolting in the carriage.

But I expect to come back here again.

Next week I'd like to go to Tarascon to do two or three studies.

If you have not written yet, I shall naturally expect the letter at Arles.

A very fine gendarme came to interview me here, and the curé too – the people can't be very bad here, because even the curé looked almost like a decent fellow.

Next month it will be the season for open-air bathing here. The number of bathers varies from 20 to 50. I am staying till tomorrow afternoon, I still have some drawings to do.

One night I went for a walk by the sea along the empty shore. It was not gay, but neither was it sad – it was – beautiful. The deep blue sky was flecked with clouds of a blue deeper than the fundamental blue of intense cobalt, and others of a clearer blue, like the blue whiteness of the Milky Way. In the blue depth the stars were sparkling, greenish, yellow, white, pink, more brilliant, more emeralds, lapis lazuli, rubies, sapphires. The sea was very deep ultramarine – the shore a sort of violet and faint russet as I saw it, and on the dunes (they are about seventeen feet high) some bushes Prussian blue.

Besides half-page drawings I have a big drawing, the pendant of the last one. Good-by for the present only, I hope, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent