

Letter 555
Arles, 17 October 1888

My dear Theo,

I am overjoyed to hear what you tell me of your two new friends. ¹ But all the same it amazes me that you tell me about them and their frame (at, if my memory serves me, 2000 fr.) and never a word of what was inside that frame, nor a single word of what they had done in the way of painting.

Perhaps it is because you think that I may have heard of them, but I declare it is the first time I have heard of this business, and even of the men themselves.

So being ignorant of things, I should like to ask, "Yes, yes, so much for the frame, but what was there inside it, and what are they actually doing?"

After that I shall certainly be better able to get some idea of what their conversations with you and Pissarro were, once I have some notion of what they themselves are doing.

In any case it proves one thing, that the Dutch artists have spoken of you as the dealer in impressionist pictures, and we must not lose sight of that.

Then what did they tell you of Dutch art, Breitner and Rappard and others, and lastly what do they say about Tersteeg?

Gauguin writes that he has already sent off his trunk and promises to come about the twentieth of this month, that is within a few days. I shall be very glad, because I do believe that it will do both of us good. So write me some details about the new friends' painting soon, and if they are really painters trying to make progress in virgin fields, boldly recommend the South to them. I believe that a new school of colourists will take root in the South, as I see more and more that those in the North rely on their ability with the brush, and the so-called "picturesque," rather than on the desire to express something by colour itself. Your news gave me great pleasure, but it so astonishes me not to know what there was inside that frame.

Here, under a stronger sun, I have found what Pissarro said confirmed, and also what Gauguin wrote to me, the simplicity, the fading of the colours, the gravity of great sunlight effects.

You never come near to suspecting it in the North. And if these artists of the monstrous frame really wish to see something new, let them go to Bing, and then to the South. Myself, I already had palpitations over my order for pine wood frames at 5 francs.

It is just what I said to Russell about his house, that this one here would cost several times less in hundreds than his will cost in thousands, and that after all, even without Russell, we were working for Gauguin.

Have they seen anything of Seurat's, our gentlemen of the frame? I think that as a creation I should prefer Seurat's frame to theirs.

By the way, speaking of Seurat, have you seen him again?

As to selling, I say you are certainly right not to go out of your way looking for sales, I certainly should prefer never to sell, if it could be.

But all the same if we were forced to it, certainly after what has gone before we have no alternative, yet even though we might be obliged to do it someday, we could not do better than take our time about it.

A good handshake, and I hope that you will tell me what there really was inside the frame. And regards to the new friends, and my best wishes.

If they want to see something new, certainly they could go South, or to Africa or Sicily if it is winter. But if they have originality, it is only the real South that will show them anything different from Holland.

Good-by, I hope for only a little while, and that you will write again soon, a good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Have you read Madame Chrysanthème yet?

I am adding a line to tell you that this afternoon I finished the canvas representing the bedroom [F 482, JH 1608].

In any case it pleased me mightily that you should have fallen in with these Dutchmen. It is really quite possible that I may have heard of this large picture, though not of the frame. Some time ago Rappard told me a story praising a picture and its painter, and I can easily tell if it's the same picture when you tell me what they are doing.

However that may be, my dear boy, look here – if you complain of having nothing in your noodle in the way of producing good stuff, just imagine how very much more reason I have for feeling the same depression. I could not even do a stroke of work without you, and we must not go and get excited over what

the two of us manage to produce, but just smoke our pipes in peace and not torment ourselves into melancholia because we are not productive separately and with less pain.

Certainly I have my own moments when I should dearly like to change and be in business for a bit, and by so doing be able to earn some money myself.

But since for the moment we can do nothing to change it, let's accept this fate, that you on your part are condemned always to do business without rest or change, and that I on my part also have a job without rest, wearing enough and exhausting to the brain. I hope that within a year you will feel that between us we have produced a work of art.

This bedroom is something like the still life of the "Romans Parisiens" with the yellow, pink and green covers, you remember it [F 359, JH 1332]. But I think the workmanship is more virile and simple. No stippling, no hatching, nothing, only flat colours in harmony.

I do not know what I shall undertake next, for my eyes are still tired even yet.

And in just such moments after hard work – and all the more the harder it is – I feel my own noodle empty too, you know.

And if I let myself go, nothing would be easier than to detest what I have just done, and kick my foot through it a few times, like old Cézanne. After all, why kick my foot through it – let's leave the studies in peace, even if one sees no good in them; and if we see something that may be called good, well, so much the better.

And after all, don't let's meditate on good and bad too deeply – they're always relative.

That is exactly the fault of the Dutch, to call one thing absolutely good and another absolutely bad. Nothing in the world is as hard and fast as that.

By the way, I have read Richepin's *Césarine* too; there are some very good things in it, that march on the retreating soldiers, how one feels their weariness, and without being soldiers, haven't we all marched like that sometime?

The quarrel of the father and son is just heartbreaking, but it is like *La Glu*, also by Richepin. I find that it leaves no hope, whereas Guy de Maupassant, who has written things certainly as sad, lets things end more humanely in the end. Look at *Monsieur Parent*, look at *Pierre et Jean*, it does not end in happiness, but in the end people are resigned and go on in spite of everything. It does not end in blood and horrors like the other things. Indeed, I much prefer Guy de Maupassant because he is more comforting. At the moment I have just finished *Eugénie Grandet* by Balzac, the story of a miserly peasant.

Good-by, I hope for only a little while.

Ever yours, Vincent

Come now, if we do not produce pictures with frames like these Dutchmen's, you and I are making pictures like Japanese prints, and let's be content with that.

1. The painter Meyer de Haan and his friend Isaäcson. De Haan exhibited his large picture "Uriel Acosta" in the Panorama in Amsterdam; discouraged by the unfavourable criticism, he went to Paris and lived there for a short time with Theo. After the latter's marriage he went to Pont-Aven, where he lived and worked with Gauguin. He died in Amsterdam in 1895. Nothing is known of his work in France. Isaäcson wrote a few articles on the art of painting in the periodical *Le Portefeuille*. Nothing is known of his paintings of that time.