

Letter 468
Arles, 10 March 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 100-Fr. note enclosed. I hope that you are right in thinking Tersteeg will be in Paris soon. It's very much to be desired with things in the state you say they are in – everyone on the rocks and hard up. I was very much interested in what you say about the Lançon sale, and about the painter's mistress. He did some work of very marked individuality; his drawing often reminded me of Mauve's.

I am sorry I did not see the exhibition of his studies and very sorry too not to have seen the Willette show. What do you think of the news of Kaiser Wilhelm's death? Will this hurry things up in France, and is Paris going to stay quiet? It's doubtful; and what will the effect of all this be on the picture trade? I read that there seems to be some idea of abolishing the import duties on pictures in America; is this true? Perhaps it would be easier to get a few dealers and collectors to agree to buy the impressionist pictures than to get the artists to agree to go equal shares in the price of their pictures over to the association, and share the proceeds of the sales, so that the society could at least guarantee its members a chance to live and to work.

If Degas, Claude Monet, Renoir, Sisley and C. Pissarro would take the initiative and say, "Look here, we five give 10 pictures each (or rather we each give to the value of 10,000 Frs. to be estimated by expert members such as Tersteeg and yourself, co-opted by the Society, said experts likewise to put in capital in the form of pictures) and we further undertake to hand over every year pictures to the value of..."

"And we invite you, Guillaumin, Seurat, Gauguin, etc., etc., to combine with us (your pictures to undergo the same expert evaluation)."

Thus the great impressionists of the Grand Boulevard, while giving pictures which would become general property, would keep their prestige, and the others could no longer reproach them with keeping to themselves the advantages of a reputation no doubt acquired primarily through their personal efforts and individual genius, but all the same a reputation that is growing, buttressed and actually maintained by the pictures of a whole battalion of artists who have been working in continual beggary up to now.

Anyway, it is to be hoped that it will come off, and that Tersteeg and you will become expert members (perhaps along with Portier?).

I have two more studies of landscapes. I hope that the work will go on steadily now, and that in a month I shall be able to send you a first consignment. I say in a month, because I want to send you only the best, and because I want them to be dry, and because I want to send at least a dozen at a time, owing to the expense of carriage.

I congratulate you on purchasing the Seurat; with what I shall send you, you must try to arrange another exchange with Seurat as well.

You realize that if Tersteeg joins you in this affair, between you, you could easily persuade Boussod Valadon to grant a regular credit for the necessary purchases. But it is urgent, since failing that, the dealers will steal a march on you.

I have made the acquaintance of a Danish artist [Mourier Peterson] who talks about Heyerdahl and other Northerners, Kroyer, etc. His work is dry, but very conscientious, and he is still young. Some time ago he saw the exhibition of the impressionists in the Rue Lafitte. He is probably going to Paris for the Salon, and wants to make a tour in Holland to see the museums.

I quite approve of your exhibiting the "Livres" with the Independents; its title ought to be "Romans Parisiens." [F 359, JH 1332]

I should be so glad to hear that you had managed to persuade Tersteeg – but we must be patient.

I had to get 50 francs worth of stuff when your letter arrived.

This week I shall set four or five things going. I am continually thinking about the association of artists, and the plan has developed further in my mind; but Tersteeg must be in it, a lot depends on that. As a matter of fact, the artists would have Tersteeg's help. Without that we should be left listening from morning till night to the lamentations of them all as a whole, and each man in particular would be everlastingly coming to ask for explanations, axioms and so forth. I should not be surprised if Tersteeg's view will be that we cannot do without the artists of the Grand Boulevard, and that he will try to persuade them to take the initiative towards our association by giving pictures which would become common property, no longer individual. If they were to make the proposal, the Petit Boulevard, in my opinion, would be morally obliged to join.

And these great ones of the Grand Boulevard will keep their present reputation only if they can forestall the not unfounded criticisms of the lesser impressionists, who will say, "Everything goes into your pockets."

To which they might well make reply, “Not at all, on the contrary, we are the first to say that our pictures belong to the artists!” If Degas, Monet, Renoir and Pissarro were to say that, even allowing plenty of margin for their individual ideas when it comes to putting it into practice, they could do worse, if only by saying nothing at all and letting things slide.

Ever yours, Vincent