

Letter 470
Arles, 18 March 1888

My dear Theo,

Here is a line for Bernard and Lautrec, whom I expressly promised to write to. I send the letters to you; you can hand them over when you have a chance, but there is no hurry whatever, and it will be an excuse for you to see what they are doing and hear what they have to say, if you want to.

But what is Tersteeg doing? Nothing? If you have had no reply, I should write him a note if I were you, very short and very cool, but conveying that you are amazed at not getting a reply from him. I say to write yourself, because even if he doesn't answer me, he must answer you, and you ought to insist on a reply or else you will lose ground with him, and on the contrary this is an excellent opportunity for improving it. I do not think that we should press him in a fresh letter, explaining the business all over again. One must be careful when dealing with him, but what must be avoided is letting oneself be treated as if one were dead or outlawed. That's all.

Let's hope that meanwhile you have had an answer from him.

I have had a note from Gauguin. He complains of the bad weather, is still ailing, and says that of all the various miseries that afflict humanity, nothing maddens him more than the lack of money, and yet he feels doomed to perpetual beggary.

Wind and rain these last few days. I've worked at home on the study which I made a sketch of in Bernard's letter. I want to manage to get colours into it like stained glass windows, and a good, bold design [F 544, JH 1369].

I am in the middle of Pierre et Jean by Guy de Maupassant. It's good. Have you read the preface, where he explains the artist's liberty to exaggerate, to create in his novel a world more beautiful, more simple, more consoling than ours, and goes on to explain what Flaubert may have meant when he said that "Talent is long patience, and originality an effort of will and of intense observation"?

There is a Gothic portico here, which I am beginning to think admirable, the porch of St. Trophime.

But it is so cruel, so monstrous, like a Chinese nightmare, that even this beautiful example of so grand a style seems to me to belong to another world, and I am as glad not to belong to it as to that other world, magnificent as it was, of the Roman Nero.

Must I tell the truth and add that the Zouaves, the brothels, the adorable little Arlésiennes going to their first Communion, the priest in his surplice, who looks like a dangerous rhinoceros, the people drinking absinthe, all seem to me to be creatures from another world? That doesn't mean that I'd feel at home in an artistic world, but that I would rather fool myself than feel alone. And I think I should feel depressed if I did not fool myself about everything.

You have already had heavy snow in Paris according to our friend L'Intransigeant. It wasn't a bad idea, that journalist advising General Boulanger to wear rose-coloured spectacles, so as to put the secret police on the wrong scent: according to him they'd match his beard better. It might have a favourable influence on the picture trade – it's been wanted for long enough.

But we really must get some idea of what our fine Mr. Tersteeg is up to. He must declare himself! In the whole crowd's interest it seems to me it's almost our business, the whole question of the impressionists is at stake, and having been challenged by us, he must give us an answer.

Like myself you will feel that we cannot proceed without being categorically informed of his intentions. If we consider it desirable to hold a permanent exhibition of the impressionists in London and Marseilles, it naturally follows that we'll try to set them up.

And if not, what are his intentions with regard to the offensive, do they exist or not?

The question remains, will Tersteeg be in it? Yes or no?

And has he taken into account, as we have, the resulting depreciation of the value of pictures now highly priced, a depreciation that will, I think, probably set in as soon as the impressionist's stock rises. You observe that the dealers in expensive pictures ruin themselves by opposing for policy reasons the advent of a school which for years has shown an energy and perseverance worthy of Millet, Daubigny and others. But let me know if Tersteeg has written you, and what he may have said. I will do nothing in this without you. Good luck and a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

I enclose Gauguin's letter with the others so that you can read all of them.