

Letter 474
Arles, 9 April 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 100-franc note enclosed. I have sent you sketches of the pictures which are to go to Holland. Of course the painted studies are more brilliant in colour. I'm once again hard at it, still orchards in blossom.

The air here certainly does me good. I wish you could fill your lungs with it; one effect it has on me is comical enough – one small glass of brandy makes me tipsy here, so that as I don't have to fall back on stimulants to make my blood circulate, there will be less strain on my constitution. The only thing is that my stomach has been terribly weak since I came here, but after all that's probably only a matter of time. I hope to make great progress this year, and indeed I need to.

I have another orchard, as good as the pink peach trees, apricot trees of a very pale pink. At the moment I am working on some plum trees, yellowish-white, with thousands of black branches [F 403, JH 1378]. I am using a tremendous lot of colours and canvases, but all the same I hope it isn't a waste of money. Out of four canvases, perhaps one at the most will make a picture, like the one for Tersteeg or Mauve; but the studies, I hope, will come in useful for exchanges.

When can I send you anything? I have a great mind to do a second version like Tersteeg's, because it is better than the Asnières studies.

Yesterday I saw another bull fight, where five men played the bull with darts and cockades. One toreador crushed a testicle jumping the barricade. He was a fair man with grey eyes and plenty of sang-froid; people said he'll be ill long enough. He was dressed in sky blue and gold, just like the little horseman in our Monticelli, the three figures in a wood. The arenas are a fine sight when there's sunshine and a crowd.

Bravo for Pissarro, I think he is right. I hope he will make an exchange with us some day.

And Seurat the same. It would be a good thing to have a painted study of his.

Well, I'm working hard, hoping that we can do something with things of this kind.

This month will be a hard time for both you and me, but if you can manage it, it will be to our advantage to make the most we can of the orchards in bloom. I am well started now, and I think I must have ten more, the same subject. You know I am changeable in my work, and this craze for painting orchards will not last for ever. After this it may be the arenas. Then I must do a tremendous lot of drawing, because I want to make some drawings in the manner of Japanese prints. There is nothing like striking while the iron is hot.

I shall be all in when the orchards are over, for they are size 25 and 30 and 20 canvases. We should not have too many of them, even if I could knock off twice as many. It seems to me that this may really break the ice in Holland. Mauve's death was a terrible blow to me. You will see that the pink peach trees were painted with a certain passion.

I must also have a starry night with cypresses, or perhaps above all, a field of ripe corn; there are some wonderful nights here. I am in a continual fever of work.

I'm very curious to know what the result will be at the end of a year. I hope that by that time I shall be less bothered with breakdowns. At present I feel pretty bad some days, but I don't worry about it in the least, as it is nothing but the reaction after last winter, which was out of the ordinary. And my blood is coming right, that is the great thing.

I must reach the point where my pictures will cover my expenses, and even more than that, taking into account how much was spent in the past. Well, it will come. I don't make a success of everything, I admit, but I'm getting on. So far you have not complained of my expenses here, but I warn you that if I continue to work at the same rate, I shall have great difficulty in making both ends meet. But the work is heavy indeed.

If there should happen to be a month or a fortnight when you were hard pressed, let me know and I will set to work on some drawings, which will cost us less. I mean, you must not put yourself out unnecessarily, there is so much to do here, all sorts of studies, not the way it is in Paris, where you can't sit down wherever you want.

If you can finance a rather heavy month, so much the better, since orchards in bloom are the kind of thing one has some chance of selling or exchanging.

But it occurred to me that you have to pay your rent, so you must tell me if things are too steep.

I am still going about with the Danish painter all the time, but he is going home soon. He's an intelligent boy, and all right as far as fidelity and manners go, but his painting is still rather spineless. You will probably see him when he passes through Paris.

You did well to go to see Bernard. If he goes to serve in Algiers, who knows but that I might go there too to keep him company.

Is it really over at last, this winter in Paris? I think what Kahn said is very true, that I have not sufficiently considered values, but they'll be saying very different things in a little while – and no less true.

It isn't possible to get values and colour.

Th. Rousseau did it better than anyone else, and with the mixing of his colours, the darkening caused by time has increased and his pictures are now unrecognizable.

You can't be at the pole and the equator at the same time.

You must choose your own line, as I hope to do, and it will probably be colour. Good-bye for the present. A handshake to you, Koning and the comrades.

Vincent