

Letter 476
Arles, c. 11 April 1888

My dear Theo,

It is awfully good of you to send me all the paints I ordered; I have just received them, but have not yet had time to check them.

I am so glad to have them. And the weather today has been fine. This morning I worked on an orchard of plum trees in bloom; all at once a fierce wind sprang up, an effect I had seen nowhere else but here, and returned at intervals. The sun shone in between, and all the little white flowers sparkled.

It was so lovely. My friend the Dane came to join me, and I went on painting at the risk and peril of seeing the whole show on the ground at any moment – it's a white effect with a good deal of yellow in it, and blue and lilac, the sky white and blue [F 403, JH 1378]. But as to the execution of what one paints outside like this, what will people say? Well, we shall see.

Then after dinner I set to work on the same picture that Tersteeg is to have (the "Pont de l'Anglais") for you [F 397, JH 1368]. And I have a good mind to make a replica of the one for Jet Mauve as well, for I spend so much, we must never lose sight of the need to get back the money that flies so fast.

I was sorry afterward not to have asked old Tanguy for the paints all the same, not that there would be the least advantage in doing so – on the contrary – but he's such a funny old soul, and I still think of him many a time. Don't forget to say hello for me if you see him, and tell him that if he wants pictures for his window, he can have some from here, and the best at that. Oh! It seems to me more and more that people are the root of everything, and though it will always be a melancholy thought that you yourself are not in real life, I mean, that it's more worth while to work in flesh and blood itself than in paint or plaster, more worth while to make children than pictures or carry on business, all the same you feel that you're alive when you remember that you have friends who are outside real life as much as you.

But just because it's what people have in their hearts that matters, and it is at the heart of all business dealings too, we must make friendships in Holland, or rather revive them. More especially since, as far as the Impressionists cause is concerned, there is little fear now that we shall not win.

And because of the victory already almost assured, we must have good manners, and do everything quietly. I would have greatly liked to see Marat's "Incarnation" which you spoke of the other day; it would certainly interest me a lot. Instinctively I think of Marat as the equivalent – in character (only more powerful) of Xantippe – the woman of a soured love. She remains a touching figure all the same – but I admit, not so gay as the Tellier household in Guy de Maupassant.

Has de Lautrec finished his picture of the woman leaning on her elbows on a little table in a café?

If I can manage to learn to work our studies from nature on a fresh canvas, we should profit by it, as far as a likelihood of selling is concerned. I hope to manage it here, and that's why I'm experimenting with the two pictures which are to go to Holland, so that you will have them too, and then it won't be unbusinesslike.

You were right to tell Tasset that he must put in the geranium lake all the same; he has sent it, I have just checked it. All the colours that the Impressionists have brought into fashion are unstable, so there is all the more reason not to be afraid to lay them on too crudely – time will tone them down only too much.

So, of all the colours I ordered, the three chromes (orange, yellow, citron-yellow), the Prussian blue, the emerald, the crimson lakes, the Malachite green, or the orange lead, hardly one of them is to be found on the Dutch palette, in Maris, Mauve, or Israëls. They are only to be found in Delacroix, who had a passion for the two colours which are most condemned, and with most reason, citron-yellow and Prussian blue. All the same, I think he did superb things with them – the blues and the citron-yellows.

A handshake for you and Koning, and once again thank you very much for the paints.

Ever yours, Vincent