

Letter 528
Arles, c. 27 August 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and for the 50-fr. note it contained. Certainly it is not out of the question that later on our sister might come and live with us. It speaks well for her taste that she likes sculpture; I was very glad to hear it. Painting as it is now promises to become more subtle – more like music and less like sculpture – and above all it promises colour. If only it keeps this promise.

The sunflowers are getting on, there is a new bunch of 14 flowers on a greenish-yellow ground [F 458, JH 1667], so it is exactly the same effect – but in a larger size, a 30 canvas – as the still life with the quinces and lemons [F 383, JH 1339], which you already have – but in the sunflowers the painting is much more simple. Do you remember that we saw a bunch of peonies by Manet at the Hotel Drouot one day? The flowers were pink, the leaves bright green painted in thick impasto, not glazed like Jeannin's, standing out against a plain white background, I think.

That was a very sound piece of work.

As for stippling and making halos and other things, I think they are real discoveries, but we must already see to it that this technique does not become a universal dogma any more than any other. That is another reason why Seurat's "Grande Jatte," the landscapes with broad stippling by Signac and Anquetin's boat, will become in time even more personal and even more original.

About my clothes, certainly they were beginning to be the worse for wear, but only last week I bought a black velvet jacket of fairly good quality for 20 francs, and a new hat, so there is no hurry.

But I consulted that postman I painted, who had often furnished and refurnished his little home moving from place to place, as to the approximate price of the necessary furniture, and he said that you could not get a good bed here which would last for less than 150 francs – if you want to get something substantial, of course.

However, that hardly upsets the calculation that by saving the money spent on lodging, at the end of a year we should find ourselves in possession of some furniture, without having spent any more during the year. And as soon as I can, I shall not hesitate to do it.

If Gauguin and I do not take the opportunity to fix ourselves up like this, we may drag on year after year in small lodgings where we cannot fail to go to seed. I have pretty well done that already, for it has been going on for a very long time. And now it has even ceased to be unpleasant, and perhaps at first I shall not feel at home when I am home. Never mind. However, we must not forget Bouvard and Pecuchet, we must not forget "à Veau l'eau," for it is all true, most profoundly true.

Au Bonheur des Dames and Bel Ami are no less true, however. They are different ways of looking at things – with the first there is less risk of behaving like Don Quixote perhaps, with the second you go the whole hog.

This week I have had the old peasant once again [F 444, JH 1563].

Oh – McKnight has left at last – I am not sorry. His friend the Belgian did not seem very upset either when he came here yesterday to tell me, and we spent the evening together. He has very sensible ideas, and at least he knows what he wants.

At present he is painting a kind of timid impressionism, but very orderly and very exact. And I told him that it was the best thing he could do, because although he would lose two years perhaps suppressing his individuality, yet it is as necessary to have a regular course in impressionism now as it was formerly to have a course in a Parisian studio. He agreed with this entirely, just because in this way you offend no one, and cannot be accused afterward of knowing nothing about the problem. He is seriously thinking of going to paint the miners of the Borinage, and if he is still here when Gauguin comes, it is not impossible that we will ask him to do for us in the North what we would do for him in the South, that is, do our utmost to enable him to live more cheaply than he would do alone.

Goodbye for the present.

Ever yours, Vincent