

Letter 534  
Arles, 9 September 1888

My dear Theo,

I have just mailed the sketch [F 1463, JH 1576] of the new picture, the "Night Café," as well as another that I did some time ago. I shall end perhaps by making some crépons.

Well now, yesterday I was busy furnishing the house. Just as the postman and his wife told me, the two beds, to be really substantial, will come to 150 fr. apiece. I found everything that they told me about prices was true. So I had to change my tack, and this is what I have done. I have bought one walnut bed and another in white deal which will be mine and which I'll paint later.

Then I got bedclothes for one of the beds, and two mattresses.

If Gauguin comes, or someone else, there is his bed ready in a minute. I wanted to arrange the house from the start not for myself only, but so as to be able to put someone else up too. Naturally this has swallowed up the greater part of the money. With the rest I have bought 12 chairs, a mirror and some small necessities. Altogether it means that next week already I shall be able to go and live there.

For a visitor there will be the prettier room upstairs, which I shall try to make as much as possible like the boudoir of a really artistic woman.

Then there will be my own bedroom, which I want extremely simple, but with large, solid furniture, the bed, chairs and table all in white deal.

Downstairs will be the studio, and another room, a studio too, but at the same time a kitchen.

Someday or other you shall have a picture of the little house itself in bright sunshine, or else with the window lit up, and a starry sky.

Henceforth you can feel that you have your country house in Arles. For I am very anxious to arrange it so that you will be pleased with it, and so that it will be a studio in an absolutely individual style; that way, if say a year from now you come here and to Marseilles for your vacation, it will be ready then, and the house, as I intend it, will be full of pictures from top to bottom.

The room you will have then, or Gauguin if he comes, will have white walls with a decoration of great yellow sunflowers.

In the morning, when you open the window, you see the green of the gardens and the rising sun, and the road into the town.

But you will see these great pictures of the sunflowers, 12 or 14 to the bunch, crammed into this tiny boudoir with its pretty bed and everything else dainty. It will not be commonplace.

And in the studio, the red tiles of the floor, the walls and ceiling white, rustic chairs, white deal table, and I hope a decoration of portraits. It will have a feeling of Daumier about it, and I dare predict it will not be commonplace.

And now do look for some lithographs of Daumier's for the studio, and some Japanese things, but there is no hurry at all for that; it's only when you find duplicates of them. And some things of Delacroix's, and ordinary lithographs by modern artists.

There is not the slightest hurry, but I have my own plan. I want to make it really an artists' house – not precious, on the contrary nothing precious, but everything from the chairs to the pictures having character. About the beds, I have bought country beds, big double ones instead of iron ones. That gives an appearance of solidity, durability and quiet, and if it takes a little more bedding, so much the worse, but it must have character.

I am very lucky to have a faithful charwoman; except for that I should not have dared to begin living at home; she is quite old and has many and varied offspring, and she keeps my tiles clean and red.

I cannot tell you how much pleasure it gives me to find a big serious job like this. For it's going to be, I hope, a real scheme of decoration that I'm starting on now.

As I already told you, I am going to paint my own bed; there will be three subjects on it. Perhaps a nude woman, I haven't yet decided, or perhaps a child in a cradle, I don't know, but I shall take my time over it. I don't feel any hesitation now about staying here, because ideas for my work are coming to me in abundance. I intend to buy something for the house every month. And with some patience the house will be worth something because of the furniture and the decorations.

I must warn you that soon I shall have to send a big order for paints for the autumn, which I think is going to be absolutely amazing. On second thought I am sending you the order enclosed.

In my picture of the "Night Café" I have tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime. So I have tried to express, as it were, the powers of darkness in a low

public house, by soft Louis XV green and malachite, contrasting with yellow-green and harsh blue-greens, and all this in an atmosphere like a devil's furnace, of pale sulphur [F 463, JH 1575].

And all with an appearance of Japanese gaiety, and the good nature of Tartarin.

But what would Monsieur Tersteeg say about this picture when he said before a Sisley – Sisley, the most discreet and gentle of the impressionists – “I can't help thinking that the artist who painted that was a little tipsy.” If he saw my picture, he would say that it was delirium tremens in full swing.

I see absolutely nothing to object to in your suggestion of exhibiting once at the Revue Indépendente, provided, however, that I am no obstacle to the others who usually exhibit there.

Only then we ought to tell them that I should like to reserve for myself a second exhibition after this first one, of studies proper. Then next year I will give them the decorations of the house to exhibit when they are complete. Not that I am so keen on it, but in order that the studies should not be confused with finished compositions, and so as to announce in advance that the second exhibition will be one of studies. For so far hardly any of them except the “Sower” and the “Night Café” are attempts at finished pictures.

Just as I'm writing to you, the poor peasant who is like a caricature of Father happens to have come into the café. The resemblance is terrible, all the same. Especially the uncertainty and the weariness and the vagueness of the mouth. I still feel it is a pity that I have not been able to do it.

I add to this letter an order for paints which is not exactly urgent. But I have so many plans in my head, and the autumn promises to give so many magnificent subjects, that I simply do not know if I am going to start five canvases or ten. It will be just as it was in the spring with the orchards in bloom, there will be no end of subjects.

If you gave old Tanguy the coarser colour, he would probably do it well.

The other fine colours are really inferior, especially the blues.

I hope to have improved a little in quality when I prepare the next batch. I am doing comparatively less, and going back over them longer.

I have kept 50 francs for the week, so there have been 250 for the furnishing already. But all the same I shall recover them, carrying on like this. And now you can tell yourself that you have a sort of country house, though unfortunately rather far away. But it would cease to be very, very far if there were a permanent exhibition in Marseilles. Perhaps in a year's time we shall see that.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent