

Letter 537  
Arles, 17 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Probably I shall hear from you tomorrow morning, but I have time to write tonight, and the week has been rather eventful.

I expect to go to live in the house tomorrow, but as I have bought some more things and have still more to add to them, and I am only speaking of what is strictly necessary – you must again send me 100 francs instead of 50.

If I reckon 50 francs for myself for the past week and deduct them from the 300 francs you sent, all that is left, even with another extra 50 francs, is no more than the exact price of the two beds. So you will see that in spite of that I have already bought many other things beside the beds and the bedding, I have already spent the greater part of the 50 francs for the week, and I have partly economized on both beds by having one of them somewhat plainer.

I am convinced that in the end we shall do well by furnishing the studio. And I already feel freer in my work, and less harried by unnecessary annoyances than I have been.

Only if, as I hope, I take more pains with the style and quality of my work, it will go a little more slowly, or rather I shall have to keep the pictures with me longer. That is, if they are subjects that are connected and complement each other. And also because there will be some pictures which I certainly do not want to send you till they are bone dry. In this last category there is a square size 30 canvas, a corner of a garden with a weeping tree, grass, round clipped cedar shrubs and an oleander bush [F 468, JH 1578]. The same corner of the garden, that is, which you have already had a study of in the last parcel [F 428, JH 1499]. But this one is bigger, there is a citron sky over everything, and also the colours have the richness and intensity of autumn. And besides it is in even heavier paint than the other one, plain and thick. That is picture number one this week.

The second represents the outside of a café, with the terrace lit up by a big gas lamp in the blue night, and a corner of a starry blue sky [F 467, JH 1580].

The third picture this week is a portrait of myself, almost colourless, in ashen tones against a background of pale veronese green [F 476, JH 1581].

I purposely bought a mirror good enough to enable me to work from my image in default of a model, because if I can manage to paint the colouring of my own head, which is not to be done without some difficulty, I shall likewise be able to paint the heads of other good souls, men and women.

The problem of painting night scenes and effects on the spot and actually by night interests me enormously. This week I have done absolutely nothing but paint and sleep and have my meals. That means sittings of twelve hours at a stretch. I read in the literary supplement of Saturday's Figaro (15 September) the description of an impressionist house. This house was built with bricks – as it were like the bottoms of bottles – of convex glass, violet glass. With the sunshine reflected in it, and the yellow refractions, the effect was incredible. To support these walls of glass bricks, shaped like violet-coloured eggs, they had invented a support of black and gilt iron representing the weird branches of Virginia creeper and other climbing plants. This violet house was right in the middle of a garden where all the paths were of bright yellow sand. The ornamental flower borders were of course most unusual in colouring. The house is, if I remember correctly, in Auteuil.

Without changing anything in this house either now or afterward, I want all the same to make it an artist's house through the decorations. That will come. A good handshake. I went for a splendid walk by myself today among the vineyards.

Ever yours, Vincent