

Letter 541a
Arles, c. 26 September 1888

Dear Theo,

I have to thank you most kindly for the consignment of canvas and colours from Tasset's, which arrived in good condition and this time by parcel post. In my last letter I already told you that autumn has manifested itself in rain and bad weather. This has hampered me a little, but all the same I have just finished a size 30 canvas representing a ploughed field, done in the sunny intervals. [F574, JH 1586]

A blue sky with white clouds. An immense expanse of ground of an ashy lilac. Innumerable furrows and clods. A horizon of blue hills and green bushes with – [illegible].

This is another one that will take a long time to dry; pictures that are thickly painted must be treated like the stronger types of wine; one must let them mature. I have ordered a white deal frame for this one.

As long as autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas and colours enough to paint the beautiful things I see. I am also working on a portrait of Milliet [F 473, JH 1588], but he poses badly, or I may be at fault myself, which, however, I do not believe, as I am sorely in want of some studies of him, for he is a good-looking boy, very unconcerned and easy-going in his behaviour, and he would suit me damned well for the picture of a lover.

I have already promised him a study for his trouble, but, you know, he cannot keep still.

Besides, he hardly has any time to spare, seeing that he must take a tender leave of all the grues et grenouilles de la grenouillère¹ of Arles, now that he has to return to his f— garrison, as he says.

I do not object to it, but I regret that he has a nervous motion of the legs when posing.

He is a good fellow, but he is only twenty-five, God damn it, ten years younger than I am – and within ten years – according to Ziem – I am afraid that, if he goes on like this, and not being able to caper about any longer, he may join the ambitious.

I should not be surprised if in his heart he were annoyed at having to leave, and perhaps he is living beyond his means, which obliges him to go back to Africa. I only know one serious fault in his character, which is that he likes L'abbé Constantin by Georges Ohnet, and I have told him that he had a thousand times better read *Bel Ami* by Guy de Maupassant.

What does Father Tanguy say of the gross-grained paints now? I think I must warn him at once that I still want 5 or even 10 meters of canvas. And that at the same time I shall also want:

3 large tubes as the silver white and the zinc white and the Prussian blue.

6 large tubes id. id. chrome I citron

6 “ “ id. id. chrome II

2 “ “ id. id. chrome III

6 “ “ id. id. malachite green

and 6 medium tubes geranium lake

12 zinc white, large tubes

12 silver white

This is approximately in proportion to the canvas.

As I have just received the consignment of canvas and colours, you will understand that there is no hurry; however, it is the minimum that I shall need during autumn and the falling of the leaves, which will be marvellous and which lasts only one week.

I am sure that I shall be able to do a good job of work, and during that period I should not like to run short of yellow and blue. In case you should be a bit hard up, I could manage perfectly without the expensive blues and the carmine. One tube of Prussian blue yields as much as six of ultramarine or cobalt and costs three times less.

Now it fades a little, but when I use zinc white in its crude state, I shall be able to do without the rest if necessary.

Delacroix swore by that vulgar blue and used it often.

So I warn you of the state of affairs in advance, though the famous falling of the leaves is still a considerable distance off.

I must work like a team of mules as long as autumn lasts if I want to recover what our furniture has cost.

[The end of the letter is missing.]

1. A private pun, really untranslatable, literally "... the cranes and frogs of the swamp..." A free translation would be "hussies and tarts in the tart shop."