

Letter 553b
Arles, 2 October 1888
[Letter to his friend Eugène Boch]

My dear friend Bock,

Many thanks for your letter which pleased me very much. I congratulate you on not having hesitated this time and on having attacked the Borinage. There you have a field where you will be able to work all your life [*illegible*] – the extraordinary scenery [as well] as the figure.

The tip girls in their pit rags especially are superb. If you should ever go to Petit Wasmes, please inquire whether Jean Baptiste Denis, farmer, and Joseph Quinet, miner, are still living there, and tell them from me that I have never forgotten the Borinage and that I should still be delighted to see it again.

Now I must tell you a piece of news, namely that I have furnished the house at last and that I have immediately furnished a bedroom for Gauguin or for anyone else who should come.

The house is a lot brighter now that it is furnished. After that I have worked like blazes, for the fall is without wind and superb. I am also working on seven square size 30 canvases. In the first place the night café where I have stayed with lamp light effect, painted in the nighttime [F 463, JH 1575].

Three views of the public garden in front of the house.

This is one of the views. A round clipped cypress or cedar shrub of a bottle green on a yellow-green lawn. In the background a row of oleanders and two figures. A sky of raw cobalt. You see, it is even a lot simpler than formerly.

Then ploughed fields; a scenery with nothing but lumps of earth, the furrows the colour of an old wooden shoe under a forget-me-not blue sky with white cloud flocks [F 574, JH 1586].

Further a view of my house and its surroundings in a sulphur sun. The sky hard and bright cobalt. – A difficult job, I tell you! [F 464, JH 1589]

Then a view of the café on Forum Square where we used to go, painted by night [F 467, JH 1580].

And lastly a study of the Rhône – of the town lighted with gas reflected in the blue river.

Over it the starry sky with the Great Bear – a sparkling of pink and green on the cobalt blue field of the night sky, whereas the lights of the town and its ruthless reflections are red gold and bronzed green [F 474, JH 1592].

The garden with the oleanders and the round clipped shrub has an impasto like painted porcelain.

Your portrait is in my bedroom along with that of Milliet, the Zouave, which I have just finished. I should like to ask you to exchange one of your studies of the coal-mines for something of mine, – but stop! – I myself am going to send you a study first, when I am sure it is one which will seem wholly unknown to you. For if you saw the night studies you might like them better than the sunlight studies. Well, leave it to me. For I hope that our intercourse once started will last forever.

Everything you'll do will interest me extraordinarily, because I love that dismal country of the Borinage, which will always remain unforgettable to me, so much.

I have nearly made up my mind, when I go to Paris next year, to push on as far as Mons. And perhaps even as far as my native country to do some spots that I know already. In the same way in the Borinage Marcusse, or from Antoine to Petit Wasmes. And further the Cour de l'Agrappe in Frameries where you are now. As a matter of fact it was in the Borinage that I first started to work from nature. But of course I destroyed it all a long time ago.

But it stirs my heart that these spots are going to be painted at last.

You will see how easily ideas will come to you.

I am writing you in a great hurry, but I wanted to answer your letter at once.

Enclosed a pretty bad sketch of the starry night. All these pictures are square size 30 canvases. If you had stayed here until now, you would have taken along other studies! For I tell you the scenery has been extraordinarily beautiful.

More than once I have done a size 30 canvas in one day, but then I did not stir from the spot from morning till sunset except to eat a morsel. My brother wrote me he saw you in passing. Well, I hope we'll meet again next year. Above all don't forget to let me have your address when you move, or to give me your exact permanent address in La Louvière, if my memory serves me well, for it will be excellent to work continuously in the mining district, and also to see something quite different come to the country of the oleanders and the sulphur sun.

Is your sister going to do the miners too? Surely there is work enough for two. I think it is a very pleasant thing for you to be both painting in the same house.

Well, I must go out to work in the vineyard near Mont Majour. It is all purple and yellow-green under a blue sky, a beautiful colour motif.

A hearty handshake and good courage and a lot of success with your work.

Sincerely, Vincent.

Excuse my great hurry; I haven't even time to read this letter over...

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[Sketch JH 1594 enclosed with letter]