

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for the package of canvases, brushes, tobacco and chocolate which reached me in good condition. I was very glad of them, for I was feeling a little low after working. Also I have been out for several days, working in the neighborhood.

Your last letter, if I remember correctly, was dated May 21. I have had no more news of you since, except only that M. Peyron told me he had had a letter from you. I hope you are well, and your wife too.

M. Peyron intends to go to Paris to see the exhibition and he will pay you a visit then.

What news can I tell you? – not much. I am working on two landscapes (size 30 canvases), views taken in the hills, one is the country that I see from the window of my bedroom. In the foreground, a field of wheat ruined and hurled to the ground by a storm. A boundary wall and beyond the grey foliage of a few olive trees, some huts and the hills. Then at the top of the canvas a great white and grey cloud floating in the azure. [F 611, JH 1723]

It is a landscape of extreme simplicity in colouring too. That will make a pendant to the study of the “Bedroom” which has got damaged. [F 482, JH 1608] When the thing represented is, in point of character, absolutely in agreement and one with the manner of representing it, isn’t it just that which gives a work of art its quality?

That is why, as far as painting goes, a household loaf is especially good when it is painted by Chardin.

Now what makes Egyptian art, for instance, extraordinary – isn’t it that these serene, calm kings, wise and gentle, patient and kind, look as though they could never be other than what they are, eternal tillers of the soil, worshippers of the sun?

I should so have liked to have seen an Egyptian house at the exhibition constructed by Jules Garnier the architect – painted in red, yellow, and blue, with a garden regularly divided into beds by rows of bricks – the dwelling place of beings whom we know only as mummies or in granite.

But then to come back to the point, the Egyptian artists, having faith, working by feeling and by instinct, express all these intangible things – kindness, infinite patience, wisdom, serenity – by a few knowing curves and by the marvellous proportions. That is to say once more, when the thing represented and the manner of representing it agree, the thing has style and quality.

So also the servant girl in Leys’s great fresco, once she is engraved by Braquemond, becomes a new work of art – or the little “Reader” by Meissonier, when it is Jaequemart who engraves it – since the manner of engraving is one with the thing represented.

As I wish to preserve this study of the “Bedroom,” if you would send it back to me, rolled up, when they are sending me some canvas again, I will copy it.

At first I had wished to have it recanvassed because I did not think I could do it again. But as my brain has grown calmer since, I can quite well do it again now.

The thing is that among the number of things you make, there are always some that you felt more or put more into and that you want to keep in spite of everything. When I see a picture that interests me, I can never help asking myself, “In what house, room, corner of a room, in whose home would it do well, would it be in the right place?”

Thus the pictures of Hals, Rembrandt, Van der Meer [Vermeer], are only at home in an old Dutch house. Now as to the impressionists – once again, if an interior is not complete without a work of art, neither is a picture complete if it is not in harmony with surroundings originating in and resulting from the period in which it was produced. And I do not know if the impressionists are better than their time or, on the contrary, are not yet so good. In a word, are there minds and interiors of homes more important than anything that has been expressed by painting? I am inclined to think so.

I have seen the announcement of a coming exhibition of impressionists called Gauguin, Bernard, Anquetin and other names. So I am inclined to think that a new sect has again been formed, no less infallible than those already existing.

Was that the exhibition you spoke of? What storms in teacups.

My health is all right, considering; I feel happier here with my work than I could be outside. By staying here a good long time, I shall have learned regular habits and in the long run the result will be more order in my life and less susceptibility. That will be so much to the good. Besides, I should not have the courage to begin again outside. I went once, still accompanied, to the village; the mere sight of people and things had such an effect on me that I thought I was going to faint and I felt very ill. Face to face with nature it is the feeling for work that supports me. But anyway, this is to show you that there must have been within me some too powerful emotion to upset me like that, and I have no idea what can have caused it. I get bored to death sometimes after working, and yet I have no desire to begin again. The doctor who has just called says that he is not going to Paris for several weeks, so do not expect his visit yet. I hope you will write me soon.

During this month I shall really again be in need of

8	tubes	flake white
6	“	malachite green
2	“	yellow ocher
1	“	red ocher
2	“	ultramarine
2	“	cobalt
1	“	raw sienna
1	“	ivory black

It is queer that every time I try to reason with myself to get a clear idea of things, why I came here and that after all it is only an accident like any other, a terrible dismay and horror seizes me and prevents me from thinking. It is true that this is tending to diminish slightly, but it also seems to me to prove that there is quite definitely something or other deranged in my brain, it is astounding to be afraid of nothing like this, and to be unable to remember things. Only you may be sure I shall do all I can to become active again and perhaps useful, at least in the sense that I want to do better pictures than before.

In this country there are many things that often make you think of Ruysdael, but the figures of the labourers are absent.

Everywhere at home and at all times of the year you see men, women, children and animals at work, and here not a third of that, and besides, it is not the genuine worker of the North. They seem to work here with languid, clumsy hands, without energy. Perhaps this is a wrong idea I have got hold of, not belonging to the country, anyhow I hope so. But this makes things colder than one would think when reading Tartarin, but perhaps he had been exiled with his whole family for many long years.

Above all, write me soon, because your letter is very slow in coming; I hope you are well. It is a great consolation to me to know that you are not living alone any more.

If some month or other it should be too difficult to send me paint, canvas, etc., then do not send them, for believe me it is better to live than to work at art in the abstract.

And above all your home must not be sad or dull. That first and painting after. Then I feel tempted to begin again with the simpler colours, the ochres for instance.

Is a Van Goyen ugly because it is painted entirely in oils with very little neutral colour, or a Michel? The shrubbery with the ivy is completely finished.[F 609, JH 1693] I very much want to send it to you as soon as it's dry enough to be rolled up.

With a right good handshake for you and your wife.

Ever yours, Vincent