

Letter 532
Arles, 4 September 1888

My dear Theo,

I am writing you as I wait for Bock, the Belgian, who is leaving early this morning. He is already thirty-three; he has spent ten years in Paris and in travelling; his sister is older than he is. Although so far he hasn't been up to much as a painter, if on his return to his own country he can at last shake off his slackness, brought about by the enervating influence of Paris and hanging about with slackers, he will be fairly on the threshold of a real painter's career.

He is very much a Belgian, for in his conversation and his manners I can easily recognize the accent of his country, the timidity of those miners, whom I still think of often. You will probably see the two pictures he is taking along with him; the drawing is feeble, but the colour is already beginning to live.

His sister may be travelling in Holland, and I have thought vaguely that I would like her and our sister to meet. I always hope that through us W. will manage to marry an artist. To bring that about, she ought to be a little in the movement. If Bock's sister really does go to Holland, we have only to say to Bock that of she wishes to make some studies at Breda, she can stay with our mother and sister. It wouldn't cause them a great deal of expense at home, they put up plenty of useless people, but altogether it would be an opportunity for them to become acquainted. But we must not press it too hard.

But the thing is that the Bock's home is a painter's house, both children being in that line, and besides, they aren't exactly penniless.

It is just a week since I sent you an order for paints and a letter to Tasset asking him if he could supply coarsely brayed colours more cheaply. I find that I have now almost used up my entire stock of paints. Altogether I have only a dozen and a half of various tubes left. So that I have had to replace the order in question by another, which you will find herewith. If Tasset cannot do the colours more cheaply I must use the double tubes as usual, but I shall need twice as much of this size tube.

While I am without them I must draw, because I am cleaned out as far as colours are concerned.

Neither Gauguin nor Bernard has written again. I think that Gauguin doesn't care a damn about it, because it isn't going to be done at once, and I for my part, seeing that Gauguin has managed to muddle along by himself for six months, am ceasing to believe in the urgent necessity of helping him.

So let's be prudent. If it does not suit him here, he may be forever reproaching me with, "Why did you bring me to this rotten country?" And I don't want any of that.

Naturally we can still remain friends with Gauguin but I see only too clearly that his mind is elsewhere. So I say, let's behave as if he were not there; then if he comes, so much the better – if he doesn't, so much the worse.

How I'd like to settle down and have a home! I keep thinking that even if we had spent 500 francs on furniture at the start, we should already have recovered all of it and I should have the furniture and should already have been delivered from innkeepers. I do not insist on it, but there is no sense in what we are doing now.

Here there will always be artists coming and going, anxious to escape from the severity of the North. And I think myself that I shall always be one of them. It's true that it would probably be better to go a little lower down where we'd be more sheltered. It's true that it wouldn't exactly be easy to find, but that's another reason for settling here, for the cost of moving from here to Bordighera, for instance, or else somewhere near Nice, could not be enormous. Once settled, we would stay there all our lives. It's a poor way of doing things to wait till one is very rich, and that is what I do not like about the de Goncourts, that whatever the truth of it may be, they ended by buying their home and their tranquillity for 100,000 francs. But we'd have it at less than a thousand, so far as having a studio in the South where we could give someone a bed goes. But if we must make a fortune first... we shall be complete nervous wrecks when we enter upon our rest, that is, worse than our present condition, in which we are still able to stand the racket. But let's be sensible enough to realize that we are going to seed all the same.

It is better to put other people up than to have nowhere to put oneself up, especially here where lodging with a landlord doesn't get you the sort of place where you can feel at home, even when you pay for it.

As for Gauguin, perhaps he is letting himself drift with the current, not thinking of the future. And perhaps he thinks that I shall always be here and that he has our word. But it is not too late to withdraw, and really I am strongly tempted to do so, because failing him, I should naturally think of another partnership, whereas at present we are bound. All the same, if Gauguin can find enough to live on, have we the right to bother him? I avoid writing Gauguin for fear of saying too bluntly – "Look how many months we have managed

to get the wherewithal to keep us in lodgings, and yet all the time pretended we couldn't afford to join hands, and meantime wearing ourselves out for the time to come.

"If you wanted me to, why didn't you tell me to come North, I should have done so by now.

"It would have cost a one-way ticket at 100 francs, whereas now, during the months this has been hanging fire, I have already paid the price of the ticket to my landlord, and you have had to do the same to yours, or else you are in his debt up to 100 francs. That means a dead loss of at least 100 francs for nothing at all."

That is what I have on my mind and that is what makes me feel that he and I both are really behaving like fools. Is it true or not? Certainly the truth is still more serious. If it is not necessary for him to alter his way of life, he has either a lot more money than I or considerably better luck. Being ruined costs more than being successful, and certainly it is our own fault if we do not have more peace.

With a handshake and good-by for now. I hope very much that you will find time later on to tell me more about our sister's stay with you. Bock will be with you in a week or ten days probably. Counting the sunflowers, I have at the moment another fifteen new studies here.

Ever yours, Vincent