

Letter 570  
Arles, 9 January 1889

My dear Theo,

Even before receiving (this very moment) your kind letter, I had had a letter this morning from your fiancée announcing the engagement. So I have already sent her my sincere congratulations in reply, and herewith I repeat them to you.

My fear that my indisposition might prevent you from making that very necessary journey which I had so much and so long hoped for, now that this fear has disappeared, I feel myself quite normal again.

This morning I was again at the hospital to get another dressing, and I walked for an hour and a half with the house surgeon, and we talked a bit about everything, even about natural history.

What you tell me about Gauguin gives me tremendous pleasure, that is to say that he has not given up his project of returning to the tropics. That is the right road for him. I think I see light in his plan, and I approve of it heartily. Naturally I regret it, but you understand that provided all goes well with him, that is all I want.

What is the '89 Exhibition going to be? Don't forget the "Anatomy Lesson" for M. Rey. He had already told me before this morning that he was fond of painting, though he knew nothing about it, and that he wished to learn. I told him he ought to turn collector, but that he should not try to paint himself. That means that perhaps we shall find two friends in the doctors here, Rey and the Paris doctor, of whom I have spoken before.

I told them that Brias of Montpellier had a certain family likeness to us, and that therefore we were only continuing in the South what Monticelli and Brias began.

I have had to pay quite a number of things on leaving the hospital, and though I am in no sort of a hurry for several days, it would be nice if you could send me 50 francs or so within the next few days.

I think the mistake in old Gauguin's calculations was that he is rather too much in the habit of ignoring the inevitable expenses of house rent, charwoman, and a lot of worldly things of the kind. Now all those things are weighing more on our shoulders, but once we have accepted them, other artists could stay with me without having those expenses.

They have just told me that during my absence the owner of my house here made an arrangement with a fellow who has a tobacco shop to turn me out and give this tobacconist the house.

This has rather upset me, for I am not much disposed to have myself turned out of this house practically in disgrace when it was I who had it repainted inside and out, and had gas put in, etc. – in fact, who had made habitable a house which had been shut up and uninhabited for a considerable time, and which I took in a very poor condition. This is to warn you that perhaps at Easter, if the owner persists, I shall ask your advice about it, and that in all this I only consider myself a representative defending the interest of our artist friends. Besides, between now and then it is more than likely that a good deal of water will have gone under the bridge.

And the great thing is not to worry about it. Has Bernard given you back Silvestre's book? I shall need the exact title to make the doctors in question read the book.

Physically I am well, the wound is healing very well and the great loss of blood is being made up, because I eat and digest well. What is to be feared most is insomnia, and the doctor has not spoken about it to me, nor have I spoken of it to him either. But I am fighting it myself.

I fight this insomnia by a very, very strong dose of camphor in my pillow and mattress, and if ever you can't sleep, I recommend this to you. I was very much afraid of sleeping alone in the house, and I have been afraid I should not be able to sleep. But that is quite over and I dare to think that it will not reappear. My suffering from this in the hospital was frightful and yet through it all, even when I was so far gone that it was more than a swoon, I can tell you as a curiosity that I kept on thinking about Degas. Gauguin and I had been talking about Degas before, and I had pointed out to Gauguin that Degas had said ...

"I am saving myself up for the Arlésiennes."

Now you know how subtle Degas is, so when you get back to Paris, just tell Degas that I admit that up to the present I have been powerless to paint the women of Arles as anything but poisonous, and that he must not believe Gauguin if Gauguin speaks well of my work too early, for it has only been a sick man's so far. Now if I recover, I must begin again, and I shall not again reach the heights to which sickness partially led me.

I should have liked very much to give another picture to Rivet, just because I quite agree with you that it would be well to put M. Rey in touch with Rivet.

But you could quite well tell Rivet that it would be a good thing to send M. Rey back here to the hospital with the doctor's degree he is trying to get.

He is very, very useful here and they will be desperately in need of a doctor here at Arles in the time to come, with cholera and the plague, etc., continuing so threatening in the region of Marseilles. Now Rey was born here, and would be no use in Paris or elsewhere, whereas once furnished with the full medical authority of Paris, he would do real miracles here in a time of calamity.

Certainly we have no right to meddle in medical affairs. Only Rivet himself will perhaps be of the same opinion, at any rate in so far as an Arlesien is not a Parisian and vice versa.

Did you stop at Breda? Naturally I am inclined to think so. Reassure mother especially with regard to me. Have you seen the portrait of me which Gauguin has [F 476, JH 1581], and have you seen the portrait which Gauguin did of himself during those last few days?

If you compare the self- portrait Gauguin did then with the one that I still have of him, which he sent me from Brittany in exchange for mine, you will see that on the whole he himself got rested here.

What has become of Haan and Isaäcson? I did hope vaguely to see them here one day if Gauguin had stayed longer with me, and with this in mind I had even taken two little rooms which were going to be vacant in the house, which I am now occupying completely (the rent is 21.50 a month). I dare not urge this any more, seeing that Gauguin has gone, and especially considering that the journey South costs a good deal.

Give them my kind regards when you see them again. Roulin wants to be remembered to you. He was very pleased with what you said of him in your letter of today, but then he fully deserves it. With a handshake, and of course you know how I wish you happy days with your fiancée.

Ever Yours, Vincent

Regards to André Bonger if he is there too.