

Letter 530
Arles, 1 September 1888

My dear Theo,

A hasty note to thank you tremendously for the prompt dispatch of your letter. As it happened my good fellow had already arrived that morning very early for his rent. I had of course to commit myself today as to whether or not I would keep the house (because I have rented it till Michaelmas, and one has to renew or cancel the agreement in advance). I told my good fellow that I would take it again for three months only or else by the month again. So supposing friend Gauguin comes and does not like it, we shall not have a very long lease on our hands.

My heart often despairs when I think of what Gauguin will say about the country in the end. The isolation of this place is pretty serious, and all the time you have to hack each step in the ice as you go from one day's work to the next. Then there is the difficulty with the models, but patience and above all a few pennies ready in your pocket will naturally get you somewhere. But it is a real difficulty.

I feel that even so late in the day I could be a very different painter if I were capable of getting my own way with the models, but I also feel the possibility of going to seed and of seeing the day of one's capacity for artistic creation pass, just as a man loses his virility in the course of his life.

That is inevitable, and naturally in this as in the other, the one thing to do is to be of good heart and strike while the iron is hot.

And I often get downhearted. But Gauguin and so many others are in exactly the same position, and above all we must seek the remedy within ourselves, in good will and patience, and at the same time struggle to be something more than mediocrities. Perhaps we shall be preparing a new road while we do this.

I am very curious to get your next letter giving a fuller account of your visit to Bing. I am not surprised at what you say, that after our sister went away you felt a void. You must try to fill it. And what is there to prevent Gauguin's coming to stay with you? In this way he could get his heart's desire of Paris, and work at the same time.

Only in that case it would only be fair for him to pay back the equivalent of what you would be doing for him in pictures. It is a constant grief to me that comparatively I can do so little with the money I spend.

My life is disturbed and restless, but then if I make a change and move about much, I shall perhaps only make things worse.

It is a terrible handicap for me that I don't speak the Provençal patois.

I keep thinking seriously of using coarser colours, which will not be any less sound for being less brayed. Often now I hesitate before planning a picture because of what the colours would cost us. You see all the same this is rather a pity, for the simple reason that we may have the power to work today, but we do not know if it will hold out till tomorrow.

All the same, far from losing my physical strength, I am regaining it, and my stomach especially is stronger.

I am sending you three volumes of Balzac today. He is really a bit out of date, etc., but like the Daumiers and the Lemuds, none the worse for belonging to a period which is over.

At the moment I am reading Daudet's *L'Immortel*, which I find very beautiful, but not particularly heartening. I think I shall have to read a book on elephant hunting, or of absolute lies about adventures which are categorically impossible, like Gustave Aimard for instance, to get rid of the heartbreak that *L'Immortel* is going to leave me with. It is exactly because it is so beautiful and so true that it makes you feel the emptiness of the civilized world. I must say though that I prefer his Tartarin for real power.

Many regards to our sister, and thank you again for your letter.

Ever yours, Vincent