

Letter 535  
Arles, 12th September 1888

My dear Theo,

If Gauguin were working with me and if for his part he were fairly generous with pictures, doesn't it mean that you would be giving work to two artists who could do nothing without you? And while admitting that I think you are perfectly justified in saying that as far as money is concerned, you see no advantage in it, yet on the other hand you would be doing the same sort of thing as Durand Ruel, who bought pictures from Claude Monet in the days before anybody else had recognized his individuality. And Durand Ruel made nothing on it; at one time he was overloaded with the pictures and could not pass them on, but still, what he did remains well done, and now he can always say that he carried the day. If, however, I saw it would mean losing money, I wouldn't suggest it. But Gauguin must be loyal, and now that I see that his friend Laval's arrival has temporarily opened a new resource to him, I think that he is hesitating between Laval and us.

I don't blame him; but if Gauguin does not lose sight of his own interest, it is only fair that you should not lose sight of yours, from the point of view of repayment in pictures. Already we can see that Gauguin would already have left us completely in the lurch if Laval had had ever so little money. I am very curious to know what he will say to you in his next letter, which you will certainly get soon.

Well, I am sure that our friendship with him will endure whether he comes or not, but also that we on our part must show some firmness. He will not find anything better, unless indeed it were by taking advantage of what you have tried to do for him. But that he will not dare do. Only you must understand that if I see that he isn't coming, I shall not be the least upset, and I shall not work the less for it; if he comes, he will be very welcome, but I see clearly that counting on him would be just the thing to do us in. Faithful he will be if it is to his advantage; if he does not come, he will find something else, but he will find nothing better, and he would lose nothing by not letting us down.

I'll need another 5 meters of ordinary canvas at 2.50 fr., but of course when Tasset is figuring the weight of the parcel, he should send a meter more or a meter less so as not to double the carriage.

I think now is a good opportunity for you to ask Gauguin bluntly when he writes to you, "Are you coming or not? If you have not made up your mind one way or the other, we shall not feel bound to carry out the scheme."

If the plan of a more serious combination cannot be carried out, all right, but then each should regain his freedom of action. I have sent off my letter to Gauguin; I asked them for an exchange. If they are willing, I would very much like to have here the portrait of Bernard by Gauguin and that of Gauguin by Bernard.

I enclose an article which will interest you. You would be very wise to go and see this.

Ideas for my work are coming to me in swarms, so that though I'm alone, I have no time to think or to feel, I go on painting like a steam engine. I think there will hardly ever be a standstill again. And my view is that you will never find a live studio ready-made, but that it is created from day to day by patient work and going on and on in one place.

I have a study of an old mill [F 550, JH 1577] painted in broken tones like the oak tree on the rock [F 466, JH 1489], that study you were saying you had had framed along with the "Sower."

The idea of the "Sower" continues to haunt me all the time. Exaggerated studies like the "Sower" and like this "Night Café" usually seem to me atrociously ugly and bad, but when I am moved by something, as now by this little article on Dostoevsky, then these are the only ones which appear to have any deep meaning. I have a third study now, of a landscape with a factory, and a huge sun in a red sky above red roofs, a day with a wicked mistral when nature seems to be in a fury.

As for the house, the thought that it's going to be habitable continues to soothe me. Will my work really be worse because, by staying in the same place, I shall see the seasons pass and re-pass over the same subjects, seeing again the same orchards in the spring, the same fields of wheat in summer? Involuntarily I shall see my work cut out for me beforehand, and I shall be better able to make plans. Then if I keep some studies here to make a coherent whole, it will mean work of a deeper calm at the end of a certain time.

I feel that as far as that goes, we have done pretty much the right thing. Only I wish you were living nearer. Seeing that I cannot bring the North nearer the South, what's to be done? Then I tell myself that by myself I am not able to do sufficiently important painting to justify your coming South two or three times a year. But if Gauguin came and if it was fairly well known that we were staying here and helping artists live and work, I still do not see at all why the South should not become another native land to you as well as to me.

I am very glad to have finished my letter to Gauguin without having said that his wavering between staying with Laval or with me has left me rather at sea. It would be unfair not to leave him perfectly free to choose and to do the best he can. But I did write that I was convinced that even if he did not come here because of the journey's being impossible, he should not stay in a hotel any longer. And that this would then mean two fixed studios instead of one.

I always come back to this, that once settled, one works more tranquilly, and in that position one can always on occasion be more of a help to other people. Bernard says it grieves him to see how Gauguin is often prevented from

doing what he could otherwise do for purely material reasons, paints, canvas, etc. Well, in any case, that can't go on. The worst that can happen to him is that he will be obliged to leave his pictures in pledge for what he owes his landlord, and to take refuge either with you or with me by making the one-way journey. But in this case, if he does not want to lose his pictures, he must definitely tackle his landlord. A case like that, in which the goods are at all events worth more than the debt, might be tried expressly by the president of the civil tribunal of the arrondissement, assuming the landlord should want to keep the whole, which he has no right to do.  
[The end of the letter is missing.]