

My dear comrade Bernard,

This time you deserve higher praise for the little sketch of the two Breton women in your letter than for the other six, because the little one has great style. I myself am behindhand with the sketches, for during the present superbly fine days I have been completely absorbed in square size 30 canvases which exhaust me considerably, and which I shall use to decorate the house. You will have received my letter in which I explained my serious reasons for advising you to try to persuade your father, if he pays your fare to Arles, to give you a little more latitude in the matter of finances.

I believe you will pay him back with your work, and in this way you would be in Gauguin's company longer; and then, when you leave to do your military service, you would set out on a fine artistic campaign. If your father had a son who sought and found unrefined gold in the pebbles and on the sidewalks, he would certainly not despise that talent. Now in my opinion your talent is absolutely equivalent to that.

Though your father might regret that it is not quite new and shining gold, coined into louis d'or, yet he would decide to make a collection of these finds, and would not part with them except for a reasonable price.

He ought to do the same thing with your pictures and drawings, which are, commercially speaking, as rare and valuable as precious stones and rare metals. And that is absolutely true.

Painting a picture is as difficult as finding a large or a small diamond. Now, however, whereas everybody recognizes the value of a louis d'or or a pure pearl, those who cherish pictures and believe in them are unfortunately rare. But they exist nonetheless.

In any case one cannot do better than wait without losing patience, even if one should have to wait a very long time.

As for you, just think over what I told you about the cost of living here, and whether you would really like to come to Arles to join Gauguin and me. Tell your father emphatically that with a little more money you would paint much better pictures.

The idea of turning the painters into a sort of freemasonry does not please me enormously. I profoundly despise regulations, institutions, etc.; in short, what I am looking for is different from dogmas, which, far from settling things, only give rise to endless disputes. It is all a sign of decadence. Since a union of painters does not exist yet – except as a vague but very comprehensive design – well let's wait quietly and see what will happen that must happen.

It will be a finer thing if all this crystallizes naturally; the more one talks about it the less it will happen. If you want to help it onward, you will only have to go on working with Gauguin and me. This is in progress, so don't let's talk about it. If it is to come about, it will happen without prolix discussions but as the result of calm, well-thought-out actions.

As for exchanges, it is just because I observe that in the [i.e. your and Gauguin's] letters such frequent mention is made of Laval, Moret and the other young man that I am anxious to make their acquaintance. But I don't have five dry studies; I shall have to add at least two attempts at pictures a little more serious: a self-portrait and a landscape during the fury of an evil-minded mistral.

Moreover I should have a study of a little garden with multicolored flowers, a study of grey and dusty thistles [F 447, JH 1550], and finally a still life of a peasant's old boots [F 461, JH 1569], last of all a little landscape of nothing at all, in which there is only a little expanse. If these studies are not to their liking, if one or the other would rather not have them, then the only thing to do is to keep those for which they want to make an exchange, and to send back the others together with the exchanges. There is no hurry, and when making exchanges it is better for each to try to give something good.

If, when it is exposed tomorrow to the sun, it gets sufficiently dry to be rolled up, I shall add a landscape of "Men Unloading Sand," also a project for and an attempt at a picture, in which there is a more mature purposefulness.

I cannot send a replica of the "Night Café" yet because it has not even been begun, but I shall be delighted to do one for you.

Once more, it is preferable for each of us to try to exchange good things, rather than do them in too great a hurry.

The artistic gentleman in the letter, ¹ who looks like me – is it me or somebody else? – as far as the face is concerned it would really seem to be me, but in the first place I am always smoking a pipe, and then I have always had an unutterable horror of sitting like that on precipitous cliffs verging on the sea, as I suffer from vertigo. So if that is meant to be my portrait, I protest against the aforementioned improbabilities.

I am terribly absorbed in decorating my house; I dare believe it will be rather to your taste, although it is certainly very different from what you do. But at the time, you spoke to me about pictures, one representing flowers, another trees, another fields. Well, I myself have the "Poet's Garden" (2 canvases; among the sketches you have there is the first conception of it, done after a smaller study that is already at my brother's). Then the

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“Starry Night,” [F 474, JH 1592] further the “Vineyard,” [F 475, JH 1595] then the “Furrows,” [F 574, JH 1586] then the view of the house [F 464, JH 1589], which might be called “The Street.” So that there is a certain unintentional consecutiveness.

Well, I am very curious to see the studies of Pont-Aven. But, as for you, please give me something a little elaborate. Anyhow, it is sure to be all right, because I like your talent so much that I greatly want to make a little collection of your works, bit by bit.

For a long time I have thought it touching that the Japanese artists used to exchange works among themselves very often. It certainly proves that they liked and upheld each other, and that there reigned a certain harmony among them; and that they were really living in some sort of fraternal community, quite naturally, and not in intrigues. The more we are like them in this respect, the better it will be for us. It also appears that the Japanese earned very little money, and lived like simple workmen. I have the reproduction (published by Bing), “A Single Blade of Grass.” What an example of conscientiousness! You will see it someday. A hearty handshake. Sincerely yours, Vincent

1. Allusion to a caricature by Gauguin representing Vincent, seated on the top of a cliff, busy painting the sun.