

Letter 550  
Arles, 10 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Thinking and thinking these days how all these expenses of painting are weighing on you, you cannot imagine how disquieted I am. When things happen to us like what you told me in your last letter about Bague, we must be getting very near to selling.

Or rather we ought to be getting near to finding some assistance, either from Thomas or some other of the half dealer, half collector type. C. M., without helping us in any other way, could buy one study from us once again.

I do not know if you have ever read *Les Frères Zemganno* by the de Goncourt brothers, which perhaps roughly sketches their life story. If you know it, you will know that I am more afraid than I can say lest the effort to get money exhaust you too much.

If I were not so horribly and continually tormented by this uneasiness, I should say that we were getting on, because my work will get better, and my health is much better than in Paris.

I see more and more that my work goes infinitely better when I am properly fed, and the paints are there, and the studio and all that.

But have I set my heart on my work being a success? A thousand times no. I wish I could manage to make you really understand that when you give money to artists, you are yourself doing an artist's work, and that I only want my pictures to be of such a quality that you will not be too dissatisfied with your work. And that is not all, I should also like you to feel that you are making a profit on the money you invest, and that by doing so, we shall achieve a more complete independence than we should gain in the art trade itself.

And what will be done later to reform trade may be just this, that the dealer will join hands with the artist, the one for what one may call the housekeeping side, to provide the studio, food, paint, etc., the other to create. Alas! We have not got to that with the old trade, which will always follow the old routine, and is no good to anyone alive, nor any profit to the dead either.

But there, we need not stew about it, because it is not our duty to alter what exists, and to beat our heads against a stone wall.

Anyway, we must get our place in the sun without upsetting anyone. And I keep thinking that you haven't the place in the sun that you ought to have, because the Paris work at Goupil's is too exhausting. Then, when I think of that, I get into a mercenary frenzy. Then I want to earn money so that you will be freer to go where you like and do what you like. I feel that we are getting near to selling or finding help, so that we shall be given a chance to breathe.

There I go, perhaps, thinking that it is quite near, and it may still be far off, and then I feel this dread of spending too much coming over me. However, the pictures come off better if one looks after oneself and keeps one's health.

But as for you and your work, and in the rest of your life as well, you must not have too many anxieties.

How are those sciatica pains, have they stopped? In any case, you will help me more by staying well and living well than by being too straitened on my account, even if the consignment of paints has to suffer.

I think the time will come when my work will be in demand, very good, but it still may be far off, and meanwhile do not pinch yourself. Because business, as well as painting, will come of itself and in a dream, as it were, quicker and better if you are taking care of yourself than if you are stinting. And at our age, surely, we ought to have a certain calm, a certain wisdom in managing our affairs. I am afraid now of poverty, bad health and all that, and hope that you share these feelings.

So I almost feel remorse at having bought that piece of furniture today, although it is good, because I have had to ask you to send me money sooner than I should have otherwise.

Get this quite clear, if you are ill or if you have too many difficulties or worries, nothing will go well. And if you are well, business will end by coming to you of itself, and ideas about your business will come to you infinitely more abundantly if you are eating well than if you are not eating enough.

So say stop if I am going too fast. If not, of course so much the better, because I also can certainly work much better when I am comfortable than when I am too hard up. But don't go and think that I care more for my work than for our well-being, or at least than for our peace of mind above all. Gauguin will feel the same thing someday and he will get all right again.

Perhaps the time will really come for him when he will want to be – and will be able to become again – what he really is – the father of a family.

I am very, very curious to know what he has done in Brittany. Bernard wrote praising it greatly. But it is so difficult to paint richly in cold and poverty, and perhaps his real home will prove to be the warmer, happier South after all.

If you saw the vines! There are bunches that actually weigh a kilogram. The grapes are magnificent this year because of the fine autumn days that came at the end of a summer that had left a lot to be desired. I am sorry I spent money on that chest of drawers, but perhaps it will save us buying a more expensive one; the cheapest would have been 35 francs. And when Gauguin comes, he must have something to put his linen in, and altogether his room will be more complete with it.

If ever for a moment we are rather flush, I shall take this one for myself, and get him the one for 35 Frs. You can always find a bargain at that price, but not always at the price I paid for this one.

I have been thinking that if you've got some studies of mine that are beginning to crowd your place a bit and get in your way, you could take them off the stretchers and send them down here where there's room enough to store them. I am thinking of some of last year's stuff, or for that matter anything that is inconveniencing you.

Paris will be very beautiful in autumn all the same. The town here is nothing, at night everything is black. I think that plenty of gas, which is after all yellow and orange, heightens the blue, because at night the sky here looks to me – and it's very odd – blacker than in Paris. And if I ever see Paris again, I shall try to paint some of the effects of gaslight on the boulevard.

Ah, but in Marseilles it will be the opposite, I imagine that it must be more beautiful than Paris, the Cannebière.

I so often think of Monticelli, and when my mind dwells on the stories going around about his death, it seems to me that not only must you exclude the idea of his dying a drunkard in the sense of being besotted by drink, but you must also realise that here as a matter of course one spends one's life in the open air and in cafés far more than in the North. My friend the postman, for instance, lives a great deal in cafés, and is certainly more or less of a drinker, and has been so all his life. But he is so much the reverse of a sot, his exaltation is so natural, so intelligent, and he argues with such sweep, in the style of Garibaldi, that I gladly reduce the legend of Monticelli the drunkard on absinthe to exactly the same proportions as my postman's. My paper is full, write me as soon as you can. With a handshake and good luck,  
Ever yours, Vincent

Someday perhaps I shall know some details of those last days of Monticelli.

I notice that this chest has panels exactly like those on which Monticelli painted.