

Letter 560
Arles, c. 4 December, 1888

My dear Theo,

It's rather more than time for me to write you a collected letter for once. First of all thank you for your kind letter, also for the 100-fr. note it contained. Our days pass in working, working all the time, in the evening we are dead beat and go off to the cafe, and after that, early to bed! Such is our life.

Of course it is winter here with us too, though it's still very fine from time to time. But I do not dislike trying to work from imagination, since that allows me to stay in. It does not worry me to work in the heat of a stove, but cold does not suit me, as you know. Only I have spoiled that thing that I did of the garden in Nuenen, and I think that you also need practice for work from the imagination.

But I have made portraits of a whole family, that of the postman whose head I had done previously – the man, his wife, the baby, the young boy, and the son of sixteen, all of them real characters and very French, though they look like Russians. Size 15 canvases. You know how I feel about this, how I feel in my element, and that it consoles me up to a certain point for not being a doctor. I hope to get on with this and to be able to get more careful posing, paid for by portraits. And if I manage to do this whole family better still, at least I shall have done something to my liking and something individual. Just now I am completely swamped with studies, studies, studies, and this will go on for quite a while – it makes such a mess that it breaks my heart, and yet it will provide me with some property when I'm forty.

From time to time there's a canvas which will make a picture, such as the "Sower" in question, which I myself think better than the first.

If we can stand the siege, victory will come to us one day, in spite of our not being among the people who are talked about. It is rather a case that makes you think of the proverb – joy in public, sorrow at home.

What can you expect? Supposing that the fight is still before us, we must just try to mature quietly.

You always told me to work more for quality than quantity.

Now nothing prevents us from having a good many studies labelled as such, and consequently a whole lot of things not for sale. And if we are obliged to sell sooner or later, then let's sell, at a somewhat higher price, things which can hold their own from the point of view of serious effort.

I think that, in spite of myself, I shall not be able to refrain from sending you some canvases soon, say within a month. I say in spite of myself, for I am convinced that canvases gain by drying thoroughly here in the South until the impasto is dry all the way through, and that takes a long time, say a year. It would certainly be better if I can refrain from sending them. For there is no need to show them at the moment, I know that well enough.

Gauguin works a lot. I very much like a still life, background and foreground yellow; he is working on a portrait of me which I do not count among his useless undertakings; just now he is doing some landscapes; and lastly, he has a good canvas of women washing, even very good I think.

You were to get two drawings from Gauguin in return for the 50 francs you sent him in Brittany. But Mother Bernard has simply appropriated them. Speaking of stories without a name, this really is one. I think that she will give them up in the end. Mind you, in my opinion, Bernard's things are very fine, and he will have deserved success in Paris.

Very interesting, your meeting Chatrian.

Is he fair or dark? I want to know that, since I know the two portraits.

Of their work, I like Mme. Thérèse and L'Ami Fritz especially. I think there is more to find fault with in the Histoire d'un sous-maître than I thought possible before.

I think that we shall end up spending our evenings drawing and writing, there is more work than we can manage.

You know that Gauguin is invited to exhibit at the "Vingtistes." He is already imagining settling in Brussels, and that certainly would be a means towards his being able to see his Danish wife again. Since in the meantime he is very successful with the Arlésiennes, I should not consider this entirely insignificant. He is married but he doesn't look it very much. In short, I fear that there is an absolute incompatibility of character between his wife and him, but he naturally cares more for his children, who are very pretty according to the portraits.

We aren't so gifted in that respect. Good-by for now. A handshake for you and the Dutchmen.

Vincent

Gauguin will write you tomorrow, he is waiting for a reply to his letter and sends you his good wishes.