

Letter 573
Arles, January 23 1889

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 50 Fr. note it contained. Of course I am now safe until the arrival of your letter after the first. What happened about that money was entirely pure chance and misunderstanding, for which neither you nor I are responsible. By just the same mischance I could not telegraph as you said, because I did not know if you were still in Amsterdam or back in Paris. It is over now with the rest, and is one more proof of the proverb that misfortunes never come singly. Roulin left yesterday (of course my wire yesterday was sent off before the arrival of your letter of this morning). It was touching to see him with his children this last day, especially with the quite tiny one, when he made her laugh and jump on his knee, and sang for her.

His voice has a strangely pure and touching quality in which there was for my ear at once a sweet and mournful cradle-song, and a kind of far-away echo of the trumpet of revolutionary France. He was not sad, however. On the contrary, he had put on his brand new uniform, which he had received that very day, and everyone was making much of him.

I have just finished a new canvas which almost has what one might call a certain chic about it, a wicker basket with lemons and oranges, a cypress branch and a pair of blue gloves [F 502, JH 1664]. You have already seen some of these baskets of fruit of mine.

Look here – you do know that what I am trying to do is to get back the money that my training as a painter has cost, neither more nor less.

I have a right to that, and to the earning of my daily bread.

I think it just that there should be that return, I don't say into your hands, since what we have done we have done together, and to talk of money distresses us so much.

But let it go to your wife's hands, who will join with us besides in working with the artists.

If I am not yet devoting much thought to direct sales, it is because my count of pictures is not yet complete, but it is getting on, and I have set to work again with a nerve like iron.

I have good and ill luck in my production, but not ill luck only. For instance, if our Monticelli bunch of flowers is worth 500 francs to a collector, and it is, then I dare swear to you that my sunflowers are worth 500 francs too, to one of these Scots or Americans.

Now to get up heat enough to melt that gold, those flower-tones, it isn't any old person who can do it, it needs the force and concentration of a single individual whole and entire.

When I saw my canvases again after my illness the one that seemed the best to me was the "Bedroom." [F 482, JH 1608]

The amount we handle is a respectable enough sum, I admit, but much of it runs away, and what we'll have to watch above all is that from year's end to year's end it doesn't all slip through the net. That is why as the month goes on I keep more or less trying to balance the outlay with the output, at least in relative terms.

So many difficulties certainly do make me rather worried and timorous, but I haven't given up hope yet.

The trouble I foresee is that we shall have to be very prudent so as to prevent the expenses of a sale lowering the sale itself, when the time for it comes. How many times we have had occasion to see just that mischance in the lives of artists.

I have in hand the portrait of Roulin's wife [F 508, JH 1671], which I was working on before I was ill. In it I had ranged the reds from pink to an orange, which rises through the yellows to lemon, with light and sombre greens. If I could finish it, I should be very glad, but I am afraid she will no longer want to pose with her husband away.

You can see just what a disaster Gauguin's leaving is, because it has thrust us down again just when we had made a home and furnished it to take in our friends in bad times.

Only in spite of it we will keep the furniture, etc. And though everyone will now be afraid of me, in time that may disappear.

We are all mortal and subject to all the ailments there are, and if the latter aren't exactly of an agreeable kind, what can one do about it? The best thing is to try to get rid of them.

I feel remorse too when I think of the trouble that, however involuntarily, I on my side caused Gauguin.

But up to the last days I saw one thing only, that he was working with his mind divided between the desire to go to Paris to carry out his plans, and the life at Arles.

What will come of all this for him?

You will doubtless be feeling that though you have a good salary, nevertheless we lack capital, except in goods, and that in order really to alter the unhappy position of the artists that we know, we need to be in a stronger position. But then we often run up against sheer distrust on their part, and the things they are perpetually scheming among

themselves, which always end in – a blank. I think that at Pont-Aven they had already formed a new group of 5 or 6, perhaps already broken up.

They are not dishonest, it is something without a name and one of their enfant terrible faults.

Meantime the great thing is that your marriage should not be delayed. By getting married you will set Mother's mind at rest and make her happy, and it is after all almost a necessity in view of your position in society and in commerce. Will it be appreciated by the society to which you belong, perhaps not, any more than the artists ever suspect that I have sometimes worked and suffered for the community... So from me, your brother, you will not want completely ordinary congratulations and assurances that you are about to be transported straight into paradise. And with your wife you will not be lonely any more; which I could wish for our sister as well.

That, after your own marriage, is what I should set my heart on more than anything.

When you are married, perhaps there will be other marriages in the family, and in any case you will see your way clear and the house will not be empty any more.

Whatever I think on other points, our father and mother were exemplary as married people.

And I shall never forget Mother at Father's death, when she only said one small word: it made me begin to love dear old Mother more than before. In fact as married people our parents were exemplary, like Roulin and his wife, to cite another instance.

Well, go straight ahead along that road. During my illness I saw again every room of the house at Zundert, every path, every plant in the garden, the views from the fields round about, the neighbors, the graveyard, the church, our kitchen garden behind-down to the magpie's nest in a tall acacia in the graveyard.

It's because I still have earlier recollections of those first days than any of the rest of you. There is no one left who remembers all this but Mother and me.

I say no more about it, since it is better that I should not try to recall all that passed through my head then.

Only please realize that I shall be very happy when your marriage has taken place. Look here now, if for your wife's sake it would perhaps be as well to have a picture of mine from time to time at Goupil's, then I will give up my grudge against them, in this way.

I said I did not want to go back to them with too naive a picture.

But if you like you can exhibit the two pictures of sunflowers.

Gauguin would be glad to have one, and I should very much like to give Gauguin a real pleasure. So if he wants one of the two canvases, all right, I will do one of them over again, whichever he likes.

You will see that these canvases will catch the eye. But I would advise you to keep them for yourself, just for your own private pleasure and that of your wife.

It is a kind of painting that rather changes in character, and takes on a richness the longer you look at it.

Besides, you know, Gauguin likes them extraordinarily. He said to me among other things – "That...it's...the flower."

You know that the peony is Jeannin's, the hollyhock belongs to Quost, but the sunflower is somewhat my own.

And after all I should like to go on exchanging my things with Gauguin even if sometimes it would cost me also rather dear.

Did you during your hasty visit see the portrait of Mme. Ginoux in black and yellow? That portrait was painted in three-quarters of an hour [F 489, JH 1625]. I must stop for the moment.

The delay of the money was pure chance, and neither you nor I could do anything about it. A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent