

My dear Theo,

I have sent off two cases of canvases these days, D 58 and 59, by goods train, and it will be at least a week or so before you get them. There are lots of daubs among them, which you will have to destroy, but I have sent them, such as they are, so that you will be able to keep what seems passable to you. I have put in some fencing masks and some studies of Gauguin's and the book by Lemonnier.

Having taken the precaution of paying 30 francs in advance to the manager, I am naturally here still, but they cannot keep me indefinitely and it is more than time to decide. Bear in mind that shutting me up in an asylum will be expensive in the long run, though probably less so than taking a house again; besides, the thought of beginning to live alone again is an absolute horror to me.

I should like to enlist. What I am afraid of is – as my accident is known all over town here – that they would refuse me, but the thing I dread, or rather the thing that makes me faint-hearted, is the possibility, the probability of a refusal here. If I had some acquaintance who could shove me into the Legion for five years, I should go.

Only I do not want this to be thought a fresh act of madness on my part, and that is why I speak of it to you, as well as to M. Salles, so that if I did go, it would be in all serenity and after mature consideration.

For bear in mind, to go on spending money on this painting when things might come to such a pitch that you would be short of money for your own housekeeping would be atrocious, and you know well that the chances of success are abominable. Besides, I am so convinced that it is an irresistible force majeure that has frustrated me. Moreover, in the future there might possibly be our sister to be provided for.

Possibly, I say, but however this may be, if I knew I'd be accepted, I'd join the Legion. The thing is I have become timid and hesitant since I have been living like a machine.

However, my health is very good and I am working a little. I am doing an avenue of pink flowering chestnuts and a little cherry tree in flower and a wisteria plant and a path in the park splashed with light and shade. [F 517, JH 1689]

This will make a pendant to the garden which is in the walnut frame.

If I talk about enlisting for five years, don't go thinking that I am doing this with the idea of sacrificing myself or of doing a good deed.

I have been "in a hole" all my life, and my mental condition is not only vague now, but has always been so, so that whatever is done for me, I cannot think things out so as to balance my life. Where I have to follow a rule, as here in the hospital, I feel at peace. And it would be more or less the same thing if I were in the army. Now if I certainly run a great risk here of being refused because they know that I am a madman or an epileptic probably for good (though according to what I have heard, there are 50,000 epileptics in France, only 4,000 of whom are confined, and so it is not extraordinary), perhaps I should soon be provided for after speaking, for instance, to Détaille or Caran d'Ache in Paris. This idea would really be no wilder than any other, so let's think it over, but think in order to act. Meanwhile I am doing what I can and I have good will enough for any kind of work, it does not matter what, painting included.

But the money painting costs crushes me with a feeling of debt and worthlessness, and it would be a good thing if it were possible that this should stop.

Besides, I have said once and for all, if at present there is a decision to be made, it is better that you and M. Salles should make it for me. And mind, I shan't say No to anything, not even to going to St. Rémy, in spite of the obstacles of higher terms than we had hoped for, and of not having full liberty to go outside to paint. We really must decide, because they cannot keep me here indefinitely.

I told the manager that I'd be glad to pay them 60 francs, for instance, instead of 45 if I could stay here indefinitely.

But their terms are fixed, it appears.

So although up till now nobody has said anything to me, I think it would be right to go. I might go and stay again at the night café, where I have stored my furniture, but...I should be in daily contact there with the very people who used to be my neighbours, for it is next door to the house where I had my studio.

However, nobody says anything to me now in town, and I actually paint in the public garden without being much bothered by anything but the curiosity of passers-by.

I have reread the article on Monet in Figaro and I like it much better than at first.

Don't let's lose heart too much over material things, but at least try to be sensible about them. It is to the good that if necessary I can go and lodge in the night café here and even board here, for the people there are friends of mine, naturally enough, since I have been and am one of their customers. It has been very hot today and that always does me good. I have worked with more spirit than I have yet had.

With a good handshake for you and also for your wife.

Ever yours, Vincent