

My dear Theo,

I have just received your good news that you are a father at last, that Jo is over the most critical period, and finally that the little boy is doing well. That has done me more good and given me more pleasure than I can put into words. Bravo – and how pleased Mother will be! The day before yesterday I received a fairly long, very calm letter from her as well. So what I have been longing for so much and for such a long time has happened at last. No need to tell you that my thoughts have often turned to you of late, and it touched me very much that Jo had the kindness to write to me only the night before. How brave and calm she was at her moment of peril, it touched me very much. Well, it all helps a great deal in making me forget these last days when I was ill – at such times I no longer know where I am and my mind wanders.

I was extremely surprised by the article on my paintings you sent me. No need to tell you that I hope to keep thinking that I don't paint like that, but I do gather from it how I ought to be painting. For the article is absolutely right in the way it shows the gap to be filled, and I think that the writer really wrote it to guide, not only me, but all the other impressionists, and even to help them make the breach in the right place. So he proposes an ideal collective ego to the others quite as much as to me. He simply tells me that here and there he can see something good, if you like, even in my work which is so imperfect, and that is the comforting part, which I appreciate and for which I hope I am grateful. Only it ought to be understood that my back is not broad enough to be saddled with that task, and I need not tell you that, in concentrating the article on me, he has made me feel steeped in flattery. In my opinion it is all as exaggerated as a certain article by Isaäcson about you which claimed that present-day artists had given up quarrelling, and that an important movement was silently taking shape in the little shop on the Boulevard Montmartre. I admit that it is difficult to say what one means, to express oneself properly – just as one cannot paint things as one sees them – and so this isn't really a criticism of Isaäcson's rashness, or that of the other critic, but as far as we are concerned, well, we are merely serving as model, and that is surely a duty and a task like any other. So, should you or I acquire some sort of reputation, then we must simply try to take it as calmly as possible, and to keep our heads.

Why not say what he said of my sunflowers, and with far greater justification, of those magnificent and quite perfect hollyhocks of Quost's and his yellow irises, and those splendid peonies of Jeannin's? You know as well as I do that there is always another side of the coin to such praise. But I am glad, and very grateful for the article, or rather "La coeur à l'aise" [Glad at heart], as the revue song has it, since one may need it, as one may indeed have need of a coin. Moreover, an article like that has its own merit as a critical work of art. As such I think it is to be respected and the writer must raise the tone, harness his conclusions, &c.

But from the outset, you should guard against allowing your young family too much contact with the artistic world. Old Goupil guided his household well through the Parisian undergrowth, and I imagine you still think of him often. Things have changed so much, today. His cold aloofness would meet resistance today, yet his capacity to weather so many storms was something special.

Gauguin proposed, very vaguely it is true, that we found a studio in his name, he, De Haan and I, but he insisted on seeing his Tonkin project through first. He seems to have cooled off a great deal, I'm not sure exactly why, about continuing to paint. And he is just the kind of man to clear off to Tonkin, in fact he needs some room to expand, and finds the life of an artist – and there is some truth in this – a mean one.

With all his experience of travel, what is one to say to him?

So I hope that he will feel that you and I are indeed his friends, without counting on us too much, which, it must be added, he in no way does. He writes with a great deal of reserve, and more seriously than last year. I have just sent another note to Russell to jog his memory about Gauguin, for I know that Russell is very reliable and a sound character. And should I get back together with Gauguin, then we would have need of Russell. Gauguin and Russell are countrymen at heart – not uncivilized, but with the innate mellowness of distant fields, probably much more than you or I – that is how they look to me.

True enough, one must sometimes have a little faith to see that. If I, for my part, wanted to go on with, let us call it the translation of certain pages of Millet, then to prevent people – not from criticizing me, that would be all right – but from hampering or stopping me by making out that all I do is produce copies – then – I need the support of people like Russell or Gauguin from among the artists to carry my project through and to make a serious job of it. I have scruples of conscience about doing the things by Millet you sent me, for example, and which seemed to me perfectly chosen, and so I took the pile of photographs and sent them straight to Russell, lest I see them again before

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I have thought it over. I don't want to do it before having heard something of what you and certain others think of the things you will soon be receiving.

Else I should be having scruples of conscience, fearing that it might be plagiarism. And not now, but in a few months' time, I shall try to obtain the frank opinion of Russell himself on the real usefulness of the thing. In any case, Russell is on a short fuse, he gets angry, and says what's what, and that is what I sometimes need. You know that I find the Virgin so dazzling that I haven't dared look at it. I felt an immediate "not yet." My illness makes me very sensitive right now, and I don't feel capable for the moment of continuing these 'translations' when such masterpieces are involved. I am stopping with the Sower on which I am working, and which is not coming on as I would wish. Being ill, however, I have thought a great deal about going on with the work. When I do it, I do it calmly, as you will soon see when I send you the five or 6 finished canvases.

I hope that M. Lauzet will come, I very much wish to make his acquaintance. I trust his opinion and when he says it [my painting] is Provence, he begs the question, and like the other critic he talks more about something yet to be done than about something already accomplished. Landscapes with cypresses! Ah, that wouldn't be easy – Aurier is aware of that, too, when he says that even black is a colour, and refers to their flaming appearance. I am thinking about it, but dare do nothing more, and like the cautious Isaäcson, I say that I don't think we are there yet. One needs a dose of inspiration, a ray from on high that is not in ourselves, to do beautiful things. When I had done those Sunflowers, I looked for the opposite and yet the equivalent, and said – it's the cypress.

I'm going to stop here – I am a little anxious about a friend who, it seems, is still ill, and whom I should like to see. She is the one whose portrait I did in yellow and black [F 489, JH 1625], and she has changed very much. She has nervous attacks, complicated by a premature change of life, in short, very painful. She looked like an old grandfather the last time. I had promised to come back in a fortnight, but was taken ill again myself

Anyhow, as far as I'm concerned, the good news you've given me, and that article, and a whole lot of things have made me feel quite well today. I'm sorry that M. Salles did not find you. I want to thank Wil once again for her kind letter. I should have liked to have replied to it today, but am putting it off for a few days. Tell her that Mother has written me another long letter from Amsterdam. How happy she will be, Wil too!

I am with you all in my thoughts, though ending my letter. May Jo long remain for us what she is now. As for the little boy, why don't you name him Theo, in memory of our Father, that would certainly give me much pleasure. A handshake,

Ever yours,
Vincent

In the meantime, if you see him, thank M. Aurier very much for his article. I shall of course be sending you a note for him, and a study.