

My dear Theo,

I have been wanting to write you collectedly for several days already, but I've been absorbed in my work. This morning your letter arrived, for which I thank you, and for the 50-fr. note it contained. Yes, I think that for many reasons it would be good if we could be together again for a week of your holidays, if longer is impossible. I often think of you, Jo, and the little one, and I notice that the children here in the healthy open air look well. And yet even here it is difficult enough to bring them up, therefore it must be all the more terrible at times to keep them safe and sound in Paris on a fourth floor. But after all, we must take things as they come. M. Gachet says that a father and mother must naturally feed themselves up, he talks of taking 2 liters of beer a day, etc., in those circumstances. But you will certainly enjoy furthering your acquaintance with him, and he already counts on all of you coming, and talks about it every time I see him. He certainly seems to me as ill and distraught as you or me, and he is older and lost his wife several years ago, but he is very much the doctor, and his profession and faith still sustain him. We are great friends already, and as it happens, he already knew Brias of Montpellier and has the same idea of him that I have, that there you have someone significant in the history of modern art. I am working at his portrait, the head with a white cap, very fair, very light, the hands also a light flesh tint, a blue frock coat and a cobalt blue background, leaning on a red table, on which are a yellow book and a foxglove plant with purple flowers [F 753, JH 2007]. It is in the same sentiment as the self-portrait I did when I left for this place.

M. Gachet is absolutely fanatical about that portrait [F 627, JH 1772], and wants me to do one of him, if I can, exactly like it. I should like to myself. He has now got so far as to understand the last portrait of the Arlésienne, of which you have one in pink; he always comes back to these two portraits when he comes to see the studies, and he accepts them totally, totally, I tell you, as they are.

I hope to send you a portrait of him soon. Then I have painted two studies at his house, which I gave him last week, an aloe with marigolds and cypresses [F 755, JH 1999], then last Sunday some white roses, vines and a white figure in it [F 756, JH 2005].

I shall most probably also do the portrait of his daughter, who is nineteen years old, and with whom I imagine Jo would soon be friends.

Then I am looking forward to doing the portraits of all of you in the open air; yours, Jo's and the little one's. I have not yet found anything interesting in the way of a possible studio, and yet we shall have to take a room to put the canvases in which are taking up too much of Tanguy's or your room. For I must still touch them up a lot. But anyway I am living one day at a time, the weather is so beautiful. And I am well. I go to bed at nine o'clock, but get up at five most of the time. I hope that it will not be unpleasant to meet oneself again after a long absence. And I also hope that this feeling I have of being much more master of my brush than before I went to Arles will last. And M. Gachet says that he thinks it most improbable that it will return, and that things are going on quite well.

But he too complains bitterly of the state of things everywhere in the villages where he has gone as a total stranger, that living there gets so horribly expensive. He says he is amazed that the people I am with give me board and lodging for that amount, and that compared with others who have been here and whom he has known I am even comparatively lucky. And that if you come with Jo and the little one, you could not do better than stay at this same inn. Now nothing, absolutely nothing, is keeping us here but Gachet – but he will remain a friend, I should think. I feel that I can do not too bad a picture every time I go to his house, and he will continue to ask me to dinner every Sunday or Monday.

But till now, though it is pleasant to do a picture there, it is rather a burden for me to dine and lunch there, for the good soul takes the trouble to have four- or five-course dinners, which is as dreadful for him as for me – for he certainly hasn't a strong digestion. The thing that has somewhat prevented me from protesting against it is that it recalls the old times to him, when there were those family dinners which we ourselves know so well. But the modern idea of eating one – or at most two – courses is certainly progress, as well as a remote return to real antiquity. Altogether father Gachet is very, yes very like you and me. I read with pleasure in your letter that M. Peyron asked for news of me when he wrote you. I am going to write him this very evening that all is well, for he was very kind to me and I shall certainly not forget him.

Desmoulins, the man who has some Japanese pictures at the Champ de Mars, has come back here and I hope to meet him.

What did Gauguin say of the last portrait of the Arlésienne, which is done after his drawing? You will see in the end, I think, that this is one of the least bad things I have done. Gachet has a Guillaumin, a nude woman on a bed, that I think very fine; he also has a very old self-portrait by Guillaumin, very different from ours, dark but interesting.

But you will see that his house is full, full like an antique dealer's, of things that are not always interesting. But nevertheless there is this advantage, there is always something for arranging flowers in or for a still life. I did

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these studies for him to show him that if it is not a case for which he is paid in money, we will still compensate him for what he does for us.

Do you know the etching by Bracquemond, the Count's portrait? It is a masterpiece.

I shall also need as soon as possible 12 tubes zinc white from Tasset and 2 medium tubes geranium lake.

Then as soon as you can send them, I am terribly anxious to copy once more all the charcoal studies by Bargue, you know, the nude figures. I can draw the 60 sheets comparatively quickly, say within a month, so you might send a copy on approval; I will be sure not to stain or soil it. If I neglect to study proportion and the nude again, I shall be badly muddled later on. Don't think this absurd or useless.

Gachet also told me, that if I wished to give him great pleasure, he would like me to do again the "Pieta" by Delacroix [F 630, JH 1775] for him, he looked at it for a long time. In the future he will probably lend me a hand in getting models; I feel that he understands us perfectly and that he will work with you and me to the best of his power, without any reserve, for the love of art for art's sake. And he will perhaps really get me portraits to do. Now in order to get some clients for portraits, one must be able to show different ones that one has done.

That is the only possibility I see of selling anything. Yet notwithstanding everything, some canvases will find purchasers someday. Only I think that all the talk that has been started on account of the high prices paid for Millets, etc., lately has made the chances of merely getting back one's painting expenses even worse. It is enough to make you dizzy. So why think about it? – it would only daze our minds. Better perhaps to seek a little friendship and to live from day to day.

I hope that the little one continues well and you do the same. Till I see you again, goodbye for now. A good handshake

From Vincent