

Letter 642
Auvers-sur-Oise, 17 June 1890

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter of the day before yesterday and for the 50-fr. note it contained. I have been waiting for the package of paints and canvas from Tasset – which has just arrived and for which also I thank you very much – before answering your questions as to the difference between Tanguy's and Tasset's colours. Well, it all comes to the same thing, among Tasset's tubes there are now and then some, especially those containing white, which are badly filled. But when Tanguy in his turn fills them badly too – certainly without doing it on purpose – e. g. the tubes of cobalt, I am holding one just now – so, considering that the facts of the case are the same on both sides, I do not see why they should have anything very serious to reproach each other with.

If there were any difference in the composition, that's what would interest me more. And in paint there is adulteration just as there is in wines, and how can you judge accurately, when you, like me, do not know chemistry? Nevertheless, as old Tanguy is taking the trouble to send off the canvases which are in his attic for us, I should strongly approve of your getting paints from him, even if they were a bit worse than the others. That would only be fair. But I repeat, what he says about a difference in the tubes is pure imagination on his part, and the reason people go to Tasset is because the latter's paints are generally less insipid.

But the difference is not important, and if Tanguy is ready and willing to pack the canvases deposited with him, it's fair that he should have the order for the paints.

I was pleased to make the acquaintance of the Dutchman ¹ who came yesterday; he looks much too nice to paint under the present conditions. If, however, he persists in wanting to do it, I told him he would do well to go to Brittany and stay with Gauguin and De Haan ², because there he could live for 3 francs a day instead of 5 francs and would have pleasant company – and that I hope very much to join them, since Gauguin is going there. I am very glad to hear that they are going to renew their attempt there.

You are certainly right that it is better for Gauguin than staying in Paris. Very glad too that he thinks well of the head of the Arlésienne in question. I hope he does some etchings of southern subjects, say six, since I can print them without cost at M. Gachet's, who is kind enough to print them for nothing if I do them. That is certainly something that ought to be done, and we will do it in such a way that it will form a sort of sequel to the Lauzet-Monticelli publication, if you approve. And Gauguin will probably engrave some of his canvases in conjunction with me. His picture that you have, for instance, and for the rest, the Martinique things especially. M. Gachet will print these plates for us too. Of course he will be at liberty to print copies for himself. M. Gachet is coming to see my canvases in Paris someday and then we could choose some of them for engraving.

At the moment I am working on two studies, one a bunch of wild plants, thistles, ears of wheat, and sprays of different kinds of leaves – the one almost red, the other bright green, the third turning yellow. [F 763, JH 2030]

The second study, a white house in the verdure with a star in the night sky and an orange-coloured light in the window and black verdure and a note of sombre pink [F 766, JH 2031]. That is all for the moment. I am planning to make a more important canvas of Daubigny's house and garden, of which I already have a little study [F 765, JH2029].

I am very glad that Gauguin is going away with De Haan again. Naturally I thought the Madagascar project almost impossible to put into practice, I would rather see him leaving for Tonkin. If he went to Madagascar, however, I should be capable of following him there, for you must go there in twos or threes. But we aren't that far yet. Certainly the future of painting is in the tropics, either in Java or Martinique, Brazil or Australia, and not here, but you know that I am not convinced that you, Gauguin or I are the men of that future. But I repeat, no doubt probably someday in the near future impressionists who will hold their own with Millet and Pissarro will be at work there and not here. It is natural to believe this, but to go there without means of existence or relations with Paris is madness, when for years you have been getting rusty vegetating here.

Thank you once more, and a good handshake for you and your wife, and good health to the little one, whom I am longing to see again.

Ever yours, Vincent

1. A young painter named Thomas Hirschig had been introduced to Theo by Bock, and the former had advised him to go to Auvers.

2. From September, 1889, through at least December, De Haan was to be Gauguin's sole financial support: "If I hadn't helped him with the necessaries these last three months, and paid for everything, he would literally have starved, for he hasn't had a penny since September." [Extract from letter to Theo from Meyer de Haan, December 13, 1889.]