

Letter 507
Arles, 29 June 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, for the 50-franc note and the package of Tasset's paints and canvases which has just arrived. He has put in his bill, which comes to 50.85 fr., so that I have been able to check his prices and compare them with Édouard's. They are considerably lower than Édouard's, so that with the 20% discount, we have nothing to complain of. As for his canvas at 4.50 fr., I shall probably now be able to find out the manufacturer's price per piece.

Your letter brings great news, namely that Gauguin agrees to our plan. Certainly the best thing would be for him to come rushing here at once. Instead of getting out of a mess, he will probably get into one if he goes to Paris first.

Perhaps he might make a deal with the pictures he will be bringing along with him, which would be great luck. Herewith the reply.

I only want to say this, that not only am I enthusiastic about painting in the South, but equally so about the North, because I am in better health than six months ago. So that if it is wiser to go to Brittany, where you get board and lodging so cheaply – from the point of view of expense I am certainly ready to come back to the North. But it would be good for him too to come to the Midi, especially as it will already be winter in the North in four months. And it seems so certain to me that two people doing precisely the same work ought, if circumstances prevent them spending more, to be able to live at home on bread, wine, and anything in short that you'd want to add. The difficulty is eating at home alone. The restaurants here are expensive because everybody eats at home.

Certainly the Picards and the Leonardo da Vinci too are not less beautiful because they are few, and on the other hand the Montcellis, the Daumiers, the Corots, the Daubignys and the Millets are not ugly because in so many cases they have been painted with very great rapidity and because there are relatively a good many of them. As for landscapes, I begin to find that some done more rapidly than ever are the best of what I do. For instance, the one I sent you the cartoon of, the harvest, and the stacks too. It is true that I have to retouch the whole to adjust the brushwork a bit, and to make the touch harmonious, but all the essential work was done in a single long sitting, and I change them as little as possible when I'm retouching. But when I come home after a spell like that, I assure you my head is so tired that if that kind of work keeps recurring, as it has done since this harvest began, I become hopelessly absent-minded and incapable of heaps of ordinary things.

It is at times like these that the prospect of not being alone is not disagreeable.

And very often indeed I think of that excellent painter Monticelli – who they said was such a drinker, and off his head – when I come back myself from the mental labour of balancing the six essential colours, red – blue – yellow – orange – lilac – green. Sheer work and calculation, with one's mind strained to the utmost, like an actor on the stage in a difficult part, with a hundred things to think of at once in a single half hour. After that, the only thing to bring ease and distraction, in my case and other people's too, is to stun oneself with a lot of drinking or heavy smoking. Not very virtuous, no doubt, but it's to return to the subject of Monticelli. I'd like to see a drunkard in front of a canvas or on the boards. It is too gross a lie, all the Roquette woman's malicious, Jesuitical slanders about Monticelli.

Monticelli, the logical colourist, able to pursue the most complicated calculations, subdivided according to the scales of tones that he was balancing, certainly over-strained his brain at this work, just as Delacroix did, and Richard Wagner.

And if perhaps he did drink, it was because he – and Jongkind too – having a stronger constitution than Delacroix, and more physical ailments (Delacroix was better off), well, if they hadn't drunk – I for one am inclined to believe – their nerves would have rebelled, and played them other tricks: Jules and Edmond de Goncourt said the very same thing, word for word – “We used to smoke very strong tobacco to stupefy ourselves” in the furnace of creation.

Don't think that I would maintain a feverish condition artificially, but understand that I am in the midst of a complicated calculation long beforehand. So now, when anyone says that such and such is done too quickly, you can reply that they have looked at it too quickly. Apart from that I am now busy going over all my canvases a bit before sending them to you. But during the harvest my work was not any easier than what the peasants who were actually harvesting were doing. Far from complaining of it, it is just at these times in artistic life, even though it is not the real one, that I feel almost as happy as I could be in the ideal, in that real life.

If all goes well, and Gauguin sees fit to join us, we could put the thing on a firmer footing by suggesting he put all his pictures together with mine, and share profit and loss. But either that will not happen, or it will happen of itself, according to whether he thinks my painting good or bad, and also according to whether or not we co-operate.

Now I must write to Russell and I am going to urge him to make an exchange with me. I must work hard to try to sell something on my part to help with the expenses, but we must be of good heart in spite of the difficulties, and working as we are to safeguard the artists' life, it will fire our blood.

A handshake, I'll write again soon. I'm going into the Camargue for two or three days to make some drawings there. I am glad that you are sending for our sister.

Ever yours, Vincent

I'll write Mourier one of these days, you will read the letter, you will see how I will talk to him – I can see the picture from here!!! the head like a Delaroche.

Have patience with M. a little longer. Perhaps he is going through a crisis.