

Letter 575
Arles, 30 January 1889

My dear Theo,

Though I have nothing very unusual to tell you, I wanted to let you know that I saw our friend Roulin again last Monday. There was enough reason for it too, as the whole of France was shaken. Certainly in our eyes the election and its results and its representatives are only symbols. But what it proves once more is that worldly ambition and fame pass away, but the human heart beats the same to this day, in as perfect sympathy with the past of our buried forefathers as with the generation to come.

I had a very friendly letter from Gauguin this morning, to which I replied without delay. When Roulin came I had just finished the duplicate [F454] of my sunflowers [F 458], and I showed him the two examples of La Berceuse [F 505, F 506] between the four bouquets.

Roulin sends his kind regards.

He was present at the demonstration in Marseilles on Sunday at the time that the election result was telegraphed from Paris. Like Paris, the whole population of Marseilles was moved to the very depths of their soul, the people are all as one and silent.

Well, who is there now who will dare to order any gun at all to fire, machine gun or Lebel rifle, when so many hearts have already offered themselves to serve as cannon fodder?

All the more because certainly the victorious politicians of this great day, Rochefort and Boulanger, are with one accord more ambitious for a graveyard than for any throne.

Anyhow, that was our interpretation of what has happened, not just Roulin's and mine, but many others'. Nevertheless we were greatly moved. Roulin told me that he almost cried when he saw that silent crowd at Marseilles, and he only recovered himself when he turned and saw behind him some very, very old friends, who stopped and happened to recognize him. Then they had supper together till late into the night.

Although he was very tired, he could not resist the desire to come to Arles to see his family again, and he came to shake hands, almost dropping with sleep and very pale. I could just show him the two copies of the portrait of his wife, which pleased him very much.

From what I am told, I am very obviously looking better; inwardly my heart is rather too full of so many feelings and divergent hopes, for I am amazed to be getting better.

Everyone here is kind to me, the neighbours, etc., kind and attentive as if I were at home.

I know already that several people here would ask me for portraits if they dared. Roulin, quite a poor fellow and lowly employee though he is, is much respected, and it is known that I have done his whole family.

My dear brother, in the meantime we will certainly go on suffering, make mistakes, fall into misfortune, I can't deny it, but we will always have worked in this present '89 with the French who we admire so much, since on their part they have made us feel that this is our homeland too. Still, that's the way they are.

Don't speak to your fiancée about this business between us. Just let me go on working in the way I asked you last March. And in this way I will have done some impressionist canvases, right?

Today I am working on a third Berceuse [F 508]. I know very well that it is neither drawn nor painted as correctly as a Bouguereau and I rather regret this, because I have an earnest desire to be correct. But though it is doomed, alas, to be neither a Cabanel nor a Bouguereau, yet I hope that it will be French.

It has been a magnificent day with no wind, and I have such a longing to work that I am astonished, as I did not expect it any more.

I will finish this letter like Gauguin's, by telling you that there certainly are signs of previous overexcitement in my words, but that is not surprising, since everyone in this good Tarascon country is a trifle cracked.

With a good handshake, also for De Haan and Isaäcson.

Ever yours, Vincent

I shall expect your letter as soon as possible after February 1st.