

Letter 578  
Arles, c. 22 February 1889

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your kind letter and for the 50-fr. note which it contained. Are you tolerably well, and is the weather in Paris bearable?

We have days of sun and wind here. I walk a lot to get fresh air. So far I am sleeping and eating at the hospital. Yesterday and today I began to work. When Mme. Roulin also left to go and live temporarily with her mother in the country, she took "La Berceuse" with her. I had the study of it and two repetitions. She had a good eye and took the best, only I am doing it again at the moment [F 507, JH 1672] and I do not want it to be inferior.

In reply to Mourier's letter, which gave me pleasure, if Gauguin wants to make an exchange with you for a copy of "La Berceuse," he can send it to his wife in Denmark, and I should willingly see a canvas of mine going there in this way. But as I have told you already, this canvas may be unintelligible.

I should have liked to send something to Holland, but I haven't enough confidence for that yet.

Can you see a blade of grass from your new apartment? I hope so.

As for Koning, really I daren't encourage him to come here too much, even with his inclination to go wild about the Midi, after the experience I have had of it now.

If he goes to Nice or Mentone, where it is perhaps healthier, he is sure to be taken by the gambling crowd because of his good nature, etc., for it is a real plague, that, even here already, and it warps the character.

But if one has too many troubles, what is one to do or say?

In short, you see that I do not yet quite know what to think.

Bernard also wrote to me. I have not yet been able to answer, for it is so hard to explain the character of the difficulties one may meet with here, and with our habits and ways of thinking in the North or in Paris, it is fatal to stay here long. In this part of the world you have to endure things that are no joke.

It must be admitted, however, that in every town there is a school of drawing and a set of collectors, but you realize that, directed as they are by some invalids and idiots of the Beaux-Arts, it is only make-believe and sham.

M. Salles handed the 50 francs over at once. I am very glad that Gauguin has finished some lithographs.

I agree with what you say, that if it takes a more serious turn someday, I must do what the doctors say and not oppose it. But that may be neither tomorrow nor the next day.

Now it is not uncommon, it seems, to see even a whole population in these parts seized with panic, as at Nice during the earthquake. Just now the whole town is uneasy, no one rightly knowing why, and I saw in the papers that actually there have again been slight earthquake shocks in places not far from here. The more reason then, I consider, why as far as I am concerned I should wait with as much patience as I can muster, hoping that things will clear up again. At another time, if I were less impressionable, I should probably poke a good deal of fun at what seems to me topsy-turvy and off-beat in the ways of this country. At present it doesn't make a particularly funny impression on me.

Well, well, after all there are so many painters who are cracked in one way or another that little by little I shall be reconciled to it.

I understand what Gauguin must suffer more than ever, for in the tropics he caught the very same thing, this excessive sensitivity. In the hospital I actually saw a mad Negress, who is staying there and working as a servant. Tell him that.

If you told Rivet that you are so uneasy about me, he would certainly reassure you by telling you that because there is so much sympathy and community of ideas between us, you feel rather the same way. Do not think too much about me, as if it were an obsession. Besides, I shall get along better if I know you have peace of mind.

A good handshake. You are very kind to say I could come to Paris, but I think the excitement of a big town would never do for me. Good-by for now.

Ever yours, Vincent