

My dear Theo,

I was busy writing you to send you the reply for M. Aurier when your letter arrived. I'm very glad that Jo and the little one are well and that she expects to be able to get up a few days from now. Then what you tell me about our sister also interests me very much. I think she was lucky to see Degas at his home.

And so Gauguin has returned to Paris. I am going to copy my reply to M. Aurier to send to him, and you must make him read this article in the *Mercure*, for really I think they ought to say things like that of Gauguin, and of me only very secondarily. Gauguin wrote me that he had exhibited in Denmark and that this exhibition had been a great success. It seems a pity to me that he did not stay on here a little longer. Together we should have worked better than I have all by myself this year. And now we should have a little house of our own to live and work in, and could even put others up.

Did you notice in the paper you sent me an article about the productivity of certain artists, Corot, Rousseau, Dupré, etc? Do you remember how many times, when Reid was there, we talked about the same thing – the necessity of producing a lot.

And that, shortly after I came to Paris, I said to you that I should be unable to do anything until I had 200 canvases, which would seem that for some natures, working too quickly is really all in the day's work, the normal condition of regular production, considering that a painter really ought to work quite as hard as a shoemaker, for instance.

Wouldn't it be a good idea to send Reid, and perhaps Tersteeg too, or rather C. M., a copy of Aurier's article? It seems to me that we ought to take advantage of it to dispose of something in Scotland, either now or later.

I think you will like the canvas for M. Aurier; it is in a terribly thick impasto and worked over like some Monticellis; I have kept it for almost a year. But I think I must try to give him something good for this article, which is very much a work of art in itself; and it will do us a real service against the day when we, like everybody else, shall be obliged to try to recover what the pictures cost. Anything beyond that leaves me pretty cold, but recovering the money it costs to produce is the very condition of being able to go on.

As to the Impressionists' exhibition in March, I hope to send you a few more canvases, which are drying at the moment; if they do not arrive in time, you could make a selection from the ones that are at old Tanguy's.

I have tried to copy the "Men Drinking" by Daumier [F 667, JH 1884] and the "Convict Prison" by Doré [F 669, JH 1885]; it is very difficult.

One of these days I hope to start on the "Good Samaritan" by Delacroix and the "Woodcutter" by Millet.

Aurier's article would encourage me if I dared to let myself go, and venture even further, dropping reality and making a kind of music of tones with colour, like some Monticellis. But it is so dear to me, this truth, trying to make it true, after all I think, I think, that I would still rather be a shoemaker than a musician in colours.

In any case, trying to remain true is perhaps a remedy in fighting the disease which still continues to disquiet me.

Just now I am in pretty good health, however, and I should think that if I were to stay some time with you, it would do much to counteract the influence which the company I am in here necessarily exercises. But it seems to me that there is no hurry about this, and we must consider coolly if this is the moment to spend money on the journey; perhaps we could do something for Gauguin or Lauzet by giving up the journey. Recently I bought a suit, which cost me 35 francs. I must pay for it toward the end of March; with that I shall have enough for the whole year, for when I came here, I bought almost the same kind of suit for 35 francs, and it has lasted me all year. But I shall need a pair of shoes and some pants in March too.

All things considered, life is not very expensive here, I think that in the North we should spend somewhat more. And that's why – even if I came to you for some time – the best policy would still be to go on with the work here.

I don't know – either way seems good to me – but we mustn't be in a hurry to change.

And don't you think that in Antwerp – if we carried out Gauguin's plan – it would be necessary to maintain a certain position, to furnish a studio, in fact to do as the greater part of the established Dutch painters do. It isn't so simple as it looks, and I should fear, for him as well as for me, a regular siege by the established artists, and there would be the same business as there was in Denmark all over again.

Altogether we must begin by realizing that the established painters can do harm in the same old way to adventurers such as we should be in Antwerp, and might force us to clear out. And as for the dealers there, we mustn't count on them at all.

The academy there is better, and they work more vigorously there than in Paris.

And besides, at present Gauguin is constantly in Paris, his reputation holds there, and if he leaves for Antwerp, he might find that it is more or less difficult to return to Paris.

In going to Antwerp, I should fear more for Gauguin than for myself, for naturally I'd shift for myself with the Flemings, I should again take up the peasant studies started some time ago, and very regretfully abandoned.

© Copyright 2001 R. G. Harrison

There is no need to tell you that I have a strong affection for the Campine. But I foresee that for him the struggle might be very hard, I think that you must tell him the pros and cons exactly as I should. I will write him soon, mainly to send him my reply to M. Aurier's article, and I should think that, if he liked, we could work together again here if his attempts to find a shelter do not succeed. But he is very clever, and perhaps he will manage in Paris itself, and if his reputation holds there, he will do well, for he always has this, that he was the very first to work in the tropics. And this question will necessarily come up again. Give him my kindest regards, and if he likes, he can take the repetitions of the "Sunflowers" and the repetition of "La Berceuse" in exchange for something of his that you would like.

If I came to Paris, I should have to touch up several canvases done at the beginning here, it isn't lack of work I should be suffering from there.

Kind regards to Jo, and a good handshake in thought.

Ever yours, Vincent

Please send the enclosed letter, after you have read it, to M. Aurier.