

Letter 496
Arles, 29 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I got your telegraph order for 50 francs on Monday morning, and thank you very much for it. Only I have not received your letter yet, and I am rather surprised.

I have had a letter from Gauguin, who says he got a letter from you with 50 Fr. enclosed, which touched him greatly, and in which you said something of the plan. As I had sent you my letter to him, he had not yet received the more definite proposal when he wrote.

But he says that he knows from experience, because when he was with this friend Laval in Martinique they managed much better together than when they were alone, so that he quite agreed with me as to the advantages there would be in living together.

He says that the pains in his bowels still continue, and he seems to me to be very depressed.

He speaks of some hopes he has of finding a capital of 600,000 francs to set up as a dealer in impressionist pictures, and that he will explain his plan, and would like you to head the enterprise. I should not be surprised if this hope is a fata morgana, a mirage of destitution, the more destitute you are – especially if you are ill – the more you think of such possibilities. To me this scheme simply looks like another proof of his breaking down, and it would be better to get him away as quickly as possible.

He says that when sailors have to move a heavy load, or weigh anchor, so as to be able to lift a very heavy weight, and to make a huge effort, they all sing together to keep them up to the mark and give them vim.

That is just what artists lack! So I should be very much surprised if he is not glad to come, but in addition to the hotel and travelling expenses, there is the doctor's bill as well, so it will be pretty steep.

But I think he ought to leave the debts unpaid, giving some pictures as security – if he is coming here, and if the people do not agree to that, to leave the debts as they are, without pictures as security. I was obliged to do the same thing to get to Paris, and though I lost a lot of things, it cannot be helped in a case like this, and it is better to get away no matter how than to go to rack and ruin where you are.

I have not gone to Saintes-Maries; they have finished painting the house, and I have had to pay for that, and then I had to get in a fairly big stock of canvases; so out of 50 francs I have got one louis left, and it is only Tuesday morning, so it was hardly possible for me to go, and I am afraid next week will be just as bad.

I was glad to hear that Mourier has come to stay with you.

If Gauguin would rather take the risk of going into business again, and if he really hopes to do something in Paris, Good Lord! let him go, but I think that he would be wise to come here at least for a rest; there is someone here who has been to Tonkin, and came back ill from that delightful place – he has recovered here.

I have two or three new drawings, and two or three new painted studies too.

One day I went to Tarascon, but unfortunately there was such a blazing sun and so much dust that day that I came back with an empty bag. I have heard of two Monticellis in Marseilles, a bunch of flowers at 250 francs, and some figures. It was that friend of Russell's McKnight, who had seen them there. I should very much like to go to Marseilles sometime.

I keep on finding very beautiful and interesting subjects here, and in spite of the worry about the expense, I think that there is a better chance in the South than in the North.

If you saw the Camargue and many other places, you would be surprised, just as I was, to find that they are exactly in Ruysdael's style.

I am working on a new subject, fields green and yellow as far as the eye can reach. I have already drawn it twice, and I am starting it again as a painting; it is exactly like a Salomon Konink – you know, the pupil of Rembrandt who painted vast level plains. Or it is like Michel, or like Jules Dupré – but anyway it is very different from rose gardens. It is true that I have only been through one part of Provence, and that in the other part there is the kind of scenery that you get in Claude Monet, for instance.

I am very curious to know how Gauguin will get on. He says that he disposed of thirty-five thousands' worth of impressionist stuff at Durand Ruel's in his time, and that he hopes to do the same for you. But it is so wretched when your health begins to bother you. I think myself that the most solid asset Gauguin has now is his painting, and the best business he could do – his own pictures. Probably he has written you already. I replied to his letter last Saturday.

I think it would come very heavy to pay all that he owes, and the journey, etc., etc. If Russell bought a picture from him, but he has the house that he is building, which leaves him short of money. I think, however, that I shall write too that effect. I have to send him something myself for our exchange, and if Gauguin wants to come, then I could ask him quite confidently. It is quite certain that if one could buy his

pictures at their present price in exchange for the money given Gauguin, there would be no risk of losing money. I should very much like you to have all his pictures of Martinique. Well, let's do what we can. With a handshake, I hope you will write soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

What is the bust of a woman by Rodin in the Salon? It cannot be the bust of Mrs. Russell, he must be working on that now though.

Hasn't my friend Mourier a lordly accent? Bropaply he sdill trinks cognac mit vatter?