

Letter 577
Arles, c. 17 February 1889

My dear Theo,

I have been so completely out of sorts mentally that it would have been useless to try to write an answer to your kind letter. Today I have just come home provisionally, I hope for good. I feel quite normal so often, and really I should think that if what I am suffering from is only a disease particular to this place, I must wait here quietly till it is over, even if it returns (and let's say that it won't).

But this is what I told M. Rey once and for all. If sooner or later it is desirable that I go to Aix, as has already been suggested, I consent beforehand and I will submit to it.

But in my character as a painter and a workman it is not permissible for anyone, not even you or a doctor, to take such a step without warning me and consulting me about it, also because since up till now I have always kept a comparative presence of mind in my work, I should have the right to say (or at least to have an opinion on) whether it would be better to keep my studio here or to move to Aix altogether. This so as to avoid the expenses and loss of moving as much as possible and not to do it except in case of absolute necessity.

It seems that people here have some superstition that makes them afraid of painting, and that they have been talking about it in the town. Very good, I know it is the same thing in Arabia, but nevertheless we have loads of painters in Africa, haven't we?

Which shows that with a little firmness you can modify these prejudices, at least as far as painting in spite of it is concerned.

The unfortunate thing is that I am rather inclined to be affected by the beliefs of others, and to feel them myself, and I cannot always laugh at whatever foundation of truth there may be in the absurdity.

As I have already been staying here for more than a year, and have heard almost all the ill that could be spoken of myself, Gauguin and painting in general – why shouldn't I take things as they come and wait for the upshot here? To what place worse could I go than where I have twice been: in the madhouse?

The advantages I have here are what Rivet used to say, "They are a sickly lot, all of them," so that at least I do not feel alone.

Then, as you well know, I am so fond of Arles, though Gauguin has uncommonly good reason to call it the dirtiest town in the whole South.

And I have already met with such friendliness from my neighbours, from M. Rey, and from everyone at the hospital besides, that really I would rather be always ill here than forget the kindness there is in the very people who have the most incredible prejudices against painters and painting, or at any rate have no clear, sane idea of it as we have.

Then they know me now at the hospital, and if it comes on again, nothing would be said, and they would know what to do at the hospital. I have no desire at all to be treated by other doctors, nor is there any necessity.

The only thing I should like to be able to do is go on earning with my hands what I spend. Koning wrote me a very nice letter saying that he and a friend would probably be coming South to me for a long time. It was in reply to a letter I wrote him some days ago. I do not dare persuade painters to come here after what has happened to me, they run the risk of losing their wits like me; the same applies to De Haan and Isaäcson. Let them go to Antibes, Nice, or Mentone, it is perhaps healthier.

Mother and our sister have also written, the latter was terribly distressed about the patient she was nursing. At home they are very, very glad about your marriage.

Now mind, you must not think too much about me, nor fret yourself. It will probably have to take its course, and we cannot change much in our fate by taking precautions.

Once more let us try to resign ourselves to our fate whatever it is. Our sister wrote that your fiancée had just been staying some time at home. That is good. Well, I send my love with all my heart, and don't let's lose courage.

Believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Address next letter to Place Lamartine.

Kind regards to Gauguin. I hope he is going to write me. I shall write him too.