

[Letter 760 \(To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Sunday, 21 April 1889\)](#)

(from [Vincent van Gogh, the letters](#))

My dear Theo

You'll probably be back in Paris when this letter arrives. I wish you and your wife lots of happiness.

Thanks very much for your kind letter and for the 100-franc note it contained. Out of the 65 francs which I owe him, I've paid my landlord only 25 francs, having had to pay 3 months' rent in advance on a room where I shan't live but where I've stored my furniture, and having in addition had around ten francs in various removal expenses &c.

Then, since my clothes were in not too brilliant a state – so that when I went out into the street it became necessary to have something new – I took a 35-franc suit and 4 francs for 6 pairs of socks. _Thus I have only a few francs left out of the note, and at the end of the month I must pay the [landlord](#) again, although we could make him wait a few days, more or less. At the hospital, after having settled the bill up to today, there's still almost enough for the rest of the month from the money I still have on deposit there.

At the end of the month I'd still wish to go to the mental hospital at St-Rémy or another institution of that kind, which [Mr Salles](#) has told me about.

Forgive me for not going into details to weigh up [6](#) the pros and the cons of such a course of action. It would strain my mind a great deal to talk about it. It will, I hope, suffice to say that I feel decidedly incapable of starting to take a new studio again and living there alone, here in Arles or elsewhere – it comes down to the same thing – for the moment – I've nevertheless tried to make up my mind to begin again – for the moment not possible. I'd be afraid of losing the faculty of working, which is coming back to me now, by forcing myself to have a studio, and also having all the other responsibilities on my back.

And for the time being I wish to remain confined, as much for my own tranquillity as for that of others. What consoles me a little is that I'm beginning to consider madness as an illness like any other and accept the thing as it is, while during the actual crises it seemed to me that everything I was imagining was reality. Anyway, in fact I don't want to think or talk about it. Excuse the explanations – but I ask you, and Messrs [Salles](#) and [Rey](#), to act so that at the end of the month or the beginning of the month of May I may go there as a confined boarder.

Beginning again this painter's life I've led up to now, isolated in the studio sometimes, and without any other source of entertainment than to go to a café or a restaurant with all the criticism of the neighbours &c., I can't do it. Going to live with another person, even another artist – difficult – very difficult – one takes too great a responsibility upon oneself. I dare not even think of it.

Anyhow, let's begin with 3 months, afterwards we'll see. Now the cost of board must be around 80 francs and I'll do a little painting and drawing. Without putting as much fury into it as the other year. _ Don't get upset about all this.

So there you have it, these days have been sad, moving house, transporting all my furniture, packing up the canvases which I'll send you, but above all it seemed sad to me that all that had been given to me by you with so much brotherly affection, and that for so many years, it was however you alone who supported me, and then to be obliged to come back to tell you all this sad story... but it's difficult for me to express that as I felt it.

[...]

Anyway, my dear fellow, we must accept it, the illnesses of our time, all in all it's only fair that having lived for years in relatively good health, sooner or later we have our share of them. As for me, you'll feel a little that I wouldn't exactly have chosen madness if there had been a choice, but once one has something like that one can't catch it any more. However, in addition there will still perhaps be the consolation of being able to continue to work on some painting a little. What will you do so as not to say to your wife either too many good or too many bad things about Paris and of a heap of things? Do you feel in advance completely able to keep exactly the right measure always, from every point of view? 3r:9

I shake your hand heartily in thought, I don't know if I'll write to you very, very often, because all my days aren't clear enough to write somewhat logically. All your kindnesses for me, I've found them greater than ever today.

I can't tell you it as I feel it, but I assure you that that kindness has been of great worth, and if you don't see its results, my dear brother, don't be upset about it, you will still have your kindness. Only transfer this affection onto your wife as much as possible.

And if we correspond a little less you'll see that if she is as I think she is, she will console you. [...]
If you see Gauguin or if you write to him, give him my kind regards.

I'll be very happy to have a little news of what you say about Mother and Sister and whether they're well, tell them to take my story, my word, as a thing they mustn't upset themselves about excessively, for I'm relatively unfortunate, but in spite of that, after all, I perhaps still have some almost ordinary years ahead of me: it's an illness like any other, and currently almost all those we know among our friends have something. So is it worth talking about? I regret causing trouble to Mr Salles, to Rey, especially also to you, but what can one do – the mind isn't steady enough to begin again like before – so it's a matter of no longer causing scenes in public, and naturally being a little calmer now, I feel completely that I was in an unhealthy state, mentally and physically. And people were kind to me then, those I remember and the rest, anyhow I've caused anxiety, and if I'd been in a normal state all of this wouldn't have happened in that way. Adieu, write when you can.

Ever yours,
Vincent

[Letter 762 Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh. Paris, Wednesday, 24 April 1889.](#)

(sourced from [Vincent van Gogh, the letters](#))

24 April 1889

My dear Vincent,

I was very touched by your letter, which we received yesterday, ¹ you really say too many kind things about a thing that's just entirely natural, not taking into account that you've given it back to me several times over, both by your work and by a brotherly affection which is worth more than all the money I'll ever possess.

It pains me to know that you're still in a state of incomplete health. Although nothing in your letter betrays weakness of mind, on the contrary, the fact that you judge it necessary to enter an asylum is quite serious in itself. Let's hope that this will be merely a preventive measure. As I know you well enough to believe you capable of all the sacrifices imaginable, I've thought that there's a possibility that you may have thought of this solution to encumber less those who know you. If that's the case, I beg you not to do it, for certainly life in there can't be agreeable. So be well aware of what you're doing, and if perhaps you wouldn't make another try first. Either by coming back here for a while, or by going to Pont-Aven during the summer, or by trying to board with people who would take care of you.

If you had no ulterior motive in writing to me as you did, I find that you're absolutely right to go to St-Rémy. By staying there for a while you'll be able to regain confidence in your own strength, and nothing will prevent you from returning to Arles after a little while if the heart tells you to. [Mr Salles](#) has sent me some prospectuses of St-Rémy in which it's said that a third party must request admission. I therefore enclose the letter for the [director](#) of the establishment, which you can use however you wish.³ As soon as you've decided to leave I'll send you the necessary money. Now I also want to tell you that we've been here since last Saturday, we're almost settled in, and every day the apartment takes on a more lived-in aspect, thanks to all sorts of inventions on [Jo](#)'s part. We get along very well together, so that there's such complete satisfaction on both sides that we feel happier than I can tell you. We left [Mother](#) and the [sisters](#) in perfect health. Ma seems to be getting younger. She has now gone back to Breda after an absence of almost a month. My marriage pleased her very much, above all because [Jo](#) and herself and [Wil](#) get on perfectly, moreover she has something so sincere in her ways that there are many people on whom she makes a very agreeable impression. Although there are many things of life about which she does not know and on which her opinion must be formed, she has such a fund of good will and ardour to do good that I'm no longer afraid of the disillusionments I feared before our marriage. Up to now everything is going much better than I had thought, and I hadn't dared hope for so much happiness.[....]

Write to me soon about what you've definitely decided and don't despair, for better days will certainly still come for you.

I shake both your hands.

Theo

[Letter 776 To Theo van Gogh. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, on or about Thursday, 23 May 1889.](#)
(sourced from [Vincent van Gogh, the letters](#))

My dear Theo,
Your letter which I've just received gives me great pleasure.
[....]

If [Gauguin](#) wants sunflowers it's only absolutely fair that he gives you something that you like as much in exchange. Gauguin himself above all liked the sunflowers later, when he had seen them for a long time. You must know, too, that if you put them in this order:

[....]

The landscape of St-Rémy is very beautiful, and little by little I'm probably going to make trips into it. But staying here as I am, the [doctor](#) has naturally been in a better position to see what was wrong, and will, I dare hope, be more reassured that he can let me paint.

I assure you that I'm very well here, and that for the time being I see no reason at all to come and board in Paris or its surroundings. I have a little room with grey-green paper with two water-green curtains with designs of very pale roses enlivened with thin lines of blood-red. These curtains, probably the leftovers of a ruined, deceased rich man, are very pretty in design. Probably from the same source comes a very worn armchair covered with a tapestry flecked in the manner of a [Diaz](#) or a [Monticelli](#), red-brown, pink, creamy white, black, forget-me-not blue and bottle green.

Through the iron-barred window I can make out a square of wheat in an enclosure, a perspective in the manner of [Van Goyen](#), above which in the morning I see the sun rise in its glory.

With this — as there are more than 30 empty rooms — I have another room in which to work. The food is so-so. It smells naturally a little musty, as in a cockroach-ridden restaurant in Paris or a boarding school. As these unfortunates do absolutely nothing (not a book, nothing to distract them but a game of boules and a game of draughts) they have no other daily distraction than to stuff themselves with chickpeas, haricot beans, lentils and other groceries and colonial foodstuffs by the regulated quantities and at fixed times.

As the digestion of these commodities presents certain difficulties, they thus fill their days in a manner as inoffensive as it's cheap. But joking apart, the *fear* of madness passes from me considerably upon seeing from close at hand those who are affected with it, as I may very easily be in the future.

Before I had some repulsion for these beings, and it was something distressing for me to have to reflect that so many people of our profession, [Troyon](#), [Marchal](#), [Meryon](#), [Jundt](#), [M. Maris](#), [Monticelli](#), a host of others, had ended up like that. I wasn't even able to picture them in the least in that state.

Well, now I think of all this without fear, i.e. I find it no more atrocious than if these people had snuffed it of something else, of consumption or syphilis, for example.

These artists, I see them take on their serene bearing again, and do you think it's a small thing to rediscover ancient members of the profession.

Joking apart, that's what I'm profoundly grateful for. For although there are some who howl or usually rave, here there is *much* true friendship that they have for each other. They say, one must suffer others for the others to suffer us, and other very true reasonings that they thus put into practice. And between ourselves we understand each other very well, I can, for example, chat sometimes with one who doesn't reply except in incoherent sounds, because he isn't afraid of me.

If someone has some crisis the others look after him, and intervene so that he doesn't harm himself. The same for those who have the mania of often getting angry. Old regulars of the menagerie run up and separate the fighters, if there is a fight.

It's true that there are some who are in a more serious condition, whether they be filthy, or dangerous. These are in another courtyard. Now I take a bath twice a week, and stay in it for 2 hours, then my stomach is infinitely better than a year ago, so I only have to continue, as far as I know. I think I'll spend less here than elsewhere, since here I still have work on my plate, for nature is beautiful.

My hope would be that at the end of a year I'll know better than now what I can do and what I want. Then, little by little, an idea will come to me for beginning again. Coming back to Paris or anywhere at the moment doesn't appeal to me at all, I feel that I'm in the right place here. In my opinion, what most of those who have been here for years are suffering from is an extreme sluggishness. Now, my work will preserve me from that to a certain extent.

The room where we stay on rainy days is like a 3rd-class waiting room in some stagnant village, all the more so since there are honourable madmen who always wear a hat, spectacles and travelling clothes and carry a cane, almost like at the seaside, and who represent the passengers there.²⁴

I'm obliged to ask you for some more colours, and especially some canvas. When I send you the 4 canvases of the garden I have on the go you'll see that, considering that life happens above all in the garden, it isn't so sad. Yesterday I drew a very large, rather rare night moth there which is called the death's head, its coloration astonishingly distinguished: black, grey, white, shaded, and with glints of carmine or vaguely tending towards olive green; it's very big.

To paint it I would have had to kill it, and that would have been a shame since the animal was so beautiful. I'll send you the drawing of it with a few other drawings of plants.

[....]

Speaking of my condition, I'm still so grateful for yet another thing. I observe in others that, like me, they too have heard sounds and strange voices during their crises, that things also appeared to change before their eyes. And that softens the horror that I retained at first of the crisis I had, and which when it comes to you unexpectedly, cannot but frighten you beyond measure. Once one knows that it's part of the illness one takes it like other things. Had I not seen other mad people at close hand I wouldn't have been able to rid myself of thinking about it all the time. For the sufferings of anguish aren't funny when you're caught in a crisis. Most epileptics bite their tongues and injure them. Rey told me that he had known a case where someone had injured his ear as I did, and I believe I've heard a doctor here who came to see me with the director say that he too had seen it before. I dare to believe that once one knows what it is, once one is aware of one's state and of possibly being subject to crises, that then one can do something about it oneself so as not to be caught so much unawares by the anguish or the terror. Now, this has been diminishing for 5 months, I have good hope of getting over it, or at least of not having crises of such force.

There's one person here who has been shouting and *always* talking, like me, for a fortnight, he thinks he hears voices and words in the echo of the corridors, probably because the auditory nerve is sick and too sensitive, and with me it was both the sight and the hearing at the same time which, according to what Rey said one day, is usual at the beginning of epilepsy.

Now the shock had been such that it disgusted me even to move, and nothing would have been so agreeable to me as never to wake up again. At present this *horror of life* is already less pronounced, and the melancholy less acute. But I still have absolutely no *will*, hardly any desires or none, and everything that has to do with ordinary life, the desire for example to see friends again, about whom I think however, almost nil. That's why I'm not yet at the point where I ought to leave here soon, I would still have melancholy for everything. And it's even only in these very last days that the repulsion for life has changed quite radically. There's still a way to go from there to will and action.

It's a shame that you yourself are still condemned to Paris, and that you never see the countryside other than that around Paris.

[....]

I retain my duties in that respect as much as anyone. And perhaps some day I'll be in a position to repay all that I've spent, because I consider that what I've spent is, if not taken from you at least taken from the family, so consequently I've produced paintings and I'll do more. That is to act as you too act yourself. If I had private means, perhaps my mind would be freer to do art for art's sake, now I content myself with believing that in working assiduously even so, without thinking of it one perhaps makes some progress.

Here are the colours I would need

3	emerald green	}	large tubes
2	cobalt		
1	ultramarine		
1	orange lead	}	
6	zinc white		
5	metres canvas		

Thanking you for your kind letter, I shake your hand warmly, as well as your wife's.

Ever yours,
Vincent

[Letter 779 To Theo van Gogh. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Sunday, 9 June 1889.](#)

(sourced from [Vincent van Gogh, the letters](#))

My dear Theo,

Thanks very much for the consignment of canvases, colours, brushes, tobacco and chocolate, which reached me in good order.¹

I was very glad of it, for I was pining for work a little. Also, for a few days now I've been going outside to work in the neighbourhood.

[....]

One is the countryside that I glimpse from the window of my bedroom. In the foreground a field of wheat, ravaged and knocked to the ground after a storm. A boundary wall and beyond, grey foliage of a few olive trees, huts and hills. Finally, at the top of the painting a large white and grey cloud swamped by the azure.⁶ It's a landscape of extreme simplicity — in terms of coloration as well. It would be suitable as a pendant to that study of the bedroom that's damaged.

When the thing depicted is stylistically absolutely in agreement and at one with the manner of depiction, isn't that what creates the quality of a piece of art?

[....]

As I want to keep this study of the bedroom, if you would send it back to me when I'm sent canvas, rolled up, I'll repaint it. Initially I'd wanted to have it lined because I didn't think I'd be able to do it again. However, as my mind has grown calmer since, I can indeed redo it now.

The thing is, among the number of things that one makes there are always some that one has felt or wanted more and which one wants to keep all the same.

When I see a painting that intrigues me, I can never help asking myself, 'in what house, room, corner of the room, in whose home would it do well, would it be in its rightful place'. Thus the paintings of [Hals](#), [Rembrandt](#), [Vermeer](#) are only at home in the old Dutch house.

[....]

I'm in good health — so-so, I feel happier with my work here than I could outside. By staying here a fairly long time, I'll have acquired controlled behaviour, and in the long run the result will be more order in my life and less impressionability. And that would be something gained. Besides, I wouldn't have the courage to begin again outside. I once went into the village — accompanied, at that. The mere sight of the people and things had an effect on me as if I was going to faint, and I felt very ill. In the face of nature it's the feeling for work that keeps me going. But anyway, that's to tell you that there must have been some over-strong emotion inside me that brought that about, and I have no idea what could have caused it. [2v:6](#)

I'm bored to death at times after work, and yet I have no desire to begin again. The doctor who has just come by says that he won't be going to Paris for a few weeks yet, so don't expect his visit for the time being.

I hope that you'll write to me soon.

This month I'll again really be in need of

8	tubes	silver white
6	"	Veronese Green
2	"	Ultramarine
2	"	Cobalt
2	"	Yellow Ochre
1	"	Red
1	"	Raw Sienna
1	"	Ivory black

It's funny that every time I try to reason with myself in order to get a clear picture of things – why I came here, and that after all it's only an accident like any other – a terrible terror and horror seizes me and prevents me from thinking. It's true that it tends vaguely to diminish, but it also seems to me to prove that there is indeed something, I don't know what, disturbed in my brain. 2v:7 But it's astounding to be afraid of nothing like this, and not to be able to remember.

Only you can count on the fact that I'm doing everything I can to become active and perhaps useful again, in this sense at least, that I want to do better paintings than before.

[...] I hope that you're well. It's a great consolation for me to know that you're no longer living alone.

If one month or another it should be too difficult for you to send me colours, canvas &c., then don't send them, for believe me it's better to live than to do art in an absent-minded way. And before everything else, your house must be neither sad nor dismal. That first and painting next.

[....]

With a really strong handshake to you and your wife.

Ever yours,
Vincent.

[Letter 781: Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh. Paris, Sunday, 16 June 1889.](#)

(sourced from [Vincent van Gogh, the letters](#))

[Letterhead: Goupil and Boussod Paris]

16 June 1889

My dear Vincent,

I should have written to you a long, long time ago but I couldn't put my thoughts into words. There are moments which one feels well, but when it's so difficult to take account of what has taken shape in thought and what is still in a vague state. So I'm not sure of being able to write to you as I wanted today, but my letter will leave all the same, if only to tell you that we often think of you and that your latest paintings have given me a great deal to think about as regards your state of mind when you made them. All of them have a power of colour which you hadn't attained before, which in itself is a rare quality, but you have gone further, and if there are people who occupy themselves seeking the symbol by dint of torturing the form, I find it in many of your canvases through the expression of the summary of your thoughts on nature and living beings, which you feel are so strongly attached to it. But how hard your mind must have worked and how you endangered yourself to the extreme point where vertigo is inevitable. With regard to that, my dear brother, when you tell me that you're working again, which gladdens me on the one hand, because in it you find a means of avoiding the state into which many of the unfortunates fall who are cared for in the establishment where you are, I think of it with a little anxiety, for before your complete recovery you mustn't put yourself at risk in these mysterious regions, which it appears one can touch lightly but not enter with impunity. Don't give yourself more trouble than is necessary, for if you give only a simple account of what you see, there are sufficient good qualities for your canvases to last. Think of the still lifes and of the flowers [Delacroix](#) did when he went to the country to stay with [G. Sand](#). It's true that afterwards he had a reaction by doing the Education of the Virgin, and that's not to say that in doing as I tell you you won't make a masterpiece afterwards. But direct your works in such a way that they don't over-exert you. [...]

The other day a [Rembrandt](#) sketch was sold in a public sale, I would like you to have seen it, it was the figure of the Angel Gabriel standing, which is in the sky of his etching of the annunciation to the shepherds. What a marvel! The colour had remained quite bright; perhaps originally it was all yellow. The shadows were much more coloured than he usually does them, and were probably very pronounced blue, green and violet, but of an exquisite unity and harmony. [...]

[...]

Good health and good handshake from [Jo](#) and from

Theo

[Letter 782 To Theo van Gogh. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, on or about Tuesday, 18 June 1889.](#)

(sourced from [Vincent van Gogh, the letters](#))

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter of yesterday. I too cannot write as I would wish, but anyway we live in such a disturbed age that there can be no question of having opinions that are firm enough to judge things. I would have very much liked to know if you now still eat together at the restaurant or if you live at home more. I hope so, for in the long run that must be the best.

As for me, it's going well – you'll understand that after almost half a year now of absolute sobriety in eating, drinking, smoking, with two two-hour baths a week recently, this must clearly calm one down a great deal. So it's going very well, and as regards work, it occupies and distracts me – which I need very much – far from wearing me out.

[...]

I despair of ever finding models. Ah, if I had some from time to time like that one, or like the woman who posed for the *Berceuse*,⁴ I'd do something quite different.

I think you did the right thing by not exhibiting paintings of mine at the exhibition by Gauguin and others. There's reason enough for me to abstain from doing so without offending them as long as I'm not cured myself.

For me it's beyond doubt that Gauguin and Bernard have great and real merit.

It's still perfectly understandable, though, that for beings like them, really alive and young, who *must* live and try to carve out their path, it's impossible to turn all their canvases to the wall until it pleases people to admit them somewhere in the official pickle. One causes a stir by exhibiting in the cafés, which I don't say isn't in bad taste. But for myself, I have that crime on my conscience, and to the point of doing it twice, having exhibited at the Tambourin and at avenue de Clichy. Not counting the disturbance caused to 81 virtuous cannibals of the good town of Arles and to their excellent mayor.

So in any case, I am worse and more blameworthy than they are in that regard (causing a stir quite involuntarily, my word).

[...]

At last I have a landscape with olive trees,⁷ and also a new study of a starry sky.⁸

Although I haven't seen the latest canvases either by Gauguin or Bernard, I'm fairly sure that these two studies I speak of are comparable in sentiment. When you've seen these two studies for a while, as well as the one of the ivy, I'll perhaps be able to give you, better than in words, an idea of the things Gauguin, Bernard and I sometimes chatted about and that preoccupied us. It's not a return to the romantic or to religious ideas, no. However, by going the way of Delacroix, more than it seems, by colour and a more determined drawing than *trompe-l'oeil* precision, one might express a country nature that is purer than the suburbs, the bars of Paris. One might try to paint human beings who are also more serene and purer than

Daumier had before him. But of course following Daumier in the drawing of it. We'll leave aside whether that exists or doesn't exist, but we believe that nature extends beyond St-Ouen.

[....]

If you can get the Bedroom lined it's better to have it done *before* sending it to me.

I have no more white at all at all.

You'll give me a lot of pleasure if you write to me again soon. I so often think that after a while you'll find in marriage, I hope, the means to gain new strength, and that a year from now your health will have improved.

What I'd very much like to have here to read from time to time would be a Shakespeare. There's one priced at one shilling, Dicks' Shilling Shakespeare, which is complete. There's no shortage of editions, and I think the cheap ones have been changed less than the more expensive ones. In any case I wouldn't want one that cost more than three francs.

Now, whatever is too bad in the consignment, put it completely to one side, pointless to have stuff like that; it may be of use to me later to remind me of things. Whatever is good will show up better by being part of a smaller number of canvases. The rest, if you put them in a corner, flat between two sheets of cardboard with old newspapers between the studies, that's all they're worth.

I'm sending you a roll of drawings.

Handshakes to you, to Jo and to our friends.

Ever yours,
Vincent