

Dear Theo,

This week I have been working hard on a large drawing which I sent you a little sketch of.

When I was with Rappard, he said, "Those very first drawings of yours were good after all; you ought to make some again in the same way."

Do you remember that in the very beginning I sent you some sketches, "Winter Tale," "Shadows Passing," etc.?

You said at the time that the action of the figures was not well enough expressed, do you remember? That was quite true, but now for several years I have drudged exclusively on the figure to get some action and structure into it. And because of that very drudgery I had somehow lost the strong desire to compose and to let the imagination work.

When Rappard spoke with a certain warmth about that very first time, it awoke again. Now, superficial though this little sketch may be, I think you will find something of that very first sentiment back in it, but now with more action.

These are "Peat Cutters" in the dunes – the original drawing is about one meter by half a meter [F 1031, JH 363].

It is a splendid bit of scenery from which one can draw an infinite number of subjects. I have been there very often recently, and made all kinds of studies of it. Rappard saw them, but when he was here, we did not yet know how to put them together. I have figured out this composition since then. And once I had, it came off pretty well, and at four o'clock in the morning I was already at work on it in my garret.

Having started composing once again, I intend to go on with it and to carry out some which I have in my head and for which I have already made the studies. I have made preparations for it by ordering some stretchers and also a large wooden frame to be able to work in the frame and shut it ¹ off. I hope that when this is finished, you will not mind taking it with you some day to show to the illustration people, and that such a thing will please you more than those single studies.

But I can't tell beforehand, and we shall see how it is when you come. But, boy, I am so glad that I have been able to start this before you come. We can speak better about the future now.

I want so much to make something comforting, something that makes one think.

You know that one of the pictures I think most beautiful of all is "The Walk on the Ramparts" by Leys. That style, however, is not the fashion nowadays, but the sentiment in it has something eternal; one may have different conceptions of reality, of nature, and yet find again, even now, what was more generally sought after and felt in Leys's time than now. But it demands continuous effort to express what one feels and to get it into shape.

I cannot tell you how that visit to Rappard has cheered me; I like his work so much, and when I was with him, he said it had also done him good to be with me. By talking together, we have got new ideas.

I wish you could meet Rappard again when you come to Holland. I think in his studio, as well as in mine, you would get an impression more reminiscent of what one used to see in the studios than of what one sees at present.

Yet I think it will have your sympathy.

Right now Rappard is working on a kind of smithy, and last winter he painted "The Asylum for the Blind" and "The Tile Painters." All of them have style and are serious and original, I think.

You understand all this causes me many expenses. Without the money I got from Rappard, I should not have been able to undertake this.

And though I have studies for it, I still need models continually, and the progress depends on whether I have money to pay them.

I have a few more in mind, but I'm getting short of money again.

You see, whenever I have a bit of luck, I immediately make use of it to undertake a thing that would otherwise have miscarried.

So whenever you can spare it, do send me something extra if possible.

This "Peat Cutters" is quite different from "Le Paradou," but I assure you I also feel for "Le Paradou." Who knows, someday I may attack such a Paradou subject.

Write soon if you haven't written already.

When you see the drawing, I don't think you will find it too large. The proportions of the figures is such that one can put some vigour into them, and each of them demands a special study. I have studies for all the figures that appear in it. I made this drawing with charcoal and crayon and printer's ink.

Well, good luck and write soon. A few days ago I was with Van der Weele in the dunes. There we found a spot where they were digging sand from the dunes, a splendid thing with diggers and wheelbarrows.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

[Sketch "Peat Cutters" F 1030, JH 364 was enclosed with letter]