

Letter 465  
Arles, 26 – 28 February 1888

My dear Theo,

Will you read the letter I have written to Mr. Tersteeg, and will you send it to him with a letter of your own if you think it is a good move? You see, my idea was that we must try something in this direction, because we shall have a hold over Reid through Van Wisselingh, and over Van Wisselingh through Tersteeg. And this you will explain to Tersteeg yourself. Since I am dependent on you, and you yourself get your own income from the Boussod Valadon people, I do not want to do anything against that firm. On the contrary, I ask nothing better than that the business you began in the shop on the boulevard should go on and increase in importance.

But you need the support of other employees of the firm. If Tersteeg refuses to have anything to do with it, we still have Reid and Wisselingh as English agents. You know that Van Wisselingh married a daughter of a picture dealer in Glasgow, a business rival of Reid's. If Reid takes up the impressionists, if he finds a jumping-off ground there, and if he tries to do this in opposition to us, from that moment we have the right to put his rival up to it. But if Wisselingh ever takes it up, and above all if now or later you have a chat with Wisselingh about it, then Tersteeg could at once reproach you – "And why, sir, when you took up the impressionists, did you keep the firm that employs you in the dark?"

So you must speak to Tersteeg about it at once, and to save you the trouble of writing a long letter, this time I have done it myself. You can make it all complete by adding a vague remark about Reid and the impressionists, and the interest that Wisselingh may come to have in the final outcome of this affair.

And I have said in the postscript that in view of the low prices compared with the interest the pictures offer, Tersteeg could easily dispose of fifty or so for us in Holland; besides, he will be obliged to have some of them, because if they are already being talked about in Antwerp and Brussels, they will likewise be talked about in Amsterdam and The Hague before long.

Finally, what I propose in the letter should not be very disagreeable either to Tersteeg or yourself; you will pilot him round the studios, and he will see for himself that next year people will start talking, and will go on talking about the new school long enough. If, however, you think my letter ill timed, you have my full permission to burn it. Only if you send it, suggest the same thing to him yourself.

You know very well, however, that Tersteeg is as much at home in the English business as a fish out of water, so that it is perfectly possible that he might be the person to direct the sale of these new pictures over there. As a matter of fact, in this way Tersteeg and the London agent would have a permanent exhibition of the impressionists in London, you in Paris, and I should begin in Marseilles; but Tersteeg must see plenty of them for himself first, and that is why it is desirable that you should take him on a grand tour of the studios, and explain to him the whole importance of the business as you go.

The association of the artists will come about all the more easily since Tersteeg will have no objection to our having the artist's interests at heart, especially not to our wanting to raise the net price of the picture; after all, there would be no market for it if it cost nothing.

In any case we must speak out boldly now, don't you think? And Mesdag and the rest must give up ridiculing the impressionists. In any case it will be a good thing to have Tersteeg interviewed on the subject.

You see, in my opinion the whole crux of the matter in England is this: either the artists give their work away at a wretched price to the dealers there, or else they combine, and choose for themselves intelligent agents who won't fleece them. Now think it over and send the letter or burn it as you think best. I am not absolutely set on its being sent, but should very much like to see Tersteeg in this, because he has the necessary assurance.

With a good handshake, Vincent

I have done another study.