

Letter 134  
Cuesmes, 20 August 1880

Dear Theo,

If I am not mistaken, you must still have “Les Travaux des Champs” by Millet. Would you be so kind as to lend them to me for a short time, and send them by mail?

I must tell you that I am busy sketching large drawings after Millet, and that I have already finished “The Four Hours of the Day” as well as “The Sower.” Well, perhaps if you saw them, you would not be altogether dissatisfied. Now if you send me “Les Travaux des Champs,” you might perhaps add some other prints by, or after, Millet, Breton, Feyen-Perrin, etc. Do not buy them for this purpose, but lend me what you have.

Send me what you can, and do not fear for me. If I can only continue to work, somehow or other it will see me right again. Your doing this will help me a great deal. If you should take a trip to Holland, I hope you will not pass by here without coming to see the sketches.

I write to you while I am busy drawing, and I am in a hurry to go back to it, so good night, and send me the prints as soon as possible, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

C/o Charles Decrucq,  
Rue du Pavillon 3, Cuesmes.

The Millets which I copied are, “The Four Hours of the Day,” the size is almost that of a page from the Cours de Dessin Bargue. You will understand well enough what I want without my telling you, but I’ll tell you anyway, so you’ll know what I really think. It is especially studies of the figure like “The Diggers” by Millet, or the lithograph after his “Le Vanneur” [The Winnower] and figures by Brion, Frère, or Feyen-Perrin, or Jules Breton. I think that you might perhaps find just what I want at the Alliance des Arts, where they sell lithographs of contemporary artists cheaply. One print which I should like to have immensely is the large etching by Daubigny after Ruysdael, “Le Buisson” [The Copse], which is sold at the chalcographic cabinet of the Louvre.

I have sketched a drawing representing miners, men and women, going to the shaft in the morning through the snow, by a path along a thorn hedge: passing shadows, dimly visible in the twilight. In the background the large mine buildings and the heaps of clinkers stand out vaguely against the sky. I am sending you a hasty sketch so you can see what it is like. But I feel the need to study the drawing of the figure from masters like Millet, Breton, Brion, or Boughton, or others. What do you think of the sketch – do you think the idea good?

Among Bingham’s photographs of pictures by J. Breton, if I remember correctly, there is one representing gleaners: dark silhouettes against a red sky at sunset. Well, these are the things I want to study. It is because I think you would rather see me doing some good work than nothing that I write to you on this subject, and perhaps it might be a reason for restoring the entente cordiale and the sympathy between us, and make us of some use to one another.

I should like very much to do that drawing over again, better than it is now. In the one I have done already, such as it is, the figures could be 10 cm. high. The pendant represents the return of the miners, but it did not turn out so well; it is very difficult, being an effect of brown silhouettes, just touched by light, against a mottled sky at sunset.

Send me “Les Travaux des Champs” by return mail if you can and will. I wrote a note to Mr. Tersteeg to ask him if perhaps there was a chance of my having for a time the Exercices au Fusain, by Bargue – that is, the studies from the nude, which you know. I do not know whether he will send them or not, but in case he should not be willing to, could you put in a word for me? For those Exercices au Fusain would be of immense service to me. But perhaps he will do me the favour of sending at least a few sheets, if not the whole course.