

Letter 144
Etten, 30 April 1881

Dear Theo,

My best wishes for your birthday. I often think of your visit; I am glad that we saw each other again, and hope you will come back this summer. I have been here a few days now and it is splendid outdoors, but the weather does not as yet permit drawing in the open air every day. Meanwhile, I have started on the Millets. The Semur is finished [F 830, JH 001] and I have sketched the Quatre heures de la journée. And now I still have to do les Travaux des champs.

As you know there was an exhibition of watercolours in Brussels – it was rather interesting. Among the Dutch there were 4 or 5 Mauves, “Woodcutters”; J. Maris, “Dunes,” like a picture by Ruysdael or Van de Velde; then J. H. Weissenbruch, 5 superb large drawings; Roelofs, also 5 large ones; then Gabriël, and Van de Sande Bakhuyzen, and Valkenburg, and Van Trigt, and P. Stortenbeker, and Vogel, etc.

Then there was a Mesdag that kept one from looking at any other drawing, at least it did for me. The beach at twilight, stormy weather, a sky with grey clouds, and the ruddy glow of the setting sun. In the foreground a fisherman on horseback – a tall, strange, dark silhouette standing out against the white foaming waves. This figure is speaking with people aboard a fishing smack that is riding on the waves in the middle distance. On deck some people are busy with a lantern, and they are talking to the man on horseback, apparently about the anchor which he must come and take ashore. It is a large, important drawing, done broadly and so vigorous that, as I told you, nothing else can really be compared to it.

There were two drawings by Ter Meulen which struck me, too, “Sheep in the Dunes” and “Sheep in the Snow”; he is progressing well. If I remember correctly, I saw that man at Bakhuyzen’s studio, drudging and plodding along, and yet he has arrived now, at least these two drawings were excellent. Then there were drawings by Meunier: “Varlet dans une Grange” [Peasant Boy in a Barn], refined in colour and tone, and also in conception, reminding one of Millet, for instance, in its simplicity and faithfulness to nature; and also “A Stoker” and “A Factory Hand.” There were several drawings by Rochussen, too, and many others; but of the Belgians, only Meunier appealed to me.

Rappard is going to Holland in three weeks, and this summer he will probably work in the country, then perhaps go to Paris next winter; but right now it looks as though he’s not going to stay there. I think he got a cold shower there at one time, but that’s no reason why he shouldn’t be more fortunate next time. It certainly is true that he’s made great progress since then.

I am very glad things have been arranged so that I shall be able to work here quietly for a while. I hope to make as many studies as I can, for that is the seed which must later produce the drawings.

Write to me now and then and, if possible, keep me informed of the things that strike you; and if you should hear of a vacancy for a draughtsman, think of me.

And now it is mail time. I will let you know what I am doing, and I hope you will occasionally advise me on what subjects to choose for drawing; sometimes it will be of use to me, sometimes, perhaps not – but tell me what you think. I will do the same for you, and then on both sides we must try to sift the chaff from the grain. Adieu, a handshake in thought,

Vincent