

Letter 149
Etten, August/September 1881

Dear Theo,

I have just come back from a trip to The Hague. I am home alone tonight, as Father and Mother are still a Prinsenhage. So it is a good opportunity to tell you about everything.

I left here Tuesday, and now it is Friday night.

At The Hague I went to see Mr. Tersteeg, Mauve and De Bock. Mr. Tersteeg was very kind, and said he thought I had made progress. As I had again copied the whole series of Exercices au Fusain, 1 – 60, I brought them with me, and it was especially in reference to them that he made the remark; he at least attaches some value to my making them, also to my occasionally copying a figure by Millet, Boughton or others, which most people do not approve of at all.

So then I got some satisfaction from that work, too.

I spent an afternoon and part of an evening with Mauve, and saw many beautiful things in his studio. My own drawings seemed to interest Mauve more. He gave me a great many hints which I was glad to get, and I have arranged to come back to see him in a relatively short time when I have some new studies. He showed me a whole lot of his studies and explained them to me – not sketches for drawings or pictures, but real studies, things that seemed of little importance. He thinks I should start painting now.

I enjoyed meeting De Bock; I was at his studio. He is painting a large picture of the dunes which has much that is fine in it. But in my opinion the fellow must practice drawing figures in order to produce even finer things. It seems to me he has a real artist's temperament and that we have not heard the last of him. He raves about Millet and Corot, but didn't these two work hard on figures – yes or no? Corot's figures aren't so well known as his landscapes, but it cannot be denied that he has done them. Besides, Corot drew and modelled every tree trunk with the same devotion and love as if it were a figure. And a tree by Corot is something quite different from one by De Bock. One of the best things I saw of De Bock's was a copy of a Corot. It's unlikely that it would be taken for an original, but it was very seriously done – more seriously than many a false Corot less noticeably different from the real thing.

Then I went to see Mesdag's Panorama with him; it is a work that deserves all respect. It reminded me of a remark, I think by Burger (or Thoré) about The Anatomy Lesson by Rembrandt: le seul défaut de ce tableau est de ne pas avoir de défaut. [This picture's only fault is that it has no fault.] The three drawings by Mesdag at the exhibition had perhaps more faults, but aroused immediate sympathy, at least it was so with me.

Speaking of the exhibition, there was a splendid drawing by Israëls, "Sewing Class at Katwijk"; Mauve, "A Plough" – splendid – "Sheep in the Dunes," and then a single figure – a labourer resting in the field at twilight. Artz had three drawings there if I remember correctly: a scene in an almshouse, old men and women eating porridge – very important, very well and seriously done; also two studies of heads, full of character – a man and woman from Scheveningen. Among Weissenbruch's was a drawing of water lilies, so simple, so full of style, of understanding and love, that many drawings by others were lost beside it. But this exhibition shows clearly that there are many clever landscape painters among the younger artists. Including Duchâtel [Du Chattel] and Neuhuys. Albert Neuhuys had a large figure drawing which was splendid, a girl and two children.

Clara Montalba's work was new to me. Hers is a peculiar talent – in some respects it reminds me of Rochussen.

At Mr. Tersteeg's I also saw many fine things by Valkenburg, Neuhuys, etc., etc. J. Maris had beautiful things at the exhibition, for instance, two little girls in white at a piano and a mill in the snow. I met Willem Maris at De Bock's. What a beautiful sketch the latter has by him, a road in winter with a little figure under an umbrella.

By chance Bosboom saw my studies and gave me some hints about them. I only wish I had more opportunity to receive such hints. Bosboom is one of those people who has the ability to impart knowledge to others and make things clear to them. There were three or four good drawings of his at the exhibition.

I stayed in The Hague until Thursday morning, then I went to Dordrecht because from the train I had seen a spot I wanted to draw – a row of windmills. Though it was raining, I managed to finish it, and so at least I have a souvenir from my little trip. [JH0015, F0850]

At Stam's I found Ingres paper twice as thick as the ordinary kind, one can work better on it. But alas, it's white. Would there be any chance of your sending some of that same kind, but the colour of unbleached muslin or linen? Like a few of the sheets that were in that lot you bought me before, and like those on

which the Exercices au Fusain are printed. Before beginning to draw on the white paper, one must first wash the whole page with a flat tone.

So I have been to The Hague; perhaps it was the beginning of a renewed and closer acquaintance with Mauve and others. I hope so. A handshake in thought; my warm thanks for your faithful help in this matter – because of the expenses perhaps I never would have gone, or at least postponed it.

Yours, Vincent

De Bock was very pleased with the drawings by Millet which he bought from you.