

My dear Theo,

I was very pleased to get your letter just now, and as I intended to write to you anyhow in the next day or so, I am replying right away.

I'm so glad you've sent the Ingres paper. I've still got some left, but not the right colour.

I was happy to hear what Mr. Tersteeg said about my drawings, and certainly no less glad that you saw progress yourself in the sketches I sent you. If it is indeed so, I mean to work to such an effect that neither you nor Mr. T. will have any reason to take back your more favourable opinions. I shall do my very best not to let you down.

The artist always comes up against resistance from nature in the beginning, but if he really takes her seriously he will not be put off by that opposition, on the contrary, it is all the more incentive to win her over – at heart, nature and the honest draughtsman are as one. (Nature is most certainly “intangible,” yet one must come to grips with her and do so with a firm hand.) And having wrestled and struggled with nature for some time now, I find her more yielding and submissive, not that I have got there yet, no one is further from thinking that than I am, but things are beginning to come more easily.

The struggle with nature is sometimes a bit like what Shakespeare calls “the taming of the shrew” (which means wearing down the opposition, *bon gré et mal gré* [willy-nilly]). In many fields, but especially in drawing, I think that “*serrer de près vaut mieux que lâcher*” [persistence is better than surrender].

I have come to feel more and more that figure drawing is an especially good thing to do, and that indirectly it also has a good effect on landscape drawing. If one draws a pollard willow as if it were a living being, which after all is what it really is, then the surroundings follow almost by themselves, provided only that one has focused all one's attention on that particular tree and not rested until there was some life in it.

Enclosed are a few small sketches. I'm doing quite a bit of work on the Leurs road these days. Working with watercolour and sepia now and then too, but that isn't coming off too well yet.

Mauve has gone to Drenthe. We've agreed that I'll go and see him there as soon as he writes, but perhaps he'll come and spend a day at Prinsenhage first.

I went to see the Fabritius in Rotterdam on my last trip, and I'm glad you had a chance to see that Mesdag drawing among other things. If the drawing by Mrs. Mesdag you mention is of yellow roses on a mossy ground, then I saw it at the exhibition and it is indeed very beautiful and artistic.

What you say about De Bock is, I think, true in every respect. I take the same view of him, but could not have put it as well as you did in your letter. If he could and wanted to concentrate, he would certainly be a better artist than he is. I told him straight out, “De Bock, if you and I were to apply ourselves to figure drawing for a year, then we would both end up quite different from what we are now, but if we do not apply ourselves and simply carry on without learning anything new, then we won't even stay as we are but will lose ground. If we don't draw figures, or trees as if they were figures, then we have no backbone, or rather one that's too weak. Could Millet and Corot, of whom we both think so much, draw figures, or couldn't they? I think those Masters tackled just about anything.” And he agreed with me about this, in part at least.

In fact, I think he's been working very hard on the Panorama, and even though he refuses to admit it, that too will have a generally favourable effect on him.

He told me a very funny thing about the Panorama, which made me feel very warmly toward him. You know the painter Destreé? He went up to De Bock with a very superior air, and said to him, with great disdain, of course, yet in an unctuous and insufferably patronizing way, “De Bock, they asked me to paint that Panorama, too, but seeing it was lacking in any artistic worth I felt I simply had to refuse.”

To which De Bock retorted: “Mr. Destreé, which is easier, painting a Panorama, or refusing to paint one? Which is more artistic, doing it or not doing it?” I'm not sure if those were his precise words, but that was certainly the gist of it, and I thought it straight and to the point.

And I respect it as much as I respect your way of dealing with the older and wiser members of your society, whom you have left to their own old age and wisdom while you yourself have got on with things in your younger and more energetic way. That is true philosophy and makes us act as De Bock and you do when the need arises; it can be said of such philosophy that it is practical as well, in the same way as Mauve says, “Painting is drawing as well.”

I've filled up my paper, so I shall end and go out for a walk. My warmest thanks for all your efforts on my behalf, a handshake in my thoughts, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Enclosed with this letter were sketches JH 058, Road with Pollard Willows, and JH 060, Man putting Potatoes in a Sack]