

Amice Rappard,

In my opinion your letter must be answered on the spot. In the first place I want you to know that it interests me very much – more than any other letter I have received from you – I learned more from it than you yourself meant to write down.

I learned from it that my friend Rappard has taken a great step forward, or will do so shortly. Why? Oh, it doesn't matter right now, but I have my reasons for believing that you have reached a point of revolution and reform. Ça ira! Within a short time there will be fire and enthusiasm in you. Ça ira! But for the moment not another word about it in this letter.

But if by chance you should be surprised at what I have told you, I hope to be able to tell you more soon in person.

For in any case I expect to see you soon, whether you come by way of Breda or Rozendaal.

In the first place, on my parents' behalf I invite you to come and stay with us one of these days, for a longer or shorter time. So it is not necessary for you to ask if it is convenient, you will only have to write: I shall come on this or that day by this or that train.

If it is impossible for you to come and stay a few days, then I count on your skipping a train, either at the station at Breda or at Rozendaal, and on your letting me know by letter or postcard the hour and place of your arrival. Then I shall be on the spot according to your information. And then I shall bring along a number of drawings, the large one, "Worn out," and several others that you do not know at all. I need not tell you that I hope that on the same occasion you on your part will show me some of your watercolours, as I am anxious to see them.

Look, we really must arrange to meet somehow one of these days. There is only one thing which might prevent me from coming to the station on the day of your passing through, but it is most unlikely that it should happen just on that very day. It is like this: Mauve is going to Prinsenhage for a day, and after that he will come and spend a day here. We hope it will happen soon, but we don't yet know which day it will be. And when Mauve is here, I go where Mauve goes. Suppose you were staying here when Mauve came, would you think that so unpleasant? I don't think you would; I don't know whether you know Mauve personally, but I think meeting him or meeting him again would be a good thing indeed. Mauve gave me courage when I needed it not long ago. He is a man of genius.

Now you are thinking seriously of going to Brussels until Christmas to paint from the nude.

Well, in your case I can well understand it, and especially in your present mood I shall see you go with an easy mind. Ce que doit arriver arrivera – what must happen will happen.

Whether you go to Brussels or not, some new flame will be kindled in you. Ça ira, and your going to Brussels or not will make little difference, but the caterpillar will become a butterfly; in this I am speaking like a fellow adventurer.

I feel sure you need not think that a few days' stay at Etten would mean a neglect of duty; on the contrary, you may take it for granted that it will be devoting yourself to duty, for neither you nor I should be idle here.

You can do some figure drawing here too if you want to. I am not sure whether I told you that my uncle at Prinsenhage saw the little sketches in your letter and thought them very good, and noticed with pleasure that you are making progress in figure drawing as well as in landscape.

I am of the opinion, Rappard, that in the beginning you should work from the clothed model. Most certainly one must have a sound knowledge of the nude, but in reality we have to do with figures with clothes on. Unless you intend to go the way of Baudry, Lefebvre, Henner, and so many others who specialize in the nude. Of course in that case you should study the nude almost exclusively; in that case the more you confine yourself to it and concentrate on it, the better. But in point of fact, I do not think you will take this road. You have too much liking for other things. You think a poor woman gathering potatoes in a field, a digger, a sower, a little lady in the street or at home, too beautiful not to feel the impulse to attack them in quite a different manner than you have done up to now. You have too much feeling for colour, too keen a perception of tone, you are too much of a landscapist to follow in Baudry's footsteps. The more so because I believe that you, Rappard, will ultimately decide to settle down in Holland too. You are too much of a Dutchman to become a Baudry. But I certainly think it excellent that you paint such beautiful studies from the nude as the two big ones I know – the reclining pose and the brown seated figure – and I wish I had done them myself. I am telling you my thoughts unreservedly, and you on your part must always tell me yours unreservedly too. Your remark about the figure of the Sower – that he is not a man who is sowing, but one who is posing as a sower – is very true [F857, JH 032].

However, I look upon my present studies purely as studies after the model, they have no pretension to being anything else.

Only after a year or a couple of years shall I have gained the ability to do a sower who is sowing; there I agree with you.

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You tell me, Rappard, that you have done hardly anything for a fortnight. Surely I know these “fortnights”; I had them myself last summer. I did not work at drawing directly – but indirectly I did; what I did was go through one of those periods of metamorphosis.

I saw Mesdag's “Panorama.” I was there with the painter De Bock, who collaborated on it, and he told me of an incident that happened after the Panorama was finished and that I thought quite funny.

Perhaps you know the painter Destrée. Between you and me and the lamppost: the incarnation of mealy-mouthed arrogance. Well, one day this gentleman came up to De Bock and said to him, very haughtily, very blandly, very condescendingly, “De Bock, I was invited to paint that Panorama too, but because it was so inartistic, I refused.” To which De Bock answered, “Mr. Destrée, what is easier, to paint a Panorama or to refuse to paint a Panorama? What is more artistic, to do a thing or not to do it?” I thought this answer very much to the point

I have good news from my brother Theo – he sends his kind regards. Do not neglect to keep up your acquaintance with him by writing him once in a while. He is a clever, energetic fellow, and I am very sorry he isn't a painter, although it is a good thing for the painters that there are such persons as he. This you will find out if you keep up your acquaintance with him.

And now I shall say, “See you soon.” Shall I? And believe me, with a handshake in thought,
Ever yours, Vincent

I am looking for a poem, I think by Tom Hood, “The Song of the Shirt”; do you happen to know it, or do you see your way to hunting it up for me? If you know it, I should like to ask you to write it out for me.

After I had closed this letter I opened it again to tell you that, although I quite understand your having made your plans, yet I want you to consider whether you will positively carry them out after all.

Speaking my mind unreservedly, I say to you, Rappard, stay here. But of course there may be reasons of which I am ignorant but which are weighty enough to make you decide on that plan.

Therefore, speaking only from an artistic point of view, I tell you that in my opinion you as a Dutchman will feel most at home in the Dutch intellectual climate, and will get more satisfaction from working after the character of this country (whether it be figure or landscape) than by concentrating on and specializing in the nude.

Although I like Baudry and others, such as Lefebvre and Henner, too – I greatly prefer Jules Breton, Feyen-Perrin, Millet, Ulysse Butin, Mauve, Artz, Israëls, etc., etc.

And I am speaking in this way because I am positive that fundamentally this is your opinion too. And though you have seen a lot, it is certain that I at least have not seen less than you of different kinds of art. Particularly seeing that I, though loosely speaking only a beginner in the art of drawing, am a pretty good judge of art in general, you should not take my opinion too lightly the few times I give it. And as I see it, both you and I cannot do better than work after nature in Holland (figure and landscape). Then we are ourselves, then we feel at home, then we are in our element. The more we know of what is happening abroad, the better, but we must never forget that we have our roots in the Dutch soil.

If I am not mistaken, you have made good progress with your work for Mr. Lantsheer; at least I am pleased to hear that he spoke that way about your picture at Arti. He has a clear eye for art, and there are not many who have so much knowledge and good taste.