

Letter 178
The Hague, Friday 3 March 1882

My dear Theo,

Since I received your letter and the money, I have had a model every day and am now up to my ears in work.

I've a new model now, though I had done a hasty drawing of her once before. Or rather, there is more than one model, for I have already had 3 individuals from the same family, a woman of about 45 who is just like a figure by Ed. Frère, and her daughter, about 30, and a younger child of 10 or 12. They are poor people and, I must say, splendidly willing. I only managed to get them to agree to pose with some difficulty and on condition that I promise them regular work. Well, that was exactly what I wanted so badly myself, so I consider the deal a good one.

The younger woman's face isn't beautiful, because she has had smallpox, but the figure is very graceful and I find it rather charming. They have the right clothes, too, black merino and a nice style in bonnets and a beautiful shawl, etc.

You needn't worry too much about the money because I reached an agreement with them at the beginning. I promised that I would give them a guilder a day as soon as I sold something. And that I shall make up then for paying too little now.

But I simply must sell something. If I could afford to, I would keep everything that I am doing now for myself, since if I could just keep it for a year, I feel sure I would get more for it.

But anyway, in the circumstances I should find it very gratifying if Mr. Tersteeg did take something now and then, if necessary on condition that it will be exchanged if it isn't sold. Mr. Tersteeg has promised to come round to see me as soon as he can find the time.

The reason I should like to keep them is simply this. When I draw individual figures, it is always with a view to a composition with more figures, for instance a 3rd-class waiting room, or a pawnshop, or an interior. But the larger compositions must mature gradually, and for a drawing with, let's say, 3 seamstresses, one might have to draw 90 seamstresses. Voilà l'affaire. [There you have it.]

I have had a kind note from C. M. with a promise that he will be coming to The Hague soon and visit me then. Well, it's just another promise, but perhaps something will come of it. We'll see.

For the rest I'm going to run after people less and less, dealers or painters, it doesn't matter who they are. The only people I shall run after will be models, since I'm sure that working without a model is quite wrong, at least for me.

It's gratifying, isn't it, Theo, when there's a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm seeing a little bit of light now. It's gratifying to draw a human being, something alive – it may be damned difficult, but it's wonderful anyway.

Tomorrow I shall be giving a children's party, two children whom I have to entertain and draw at the same time. I want there to be some life in my studio and already have all sorts of acquaintances in the neighbourhood. On Sunday I am having a boy from the orphanage, a real type, but unfortunately I can only get him for a short time.

It may be true that I don't have the knack of getting on with people who are sticklers for etiquette, but on the other hand perhaps I get on better with poor or common folk, and what I lose on the one hand I gain on the other. Sometimes I just leave it at that and think: after all, it's right and proper that I should live like an artist in the surroundings I'm sensitive to and am trying to express. Honni soit qui mal y pense.

Here we are at the beginning of another month, and although it's not yet a month since you sent me something, I would ask you to be kind enough to send me some more soon, if you can. It doesn't have to be 100 frs. all at once, but just a little to be going on with between now and when you can send the rest. I mention this because you said in a previous letter that you wouldn't be able to raise any money until after stocktaking.

It grieves me sometimes when I realize I'm going to have to keep a model waiting, because they need it so badly. So far I have been paying them, but next week I shan't be able to. But I'll be able to get a model anyway, either the old woman or the younger one or the child.

Incidentally, Breitner mentioned you to me the other day, saying there was something he was very sorry for and which he thought you might still be cross about. Apparently, he still has a drawing that belongs to you, but I didn't understand exactly what it was all about. He is at work on a large affair, a market that will be full of figures. Last night I went out with him to look for different types of figures on the street so as to do a study of them later with a model in the studio. I've drawn an old woman in this way whom I saw on the Geest, where the madhouse is [F 913, JH 109].

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Well, bonsoir, I hope to hear from you soon,
Ever yours, Vincent

I had to pay the rent too this week. Good-night, it's two o'clock already and I haven't finished yet.