

Letter 220
The Hague, 26 July 1882
Wednesday morning

Dear Theo,

I do not want you to imagine my being in a depressed or abnormal mood. And therefore I already wrote you in my last letter about my work, and as I have to ask you a few things in connection with it, I will not put off writing again. When you come, I want to try and show you some watercolours done in different ways. Then we can see and talk over what you think is best. So I work regularly on that every day, and will continue to do so until you come. I have now made three of Scheveningen, also the "Fish Drying Barns," which you know – drawn as elaborately – but now there is colour too. I am sure you know, Theo, that it is not more difficult to work in colour than in black and white; indeed, perhaps the reverse, for as far as I can see, three-fourths of it depends on the original sketch, and almost the whole watercolour rests on its quality.

It is not sufficient to give an *à peu près*; it was and is my aim to intensify it.

In the black-and-white "Fish Drying Barns" that is already apparent, I think, for in them you can follow everything and trace the composition of the whole. And look here, I think the reason for my working so much more easily in watercolours is that I have tried so hard and for such a long time to draw more correctly.

Tersteeg called my activities a waste of time, but you will soon see that I have gained time. I already feel it now, and when you come, you will see it for yourself.

This evening I made the rounds of all the shops, looking for the thick Ingres paper, but had no luck. They have the thin kind, but not the thick or "double." Some time ago I bought out all of Stam's supply, and since it had been in stock for some time, it had turned a fine colour. When you come, do try to bring some for me. And if you cannot get it, ask for papier de la forme, which is cream coloured, strong, and one can wash on it. I also think it is much cheaper than Harding or Whatman, so that in the long run it saves a great deal.

When you come, I know a few beautiful paths through the meadows where it is so quiet and restful that I am sure you will like it. There I discovered old and new labourers' cottages and other houses that are characteristic, with little gardens by the water's edge, very cosy. I will go and draw there early tomorrow morning. It is a road which runs through the meadows of the Schenkweg to Enthoven's factory or the Zieke.

I saw a dead willow trunk there, just the thing for Barye, for instance. It was hanging over a pool that was covered with reeds, quite alone and melancholy, greenish, yellowish, but mostly a dull black, with bare white spots and knotted branches. I am going to attack it tomorrow morning.

I also did a bleaching-ground at Scheveningen right on the spot, washed in at one sitting, almost without preparation, on a piece of very coarse Torchon (unbleached linen) [F None, JH 163]. Enclosed a few small sketches of it.

About the time of your arrival I will have some things to show you. I think you will like that "Fish Drying Barn" now that it is done in colour [F 945, JH 160].

Be sure, boy, that I am quite my old self again, and be sure I believe that all depends on the work, and that I consider everything in direct relation to it. The new studio is a great improvement on the old one; it makes work easier, and it is much better for posing especially because one can take a greater distance.

I am sure that the extra rent I pay is made up for by better work.

But I have a favour to ask. I could very well understand, and it would be very natural if, instead of sending money on the first of August, you gave it to me when you came, for instance on the seventh of August. But as I bought paper and paint and brushes as soon as I received your last letter, and shall need a few other things about the first of August, I beg you kindly to send me the money about the first, though you will be coming soon after. For I figured it out exactly, and I shall be absolutely penniless after the first few days of August. I hope it will not be inconvenient for you. Of course I am not asking for more, but I am asking you to send it on time, on the first day of August if possible, if not, in the first days of the month.

I also have a second drawing of the Rijswijk meadow, in which the same subject gets quite a different aspect through a change of viewpoint [F927, JH 161].

You see I am quite taken up by landscape, but it is because Sien is not yet fit to pose; nevertheless, the figure remains the principal thing for me.

When you come, I shall take care to be near the house as long as you are in town so you will know where to find me; and then while you attend to business and pay your calls, I will go on drawing as usual. I can meet you by appointment wherever you wish, but for several reasons it is better for us both, I think, if I do not go with you to see Tersteeg or Mauve, etc. and then, I am so used to my working clothes, in which I can lie or sit on the sand or the grass, whichever is necessary (for in the dunes I never use a chair, only an old fish basket sometimes); so my dress is a little too Robinson Crusoe-like for paying calls with you.

I tell you this before your visit so that you may know that I will not be any trouble to you, but for the rest you will understand that I actually long for every half hour that you can spare. I think we shall feel easier with each other if

we stick to the subject of painting and drawing, and talk especially about that. But if there is nothing else which bothers or worries you, then remember I haven't a single secret from you and you have my full confidence in everything.

I am also very anxious to show you the wood engravings. I have a splendid new one, a drawing by Fildes, "The Empty Chair of Dickens," from the Graphic of 1870.

I could have bought three etchings by Méyron for 2 guilders, but I let them go. They were indeed very beautiful, but I have so few etchings, and when I buy anything, I stick to wood engravings. But I wanted to tell you about them – Blok is the one who has them; I don't know if all Méryons are rare and have any money value. They are from an old series L'Artiste.

I am still wrapped up in those books by Zola. How he painted those Halles!

My health is pretty good, but I still feel the effect of my illness and will continue to for a pretty long time. Sien and the baby are well and are getting stronger, and I love them both.

Someday I must do the cradle in watercolour (when it is rainy and I cannot work outside). But for the rest I want to show you landscape watercolours when you come. I hope to do figure watercolours this winter after I have been here a year. First I shall have to draw more from the nude, and more in black and white too, I think. We shall talk all that over, and I am sure that your visit will contribute much toward keeping things in order and making the work go smoothly.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

By going quietly on with my work I have every hope of eventually getting an entirely new circle of acquaintances to compensate for the loss of the sympathy of Mauve, Tersteeg and others; but I will make no step toward it, not the least – it must come from the work itself.

What has happened to me with Tersteeg is not at all unusual; everybody meets with such things in life. One cannot tell exactly where the fault lies. But with Tersteeg it is an old trouble. I am now almost certain that long ago he said things about me which contributed not a little toward putting me in a bad light. But I need not mind that – what could harm me before cannot harm me now.

When you come to the studio, you will see for yourself that it really is absurd when he says, "Oh! Your drawing will never amount to anything." However, it is hard to contradict such a remark, for as soon as one does, one is called conceited, and they mention the greatest artists and say, "He fancies he's like them."

But I repeat, everyone who works with love and intelligence finds a kind of armour against the opinion of other people in the very sincerity of his love for nature and art. Nature is also severe and, so to speak, hard; but she never deceives and always helps us on.

So I do not count my falling into disgrace with Tersteeg, or whomever, a misfortune; though I am sorry about it, that cannot be the real cause of misfortune. If I had no love for nature or my work, then I should indeed be misfortunate.

The worse I get along with people, the more I learn to have faith in nature and to concentrate on her.

All those things make me feel brighter and fresher – you will see that I am not afraid of a bright green or a soft blue, and the thousands of different greys, for there is scarcely any colour that is not grey: red- grey, yellow-grey, green-grey, blue-grey. This is the substance of the whole colour scheme.

When I returned to that fish drying barn, a wonderfully bright fresh green of turnips or rapes had sprouted in those baskets full of sand in the foreground which serve to prevent the sand from drifting off the dunes. Two months ago everything was bare except the grass in the little garden, and now this rough, wild, luxuriant growth forms a very pretty effect in contrast to the bareness of the rest.

I hope you will like this drawing, the distant horizon, the view across the roofs of the village with the little church steeple, and the dunes – it was all so fine. I can't tell you what great pleasure I had making it. So do come soon. I think you will approve of the change of studio when you see that it gives me an infinitely better opportunity to work – more distance, better light, more room.

Last night I received a parcel from home. Among other things there was a sort of spring coat, which comes in very handy. I thought it very kind of them. And there was tobacco in it, and cigars, and cake and some underwear. In short, quite a parcel. Wasn't that nice of them? I appreciate it perhaps more for the kind thought than for anything else.

I also had a letter from Van Rappard.

I am confoundedly pleased that the fellow is so absorbed in his English wood engravings. It is true I encouraged him in the beginning, but now he no longer needs any encouragement, he is almost as enthusiastic about it as I. When you come, I will show you a few which you will not soon forget after you have seen them. And there are things among them quite different from Boughton's style, for instance, though he certainly is also one of the main ones. I mean things remarkable for their reality and style, like Albrecht Dürer's, and yet at the same time with much local

colour and chiaroscuro. One does not see these things often now, for one has to look for them in magazines of ten and fifteen years ago, for instance, at the time of the war of '70 – '71.

["Bleaching ground Scheveningen" JH 163 was included in the letter]