

Letter 224
The Hague, c. 10 – 12 August 1882

Dear Theo,

During the few days since you left, I have made some experiments with painting. And I thought you might be curious to know how it turned out. I wish you could spend an hour with me in the studio again, that would be the best way to tell you how it went. But as this is of course impossible, I shall only tell you that I now have three painted studies. One of a row of pollard willows in a meadow (behind the Geest bridge); then a study of the cinder path near here; and today I was at the vegetable gardens on Laan van Meerdervoort again, and saw a potato field with a ditch; a man in a blue smock and a woman were picking up potatoes, and I put their figures in.

It was a white, sandy field, partly dug up, partly still covered with rows of dried stalks, with green weeds in between. In the distance, dark green trees and a few roofs.

I did this last study with special pleasure. I must tell you that painting does not seem so strange to me as you would perhaps suppose; on the contrary, I like it very much, as it is a very strong means of expression. And at the same time one can express tender things with it too, let a soft grey or green speak amid all the ruggedness.

I am very glad I have the necessary materials, for already I had often suppressed the desire to paint. It opens a much broader horizon.

Now I should prefer to go on making quite a number of painted studies, and hang them in my studio without speaking to anybody about the change. And in case someone wonders at seeing things painted by me, I should say, Did you think that I had no sentiment for it, or was unable to do it?

But I have attached great value to drawing and will continue to do so, because it is the backbone of painting, the skeleton that supports all the rest. I like it so much, Theo, that it is only because of the expenses that I shall have to restrain myself rather than urge myself on. These studies are of medium size, a little larger than the cover of an ordinary paintbox, because I do not work inside the cover, but thumbtack the paper for the study onto a frame which has canvas stretched on it, and which I can carry easily in my hand. I will draw larger things before I paint them, or I will make grisailles of them if I can discover the technique – I will try to find it.

It becomes too expensive if one is not economical with the paint; but, boy, it is so delightful to have so many new and good materials; once more, many, many thanks. I will certainly try and take care that you never regret it, but have the satisfaction of seeing progress. I write you just this little word to tell you I have made a beginning. Of course the studies must get even better. I know they have many faults, but I believe that in these first ones you will already see something of the open air, which proves that I love nature and that I have a painter's heart. Enclosed, a small scratch of the Laan van Meerdervoort. Those vegetable gardens there have a kind of old Dutch character which always appeals to me greatly.

Well, goodnight, it is already late, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I am reading Zola's *La Curée*

When I finished this letter, it seemed to me something was missing.

I thought, I ought to be able to write him that I have started to paint a scene of sand, sea and sky like the one we saw together at Scheveningen.

So I kept my letter, and this morning I marched to the beach and have just returned from there with a rather large-sized painted study of sand, sea and sky, a few fishing smacks, and two men on the beach [F 002, JH 173]. There is some dune sand in it, and I assure you that this will not be the last one. I thought you would like to hear that I had started it.

I repeat, I shall see to it that when you come back in half a year or in a few months or a year, the studio will have become a painter's studio. These pen-and-ink sketches have been made in a great hurry, as you can see. Now that I am making some progress, I will try and strike while the iron is hot – that means I shall go on painting. If you can send the usual amount about the twentieth, I can certainly go on painting for some time. I think that after a month of steady painting, the studio will have quite a different aspect. Hoping this will please you, I shake hands with you again and warmly wish you prosperity in everything.

[Gardens on Laan van Meerdervoort, JH 175, was enclosed in this letter.]