

Letter R11
13 August 1882
Sunday evening

Amice Rappard,

Your letter, which I received last night, gladdened my heart. I had been expecting it, but I thought you were on a jaunt somewhere. What you say about Drenthe interests me – I do not know it at all from my own observation, but I do through the things Mauve and ter Meulen, for instance, brought back from there.

I imagine it is something like Brabant when I was young – say, some twenty years ago. I remember as a boy seeing that heath and the little farms, the looms and the spinning wheels in exactly the same way I see them now in Mauve's and ter Meulen's drawings. But since then that part of Brabant with which I was acquainted has changed enormously in consequence of agricultural developments and the establishment of industries. Speaking for myself, in certain spots I do not look without a little sadness on a new red-tiled tavern, remembering a loam cottage with a moss-covered thatched roof that used to be there.

Since then there have come sugar-beet factories, railways, agricultural developments of the heath, etc., which are infinitely less picturesque.

It can't be helped – but what is sure to remain is something of the stern poetry of the real heath. And this real heath seems to exist in Drenthe as it used to in Brabant.

Yet there is an enormous amount of beautiful scenery in Brabant, even now – do you remember 't Heike,¹ where we were together?

I think the little sketches in your letter very good; I find much character in that "Churchyard" especially. As for me, in consequence of a visit from my brother, who saw my watercolours, I am also very busy painting.

Speaking frankly, I do not think people would conclude from my first painted studies that they really are my first.

There is nothing strange in it for me, and it greatly attracts me.

Last night I found a very pretty effect in the meadows near Rijswijk. Flat green meadows, across which runs a black coal path with a ditch alongside. The sun is setting fiery red – a poor peasant is trudging home – in the far distance a farmhouse.²

Further, I have a small marine – and patches of dune soil – a row of pollard willows, a potato field and so on. Painting is so sympathetic to me that it will be very difficult for me not to go on painting forever.

It is more virile than doing watercolours, and there is more poetry in it.

Probably you know that at present there is an exhibition of the Hollandse Tekenmaatschappij ["Dutch Drawing Society"] here. There are splendid things

There is a "Woman at a Weaving Loom" by Mauve that I cannot get out of my mind. A "Poor Old Woman" by Israëls, the same. Neuhuys, Maris, Duchâtel [Du Chattel], ter Meulen and a lot of others, to say nothing of Weissenbruch!

There is an extremely nice portrait of Weissenbruch by Israëls, so true and characteristic that I cannot describe it to you.

There is also a beautiful large marine by Mesdag and two Swiss things by him that I think rather silly, although there is a certain boldness in them – but not carried through and not "felt." But I think the large marine superb. By Willem Maris, a very striking "Sow" with a legion of piglets.

And a Jaap [Jacob] Maris, a very large "Town View," as vigorous as Vermeer of Delft.

Some time ago we had an exhibition of French art from private collections: Daubigny, Corot, Jules Dupré, Jules Breton, Courbet, Diaz, Jacque, Th. Rousseau; this work stimulated me very much – but for all that I felt a certain melancholy when I thought how these faithful veterans are disappearing one by one. Corot is dead and gone, Th. Rousseau, Millet, Daubigny are resting after their labours. Jules Breton, Jules Dupré Jacque, Ed. Frère are still there, but how long will they be going around in their painter's smocks? They are all elderly men, with one foot in the grave. And their successors – are they worthy of those first truly modern masters? All the more reason for us to bestir ourselves energetically and not to slacken.

I am much pleased with my new studio; I can find my subjects in the immediate neighborhood. With all my heart I hope you will come and see me eventually, and I am always eager to see something of your work, or to read about it in a letter.

My brother also sends you his kind regards; I told him you were working so hard. The same is true of me in this respect, so that at present I am writing only a few letters, and I am writing in great haste now too.

Good luck and success in everything, and believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

1. Or "Het Heike," literally, "The Little Heath," a poor district near Etten.

2. See the same description in letter 225 to Theo of August 15, 1882