

Letter 225
The Hague, 15 August 1882

Dear Theo,

You must not take it amiss if I write you again – it is only to tell you that painting is such a joy to me.

Last Saturday night I attacked a thing I had been dreaming of for a long time. It is a view of the flat green meadows, with haycocks. It is crossed by a cinder path running along a ditch. And on the horizon in the middle of the picture the sun is setting, fiery red.

I cannot possibly draw the effect in such a hurry, but this is the composition.

But it was purely a question of colour and tone, the variety of the sky's colour scheme – first a violet haze, with the red sun half covered by a dark purple cloud which had a brilliant fine red border; near the sun reflections of vermilion, but above it a streak of yellow, turning into green and then into blue, the so-called cerulean blue; and then here and there violet and grey clouds, catching reflections from the sun.

The ground was a kind of carpetlike texture of green, grey and brown, but variegated and full of vibration – in this colourful soil the water in the ditch sparkles.

It is something that Émile Breton, for instance, might paint.

Then I have painted a huge mass of dune ground – thickly painted and sticky [F 002, JH 173].

And as for these two, the small marine and the potato field, I am sure no one could tell that they are my first painted studies.

To tell you the truth, it surprises me a little. I had expected the first things to be a failure, though I supposed they would improve later on; but though I say so myself, they are not bad at all, and I repeat, it surprises me a little.

I think the reason is that before I began to paint, I had been drawing so much and had studied perspective in order to build up the composition of the thing I saw.

Now, since I have bought my paint and brushes, I have drudged and worked so hard on seven painted studies that right now I'm beat. One of them has a figure in it, a mother with her child, in the shadow of a large tree, in tone against the dune, on which the summer sun is shining – almost an Italian effect. I simply couldn't restrain myself or keep my hands off it or allow myself any rest.

As you perhaps know, there is an exhibition of the Black and White Society. There is a drawing by Mauve – a woman at a weaving loom, probably in Drenthe – which I think superb.

No doubt you saw some of them at Tersteeg's. There are splendid things by Israëls – including a portrait of Weissenbruch, with a pipe in his mouth and his palette in his hand. By Weissenbruch himself, beautiful things – landscapes and also a marine.

There is a very large drawing by J. Maris, a splendid town view. A beautiful W. Maris, among other things, a sow with a litter of pigs, and cows. Neuhuys, Duchâtel, Mesdag. By the last, besides a fine large marine, two Swiss landscapes which I think rather stupid and dull. But the large marine is splendid.

Israëls has four large drawings, a girl at the window, children near a pigsty – the sketch for the little picture at the Salon – a little old woman kindling the fire in the twilight, at the time engraved for the Art Chronicle. It is very inspiring to see such things, for then I perceive how much I still have to learn.

But this much I want to tell you – while painting, I feel a power of colour in me that I did not possess before, things of broadness and strength.

Now I am not going to send you things at once – let it ripen a little first – but know that I am full of ambition and believe that for the present I am making progress. (In three months, however, I will send something to give you an idea of how I'm getting on.) But that is just the reason for me to persevere and to acquire what I need.

So do not think that I am satisfied with myself from what I say about my work – the contrary is true; but I think this much is gained: in the future when something strikes me in nature, I shall have more means than before with which to give it new vigour.

And I am not displeased that what I shall make in the future will look more attractive.

Neither do I believe that it will hinder me if my health should give way a little from time to time. As far as I can see, the painters who occasionally cannot work for a week or two are not the worst ones. It may be because they are the ones “qui y mettent leur peau,” as father Millet says. That doesn't matter, and in my opinion one must not spare oneself when there is something important to do. If a short period of exhaustion follows, it will soon pass, and so much is gained that one harvests one's studies just the way a farmer harvests his crops. Now for myself, I have not yet thought of taking a rest. Only yesterday, Sunday, I did not do so much – at least I did not go out to paint. I will see to it that even if you come this winter, you will find the studio full of painted studies.

I had a letter from Rappard yesterday; he has been to Drenthe, and judging from the two little sketches he sent me, he has not been idle. He seems to work very hard and well, too – figures as well as landscape. Well, adieu, I must set off to work again; with a handshake,
Yours sincerely, Vincent

It is now just two years since I began to draw in the Borinage.