

Dear Theo,

When you were here we spoke about a certain little drawing which I would send you, so I then sent you the one of the little bench [F 951, JH 197]. To show you that I myself seriously intend to work on in that style, I am enclosing a few little sketches.

I am doing a watercolour of the flocks of orphans with their spiritual shepherds, which probably will not succeed well enough to be saleable.

But to show you that it is not so easy to get some character into the figures, and that I am trying hard to overcome this difficulty, I am also sending you sketches of figure studies which I made recently, and which are of course more elaborate than these sketches.

If I had remained on good terms with Mauve, and had done a watercolour like the one of the little bench, or now the one of these orphans, I think that he would have pointed something out to me which would have made it saleable, and which would have given it quite a different aspect.

It is a fact that many a painter's watercolours or pictures are worked up by another painter – and sometimes even completely altered.

That is what I miss now – but though I don't exactly disapprove of more experienced painters either making suggestions or working it up themselves (especially because it is so necessary for the younger ones to earn money in order to be able to keep going), I think it is not exactly a misfortune to struggle on alone.

What one learns from personal experience is not learned so quickly, but it is imprinted more deeply on the mind.

I went to see the drawings in the Gothic Hall; I thought the ones by Rochussen were splendid. It was a thing from Napoleon's time: French officers in an old town hall, who seemed to be asking for papers and information from the mayor and town council. It was so typical, that little old mayor and then those generals, exactly the way Erckmann-Chatrion, for instance, describes it in *Madame Thérèse*. I enjoyed it immensely.

There were also some very beautiful things by Allebé [Dutch painter], drawings from the Zoological Gardens, and a landscape with fir trees on the rocks by the seashore, through which one sees a fisherman's cottage in the valley. By Hoeterinks there were beautiful town and beach views with small figures. But however much I like his current drawings, it seems a pity to me that he didn't stick to his original style, when he did characters taken from the people (for instance, a picture "Le Mont de Piété.") [The Pawnshop.]

It is the same with drawing as it is with writing. When a child learns to write, it seems almost impossible to him that he will ever learn, and seeing the teacher write so quickly seems almost like a miracle. But nevertheless, in time every child learns. And I really believe one must learn to draw in such a way that it becomes as easy as writing, and that one must know the proportions as well, and learn to see so accurately that one can reproduce whatever one sees on a larger or smaller scale.

We are having very beautiful bad weather here at present, rain, wind, thunderstorms, but with splendid effects; that's why I like it, but for the rest, it is rather chilly. The time for working in the open air is drawing to a close, and the main thing is to profit as much as possible before the winter comes.

Toward winter I shall clean up the studio – that is, I shall take the studies down from the walls and remove everything that takes up too much room – so that I shall have plenty of room to work with models. I feel that I need a great many figure studies – also of Scheveningen fisherwomen. I should like to get some of the studies you have back sometime, the ones you do not care to keep (of course, if you have a chance to send them). If there is anything you want to keep, if there is anything I have here you would like to have, just say so, for I consider everything as belonging to you. If I ask it back, it is because what is made directly from the model is often necessary for watercolours, for instance. But there is no hurry – just don't throw them away, even though they are not so very well done, for everything may be useful. I do not think I am mistaken in believing that being and remaining productive depends on the studies one has and continues to make. The more variety there is in them, the more one drudges on them, the more easily one works later when it comes to making real pictures or drawings. In short, I reckon the studies to be the seed, and the more one sows, the more one may hope to reap.

Lately I read *Les Deux Frères* by Erckmann-Chatrion, and I liked it. It must have been a pleasant time when there were so many artists in the Alsace – Brion, Marshall, Jundt, Vautier, Knaus, Schuler, Saal, Van Muyden and a great many more – together with many others who worked in the same line, like Chatrion and Auerbach. I myself like them better than Tapiró or Capibianchi, or those hordes of other Italians who seem to go on multiplying.

Adieu, believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

[Sketch of Orphans, JH 203, was enclosed with letter]