

Letter 239
The Hague, 29 October 1882

Dear Theo,

It's Sunday again, and rainy as usual. We have had a gale too this week, and there are few leaves left on the trees. I can tell you, I'm glad the stove is burning. When I happened to arrange my drawings this morning, namely, the studies from the model which have been done since your visit (not counting the older studies or those I drew in my sketchbook), I counted about a hundred.

I mention the number because I remember that you asked me during your visit if I had even more studies than the drawings you saw then. I do not know whether all painters, even those who look down on my work so much that they think it beneath their dignity to take the slightest notice of it, work harder than I do. Nor do I know if they know a better way than to work from the model, though, in my opinion, they do it too little; as I wrote you before, I cannot understand why they do not take more models. (Of course I do not mean people like Mauve and Israëls – though the latter, in my opinion, sets a splendid example of always working with a model – but I mean more especially people like De Bock or Breitner.) I haven't seen the latter since I visited him in the hospital during his illness. By chance I heard a rumour that he had become a teacher of drawing at a high school; from himself I did not hear a single word.

This week I had a letter from Rappard, who is also astonished at the behaviour of many painters here, and whose picture was refused for the Arti [a society of painters in Amsterdam] exhibition. I ask you, is it just that he and I are counted for nothing?

For I assure you that he works hard. This summer he was in Drenthe, and after that he worked quite a while in the hospital for the blind in Utrecht. It was curious to hear him tell of some experiences which were almost the same as mine.

Well, I often long for you, as I already wrote you. If I saw you more often, and if I could speak to you about my work, I should make more things, which I am sure might proceed from the studies I have. But you remember that not long ago I wrote you (when sending you a sketch in colour of a potato market), "I must try to paint the bustle of the streets again." The result if this is about twelve watercolours which I am doing right now, so I do not want to say that I cannot do anything with my studies or that I make them without a definite purpose, but only that I believe I could do more with them and make them more directly effective if I could sometimes consult you about it.

But however that may be, I work with great pleasure these days, and I hope there will be some things among my pictures which will please you too when you come.

I believe that if one wants to make figures, one must have a warm feeling, what Punch calls in its Christmas picture, Good will to all – that means one must have real love for one's fellow creatures. I for one hope to try my best to be in such a mood as much as possible.

It is for just this reason that I am sorry not to have any intercourse with painters, and that, as I wrote you before, one cannot sit cosily together round a fire on a rainy day like today, looking at drawings or engravings and stimulating each other in this way.

I must ask you something: Are there any cheap Daumier prints to be had, and, if so, which ones? I always found him very clever, but it is only recently that I have begun to have the impression that he is more important than I thought. If you know any particulars about him or if you have seen any of his important drawings, please tell me about it.

I had seen some caricatures of his before now, and perhaps for that very reason had the wrong idea about him. His figures always impressed me, but I think I know only a very small portion of his work, and that, for instance, the caricatures are not at all the most representative or most important part of it.

I remember we spoke about it last year on the road to Prinsenhage, and you said then that you liked Daumier better than Gavarni, and I took Gavarni's part, and told you about the book I had read about Gavarni which you have now. But I must say that since then, though I have not come to like Gavarni less, I begin to suspect that I know but a very small portion of Daumier's work and that the very things which would interest me most are in the portion of his work which I do not know (though I already greatly appreciate what I know of him). And I have a vague recollection, but I may be mistaken, that you spoke about large drawings, types or heads of people, and I am very curious to see them. If there were more things of his as beautiful as a print I found recently, "Les 5 ages d'un buveur [the five ages of a drinker], or like that figure of an old man under a chestnut tree which I mentioned to you before – yes, then he would perhaps be the greatest of all. Can you perhaps give me some information about it?

Do you remember the figures by De Groux from the “Uilenspiegel,” which I used to have but have lost, alas. Well, those two prints by Daumier just mentioned are like them, and if you can find more of them, those are what I mean (I care much less for the caricatures).

I am awfully sorry that I don’t have those De Groux and Ropses any more. I gave them away in England with some other things to Richardson, the travelling representative for Goupil & Co.

Well, my boy, one thing I can promise you against the time of your arrival, besides the watercolours and painted studies, I shall beg you to take the trouble of looking through a portfolio with a hundred drawings, all studies of figures. I already have them now, if I count some old ones in. But in the time between now and your arrival, I will try to make some better ones instead of those which are not good enough, and I will try to put some more variety into them. Goodbye, with all my heart I wish you some prosperity and happiness. Believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent