

Amice Rappard,

My heartfelt thanks for your money order, no less for your letter¹. The reason for my disappointment over the money I expected, about which I wrote, has now been established. A letter containing money (especially intended to pay for lithographs) got lost, and there is little hope of its turning up again, though the matter is being investigated. But I would rather have it this way than to find that they were not appreciated at all, as was the case last summer with my drawings. It is very annoying not to be able to press on with my work as vigorously as I could have if the money had not been lost, but things will be straightened out eventually, and in the meantime I am trying to continue working anyway.

I have little time to write, but all the same I want to tell you that I think your remarks on the faulty drawing in the lithograph in question are correct in principle – and that I now notice it myself.

I should like to write at greater length about your statement, “One should only put something before the world if that something fulfills the strictest demands of technique.” That is what the art dealers say too, and I do not believe what they say. Think it over a little² – that would save me the trouble of writing about it – and ask yourself whether it is not just as permissible to put a drawing like this one, just as is drawn from the model without any subsequent retouching, before the world (although I admit that there is some faulty drawing in it), as it is for me to go out into the street in my work clothes if I think it convenient, and without having to plant myself before a mirror to see if there’s something the matter with my attire before I leave the house. If you admit that these things are similar, though you yourself would do neither, then the question remains whether it is not often more advisable during a campaign to march quickly than to smarten oneself up.

Further, I cannot agree with what you say about the way the public looks at things, namely being struck by faulty drawing before seeing the character. I do believe, however, that a relatively small part of the public looks at pictures in exactly the way you describe, but not the big crowd to whom Herkomer says, “For you, the public, it is really done”³ – at least that’s what I think.

So much for that – if I can find time and words for it, I shall try to make my meaning clearer to you someday. As I happen to be writing about matters on which I am not entirely in agreement with you (your remarks about my faulty drawing do not belong to them; I found every one of them correct), I want to speak to you about your “big decoration” and “menu,” and I will say only this, Old fellow, you’d better do something else; it’s dangerous navigation. You know where you begin, but you don’t know whether you’ll have the power to stop. Once you have got the reputation of being able to do something for “festive occasions,” there will never be a “festive occasion” without your being the victim. Look it up in De Oude Heer Smits,⁴ who wrote a very witty and practical little essay about this which will explain it to you more clearly than I can. This is the time for campaigning; at least a time when a campaign can be undertaken.

I am not speaking about the nude in itself, but of the “big decoration.”

I know Boughton’s “The Heir” as a painting; I saw it at the Royal Academy and later at Goupil’s. At the time I admired it so much that I made a little sketch of it for an acquaintance in Holland, to give him an idea of it. I do not know the wood engraving.

I cannot get Renouard’s “The Miners” here. I have gone to all kinds of places to get the last issues of L’Illustration; and they either did not have any or had issues in which these prints do not occur.

On condition that you will let me pay for it – not otherwise – I should like to ask you to look up the issues and to order them for me, at least if you intend to order them for yourself.

If they should not be able to do it in Utrecht, I can order them here, but only if I know the numbers in which they occur and the dates. One must always hurry when ordering separate issues, as the orders are often ignored, or that particular issue sold out. Thus, because time is of the essence, it might be more practical if you ordered them in Utrecht.

I once got Renouard’s “Enfants assistés” in this way.

Yes – and now you must not take it amiss if I state my meaning somewhat more forcibly: the more you make menus and decorations for festive occasions – however nice or well done they may be – the less you will remain at peace with your conscience as an artist. And the more you devote yourself to serious toiling and moiling, such as the “Asylum for the Blind,” the “Tile Painters,” the “Girl Knitting” the more you will feel that though this toiling and moiling may not score an immediate success, it has its *raison d’être*.

The Society Kunstliefde [Love of Art] is more in need of your serious work than of a decoration, however well it might turn out.

Now it seems to me that I have a daalder [1.50 guilders] of yours in my possession with which to buy wood engravings, or something like that, as the opportunity occurs, and on this condition I won’t return the surplus of your money order, which is at the moment doubly welcome, for it will be a tremendous disappointment if the letter is not found. Once again, many thanks for the early remittance, and be assured that if I say something

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about that decoration or other things in which my opinion differs from yours, I speak that frankly just because I appreciate your intentions and your work and consider them important.

However harsh it may sound, I really believe that you will have the greatest and best influence, e.g. in the Society Kunstliefde, if you decline all posts of honour and do not occupy yourself with being of “service” on festive occasions – from which I do not expect any good anyway, either for the artists or for the public, and which I do not consider proofs of prosperity of the societies which celebrate them.

Adieu, believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

1. See letter 249 to Theo of 1 December 1882.
2. Vincent wrote the underlined part of this sentence in English.
3. Underlined part written in English.
4. “Old Mr. Smits,” pseudonym of the Dutch humorist Mark Prager Lindo (1819-77).