

Dear Theo,

I wrote you yesterday, but I am doing so again today to acknowledge receipt of your letter and to thank you for it and to tell you that it cheered me. I was rather worried that you might think I had begun to slacken because you had seen so little of my work recently.

On the contrary, I have been working very hard lately, and am still absorbed in all kinds of things in which I am beginning to see a light, but which I do not quite have within my grasp yet. In my last letter I told you I was making experiments in Black and White with lithographic crayon.

You speak too well of me in your letter, but your thinking well of me is all the more reason for me to try not to be quite unworthy of it. And as to what I said about having made some progress by the experiments in question, perhaps I do not see my own work clearly. Perhaps it is a step forward, perhaps not – will you tell me your opinion of it in reference to the two studies I sent you, which I did recently along with a few others?

In seeking a more vigorous process than the one I have used up to now, I am trying to follow somewhat the English reproductions made by the process you described; and as to the value of black, I am also guided by the black sketches which Buhot made on the sample paper. And if you have an opportunity, please talk it over with an expert and ask him if reproduction of drawings like these, for instance, would be possible (aside from the secondary question of whether these or similar ones would be to their particular taste).

As to the sentiment of the drawings, I should like to know your opinion because, as I have already said, I myself cannot judge what is or isn't in them.

Or rather, it is because I myself prefer studies like these – even though they are not quite finished and many things in them have been neglected – to drawings with a definite subject: they remind me more vividly of nature itself. You will understand what I mean: there is something of life itself in the real studies, and the person who makes them will not think of himself, but of nature, and so prefer the study to what he may perhaps make of it later – unless something quite different should finally result from the many studies, namely the type distilled from many individuals.

That's the highest thing in art, and there art sometimes rises above nature – in Millet's "Sower," for instance, there is more soul than in an ordinary sower in the field.

But what I want you to tell me is whether you think that this process would eliminate some of your objections to pencil. They are a few "Heads of the People."

And I intend to try to form a collection of many such things, which wouldn't be quite unworthy of the title "Heads of the People."

By working hard, boy, I hope to succeed in making something good. It isn't there yet, but I aim at it and struggle for it. I want something serious – something Fresh – something with soul in it! Forward – forward.

From what I have just said you will see clearly enough that I want to do some serious work for reproduction rather than be contented with having one little drawing printed.

But all information and hints about processes are very welcome to me.

In Goupil & Co.'s show window I saw a large etching by Fortuny, "Un Anachorète," as well as his two beautiful etchings, "Kabyle Mort" and "La Garde du Mort." I was very sorry then that I had told you some time ago that I didn't like Fortuny – I like this very much. But of course you understand this, too.

It's the same with Boldini.

But Fortuny's seriousness in those three etchings, for instance, is just the thing many of his imitators lack: they settle down into the style for which Fortuny set the fashion, for instance, in "Le Choix d'un Modèle," etc.

And that is diametrically opposed to the sombre, noble art of Brion, De Groux, Israëls, etc.

If possible, please send me a recent issue of the Vie Moderne, choosing one with reproductions such as those which you wrote about. The magazine is nowhere to be found here (and the few numbers I have are years old).

When you come sooner or later, I can show you more, and then we can talk about the future. You know well enough how unfit I am to cope with either dealers or art lovers, and how contrary it is to my nature. I should like it so much if we could always continue as we are now, but it often makes me sad to think that I must always be a burden to you. But who knows, in time you may be able to find someone who takes an interest in my work, who will take from your shoulders the burden which you took upon yourself at the most difficult time. This can only happen when it is quite evident that my work is serious, when it speaks more clearly for itself than it does now.

I myself am too fond of a very simple life to wish to change it, but later on, in order to do greater things, I shall have greater expenses, too. I think I shall always work with a model – always and always. And I must try to arrange matters so that the whole burden doesn't always fall on you.

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This is only a beginning – later you will get better things from me, my boy. In the meantime, let me know whether you think that some of the objections to the use of pencil alone may have been taken care of somewhat by this crayon. Don't you also think that by making such drawings, I perhaps indirectly learn things useful for the actual lithographing?

Adieu. Once more many thanks for your letter.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent