

Dear Theo,

It is just getting dark, and for curiosity's sake I am sending you today's drawing, because I wrote you about it. This morning I began a watercolour of a boy and a girl in such a soup kitchen, with another figure of a woman in a corner [F 1020b, JH 331]. That watercolour became too blurred, which was partly because the paper was not suitable.

But I saw how infinitely better the studio is now for colour, and of course I will not stop at this first experiment. So the morning passed, and I spent the afternoon making a drawing with crayon, the one piece that was left from this summer. I am sending you the drawing by the same mail. I don't think it finished enough, but as a "sketch from life" there is perhaps some life in it, and some human sentiment. By and by better things will follow.

This drawing still leaves the question of watercolours undecided, but gives a provisional answer to what you wrote about the little sketch I sent you to give you an idea of the effect of the windows in the studio.

Will you do me a very great favour – send me a few pieces of that crayon by mail?

There is a soul and life in that crayon – I think conté pencil is dead. Two violins may look the same on the outside, but in playing them, one sometimes finds a beautiful tone in one, and not in the other.

Now that crayon has a great deal of tone or depth. I could almost say, That crayon knows what I want, it listens with intelligence and obeys; the conté pencil is indifferent and unwilling.

The crayon has a real gypsy soul; if it isn't asking too much of you, send me some of it.

Who knows, if now, with the better light, and the crayon, and the lithographic crayon, I shan't succeed in making something for illustrated papers. Current events – that was what they asked for – if they mean such things as, for instance, illuminations for the king's birthday, I should care very little for it – but if their lordships the managers would consent to rank scenes from the daily life of the people under current events, I should gladly try my best to make them.

When I have some more of that crayon, I shall make a few more figures of almshouse men.

And from those soup kitchens, of which this is the first, you will get some quite different compositions.

You will perhaps find this size a little too large, but I think after having worked some time, always with models, I shall succeed in making the figures so vigorous that their being large won't matter, and it will be even better that way. It need not prevent my making smaller ones, and I can always reduce the size. There is much that I don't like in this rough sketch, but I know for sure that in a short time I shall make progress.

When you see this group of people together, can you understand that I feel at home with them?

Some time ago I read the following words in Eliot's Felix Holt the Radical:

The people I live among have the same follies and vices as the rich, only they have their own forms of folly and vice – and they have not what are called the refinements of the rich to make their faults more bearable.

It doesn't much matter to me – I am not fond of those refinements, but some people are, and find it difficult to feel at home with such persons as have them not.

I shouldn't have thought of it in these terms, but I have felt the same sometimes. As a painter I not only feel perfectly at home and contented with them, but I find in them a quality that sometimes reminds me of gypsies, at least of something as picturesque.

As I have written so often lately, I probably won't write again before the tenth; don't send me the money later if you can help it, for I promised Leurs I should pay something off about that time; I must do that before I can get some new things which I shall need. For instance, I intend to buy, at what they call wholesale price, several things which he has had for a long time, and will let me have cheaply. Especially a number of sheets of a rough kind of watercolour paper which is no longer in demand, but which I like better than the smooth kind. You would do me a great favour by sending that crayon.

Adieu, my very best wishes, especially for your patient. Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent