

Amice Rappard,

Thanks for your letter; I was interested to learn that you are working on your picture "The Tile Painters"¹ again. I also found something in your letter which bears on your coming here, which was all the more reason for me to decide to send you one of these days the rest of the wood engraving duplicates that I have, as I think you would not like to wait for them any longer than necessary. You will, as I see it, after looking them over, consider various of the sheets not unsatisfactory possessions. I have also taken apart the Graphic Portfolio and inserted the items among my loose sheets. This is the reason why you have already got Herkomer's "Low Lodginghouse," and a number of the best ones in the present batch too. I am sending you the ordinary prints of some of the sheets whose duplicates I got in this way, but also some others which are impressions from the book itself, which means that they are not prints from clichés but impressions of the original blocks.

In the present package you will at last find some things by Boyd Houghton, namely "Shaker Evans," "Liverpool Harbour," "Mail in the Wilderness" and "Niagara Falls." After you have seen my Boyd Houghtons from the first year of the Graphics you will understand more clearly what I wrote about the importance of this master's work. Van der Weele saw them too this week and was struck by them.

This week I have been working on drawings of figures with wheelbarrows – perhaps for lithographs too – but how do I know what will come of it? – I just go on drawing, that's all. As I told you just now, Van der Weele came to see me during the week. I had just been working from the model, and we held an art show of pictures from the Graphic spread out on a wheelbarrow that had been the attribute of the model I had been drawing. We looked at one sheet by Boyd Houghton with special attention – I already wrote you about it once – it represents a corridor in the offices of the Graphic at Christmas. The artists' models come to wish them a Merry Christmas, and most probably to receive tips. Most of the models are invalids – a man on crutches leads the procession – his coattail is held by a blind man, who is carrying another man on his back who cannot walk at all – his coattail again is held by a second blind man, who is followed by a wounded man with a bandage around his head, and after him come others shuffling along. I said to Van der Weele, "Just tell me – do you think we use enough models??" Van der Weele answered, "When Israëls came to my studio the other day, and saw my large picture of the sand carts, he said, I advise you above all to use a lot of models."

Well, I believe that many would use more models if they had a bit more money – but if we only spent every tenpence we could spare on them all the same...!² It would be wonderful if the artists combined, and there was some place where the models could meet every day, as in the old days of the Graphic.

Well, however that may be, let's encourage each other to do it, and let's inspire each other as much as we can to work, on, not in the manner the dealers want us to, but with virile strength, truth, good faith and honesty. All of which has in my opinion a direct bearing on working from the model. It seems to be some kind of fate that what one produces in this fashion is called "unpleasing"; but I think that this imaginary but very active prejudice would have to yield to contrary efforts on the part of the painters, provided these painters agreed among themselves, and helped and backed each other up, and no longer let the dealers be the only ones to speak to the public, but spoke up themselves once in a while too; for although I am willing to admit that what a painter would say about his own work would not always be understood, I am still of the opinion that a better seed would be sown in the field of public opinion in this way than the seeds the dealers and such fellows customarily sow according to a never-changing formula – convention ...

These thoughts cannot but lead me to the question of exhibitions. You are working for exhibitions – all right – I for my part most decidedly don't hold with exhibitions. I used to attach more value to them than I do now – I don't know why – formerly I looked upon exhibitions otherwise than I do now – perhaps I once had rather too good an opportunity to look behind the scenes at some proceedings connected with exhibitions – and perhaps it is not merely indifference on my part when I say that many people are mistaken about the results of an exhibition. I don't want to expatiate on this theme at present, I only want to say this, Speaking for myself, I expect more good from a uniting of painters actuated by mutual sympathy and singleness of purpose and warm friendship and loyalty than from a uniting of their works by means of exhibitions.

I do not venture to infer from the fact that I see a number of pictures hanging together in the same hall that there is a spirit of unity and mutual respect and wholesome co-operation among those who made said pictures, etc. I consider this latter exigency – whether it is to be or not to be – so important that very little else can be counted important except in connection with achieving spiritual unity, and however important some other things may be considered by themselves, no substitute can ever make up for the lack of this unity; and the lack of it means the lack of sure ground to stand on. I don't at all desire that exhibitions, etc., should be discontinued, but what I do desire is a reform, or rather a renewal and strengthening, of painters' societies and of the co-operation among painters, all of which would have such an influence that even exhibitions would actually become useful.

As regards your "Tile Painters" – and I was interested to hear that you have started working on it again – I am extremely curious to know what it is and how it will turn out. I am interested in everything connected with this

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picture or your other pictures, and all that I see of them or hear of them arouses my sympathy – whether or not they are going to be sent to an exhibition leaves me as indifferent as the kind of frame you have put around them.

Well, adieu. Write again soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

1. See letter 275 to Theo.
2. See letter 278 to Theo.