

Amice Rappard,

On my coming home I found your postcard, which arrived a few moments after I went away this morning; I see from it that apart from having your model this afternoon, you also had an engagement in the morning. I am sorry you did not tell me, for we might have gone together.

For the rest – the pleasure of seeing your work is no trifle to me, and if it's true that I didn't upset your plans too much, I'm delighted with my visit to you.¹

But it wasn't my fault, as I hadn't received your postcard, which I only just found.

I repeat, I think your work is excellent – I think the sketch of the "Woman Spinning" especially is excellent too, indeed I do – that is it.

I wish you had a charcoal drawing of the "Tile Painters" too; I suggest you still make one. Why? – because such compositions most certainly come out strongly in painting, in which state they are in many respects truer to nature and more vigorously accented.... But the black and white or the light and brown in itself may acquire a peculiar charm – and has its own merits, and is at the same time suitable for reproduction – a photograph of the painted "Tile Painters" is doomed to be a failure, as the blue would come out white in the reproduction.

I think the heads [studies] of the blind men eminently good. Are you willing to decide in principle that we are to visit each other again before the end of the year?

Here follows a passage from Dickens that expresses forcefully what goes on in the mind of a figure painter while he is working on a composition:

I was occupied with this story during many working hours of two years. I must have been very ill employed, if I could not leave its merits and demerits as a whole to express themselves on its being read as a whole. But, as it is not unreasonable to suppose that I may have held its various threads with a more continuous attention than any one else can have given to them during its desultory publication, it is not unreasonable to ask that the weaving may be looked at in its complete state, and with the pattern finished – Preface, Little Dorrit.

Here you are, my dear friend, beautifully expressed, how a figure painter deserves to be looked at – as a whole. This is how I looked at your work today, and my sympathy for you was confirmed by it. And as for you, I want you to go on looking at me as a whole too, which many others don't do.

What I think excellent too is that one sees books in your studio: Hugo, Zola, Dickens – figure painter's books. I shall send you Erckmann-Chatrian's *Histoire d'un Paysan*. The French Revolution – that is the central point – the Constitution of 1789 being the modern Gospel, no less sublime than that of 1 A.D. And how one can be a figure painter without feeling something of it is incomprehensible to me – and I find a certain emptiness in these figure painters' studios where the modern writings are absent. And I think that's your impression too.

Do you know what I forgot to take with me? – the "Grève des Charbonniers" [Strike of the Miners] by Robe, which I think you have in duplicate. I have it myself, but it was intended for Van der Weele, who – between you and me – is sorely in need of seeing some foreign compositions and, I think, is somewhat afflicted with Dutch prejudices – though he has freed himself of them in his large picture.

What I wanted to say about the printer's ink was, Just dabble a little with it – at random, as it were, and out of your own imagination, on a piece of paper or an old study, just to see the effect. But go easy on the turpentine; then I think you will find things in it that you will be able to use.

And try washing with a wet brush in something you have drawn with lithographic crayon. If you take the trouble, you will be able to find some things in the printer's ink that will be useful and practical – probably more and better things than I have found myself up to now.

How beautiful your illustrations by Lhermitte, Perret and Bastien Lepage are. If I were you, I should make more of those beautiful heads, like the ones of those blind men. I am going to try it with a finer pencil too.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

With reference to novelists, isn't it your opinion too that one knows such writers as Dickens, Balzac, Hugo, Zola only when one has a general idea of their works as a whole? I think the same applies to Michelet and Erckmann-Chatrian.

1. See letter 286 to Theo.