

Dear Theo,

Soon after I had dispatched my letter to you, I received a characteristic letter from Rappard; I am enclosing it for you to read because you used to know him but have not met him lately. Judging from the generally serious tone of his letter, you will agree with me, I think, that he has changed greatly for the better (though he was all right before). His drawings are confoundingly well done indeed, and he does honest work.

Well, just read the letter. I think his ideas are sound. Send me back the letter sometime.

I have another thing to tell you – I told you about my plan for a large drawing – well, I started it the very same day that I wrote you, just because Rappard's letter had stimulated me. I have worked on it since then, and it absorbed me so much that I worked at it almost through the whole of last night. I saw it clearly before me, and wanted to carry it through.

I made the composition even simpler, only one row of diggers. I sketched seven figures in it, five men and two women; the rest are smaller, on the second plane. It is the strongest drawing I have ever made.

As to the conception, my ideas about it are similar to those which Rappard expresses in his letter. Like him, I adopted the manner of some English artists, without thinking of imitating them, but probably because I am attracted by the same kinds of things in nature; they are reproduced by relatively few, so that if one wants to make them, one must seek a way to express what one feels and venture a little outside the ordinary rules to render them exactly as one wants. (Like Rappard, whose drawing had all kinds of machines in action, which hardly anybody else would think of attacking, and which are not at all what one is accustomed to calling picturesque.)

Do you know what Rappard's drawing is like? It is exactly like reading a description of a factory by Zola, Daudet or Lemonnier. I underlined a passage in his letter – that about drawing in painting. Well, it comes to about the same thing as what I said last year to some people who told me "Painting is drawing in colour." I answered, "Exactly, and drawing in black and white is, in fact, painting in black and white."

They said "painting is drawing," and I said "drawing is painting." But my technique was then too weak for me to express it in anything but words; now I say it less in words but more silently in my work.

Since you wrote me about your being somewhat in financial difficulties, I have really worked in a kind of fury, day and night.

This is now the fifth large one I have started; actually, it is the sixth, for I made the refuse dump twice. And what a lot of studies I had to make for them; you will see when you come.

Though Rappard has not drawn with printer's ink, I have done so occasionally and what he says is true: he works in a white passe-partout and then it looks more black. I work in a brown passe-partout with a black inner strip, the black of which has been made very deep, to keep the drawing light. He is somewhat wrong when he says that the English do not use printer's ink, for they work the drawings up by using an enormous depth of colour, compared with which the blackest charcoal becomes light. This strength of colour is obtained by using printer's ink or autographic ink, or lampblack, or neutral tint, and other blacks used in watercolours.

You must not be surprised that I undertook so many things in so short a time. In composing a drawing almost more than in painting thought and concentration play a part, and I for one get good results by plodding on for a day and half a night, as I did on that last one. In that way one can become productive, too – it absorbs one enormously. But just when one feels so much attracted by the work, one must stick to it till one drops with exhaustion, so to speak.

I am absolutely penniless; send the money somewhat sooner if possible.

I shall again sleep little tonight because of the drawing; but it is very cozy smoking a pipe in the night, when everything is quiet; and daybreak and sunrise are wonderful. Well, boy, send the money soon if you can. Good luck. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent