

Dear Theo,

As I look forward to your arrival, there is hardly a moment when my thoughts are not with you.

These last days I have gone on to paint several studies, so that you may see them at the same time. And that change of work does me good, for though I cannot do literally as Weissenbruch does, and go and stay in the polders for a few weeks, yet I do do something like it, and to look at the green fields has a calming effect.

Besides, I decidedly hope in this way to make progress in terms of colour. The last painted studies seem to me firmer and more solid in colour. So for instance a few I made recently, in the rain, showing a man on a wet, muddy road, express the sentiment better, I think.

Well, we will see when you come.

Most of them are impressions of landscape, I dare not say as well done as those that sometimes occur in your letters, because still I am often checked by technical difficulties – yet there is something in them, I think – for instance, a silhouette of the city in the evening, when the sun is setting, and a towpath with windmills.

For the rest, it is miserable enough that I still feel very faint when I am not hard at my work, but I believe it is receding. I will decidedly try hard to lay up a reserve of strength for I shall need it to carry on the painting of the figure with a firm hand.

While painting, I feel of late a certain power of colour awakening in me, stronger and different from what I have felt till now.

It may be that the nervousness of these days is linked up with a kind of revolution in my way of working, for which I have been seeking and of which I have been thinking for a long time already.

I have often tried to work less dryly, but it always turned into the same thing over again. But now that a kind of weakness prevents me from working in my usual way, this seems to help, rather than to hinder, and now that I let myself go a little, and look more through the eyelashes, instead of concentrating on the joints and analysing the structure of things, it leads me more directly to seeing things more like adjacent contrasting patches of colour.

I wonder what it will lead to, and how it will develop. I have sometimes wondered why I was not more of a colourist, because my temperament decidedly seems to indicate it – but up till now it developed very little.

I repeat, I wonder how it will develop – but I see clearly that my last painted studies are different.

If I remember rightly, you still have one from last year, of a few tree trunks in the wood.

I do not think that it is really bad, but it is not what one sees in the studies of colourists. Some colours there are correct, but though they are correct they do not have the effect they ought to have, and though the paint is here and there laid on thickly, even so the effect is too meagre. I take this one as an example, and now I think that the last ones which are less thickly laid on are nonetheless becoming more potent in colour, as the colours are more interwoven and the strokes of the brush cover one another, so that it is mellower and more for instance like the downiness of the clouds or of the grass.

At times I have been greatly worried that I made no progress with colour, but now I am hopeful again.

We shall see how it will develop.

Now you will understand that I am very anxious for your coming, for if you also saw that there is a change, I should not doubt that we are on the right track. I dare not quite trust my own eyes as regards my own work. Those two studies, for instance, which I made while it was raining – a muddy road with a little figure – they seem to me exactly the opposite of some other studies. When I look at them I rediscover the sentiment of that dreary rainy day; and in the figure there is a kind of life, though it is nothing but a few patches of colour – it is not summoned by correctness of drawing, for there is in effect no drawing. What I mean to suggest is that in these studies I believe there is something of that mysteriousness one gets by looking at nature through the eyelashes, so that the outlines are simplified to blots of colour.

Time must pass over it, but at present I see in several studies something different in colour and tone.

Recently I often think of a story I read in an English magazine, a tale about a painter, in which there appears a person whose health suffered also in a time of trouble, and who went to a lonely place in the peat fields, and there in that melancholy setting found himself again, and began to paint nature as he felt and saw it. It was very well described in the story, evidently by a person who was well up in art, and it struck me when I read it, while now of late I sometimes think of it again.

At any rate I hope we shall soon be able to talk it over and consult together. If you can, write soon, and of course the sooner you can send the money, the better it will be for me.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours, Vincent

For no particular reason, I cannot help adding a thought that often occurs to me. Not only did I start drawing relatively late in life, but it may well be that I shall not be able to count on many more years of life either.

If I think about it dispassionately – as if making calculations for an estimate or a specification – then it is in the nature of things that I cannot possibly know anything definitely about it.

But by comparison with various people with whose lives one may be familiar, or by comparison with some with whom one is supposed to have some things in common, one can draw certain conclusions which are not completely without foundation.

So, as to the time I still have ahead of me for work, I think I may safely presume that my body will hold up for a certain number of years quand bien même [in spite of everything] – a certain number between 6 and 10, say. (I can assume this the more safely as there is for the time being no immediate quand bien même.)

This is the period on which I count firmly. For the rest, it would be speculating far too wildly for me to dare make a definite pronouncements about myself, seeing that it depends precisely on those first, say, ten years as to whether or not there will be anything after that time.

If one wears oneself out during these years then one won't live beyond 40. If one conserves enough strength to withstand the sort of shocks that tend to befall one, and manages to deal with various more or less complicated physical problems, then by the age of 40 to 50 one is back on a new, relatively normal course.

But such calculations are not relevant at present. Instead, as I started to say, one should plan for a period of between 5 and 10 years. I do not intend to spare myself, to avoid emotions or difficulties – it makes comparatively little difference to me whether I go on living for a shorter or longer time – besides I am not competent to manage my constitution the way, say, a physician is able to. And so I go on like an ignoramus, one who knows just one thing: within a few years I must have done a certain amount of work – I don't need to rush, for there is no point in that, but I must carry on working in complete calm and serenity, as regularly and with as much concentration as possible, as much to the point as possible. The world concerns me only in so far as I owe it certain debt and duty, so to speak, because I have walked this earth for 30 years, and out of gratitude would like to leave some memento in the form of drawings and paintings – not made to please this school or that, but to express a genuine human feeling. So that work is my aim – and when one concentrates on this idea, everything one does is simplified, in that it is not muddled but has a single objective. At present the work is going slowly – one reason more not to lose any time.

Guillaume Régamey was, I think, someone who left behind no particular reputation (you know there are two Régameys, F. Régamey paints Japanese people, and is his brother), but is nevertheless a personality for whom I have a great respect. He died at the age of 38, and one period of his life lasting 6 or 7 years was almost exclusively devoted to drawings with a highly distinctive style, done while he worked under some physical handicap. He is one of many – a very good one among many good ones.

I don't mention him to compare myself with him, I am not as good as he was, but to cite a specific example of self-control and willpower, sustained by one inspiring idea, which in difficult circumstances nevertheless showed him how to do good work with utter serenity.

That is how I regard myself, as having to accomplish in a few years something full of heart and love, and to do it with a will. Should I live longer, *tant mieux*, [so much the better] but I put that out of my mind. Something must be accomplished in those few years, this thought guides all my plans. You will understand better now why I have a yearning to press on – and at the same time some determination to use simple means. And perhaps you will also be able to understand that as far as I am concerned I do not consider my studies in isolation but always think of my work as a whole.