

Dear Theo,

After having nosed around this place for some days, I am writing to you again. Here it is so absolutely and entirely what I think beautiful, that means there is peace here.

There are other things I think beautiful – for instance, the drama – but that is everywhere, and there are not only Van Goyenesque effects here.

Yesterday I drew some decayed oak roots [F 1095, JH 406], so-called bog trunks (that is, oak trees which have perhaps been buried for a century under the bog, from which new peat had been formed; when digging the peat up, these bog trunks come to light).

These roots were lying in a pool, in black mud.

Some black ones were lying in the water, in which they were reflected, some bleached ones were lying on the black earth. A little white path ran past it all, behind that more peat, pitch-black. And a stormy sky over it all. That pool in the mud with those rotten roots was completely melancholy and dramatic, just like Ruysdael, just like Jules Dupré.

This is a scratch of the peat fields.

There are very often curious contrasts of black and white here, for instance, a canal with white sandy banks, across a pitch-black plain. In the above sketch you can see it too, black figures against a white sky, and in the foreground again a variation of black and white in the sand.

I saw an effect exactly like Ruysdael's bleaching fields at Overveen; in the foreground a high road overshadowed by clouds, then a low barren meadow, on which the light fell, and down below two houses (one with a slated roof, the other with red tiles). Behind it a canal and mounds of peat, varying in size according to the plane on which they stand; far away a silhouette of a small row of huts, and a little church spire, little black figures spreading linen out to bleach, a single mast of a barge sticking up between the mounds of peat. A grey stormy sky over all. I often think of Van Goyen on these misty mornings, the cottages are just like this, they have that same peaceful and naïve aspect.

I think I have found my little kingdom, you know.

"Coming events cast their shadows before," is an English proverb.

I must repeat once more that I hope you feel perfectly sure, in hours of melancholy, that you are not without a friend. For I think I can assure you that you can trust me. Why do I repeat this? – because I have been thinking over what you wrote about America. And I cannot approve of that "plan quand même," even if you had the finest connections there, for instance, with Knoedler or whomever you like. Though the thought may have crossed your mind only in a melancholy moment, though it is not exactly a plan – I do not believe it is – still it proves that you have your gloomy moments. And I can understand perfectly well – though I know nothing of the circumstances, but quite in general – that it is not very pleasant at Goupil's. Wisselingh told me the story of the firm in London, and I can only say that there is certainly an enormous difference between the house of Goupil & Co. as it was (for instance, when Uncle Vincent was still a partner, and not even during his last years) and as it is now.

This must be very unpleasant for persons like you, everything so much more disagreeable than in former years.

Personal activity, personal energy, Tersteeg has it, you have it, and at the same time you have a position; but in case of a change, it might not be of any use to you, and you would hurt yourself everywhere against "triomphe de la médiocrité, de la nullité, de l'absurdité."

For instance, take Wisselingh who is strong-minded; very well, he keeps on his feet, but in no respect has he the active life Uncle Vincent has – why not? – because now other things are more important; and, for instance, if he were young now, Uncle Vincent would not be able to do now what he could do then, any more than you could now if the present were the past. Therefore I say, what's the fun of it? – at present one is bored – as, for instance, Wisselingh, as far as I can see, is enormously bored, because he cannot act.

If you have personal energy, do not let it wear out, do not let it rust; if things get rotten and one cannot rely on anything, then try something simpler. But I am so out of everything, I know so little about it directly – I think the few words I heard from Wisselingh about London are the only things I have heard about business in a year and a half, so I may be quite mistaken.

But some things seem so queer to me that in general I suppose business to be out of joint, though I do not know exactly where and how.

Now you will perhaps say, Yes, but your painter's business is even more wretched, unsafe, and there, too, it may happen that personal energy or activity cannot do everything, for instance provide one with food for

some time. All right, admitting this to be true, but if it is a case of providing for the simplest needs, trying a spot where life is cheaper instead of the very expensive city life won't make things worse. If I had just a little luck; if I found a few friends for my work – then, yes, then I would speak quite differently still.

For the very reason that I owe my having been able to work on till now to you, I want to tell you that I do not doubt for a moment that you would consider it a delightful thing to have a handicraft; and though at first it might bring you into the most impossible and queer relations with your real position as far as life in general is concerned, the glimpse of the future would give you a “qu'est-ce que ça me fait” – a future which, though it does not entirely depend on personal activity, nevertheless has a more direct connection with it than trade, which is no handicraft.

In the beginning you would not have to be alone, and I assure you that this shortens the initial ineptitude enormously. It is a fatal thing that sometimes one has to plod for a whole year on a thing that might have been explained in two weeks by someone more advanced. It does depend on personal effort, but the road is easier or more difficult according to one's being alone or not. And the worst is when one absolutely has to know a thing, and on seeking information, has the other one turn his back on you. That is a terrible thing, but it does happen, and perhaps people call that “distinguished manners.” One is absolutely beaten then, and it is so painful to know in advance that one is sure to make a number of mistakes before finding out for oneself; all such losses of time and misery are expenditures which might have been avoided.

The result is that one never asks again, and will only depend on oneself; but it ought not to be so. Well, there are many things that ought “not to be so.” Enough of it; I only say, If ever you change (though there may be no question of it as yet), then become a painter. And then spend your early days together with me, though I do not know as much as many others and I am still ignorant on many points.

I shall be able to speak much, much more definitely about it if I succeed in getting some more stability in my affairs this year. When C. M. comes, talk it over with him. I do wish that things would become a little easier, especially for you, through relations with him.

A thing that would help you a good deal is that you would be coming fresh from the world of art, from which I had been excluded a long time when I began.

For it is necessary to thoroughly feel the link between nature and pictures in general. I have had to renew that in myself. I hope to make something of the women on the moor on the enclosed little sketch, and I am going to the same field again.

Adieu, boy, but you must not think about going to America any more.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

And you must not think “I am not an artist,” for as far as universal feelings of energy and intellect are necessary, rest assured that you possess them.

As I told you, I shall be at Hoogeveen on October 12, but after that I shall come back here.