

Letter R44
Nuenen, mid March 1884

Amice Rappard,

Your letter about the drawings delighted me.¹ As for the weaving loom, the study of that apparatus was indeed made on the spot from start to finish, and it was a hard job – on account of the fact that one must sit so close to it that it is difficult to take measurements; I did include the figure in the drawing after all. But what I wanted to express by it was just this: “When that monstrous black thing of grimed oak with all those sticks is seen in such sharp contrast to the greyish atmosphere in which it stands, then there in the centre of it sits a black ape or goblin or spook that clatters with those sticks from early morning till late at night.” And I indicated that spot by putting in some sort of apparition of a weaver, by means of a few scratches and blots, where I had seen it sitting. Consequently I hardly gave a thought to the proportions of the arms and legs.

When I had finished drawing the apparatus pretty carefully, I thought it was so disgusting that I couldn't hear it rattle that I let the spook appear in it. Very well – and – let us say it is only a mechanical drawing – all right, but just put it beside the technical design for a loom – and mine will be more spectral all the same, you may be sure of that. As a matter of fact it is no mechanical drawing – or it may be except for a “je ne sais quoi.” And – if you were to put my study beside the drawing of a mechanic who had designed a weaving loom – mine would express more strongly that the thing is made of oak grimed by sweaty hands; and looking at it (even if I had not included him in the drawing at all, or even if I did add his figure out of proportion), you could not help thinking occasionally of the workman, whereas absolutely nothing like it would occur to your mind when you looked at the model of a loom drawn by a mechanic. A sort of sigh or lament must issue from that contraption of sticks now and then.

I very much enjoy seeing your drawings of machines. Why? – because when you draw nothing but the flywheel, I for one cannot help thinking of the boy who turns it, and I feel his presence in a way I can't define. And those who look upon your mechanical drawings as designs for apparatuses do not understand your art at all.

But – if one draws such an apparatus – taken by itself – then I agree with you that one ought to do it in as mechanic-like a way as possible, if one wants to profit by it as a study.

Meanwhile I quite understand your idea that, if it were to be a black-and-white drawing – which I hope to make it someday, if I can get hold of the right model – that little black spook in the background must be the centre, the starting point, the heart of it, most deeply felt, most elaborately finished, and all the rest must be kept subordinate to it.

Well, I was pleased to hear that you liked my winter garden a little [F 1130, JH 465]. Indeed, this garden sets me dreaming, and since then I have made another one of the same subject, also with a little black spook in it, which this time too appears in it not as an example, worthy of imitation, of the correct drawing of the structure of the human body, but as a contrast [F 1128, JH 466]. I am sending you a few others too – a sepia sketch of “Het Broek” – pen-and-ink drawings, “Pollard Willows” [F 1240, JH 469] – “Poplar Avenue” [F 1239, JH 464] – “Behind the Hedges” [F 1129, JH 461] – the “Kingfisher” [F 1135, JH 468] – “Winter Garden.”

I sent them rolled up, but please put them into the portfolio along with the others, especially when you return them, in order to keep them as flat as possible. I added a piece of grey paper; they will show up better if you place them against that.

As for these drawings and art shows, I am not interested in art shows. But what I am interested in is this. I work every day, of course – and not a week passes without my doing some studies like these. I always consider it possible that some day I shall find an art lover who would like to buy them from me – not one or two but fifty for instance.

I have heard of more than one painter who was forced to part in this way with his studies (which he most probably would have kept himself if he had been able to), but who on the other hand got some money to tide him over the bad times.

And if I ask you to show them to people as the opportunity arises, I repeat, I do this because it is not altogether impossible that you will be able to bring me into contact with such an art lover. If it does not happen, well, then it doesn't; but, inasmuch as my life is getting more difficult instead of easier, it is my bounden duty to look for opportunities to hunt up chances to sell my work. And I therefore ask you to show them when there is a favorable opportunity; if they take no notice of them, all right – I am prepared for that too. To give a one-man show of my work is something I do not desire at all for the time being.

As for the people who are interested in drawings – among the ordinary art-loving public there is always a chance of finding some feeling – a little faith and belief; but among the superficially initiated like the art dealers (without exception) one certainly does not find any feeling, belief or faith, but only old files of superficial judgments, generalizations, conventional criticism ... old files, which I think it would mean losing one's time on – and losing one's teeth – to blunt one's dental equipment.

So – show them, if you find an opportunity, but please do not do so especially – do not force things – but I repeat, I for my part have to do it. If I were not forced to do it, should very much prefer to keep at least the studies myself, and I would never sell them. But... you know the rest.

Well, goodbye – I have taken up painting again recently.

Ever yours, Vincent

At times I think of never doing anything but pen-and-ink drawings and painting.

1. See letter 364 to Theo.