

Letter 374
Nuenen, early August 1884

Dear Theo,

I just wanted to drop you a line while you are in London. Thanks for your last letter, and the enclosed 150 francs.

How I should love to walk with you in London, particularly in real London weather when the City, especially in certain old parts near the river, has aspects that are very melancholy but at the same time have a remarkably striking character, which some present-day English artists have begun to make after they learned to observe and paint from the French. But unfortunately it is very difficult to get to see that English art which is really the most interesting to you and me. Generally most of the pictures in the exhibitions are not sympathetic.

I hope, however, that you will come across things here and there which will make you understand. Now I for my part have always remembered some English pictures such as "Chill October" by Millais and, for instance, the drawings by Fred. Walker and Pinwell. Just notice the Hobbema in the National Gallery; you must not forget a few very beautiful Constables there, including "Cornfield," nor that other one in South Kensington called "Valley Farm."

I am very curious to hear what struck you most, and what you have seen there.

Last week I was in the fields every day during the harvest, of which I made a composition.

I made this for somebody in Eindhoven who wants to decorate a dining room [Hermans]. He intended to do this with compositions of various saints. I begged him to consider whether the appetite of the worthy people who would have to sit down at that table would not be more stimulated by six illustrations from peasant life in the Meierij [Manor District], at the same time symbolizing the four seasons, than by these mystical personages. And now, after a visit to my studio, the man became quite enthusiastic about it. But he wants to paint those panels himself, and will he be able to do it? (But I should design and paint the compositions on a reduced scale.)

He is a man with whom I want to remain on good terms – a former goldsmith who has three times amassed a very important collection of antiques and sold it again. He is rich now, and has built himself a house that is again full of antiques, and furnished with some very beautiful oaken chests, etc. He is decorating the ceilings and walls himself, and really does it well sometimes. But he positively wants "painting" in the dining room, and has begun to paint twelve panels of flowers.

There are six panels left on the longest wall, and for these I gave him preliminary sketches of a sower, ploughman, shepherd, harvest, potato digging, ox wagon in the snow.

But I don't know whether it will come to anything, for I have no definite arrangement with him.

But he is pleased with this first panel, as well as with my sketches for the other subjects.

I long very much for your coming.

I am still pleased to be here; at times I do not miss some things, but my work absorbs me sufficiently.

Well, remember me to Mr. O. [Obach] if you bump into him.

When you come here, you will find all the farmers ploughing and sowing spurry, or they will have just finished doing it.

I have seen splendid sunsets over the fields of stubble.

Goodbye for now.

Yours, Vincent