

Letter 386  
Nuenen, mid November 1884

Dear Theo,

Yesterday I brought home that study of the water mill at Gennepe [F 125, JH 525], which I painted with pleasure, and which has procured me a new friend in Eindhoven [Anton Kerssemakers], who passionately wants to learn to paint, and to whom I paid a visit, after which we set to work at once. So that very evening he had already brushed a still life, and he has promised me he will try to paint about thirty of them this winter, which I will come and look at now and then, and help him to make. He is a tanner who has time and money, and is about 40 years old, so he has more chances than Hermans, who wonderfully keeps up his ardour for all that, however, and works just as hard as he did the first days, i.e. gives almost all his time to it. I think this new fellow will soon get an eye for colour.

I intend to make these people gradually pay, not in money, but by telling them, You must give me tubes of paint. For I want to paint a lot – continually, and I want to manage so that I no longer need work at half speed, but can paint from morning till night.

You must not suppose that I am so eager for people to approve of my work and my actions in general. On the contrary, for the moment, for instance, I am almost more glad that Mauve and Tersteeg have refused me than if it had been the reverse. Understand me well! It is because I feel within me the power to win them over in the end, notwithstanding everything.

I should not have applied to them again if I didn't feel that I had gained a fixed point by drudging these last years on the ABC of drawing and painting – drudging harder than they can imagine – and I should not have started a new fight if I didn't feel sure of the possibility of winning it.

I am not sure of the certainty of winning it, however, but I dare speculate on its chance, so I am none the worse for it now that I have begun to appeal to the public. In the very fight I shall feel my strength grow, and I shall learn more by criticism, by ill will, even by opposition, than by resignation.

But those things I mentioned to you – I must insist, decidedly insist on. I have set myself the task of making a certain number of studies, for which I lack the money, no matter how I calculate, and yet I cannot put them off for any reason on earth. New Year's is at hand; I have to pay a few things about that time, and I have already paid some off this month. But in this way I run short of money for my work, and if I don't find something extra, I shall lose a month's work, and under the circumstances that must not be; do try your very utmost to obtain an extra 100 francs for me.

I, for my part, will also try to get a contribution of colours from the people whom I give lessons to.

I hope you will feel that just because of my appeal to Mauve and Tersteeg and their refusing, directly or indirectly I must show very shortly that I have again accomplished something – and that all energy must now be concentrated, and that work must be done at full speed, though it might turn out a little more expensive. That will be amortized, and I stick to what I said, in the future we must manage to get at least a good interest from the capital invested.

A change has come into my colour since you were here; I already had a presentiment of it when you were here, and you will see that – with some more studies, those which I am writing about now, which must be finished within a couple of months – it will be proved beyond a doubt that, exactly in the matter of colour, I have achieved something. It is not my fault, but at the moment I am short of money, just because I have painted more than I could really afford, and there can be no economizing now, for we can gain important points by striking while the iron is hot. I remember having said in my last letter: “that I no longer care what your opinion is”; I don't mean that as rudely as it sounds, I only mean that in some respects I have decided to push on with passion rather than prudence, because this is more in character, and, after all, I cannot put up with those cool calculations. And yet I calculate too. The extra I ask – I don't ask it at once, but look at what I mean. Try to send 20 francs extra about November 20, then the ordinary amount on December 1, another 20 francs extra about December 20, and the same in January. Then I shall be able to make both ends meet during those months, and need not stop for days when the work requires my not losing a moment.

If it can be a little more, so much the better, but try at least to do what I just asked.

And I for my part can perhaps get something in the form of tubes of colour from that new acquaintance.

I don't think I am mistaken in regard to Tersteeg and Mauve when I venture to say there is certainly a chance of getting at them and winning them over. They may be won over by colour, and by working hard. I see a chance of giving them convincing proof that I have a notion of, and sentiment for, colour. And then portraits are more and more in demand, and there are not so very many who can do them, and I want to try to learn to paint a head with character; I have just recently become enthusiastic about it, because my idea of

colour has become firmer. You need not meddle at once in that affair of Tersteeg and Mauve, rather spare yourself, but when for instance I have those projected 50 heads ready by the end of January, then it might be well if you unexpectedly said a few words to them.

Hermans has, after all, positively promised to give me the money for a trip somewhere, but with a return ticket. If I want to go to Antwerp, I can take him at his word, and this winter I will manage to try to get some connections there, though that may not succeed all at once either.

Goodbye, be sure to send me 20 francs by November 20, to keep me going till the end of the month. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent