

Dear Theo,

You would greatly oblige me by trying to get for me:
Illustration No.2174, 24th October 1884.

It is already an old number, but at the office you will probably be able to get it. In it there is a drawing by Paul Renouard, a strike of the weavers at Lyons. Also one from a series of Opera sketches (of which he has also published etchings) – called “The Harpist,” which I like very much.

Then he has also done just recently, “The World of the Law Courts,” which I got from Rappard, you know it probably from the “Paris Illustré” by Damas.

But I think the drawing of the weavers the most beautiful of all, there is so much life and depth in it that I think this drawing might hold its own beside Millet, Daumier, Lepage.

When I think how he rose to such a height by working from the very beginning from nature, without imitating others, and how he is none the less in harmony with the very clever people, even in technique, though from the very first he had his own style, I find him again a proof that by truly following nature one’s work improves every year.

And I am daily more convinced that people who do not in the first place wrestle with nature never succeed.

I think that if one has tried to follow attentively the great masters, one finds them all back at certain moments, deep in reality – I mean that their so-called creations will be seen by one in reality, if one has the same eyes, the same sentiment as they had. And I do believe that if the critics and connoisseurs were better acquainted with nature their judgment would be more correct than now, when it is the routine to live only among pictures, and to compare them mutually. Which of course, as one side of the question, is good in itself, but it lacks a solid basis if one begins to forget nature and looks only superficially. Can’t you understand that I am perhaps not wrong in this, and to say more clearly still what I mean, is it not a pity that you, for instance, seldom or hardly ever enter those cottages, or associate with those people, or see that sentiment in landscape, which is painted in the pictures you like best. I do not say that you can do this in your position, just because one must look much and long at nature before one comes to the conviction that the most touching things the great masters have painted still find their origin in life and reality itself. A basis of sound poetry, which exists eternally as a fact, and can be found if one digs and seeks deeply enough.

“Ce qui ne passe pas dans ce qui passe,” it exists. [“The durable within the transitory”]

And what Michelangelo said in a splendid metaphor, I think Millet has said without metaphor, and Millet can perhaps best teach us to see, and get “a faith.” If I do better work later on, I certainly shall not work differently than now, I mean it will be the same apple, though riper; I shall not change my mind about what I have thought from the beginning. And that is the reason why I say for my part: if I am no good now, I shall be no good later on either, but if later on, then now too. For corn is corn, though people from the city may take it for grass at first, and also the other way round.

In any case, whether people approve or do not approve of what I do and how I do it, I for my part know no other way than to wrestle so long with nature that she tells me her secret.

All the time I am working at various heads and hands.

I have also drawn some again, perhaps you would find something in them, perhaps not, I can’t help it. I repeat, I know no other way.

But I can’t understand that you say: perhaps later on we shall admire even the things done now.

If I were you, I should have so much self-confidence and independent opinion that I should know whether I could see now what there was or was not in a thing.

Well, you must know those things for yourself.

Though the month is not quite over, my purse is quite empty. I work on as hard as I can, and I for my part think that by constantly studying the model, I shall keep a straight course.

I wish you could send me the money a few days before the 1st for that same reason, that the ends of the month are always hard, because the work brings such heavy expenses, and I don’t sell any of it. But this will not go on so for ever, for I work too hard and too much not to arrive eventually at the point of being able to defray my expenses, without being in a dependent position. For the rest, nature outside and the interiors of the cottages, they are splendid in their tone and sentiment just at present; I try hard not to lose time.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent