

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for the Illustrations you sent, I am much obliged to you. I think the various drawings by Renouard beautiful and I did not know one of them.

However – this is not to give you extra trouble, but because I wrote things about them which perhaps cannot quite be applied to other drawings of his – the real Renouard composition I meant is not among them, perhaps that issue is sold out. The breadth of the figure in it was superb, it was an old man and some women and a child, I believe, sitting idle in a weaver's cottage where the looms stood still.

I had not yet seen anything in reproduction from the Salon of '84, and now I at least got some idea of a few interesting pictures from the Salon number. For instance of that composition by Puvis de Chavannes.

I imagine that the Harpignies with the setting sun must have been splendid. And the pictures by Feyen-Perrin which they give sketches of.

I was also struck by the figure of a girl by Emile Levy, "Japonaise," and the picture by Beyle, "Brûleuses de Varech" [Women burning seaweed], and the one by Collin, "L'Ete," three figures of nude women.

I am very busy painting those heads. I paint in the daytime and draw in the evening. In this way I have already painted at least some thirty and drawn as many.

With the result that I see a chance of doing it even better before long, I hope.

I think that it will help me for the figure in general. Today I had one white and black against the flesh colour.

And I am also looking for blue all the time. Here the peasant's figures are as a rule blue. That blue in the ripe corn or against the withered leaves of a beech hedge – so that the faded shades of darker and lighter blue are emphasized and made to speak by contrast with the golden tones of reddish-brown – is very beautiful and has struck me here from the very first. The people here instinctively wear the most beautiful blue that I have ever seen.

It is coarse linen which they weave themselves, warp black, woof blue, the result of which is a black and blue striped pattern. When this fades and becomes somewhat discoloured by wind and weather, it is an infinitely quiet, delicate tone that particularly brings out the flesh colours.

Well, blue enough to react to all colours in which hidden orange elements are to be found, and discoloured enough not to jar.

But this is a question of colour, and what matters more to me at the point I'm at now is the question of form. I think the best way to express form is with an almost monochrome colouring, the tones of which differ principally in intensity and in value. For instance, "La Source" by Jules Breton was painted almost in one colour. But one really ought to study each colour separately in connection with its contrast before one can be positively sure of being harmonious.

When there was snow, I also painted a few studies of our garden. The landscape has changed much since then; now we have splendid evening skies of lilac with gold over dark silhouettes of cottages between the masses of ruddy-coloured brushwood – above which rise the spare black poplars, while the foregrounds are of a faded and bleached green, varied by strips of black earth and pale withered rushes along the ditch edges [F 067, JH 604].

I certainly see all this too – I think it just as superb as anybody else, but I am even more interested in the proportion of a figure, the division of the oval of the head, and I cannot master the rest before I have a better grip on the figure.

Well – first comes the figure; I personally cannot understand the rest without it, and it is the figure that creates the atmosphere. I can understand, however, that there are people, like Daubigny and Harpignies and Ruysdael and so many others, who are absolutely and irresistibly carried away by the landscape itself; their work satisfies us fully because they themselves were satisfied with sky and earth and a pool of water and a shrub.

But I think it a mighty clever saying of Israëls, when he remarked of a Dupré, It is just like "a picture of the figure."

Goodbye and many thanks again for the Illustrations.

Ever yours,

Vincent.