

Dear Theo,

I have wondered a little at not having heard from you yet. You will say that you have been too busy to think of it, and of course I understand this.

It is late in the evening, but I want to tell you once more how sincerely I hope that in the future our correspondence will become somewhat more animated than it has been of late.

Enclosed you will find two scratches of a few studies I made, while at the same time I am again working on those peasants around the dish of potatoes [F078, JH 734]. I have just come home from this cottage and have been working at it by lamplight, though I began it by daylight this time.

This is what the composition looks like.

I painted it on a rather large canvas, and as the sketch is now, I think there is some life in it.

Yet I am sure C. M., for instance would find fault with the drawing, etc. Do know what a positive argument against that is? That the beautiful effects of in nature demand a very quick hand in drawing.

Now I know quite well that the great masters, especially in the period of their ripest experience, knew both how to be elaborate in the finishing and at the same time to keep a thing full of life. But certainly that will be beyond my power for the present. At the point I am now, however, I see a chance of giving a true impression of what I see.

Not always literally exact or rather never exact, for one sees nature through one's own temperament

The advice I want to give, you know, is the following: Don't let the time slip by; help me to work as much as possible, and from now on keep all the studies together.

I do not like to sign any of them yet, for I do not want them to circulate as pictures, which one would have to buy up again later when one had some reputation. But it will be a good thing if you show them, for you will see that someday we shall find somebody who wants to do the same thing I propose to you now, namely make a collection of studies.

I intend to go out regularly every morning and to attack the very first thing I see people do, either in the field or at home, which in fact I am already doing now.

You are looking for new ideas for the art trade; the idea of being kind to the art lovers is not new, but it is one that never gets old.

Like that of guaranteeing a purchase. And I ask you, isn't it better for an art lover to possess from one painter, for instance, twenty quite different sketches at the same price which he in all fairness would have to pay for one finished picture which, as a saleable article, had its value on the market? If I were in your place, as you know so many young painters who haven't a reputation yet, I would try to bring painted studies on the market, not as pictures, but mounted in some way on gilt Bristol, for instance, or black, or deep red.

Just now I mentioned giving a guarantee.

Not all painters make a lot of studies – but many do, and especially the young ones must do so as much as possible, mustn't they? He who possesses a painter's studies may always be sure (at least it seems that way to me) that there is a bond between the painter and himself which cannot easily be broken at a whim.

There are people, as you know, who support painters during the time when they do not yet earn anything, very well! But how often doesn't it happen that it ends miserably, wretchedly, for both parties, partly because the protector is annoyed about the money, which is or at least seems quite thrown away, whereas, on the other hand, the painter feels entitled to more confidence, more patience and interest than is given him? But in most cases the misunderstandings arise from carelessness on both sides.

I hope this will not be the case between us.

And I hope that by and by my studies will give you some new courage. Neither you nor I are contemporaries of that race which Gigoux, in that book you sent me, rightly calls "Les vaillants."

But it seems to me right after all to keep the enthusiasm of those days in the present time, for it is often true that fortune favours the bold, and whatever may be true about fortune or "la joie (?) de vivre," as it is called, one must work and dare if one really wants to live.

I repeat, let us paint as much as we can and be productive, and, with all our faults and qualities, be ourselves; I say us, because the money from you, which I know costs you trouble enough to get for me, gives you the right, if there is some good in my work, to consider half of it your own creation.

Try to speak to somebody at Le Chat Noir and ask them if they want a sketch of those potato eaters, and if so, of what size, for it's all the same to me. Good-by, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent