

Letter 414  
Nuenen, 21 or 28 June 1885

Dear Theo,

Today being Sunday, I want to write you again.

Because I forgot to say something of Uhde's picture, "Laissez venir à moi les petits enfants."

Yes, I like it, but it isn't new.

And I prefer interiors in a bright tone with peasant children, without a mystic figure of Christ, as Israëls or Artz paint them, to this one, where one gets a mystic Christ into the bargain.

The children are very expressive – but are they better than those by Labrichon, Frère or even Knaus, Vautier (in their best period)?

Do not think this unimportant, for all those people I mention were, especially in the past, extraordinarily clever in expressing character.

My objection to Uhde's picture is that there is a certain coldness in it like in new brick houses and schools and the Methodist churches. And notwithstanding the great merits of the picture, excuse me, but it makes me long for Decamps's or Isabey's less orthodox style of painting.

There is after all something consumptive in it, and I think a Corot, a Dupré, a Millet, infinitely healthier in tone.

But I can only judge from the reproduction; perhaps if I saw the picture, I should get more reconciled to it as to technique.

You know how much I like the bright painters too, but you see it goes too far, and Mantz expresses it very subtly when he says, "Ceux qui rêvent toujours partout le maximum des clairs, trouveraient d'une intensité un peu noire les verts de M. Harpignies" [those who are forever and everywhere dreaming of the maximum of light tones would find Mr. Harpignies's greens somewhat black].

That's it exactly: They begin to find heresy in every effect against a strong and coloured light, in every shadow – they never seem to walk early in the morning or in the evening at sunset – they want to see nothing but full daylight, or gaslight, or even electric light!

Now, the effect of all this on me is that I sometimes detect in myself a longing to see things like, for instance, "The Moving Out" by Nuyen, like an old Leys, like a Cabat, a Diaz, or Lepoitevin.

Perhaps you will call this nothing but my constant waywardness. But I begin by admitting that I find Uhde's picture very good; only having found it good, I became conscious of an aftertaste that is not altogether peasant, at least not cheering, because that kind of painter generally doesn't improve in his later pictures.

Well, it is a typical picture for the house Goupil & Co.; of their best. They have also had Knaus at Goupil's, and Labrichon too. I assure you that I do not systematically despise all this, far from it. Does it express what I mean when I say it thus: "It is a good picture of Messrs. Goupil & Co.'s?" Does it express what I mean when I say, "Beaucoup, mais beaucoup de talent – autant que possible – du génie? Non." [Lots, oh, lots of talent – as much as you like – but genius? No.]

This picture of Uhde's is much more German (notice in Mantz's article how slyly he chaffs Meyerheim, "nature mortier"<sup>1</sup> – did you notice it?), I repeat, much more German than it seems.

Oh, how wise, those new, those arrogant people of the new progress who criticize Harpignies, I am sure that you cannot stand them either, and in character they are a new edition of Monnier's M. Prudhomme. To speak of something more stimulating. I enclose a wood engraving after Clausen; he began rather in a German style but has improved, as Neuhuys also often improved.

The reason why I send you this little print is – here at last you have something of English art; it reminds me of work by Pinwell and Fred. Walker. It is different from Millet, but you will see, however long you look at it, it never bores you.

Don't throw it away, for one so seldom sees something of that rare art, which one must not mistake for Bridgmann, for instance.

And the other little print, though less virile in conception, is mighty good as to sentiment and also quite original.

Every day I work hard on drawing figures. But I must have a hundred of them, even more, before I am through. I want to find something different from my old drawings and to grasp the character of the peasants – especially those from this neighbourhood.

And it is about harvest time, and then I must make a campaign both of corn reaping, and potato digging. At that time it is twice as hard to get models, and yet it is necessary, for I become more and more convinced

that one cannot be too conscientious, that one must always exert oneself on what Daudet calls “the search for the model” (in L’Histoire de mon Livre, an article about “Les rois en exil,” which I just read). I should like to show Serret the studies of the harvest too. Therefore I cannot tell exactly when I shall be able to send the portfolio with studies from the model. But at all events it will be soon. I also hope to send before the harvest about three more cottages, painted studies, like those last ones. Am I wrong when I think there is some good in the old tower? Have you already varnished it? Both are now dry enough for a little varnish, and need it badly, because both are painted over something else. Can you fix the time of your coming approximately? And are there no new Lhermites? Goodbye, with a handshake,  
Ever yours, Vincent

I repeat, there are only too many examples of the very bright painters later becoming chalky or oily; it is because I noticed this so often that I have certain reservations, that I cannot altogether admire Uhde’s picture. “The Two Blacksmiths” by Raffaelli is very beautiful.

1. In French, a still life is a “nature mort,” literally “dead nature.” The pun means “nature which has died.”