

Letter 420
Nuenen, mid August 1885

Dear Theo,

That colour dealer writes me that I can send him the pictures. But he wants me to send them as soon as possible, because there are many foreigners in The Hague just now. He is perfectly right there.

Now I must beg you to try to send me enough money to have a box made and to pay the carriage. Deduct it from the next month's allowance if you like, but I haven't got a cent and I want to send the pictures at once. Your visit has really left me no comforting impression; more than ever I believe that more difficulties are threatening you in the coming years than you suppose.

I go on insisting that it is fatal that your energy has manifestly taken another direction, instead of being turned to making a success of painting for both of us. And yet it is only a very short time ago that you wrote you had more confidence now, and that my work was good.

You take it as though I were misbehaving toward you, or were your enemy, because at present I object to quite a number of things. And I am very uneasy about the future. For all that, I cannot speak otherwise than I did.

In my opinion you don't in the least belong among the rising men. Resent this if you like, and in the future treat me just as you like because of it.

I will take back my objections as soon as I see quite different things in you – but that I made them on the occasion of your visit – yes.

Though you say today, "I am selling to the tune of 500,000 fr. a year" – this does not impress me the least little bit, as I am too much convinced of the difficulty of keeping it up for one-half, or one-fifth, and of delivering the goods in the years to come.

It is too high up in the air for my taste, too little on solid ground. And, after all, art itself is solid enough, that isn't the trouble. But being a counting house is a passing thing, "être un comptoir cela passe," is not a phrase of my own but of somebody whose sayings have come terribly true.

I wish you were or would become a painter.

I say this straight out, more emphatically than before, because I really believe that the great art-dealing business is in many respects a speculation like the bulb trade was. And the situations in it, dependent on chance and freaks of fortune.

Make a mistake in a calculation – even supposing it is only an insignificant slip – and what will become of the enormous figure of your present turnover? This figure is wholly dependent on a whim of Messrs.

Goupil & Co.'s.

And connoisseurship, the clean aspect of it without claptrap, is more nearly related to the practice of art than you would be inclined to think. Dealing in pictures is quite different when one is entirely on one's own from doing business in the employ of big distributors. And the same is true of a lot of other things.

So, in short – work hard – but at the same time try to work sensibly. The trouble you have taken along with me – for furnishing money is taking trouble too, and I don't in the least try to get away from it – this trouble anyway has been an act of personal initiative, of personal will and energy – but what shall I have to say and think of it if there is nothing to compensate for the gradual but undeniable weakening of financial aid?

In my opinion, at least, now is just the moment to try to do something with my work. I have looked for addresses in Antwerp, too, and expect to hear more definitely from there shortly. Then I could probably send something there, too. But if you should know of anything, help me carry it through.

You told me yourself, "Where there's a will there's a way." Well, I am going to take you at your word a little, at least as to your really wanting us to make progress together.

If I were to demand extravagant things and you refused – well, all right then – but when it is a question of the most urgent, the very simplest necessities of life, and it is increasingly and ever more badly becoming downright starvation, only then do I think you go too far in your economizing, and that in this respect it is far from useful.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

A few more words about Serret and Portier. Tell them the simple facts, namely that I did have some studies ready, but that I had to pay a colour dealer who was getting troublesome just now. That in order to put a stop to it I wrote him that his colours were invested in my studies, and that in consequence I requested him

