

Dear Theo,

Very many thanks for the 50 francs and your letter.

You will be able to understand that I shall leave next Tuesday if you consider, firstly, that I am simply longing for it, secondly, that I risk getting stuck here with my work through lack of models, while working out-of-doors has stopped because of the cold.

As to my feeling the loss of a studio in Antwerp, yes, I certainly shall. But I must choose between a studio without work here, and work without a studio there.

I chose the latter. And I did it so gladly that it seems to me like a return from exile. For I have been altogether out of the painters' world for a long time. And meanwhile my power has somewhat ripened, so that I feel more independent of the common intrigues, which enables me to pitch certain fellows out. I mean that in The Hague I was somewhat weaker with my brush than the rest – I don't say in my drawing – and as they asked only for painting and colour, I was more easily crushed than will prove possible now.

As for Rubens, I am looking forward to him very much, but do you object to my thinking Rubens's conception and sentiment of his religious subjects theatrical, often even badly theatrical in the worst sense of the word? Look here – take Rembrandt, Michelangelo – take the "Penseroso" by Michelangelo. It represents a thinker, doesn't it?

But his feet are small and swift, his hand has something of the lightning quickness of a lion's claw and – that thinker is at the same time a man of action, one sees that his thinking is a concentration, but – in order to jump up and act in some way or other. Rembrandt does it differently. Especially his Christ in the "Men of Emmaus" is more a soul in a body, which is surely different from a torso by Michelangelo, but still – there is something powerful in the gesture of persuasion.

Now put a Rubens beside it, one of the many figures of meditative persons – and they become people who have retired into a corner in order to further their digestion. That's how it is in everything religious or philosophical he does, it is flat and hollow; but what he can paint is – women – like Boucher and better – there especially he gives one most to think about and there he is at his deepest. What he can do – combinations of colours – what he can do is – paint a queen, a statesman, well analyzed, just as they are. But the supernatural – where magic begins, no – unless putting something infinite into a woman's expression, which, however, is not dramatic. I found a passage about Gainsborough which again stimulates me to work with one stroke. Look here:

It is this brusqueness of touch that produces so much effect. The spontaneity of his impression is all there, and communicates itself to the spectator. For the rest Gainsborough had a perfect method of ensuring the completeness of his composition. He planned his picture all at once, and carried it out harmoniously from top to bottom, without concentrating his attention on separate little fragments, without obstinately worrying over details, for he sought the general effect, and he nearly always found it, thanks to his broad vision on the canvas, which he looked at as one looks at nature, at a single glance.

I shall send you the book by Ch. Blanc, etc., from Antwerp, as soon as I can add a few studies.

As I don't know where I shall stay, I'll ask that when you write on December 1, address your letter c/o G.P.O., unless I let you know otherwise.

For I shall write again one of these days.

I found the enclosed sonnet by Jules Breton in a magazine.

I repeat, as to my rather sudden departure from here, if I hadn't had trouble with the models, I should have spent the winter here. But working steadily with models here is not so much hampered by the priest's opposition, which in itself would have been neutralized by my ignoring it completely, but the worst is that though I have the courage to stand my ground, people hesitate, and are more frightened than I thought they would be.

And I am not going to undertake it unless I am quite sure that they have the courage. Now it might help if I go away for a couple of months, and if it doesn't help, then not one of those to whom I gave something for it every week last winter will earn a penny with it this winter.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent