

Dear Theo,

Today for the first time I feel rather faint – I had painted a picture of “Het Steen” and went to show it to some dealers. Two of them were not at home, and one did not like it, and one complained bitterly that in a fortnight literally not a single person had shown his face in the store. This is not very encouraging, especially when the weather is chilly and gloomy, and when one has changed one’s last 5-franc piece and doesn’t know how to get through the next two weeks.

Oh dear. Do try to keep me afloat these two weeks, for I want to paint some more figures. This morning I heard it said that some of those pictures I wrote you about had been sold privately – there was a rumour of 21,000 fr. I don’t know if it is true, but at all events there was a crowd of spectators when I was there, and the exhibition for the raffle was also crowded. If there were more better things on view, more business would be done. But the shops have a desolate aspect. The picture of “Het Steen” is rather elaborate, and I shall make another one from a different spot on the quay. [Both paintings lost]

But I greatly prefer to paint the figure, I also believe the market might be overloaded with landscapes, and though painting the figure presents more difficulties because of the models, yet after all it gives perhaps a better chance. What the dealers say is that women’s heads or women’s figures are most likely to sell.

This spring I shall have to decide whether I shall stay in the neighbourhood of Nuenen or not. I should like to hear your opinion on the matter.

I cannot understand why Portier, after his first favourable impression of my work, has become so absolutely indifferent to it since then. I cannot get on when I must spend more on colour than I receive, and I am not the least bit, literally not the least bit, better off than I was years ago, that winter in Brussels. Then I received 50 fr. less, but painting costs me much more than 50 fr., and it has to be paid on the spot.

I do not feel faint as long as I am painting, but in the long run those intervals are always sometimes rather too melancholy, and it grieves me when I don’t get on, and am always in a bad fix. Do you know, for instance, that in the whole time I’ve been here, I’ve only had three warm meals, and for the rest nothing but bread? In this way one becomes vegetarian more than is good for one. Especially as it was the same thing in Nuenen for half a year, and even then I could not pay my colour bill.

Painting is expensive, yet one must paint a great deal. I have half a promise of a model to sit for a portrait, I would do my utmost to get her. Now what I cannot understand is that people like Portier, like Serret, for instance, if they cannot sell, do not at least see their way of getting me some work or other.

Listen, Theo, another thing – I don’t think it will seem incomprehensible to you that I haven’t had the slightest inclination to write to the people at home when they are staying with my charming sister Anna or with other, to me, equally charming members of the family.

As I have received a letter from Mother asking me to write her and informing me that she has asked you to give her my address, will you let them know that I am not going to write, which for that matter I told them quite simply when I went away. You will understand that things like what happened in March are decisive.

Then I left the house, from which may be inferred as a matter of course that they got what they wanted; for the rest, I think of them extremely, extremely little, and I do not desire them to think of me, as far as that goes.

Certainly it is regrettable that such things much happen. But then, you see, there are certain recollections as, for instance, that up to the last Father spoke and behaved toward me, really, in the same way as the Roman Catholic priest. Can’t they understand of their own accord that, for the very reason that you no longer feeling angry, you have definitely become more estranged from them than if they were strangers?

Tell Mother so, if you like, for I do not want to say a harsh word to her, but I positively decline to write. And Mother is old, so I do not want to tell her sharply that I refuse to write. Such things have happened to other painters too, and it is one of those things it is better to leave alone.

At the museum there is a portrait of Delroche painted by Portaels. During his life he seemed such a big man, but how hollow and empty he proved to be afterward! Manet and Courbet did not seem serious during their lives, yet how they proved themselves to be real painters!

By a curious mishap an accident has happened to the portrait of Delaroché, so that a hole was cut right in the middle of the forehead. It looks well, and really seems to belong to it. Ah! there is quite a curious race of people of whom one would not oppose at certain moments that they are actually absolutely hollow and empty. One can be mistaken. And sometimes it is quite refreshing to perceive one has been mistaken, though then one has to begin all over again from the very beginning. Goodbye,

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Ever yours, Vincent