

Dear Theo,

I received your letter and enclosed 25 fr., and thank you very much for both. I am very glad that you are not opposed to my intention of coming to Paris. I think it will help me to make progress, and if I did not go, I am afraid I should get into a mess, and continue to go in the same circle and keep on making the same mistakes.

Besides, I do not think it would do you any harm to come home to a studio in the evening.

For the rest, I must say exactly the same about myself as you write about yourself: You will be disappointed in me.

Yet the thing to do is to combine. And the result may be a much better understanding.

Now what shall I tell you about my health? I keep thinking there is a chance of avoiding a real illness, but it will take some time to restore my health.

I have two more teeth that must be filled, then my upper jaw, which was in the worst condition, will be all right. I have still to pay 10 fr. on it, and then another 40 fr. to have the lower jaw taken care of too.

Thus some of those ten years which I seem to have spent in prison will disappear. Because bad teeth, which one rarely sees nowadays when it is so easy to have them taken care of, give the face a somewhat sunken look.

And then, even when taking the same food, one can digest it better when one can chew well, so my stomach will have a better chance to recover.

But I can feel that I am in a bad condition, and as you write yourself, by neglecting it, it might become much worse. But we will try to get over it.

I have not worked for a few days. I went to bed early a few times (generally after drawing at the club it was one or two o'clock) and I feel that it does me good.

I had a little note from Mother saying that they will start packing in March.

Further, as you tell me that your lease is not up till the end of June, perhaps it might be better after all if I went back to Nuenen in the beginning of March; but if I should have to meet with opposition and scenes like the ones before I left, I should lose time there, and then I should go somewhere else, if only for a few months, as I want to make some new things out-of-doors to take to Paris with me.

That Sibert, the drawing-class teacher who at first spoke to me in the way I wrote you about, definitely picked a fight with me today, perhaps to get rid of me, but he did not succeed because I told him, "Pourquoi cherchez-vous dispute avec moi, je ne veux pas me disputer, et en tout cas je n'y tiens aucunement à vous contredire, seulement vous me cherchez dispute exprès." [Why do you pick a quarrel with me, I don't want to quarrel, and in any case I don't desire the least bit to contradict you, only you pick a quarrel with me on purpose.]

Apparently he did not expect this, and just this once could not say much in answer, but next time he can of course start a fight all right.

What's behind it is that the fellows in the class are discussing my work, and that I have said – not to Sibert, but outside the class to some of the fellows – that their drawings were absolutely wrong.

I can tell you, if I went to Cormon, and if sooner or later I got into trouble either with the teacher or with the pupils, I should not mind it a bit. Even without a teacher I might go through that course of drawing from the ancients, by going and drawing at the Louvre, for instance. And if necessary I should do so, though I should by far prefer to have my work corrected, as long as it does not become deliberate nagging – that correction without any other motive than a certain peculiarity in one's way of working which is different from that of the others.

If he begins again I shall say aloud in the class, "Je veux bien faire mécaniquement tout ce que vous me direz de faire, parce que j'y tiens à vous rendre ce qui vous revient à la rigueur, si vous y tenez, mais pour ce qui est de me mécaniser comme vous mecanisez les autres, cela n'a, je vous assure, pas la moindre prise sur moi.

"Vous avez du reste commencé à me dire tout autre chose, c'est à dire que vous m'avez dit: prenez vous-y, comme vous voudrez." [I am quite willing to do all that you tell me to do mechanically, because, if necessary, I particularly want to give you your due, if you desire it, but as for mechanizing me as you mechanize the others, I assure you it will not influence me in the least.

Anyway, you started by telling me something quite different, that is, you said: Go to work just as you like.]

The reason I draw from the plaster casts, ne pas prendre par le contour mais prendre par le milieu – I have not mastered it yet, but I feel it more and more, and I shall certainly carry it through, it is too interesting. I wish we could be together in the Louvre for a few days and talk it over. I think it would interest you.

This morning I am sending you Chérie, especially because of the preface, which will certainly strike you.

And I wish that we too might work together somewhere at the end of our lives, and looking back, might say – "Firstly, we have done this, and secondly that, and thirdly that."

And if we have the wish and the courage, will there be something to talk over then? We can try two things – make some good things ourselves – and collect and do business with what things of others we admire. But we must both live somewhat more vigorously, and perhaps joining hands is a step toward this.

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But now, allow me to touch on a delicate question. If I have said some unpleasant things about our upbringing and our home, this has been because of finding each other and understanding each other in business; and when working together, we are on a ground where there must be criticism.

Now I can perfectly understand that one can love a thing or a person passionately, and cannot help it.

All right, I will not butt in, only in so far as it might make a fatal separation between us where unity is necessary. And our education, etc., will not prove to have been so good that we will keep many illusions about it, and perhaps we would have been happier with another education.

But if we keep to the positive fact of wanting to produce and to be something, then we can talk over accomplished facts, when it cannot be avoided, without getting angry, even if they might concern, or stand in direct relation with, the Goupils or our family. Besides, these questions are between you and me for a better understanding of the situation, and not out of spite.

But if we undertake something, it will be no unimportant thing for either of us to improve our health, because we shall need a long life, at least twenty-five or thirty years of incessant work. The present time is so interesting if one considers that it is possible we shall witness the beginning of the end of a society.

And in the same way as there is infinite poetry in autumn, or in a sunset, when one feels a mysterious aspiration in nature, so it is now. And in art there is decadence if you like, after Delacroix, Corot, Millet, Dupré, Troyon, Breton, Rousseau and Daubigny, que soit, but a decadence so full of charm that you can still expect enormously beautiful things, and they are made every day.

I am longing terribly for the Louvre, the Luxembourg, etc., where everything will be new to me.

All my life I shall regret not having seen the Cent chefs-d'oeuvre, the Delacroix exhibition and the Meissonier exhibition. But there are other things left.

It is true that I may have made less progress through wanting to get on here too quickly, but what shall I say? One of the reasons was my health, and if I get that back as I hope, my work here will prove to have been less unfruitful.

Am I right that if one asks permission, one may draw from the plaster casts in the Louvre even if one is not at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts? It would not surprise me if, once having got used to the idea of living together, you will think it stranger and stranger that for fully ten years we have been so little together.

Well, I certainly hope that this will be the end of it, and that it will not begin again.

The apartment which you mention is perhaps rather expensive; I mean, I should like a somewhat cheaper one just as well.

I wonder how those few months in Nuenen will be.

As I still have some furniture there, and as the country there is very beautiful, and as I know the neighborhood pretty well, it would perhaps be a good thing to keep a pied-a-terre there in some inn, where I could leave the furniture, as otherwise it would be lost, and under the circumstances it may be of so much use.

The best things are sometimes made when one comes back to old spots.

I must finish this as I must go to the club. Think over what would be the best thing to do.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent