

Dear Theo,

I decidedly want to tell you that it would make me feel much better if you would approve of my coming to Paris much earlier than June or July. The more I think about it, the more anxious I am to do so.

Just think, if all goes well, and if I had good food, etc., all that time, which certainly will leave something to be desired, even in that case it will take about six months before I shall have recovered entirely.

But it would certainly take a much longer time if between March and July I had to go through the same things in Brabant as I have had to go through these last months – and probably it wouldn't be any different.

Now, at this moment, I am feeling terribly weak, even worse than that, from reaction after overwork, but that is the natural course of things and nothing extraordinary; but as it is a question of taking better nourishment, etc., you see in Brabant I shall again spend my last penny on models; it will be the same story all over again, and I do not think that will be right. In that way we stray from our path. So please allow me to come sooner, I should almost say at once.

If I rent a garret in Paris, and bring my paintbox and drawing materials with me, then I can finish what is most pressing at once – those studies from the ancients, which certainly will help me a great deal when I go to Cormon's. I can go and draw either at the Louvre or at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

For the rest, before settling in a new place, we could plan and arrange things so much better. If it must be, I am willing to go to Nuenen for the month of March, to see how things are there and how the people are and whether or not I can get models there. But if not so, which I presume to be the case, I should go straight to Paris after March, and start drawing at the Louvre, for instance.

I have carefully thought over what you wrote about taking a studio, but I think it would be a good thing if we looked for it together, and if before going to live together definitely, we did so temporarily, and if I began by renting a garret, say from April till June.

Then I shall feel at home again in Paris by the time I go to Cormon's.

And in this way I shall keep up my spirits better.

I must also tell you that, although I keep going there, that nagging of those fellows at the academy is often almost unbearable, for they remain positively spiteful.

But I try systematically to avoid all quarrels, and go my own way. And I feel I am on the track of what I am seeking, and perhaps I should find it the sooner if I could go my own way when drawing from the plaster casts. After all I am glad I went to the academy, for the very reason that I have abundant opportunity to observe the results of prendre par le contour.

For that is what they do systematically, and that is why they nag me. "Faites d'abord un contour, votre contour n'est pas juste, je ne corrigerai pas ça, si vous modelez avant d'avoir sérieusement arrêté votre contour." [First make a contour, your contour isn't right; I won't correct it if you do your modelling before having seriously fixed your contour.]

You see that it always comes to the same thing. And now you ought to see how flat, how lifeless and how insipid the results of that system are; oh, I can tell you I am very glad just to be able to see it close up. Like David, or even worse, like Pieneman in full bloom. I wanted to say at least twenty-five times, "Votre contour est un truc, [Your contour is a joke] etc." but I have not thought it worth while to quarrel. Yet I irritate them even though I don't say anything; and they, me.

But this doesn't matter so much, the problem is to go on trying to find a better working method. So – patience and perseverance.

They go so far as to say, "La couleur et le modelé c'est peu de chose, cela s'apprend très vite, c'est le contour qui est l'essentiel et le plus difficile." [Colour and modelling aren't much, one can learn that very quickly, it's the contour that is essential and the most difficult.]

You see, one can learn some new things at the academy. I never knew before that colour and modelling came so easily.

Just yesterday I finished the drawing I made for the evening class's competition. It is the figure of Germanicus that you know. Well, I am sure I shall place last, because all the drawings of the others are exactly alike, and mine is absolutely different. But I saw how that drawing they will think best was made. I was sitting just behind it, and it is correct, it is whatever you like, but it is dead, and that's what all the drawings I saw are.

Enough of this, but let it annoy us so much that it makes us enthusiastic for something nobler, and that we hasten to achieve this.

You, too, need a more vigorous life, and if we might succeed in joining hands, together we should know more than each separately, and should be able to do more.

Tell me, did you notice that ingenious saying of Paul Mantz's, "Dans la vie les femmes sont peut être la difficulté suprême." It was in an article on Baudry.

We shall experience our share of it, besides the experience we may have already gathered.

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In a chapter in L'Oeuvre by Zola, in the Gil Blas, it struck me that the painter, Manet of course, had a scene with a woman who had posed for him, and to whom he had later become indifferent, oh – curiously well described. What one can learn in this respect from the academy here is never to paint women.

They hardly ever use nude women models. At least not at all in the class, and it's extremely unusual privately. Even in the antiquities class there are ten men's figures to one woman's figure. That is easy enough.

In Paris, of course, this will be better, and it seems to me that, in fact, one learns so much from the constant comparing of the male figure with the female, which are always and in everything so totally different. It may be "supremely" difficult, but what would art and what would life be without it?

Goodbye, write me soon. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

My being in Nuenen, at least for the month of March, would only be for the moving, and I have to be there also for my change of domicile. But as to myself, I am quite willing not to go back there at all.