

Dear Theo,

Of course all my attention is concentrated on gaining what I want to gain, namely – freedom of scope for my career. That means overcoming the obstacles instead of being buried under them. I have already told you that my health is very poor and that I shall have to act energetically to rebuild it.

Further, I have told you that there is no reason for me to go and work again in the country for the first year, that it is infinitely better for my whole future to draw from the plaster casts and from the nude in the city. Must one be on one's guard against a general fall in prices, diverse slumps, and consequently the rigidity of business routine these last years, or mustn't one? However, I don't ask you to have a fixed opinion about it. I don't have one either.

One cannot predict anything with certainty in such a large field. So let's leave it at that. But if one analyzes from up close, one sees that the greatest and most energetic people of the century have always worked against the grain, and they have always worked out of personal initiative. Both in painting and in literature. (I do not know anything about music, but I suppose it has been the same there.) To begin on a small scale, to persevere quand même, to produce much with small capital, to have character instead of money, more audacity than credit, like Millet and Sensier, Balzac, Zola, de Goncourt, Delacroix. But to start a studio in Paris at once might not be so good as doing it after a year of study, both for you and for me.

Let me draw for a year at Cormon's while you thoroughly investigate business conditions once more, and the various opportunities. And then I think we may risk it.

Because in a time of financial crisis like the present, money is what ammunition is to a soldier in a hostile country – don't let's waste our powder.

Further – I have heard several fellows, both painters and ordinary people, complain, "I have taken an expensive room to induce people to come to me, but since then nobody has come, and I myself do not feel at home in it." Still, I believe that for portraits it is necessary to have a certain comfort in the studio, otherwise people who come to pose there would get disgusted.

But if one wants to start a studio, one must consider well where to rent it, where one has the greatest chance of getting visitors, and making friends, and getting known.

Because of the primary necessity of drawing for a year, for the moment the question of a good studio is quite secondary, and anything will do.

If we do it quietly and intelligently, I don't think that this year of drawing would be a misfortune. On the contrary, we shall have time to consider everything at our ease, and to look before we leap.

If I came to Paris, the most practical thing to do would be to wait for a year before taking a studio. In that year we would get to know each other better and more intimately, which may bring a great change, and then we should be less afraid to undertake bigger things, because meanwhile we should have fortified the weak points.

If we work for another year, if we recover our health, both you and I – then we can resist things so much better than now.

But what must I do now? Look here, going back to Brabant is really a useless detour, and I shall lose money and time by it. Why can't I go straight to Paris from here, if you like, and go on working here till I leave? I tell you, I am in such a wretched condition that, if there is any money to spare, let me look after my health then, and let the rest go, for at home they can manage just as well with a hired man, even better perhaps.

If I do not take some nourishing food I am sure to get sick. It would not be my fault, and indeed I should not care much, let come what may.

If I go to Brabant, I have the expenses of my journey, I must also pay for my room there, which I have given up, and must find another place to store my things, which would be no less than 50 francs rent, and another 50 francs in advance for a new storage place and for moving. I should also be obliged to pay an outstanding colour bill, and of course I should begin to paint there again.

Now I thought that through force majeure, I am free to declare myself unable to fulfill those obligations for the moment, i.e. not to pay my rent there, but say, "Put my furniture in your attic, keep it as a security, I shall pay you when I come to get it"; then I need not rent a new place for storage.

If I am so weak as to spend money all the time, even though I cannot afford it, I do myself too much harm, and make myself unfit for my work.

I think you will agree with me. If you remember how I have complained lately that I could not go on in that way, you see that there was reason for it.

If I had known beforehand what I have noticed here about opportunities to work in a studio, I should have done it sooner.

Now – as I must go on, and as I am ill at the same time, I cannot but ask you to allow me to stay here till I go to Paris, and by all means let me go to Paris no later than when the course here ends – that is March 31.

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Then we shall still have the unavoidable expenses of the journey to Paris. You will have to move too, which also brings expenses. So Brabant is a useless detour, a loss of time, etc.

The way things are now, I must live from hand to mouth, and what is unpaid must wait.

When I have recovered my health and begin to sell in Paris – all right, then I can pay the rent and the colours.

I can't now, I don't have the money, neither do you, that's all.

Besides, I have had so much unpleasantness there that I need not consider any of their feelings.

It would also be a weakness on your part if you tried to change it.

You continually write me that you have no money; all right, so that's a fact. If it is not possible to make money for food, it need not be possible for rent either, or for superfluous travelling expenses.

And I know too well that at home Rijke, the gardener, or Husing is much more fit than I to pack things up and send them off. I'd do it if I were there, but to travel there on purpose when there are at least six pairs of hands as good as mine at their disposal, No. After all I don't care, but I tell you only what is right, and I point out to you the urgency of carrying through what will help us on. It would not be pleasant for me to come back sick either; you can't say anything against that.

Let me recover my health first; I am now too far below the mark.

In short – the conclusion of this and the previous letter is: To go on quietly either here or, much better still, at Cormon's; besides, I am sick, though I keep going.

If I saw a possibility of doing it, I should not object to going back to Brabant. I should even do it gladly if I could, but neither you nor I have the means, and they can spare me there better than they can use me.

Goodbye – write me soon,

Ever yours, Vincent