

Letter 179
The Hague, 5 – 9 March 1882

Dear Theo,

In your letter of February 18 you said, “When Tersteeg was here, we of course spoke about you and he told me that whenever you wanted anything, you could always go to him.”

Then why is it that when I asked Tersteeg some days ago for 10 guilders, he gave them to me, but accompanied by so many reproaches – I might almost say insults – that I could hardly control myself, though I did. I would have thrown the 10 guilders in his face if the money had been for myself, but I had to pay the model, a poor sick woman whom I cannot keep waiting. So I kept quiet. But for six months I will not go to Tersteeg again, or speak to him or show him my work.

I’m not going to say that to him, but I’m saying it to you.

Dear Theo, you may say, “You must remain on good terms with Tersteeg, he is almost like an elder brother to us.” But my dear fellow, he may be kind to you, but for years he has only shown his unfriendly and harsh side to me.

He would have the right to reproach me if I did not work, but it is unjust to someone who toils patiently, hard, and continuously on a difficult work, to make reproaches like this:

“Of one thing I am sure, you are no artist.”

“One objection which has great weight with me is that you started too late.”

“You must earn your own living.”

Then I say, “Stop, watch what you say.”

One cannot always be friends, one must quarrel sometimes. As to the arrangement between you and me about receiving money from you, when you come to The Hague, which I hope will be soon, I want to speak about that with you in Mauve’s presence and with nobody else. Mauve’s large picture will soon be finished, and then I suppose Mauve will give me some hints about watercolours again.

The substance of what Mauve has said up to now is, “Vincent, when you draw, you are a painter.”

And therefore I have worked, and worked hard, on drawing, on proportion, on perspective, for weeks and weeks; Tersteeg doesn’t fully appreciate this and only talks about “things that don’t sell.”

I do not deserve his reproaches, but I will be calm because I certainly do respect him; therefore I say, After six months we shall speak to each other again, for six months we shall not see each other.

If you can, send me the money for this month soon. I am making progress with my work, but cannot work without money or with too little.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I would rather go without dinner for six months and save in that way than occasionally receive 10 guilders from Tersteeg accompanied by his reproaches.

I should like to know what painters would say to his argument, “Work less from the model because it is cheaper,” when after a long search one has found models who are not too expensive.

Working without a model is the ruin of a painter of the figure.