

Letter 298
The Hague, c. 6 – 8 July 1883

Dear Theo,

If you feel the way I do, you will occasionally have a sudden urge to look up some fellow whom you haven't seen for a long time. I felt this way about De Bock, and I will tell you what I saw in his studio, because you used to know him even better than I.

The first thing I saw in the hall was a large sketch – an enormous windmill covered with snow, near a kind of ditch or canal. Half romantic, half realistic – a combination of styles which I don't dislike. But far from finished – though energetically put down with a fine, strong effect in it. In short, a thing one would always look at with pleasure, and I don't mind it's being unfinished. I should like that thing of his just as it is, in my studio, because it is so impressive.

Another sketch, the one of his picture for the Salon, was also good, but even more romantic.

Then there were some pictures more “blondly” brushed, several pretty studies. The impression he made on me was about the same as last year, perhaps just a little bit more positive and serious. Some sketches were riper and more correct in tone and colour than last year, and the grounds firmer, but in my opinion the relative proportions of the planes and masses are always left too vague; this correctness in proportions is the distinctive quality of Corot and Rousseau and Dias, Daubigny, Dupré. They all have this in common – that they are very careful about it – and their backgrounds are also very expressive, and not so detached. But there are very good points in De Bock's work, and one would look at it with more pleasure if the things were put down in a less visionary way. He ought to be a little more realistic – then his work would show more genius.

Nor can I understand why he doesn't vary a little more; for instance, I have also done a few landscape studies this week, one yesterday at De Bock's, a potato field in the dunes; the day before, a spot under the chestnut trees; another one of a yard with heaps of coal. Well, it is relatively very seldom that I happen to draw landscape, but now that I am doing so, I immediately have three very different subjects. He who is decidedly a landscape painter, why doesn't he do that more, instead of always painting a dune with a little tree and a little bent. Very beautiful in itself, but there are so many things just as beautiful, and which one would suppose would attract him. Well, you know that as well as I do. I repeat, my impression of him is that he certainly is not losing ground.

In my last letter I wrote you I had thought of moving, especially to be even nearer the sea.

I spoke with De Bock about houses in Scheveningen, but I'd better not complain about my studio's rent being too high, when I compare it with the rents others pay; for instance, Blommers's old house is to let – rent 400 guilders – and I pay 170 guilders – a year. Moreover, the studio is not larger than mine, and as to comfort, I prefer to keep what I have now. De Bock himself pays as much as Blommers. And this tallies with what I heard last year about average rents. If I wanted to live near the sea, Scheveningen would be out of the question, and I should have to go to some more remote place, for instance, like Hook of Holland or Marken. But now I think I will ask De Bock to let me have a corner of his garret as a pied-à-terre, and to keep my drawing material there, so that I needn't drag it along every time. If one gets there tired already, the work slows down and the hand is not very firm (if one didn't have to work at once, one would of course not bother about that little fatigue). If one has to walk and to carry everything, one gets just tired and warm enough to be handicapped by it. So that pied-à-terre at De Bock's and taking the streetcar oftener would perhaps enable me to make drawings of the sea and Scheveningen more seriously than I have up to now. De Bock promised to come and see me this week, and we shall talk it over again. He himself is thinking of moving; he has rented this house till May and said something about its perhaps being empty for a few months. We must wait and see. He repeatedly asked after you, and I said you probably will come to see him this summer. His large picture at the Salon has not been sold, of course. How did you like it? Opinion about it was very divided. When I have that pied-à-terre of his, I think I can manage to be at Scheveningen often this autumn. We shall see – but I long very much to work on the beach.

This week I made a study of a man towing a barge, and of a man carrying peat, and meanwhile I am always working on the potato diggers. I hope I will get on with De Bock a little now, perhaps it wouldn't harm either of us, and we might learn something from each other. He has bought a lot of antiques and his rooms look very nice, but I imagine it cost him a lot of money.

Will you write soon? I wrote you about De Bock, as I recently did about Rappard, so that you may know something about what the friends are doing. Rappard is away; he wrote to tell me that he is using printer's ink the way I told him to after all – and in this way, namely with turpentine, he got on much better. You know I've always said that my present studio was good, especially after the change. Indeed, when I think of

moving, I would much rather arrange it so that I need not move, for in comparison with others I am very well off. Besides, one is attached to a house one has arranged oneself, and feels at home in it.

Try to send me something soon, boy, for I shall need it.

De Bock has also taken up Zola, and has read *Le Nabob* by Daudet too. Do you know *Germinie Lacerteux* by Jules and Edmond de Goncourt? That must be very good, in the manner of Zola; I shall try to get it.

I have ordered an instrument which will enable me to fix a charcoal drawing in the open air while working on it, then one can work it up more thoroughly. I am anxious to get it.

Near De Bock's, I found splendid potato fields in the dunes behind the lighthouse.

Adieu, boy, good luck and write soon. Goodbye, boy. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I have been absorbed these days with a drawing by Régamey, of a diamond mine; at first sight, no different from any of those superficial drawings which fill the magazines – one would just pass over it; but if one looks at it a little longer, it becomes so beautiful and so intriguing that one is quite fascinated by it. Régamey is clever – this reproduction is by Felix, who often reproduces the Japanese things.