

Letter 395  
Nuenen, c. 1 March 1885

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the early remittance of this month's money, which, coming early, in fact helps me more. Thanks also for the splendid wood engraving, after Lhermitte, one of the few things of his I know, for I have only seen the following: a group of girls in a cornfield, an old woman in a church, a miner or some such type in a little bar and "La Moisson" [The Harvest], and that's all, and none of these giving an idea of his real technique the way these woodcutters do. If *Le Monde Illustré* gives a composition of his every month – this one forms part of a series "Les Mois Rustiques" – I should like very much to have the whole series, and I shall be very glad if you will send them. For of course I never see anything here, and after all I need to see some beautiful things now and then; so just deduct 20 francs someday, but send me such things whenever they appear in the magazines.

As to what you write, that if I had anything ready which I thought suitable, you would try and send it in for the Salon, I appreciate your being willing to do so.

This in the first place, and further, that had I known it six weeks ago, I should have tried to send you something for this purpose.

Now I have nothing that I should care to send in; lately I have, as you know, painted heads almost exclusively, and they are studies in the real sense of the word – that is to say, they are meant for the studio. However, today I at once started to make some, which I will send you. Because I think it might be useful if, when you meet a good many people on the occasion of the Salon, you have something to show – even if it's only studies.

So you will receive an old model, and a young woman's head, and probably more than one of these two models.

As to what you write of your feelings about various conceptions of heads, I believe that these which come straight out of a cottage with a moss-covered thatched roof will not seem absolutely inappropriate to you, though they are nothing but studies.

Had I known it six weeks ago, I should have made of it a woman spinning or a woman spooling yarn – a whole figure.

To return for a moment to the subject of the women's heads, genre *Jacquet*, not the earlier ones, but those of the present. Take the reaction against it, which certainly has a motive. Or consider the people who paint heads of girls such as our sister, for instance; I can perfectly well understand there are painters who do so. Whistler did it well several times; Millais, Boughton – only to mention people of whom I saw something of the kind at one time; I know but little of *Fantin Latour*, but what I saw I thought excellent, *Chardin*-like. And that's saying a lot.

I, for my part, however, am not the personality to have had much chance of getting on a sufficiently intimate footing with girls of that sort for them to be willing to pose for me. Especially not with my own sisters.

And perhaps I am also prejudiced against women who wear dresses. And my territory is more those who wear jackets and skirts. But I think what you say true – namely, that they can very well be painted, and that it has its *raison d'être* as a reaction against the present-day *Jacquets*, and *Van Beers*, etc. but – *Chardin* (let's summarize the aim of that reaction in his name, *Fantin Latour* at least would approve of this) was a Frenchman, and painted "*Françaises*." And in my opinion the respectable Dutch woman very, very often lacks the charm that French women frequently have. Consequently the so-called respectable class of Dutch women is not so very particularly attractive to paint, or to think of. But on the contrary, certain ordinary servant girls are again very *Chardin*-like.

Just now I paint not only as long as there is daylight, but even in the evening by the lamp in the cottages, when I can hardly distinguish anything on my palette, so as to catch, if possible, something of the curious effects of lamplight in the evening, with, for instance, a large shadow cast on the wall.

It is a fact that in the last few years I certainly have not seen anything as beautiful as those woodcutters by *Lhermitte*. How completely according to intention and full of feeling his figures are in that composition.

Again, many thanks for it.

Ever yours, Vincent

The *Chardin*-esque is in my opinion a peculiar expression of simplicity and goodness – both through and through – and I have some doubts about whether something like either quality might be found, for instance, in one of our sisters. But if *Wil* were a Frenchwoman instead of being a clergyman's daughter, she might have it. But one is nearly always driven from one's course to the opposite side of the world.