

Letter 415
Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885

Dear Theo,

Today I had a visit from Wenkebach, a painter from Utrecht, who is a friend of Rappard's. He is a landscape painter and I have often seen his name mentioned; he received a medal in London at the same time as Rappard. He has seen my work, those cottages which I am going to send you and also the drawings of figures.

I told him I was sorry to say there had been a misunderstanding between Rappard and me, which I could hardly explain otherwise than that he had been gossiping about my work with other people from The Hague, and as he had not seen anything of it for a long time, he had involuntarily been turned against me. I showed Wenkebach figures which Rappard used to like, and at the same time the new ones, and showed him that indeed I had changed in some respects and would change even more, but that what I made now was certainly not inferior.

Then he said that he did not doubt that Rappard would take back what he had written.

Then I showed him that, as to colour, I certainly do not want to always paint dark. Some of my cottages are even quite light.

But that my aim is to proceed from the primary colours – red, blue, yellow – and not from grey.

We had a long discussion about colour, and among other things he said he had noticed how Jaap Maris in old watercolours also frequently used ruddy, brownish-grey, red colours. So that if one puts them beside one of his present drawings, they become quite red.

It is the same with Israëls.

Perhaps I do more harm than good by telling you this, because it is only part of the conversation, and I ought to tell the whole of it. But we have discussed it before, so you will perhaps understand it in its real connection. In order to get an honest, sound palette, and to stick to it, it is necessary to practice the strongest colour scales too, and to continue to use them, especially in these days when imitators (not the masters themselves) of the great painters in grey want to paint more and more, always and everything light. So Wenkebach said, for instance, that he liked the picture of the old tower for its technique too; I painted it last year, with a lot of bitumen in it. He said he found it quite original.

The same with other old things. That water mill, the plough with oxen, the avenue of autumn trees.

But what pleased me most of all was that he liked the figures.

He called them Millet-like. But I know for sure that I will get them even better if only I have some luck with the money and can continue working on them at full speed; but that is what rather worries me, and for this month I am absolutely cleaned out. I am literally without a penny.

We shall have hard times; it is not all my fault, but only by perseverance do we have a chance to reap, after some time, what we are sowing.

And it worries me enough that you have all those money troubles; I wish I could lighten them for you somewhat.

When you come over to Holland, wouldn't it be advisable to try Tersteeg once more?

Tersteeg is a man who dares; once he is convinced, he is all right. And the same with Mauve.

If there were many people who persevered in studying the figure, I should say there is little chance of finding help.

But they aren't so very numerous, and yet they aren't less necessary than before.

It is hard for you to keep it up all by yourself, and I cannot do anything to lessen the expenses; on the contrary, I wish I could take even more models. What is to be done?

One must not call it engaging in a hopeless struggle, for others have won, and we shall win too.

As to Rappard, I just wrote to him, I want him to retract completely what he has written. But you see, Theo, how much depends on being consistent in one's work.

I wrote Rappard that actually we have to fight other things than each other, and that at this moment those painting rural life and the life of the people must join hands because union is strength.

At any rate, one cannot do it alone; a whole group that is of the same mind can do more. You too must be of good courage, for perhaps we shall make more friends and then will become more animated, and perhaps the mutual discord will change into a peasant uprising against the kind of painters one finds on every jury nowadays, who, if they could, would even now obstruct the ideas which Millet pioneered.

Goodbye, send me something if you can, even if it's only 10 francs to help me through these last days of the month.

Ever yours, Vincent