

Letter 445
Antwerp, c 17 January 1886

Dear Theo,

I want to tell you that Verlat has at last seen my work, and when he saw the two landscapes and the still life that I had brought from the country, he said, "Yes, but that does not concern me"; when I showed him the two portraits he said, "That is different, if it is figure painting, you may come." So tomorrow I shall start working in the academy's painting class.

Besides, I have arranged with Vinck (a pupil of Leys's by whom I saw things in the manner of Leys, medieval) to draw works of antiquity in the evening.

I think neither of these things will do me harm, and perhaps can be of some use to me either in painting or in drawing. And at all events, it is an attempt to come into contact with people. In the painting and drawing class I saw in passing several fellows my age at work.

And if I might get on friendly terms with Verlat or Vinck or whoever it may be, it would certainly get me a lot of models.

Well, this is essentially the practical side of the matter.

Then I have to go and see two fellows about portraits; I do not know what the result will be.

One is a question of two portraits of a couple of very beautiful hussies, types with dark eyes, dark hair, two sisters, who I suppose are kept women.

And the other one is a portrait of a married woman. But I repeat, there is nothing definite, and it may come to nothing.

But I know that eventually I would be willing to do them for nothing, just for practice.

But just consider whether, if I must go and work there or anywhere else, it is necessary for me to do something about my clothes, for I have worn mine for two years now, and especially of late they have had much wear and tear. Even a suit for some 40 fr. would do.

And I must also be prepared for Verlat's saying I have to provide myself with some painting material or other, so that I must have the means to do so. Therefore try, as I asked you, to send me another 50 fr., then I can keep going till the end of the month, and could buy a new pair of trousers and a waistcoat at once, and the coat in February.

It is very cold here, and most of the time I feel far from well, but as long as the painting flourishes, it doesn't matter so much.

I have been drawing there for two evenings already, and I must say that I believe that just for the making of, for instance, peasant figures, it is very useful to draw from the plaster casts. But for goodness' sake, not the way it is usually done. In fact, in my opinion the drawings that I see there are all hopelessly bad and absolutely wrong, and I know for sure that mine are totally different. Time must show who is right.

The feeling of what ancient sculpture is, damn it, not one of them has it.

I, who for years had not seen any good plaster casts of ancient sculptures – and those they have here are very good – and who during all those years have always had the living model before me, on looking at them carefully again, I am amazed at the ancients' wonderful knowledge and the correctness of their sentiment.

Well, probably the academic gentlemen will accuse me of heresy, but never mind.

I should like to get on with Verlat. I think many of the things he makes both harsh and wrong in colour and paint, but I know that he also has his good days, for instance, that he paints a better portrait than most of the others. So we must wait and see.

I feel in high spirits notwithstanding all, just because it refreshes me to be in all kinds of conditions so disparate from those in the country, and it may be that I shall feel at home here after all – but do your best to write me soon, and it is really necessary that I get those 50 fr. for this month, otherwise I cannot manage, and things are too urgent. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent