

Letter 150
Etten, September 1881

Dear Theo,

Though it is only a short time since I wrote to you, I have something more to tell you now.

For there has been a change in my drawings, both in the way I set about them and in the result.

Also, as a consequence of some of the things Mauve told me, I have started to work with live models again.

Luckily I have been able to get several people to sit here for me, including Piet Kaufman, the labourer.

Careful study and the constant and repeated copying of Bargue's Exercises au Fusain have given me a better insight into figure-drawing. I have learned to measure and to see and to look for the broad outlines, so that, thank God, what seemed utterly impossible to me before is gradually becoming possible now. I have drawn a man with a spade, that is un bêcheur [a digger], five times over in a variety of poses, a sower twice, a girl with a broom twice. Then a woman in a white cap peeling potatoes [JH0023, F1213] and a shepherd leaning on his crook and finally an old, sick peasant sitting on a chair by the hearth with his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees [JH0034, F0863].

And it won't be left at that, of course. Once a few sheep have crossed the bridge, the whole flock follows. Now I must draw diggers, sowers, men and women at the plough, without cease. Scrutinize and draw everything that is part of country life. Just as many others have done and are doing. I no longer stand helpless before nature as I used to.

I brought along some conté-crayon in wood (just like pencils) from The Hague, and I work with them a great deal now.

I have also started to introduce the brush and the stump. With a little sepia and India ink, and now and then with a little colour.

What is quite certain is that the drawings I have been doing lately bear little resemblance to anything I have done before.

The size of the figures is about the same as that of an Exercices au Fusain.

As for landscape, I don't see why it need suffer in any way as a result. On the contrary, it will gain.

Enclosed are a few small sketches to give you an idea.

Of course I have to pay the people who pose. Not much, but because it happens every day it is one expense more until I manage to sell some drawings.

But since a figure is hardly ever a complete failure, I am sure that the outlay on the model will be recovered in full relatively soon.

For nowadays anyone who has learned to tackle a figure and hang on to it until it is safely down on paper, can earn quite a bit. I need hardly tell you that I am merely sending you these sketches to give you some idea of the pose. I dashed them off today in no time at all and can see that there is a lot wrong with the proportions, more so anyway than in the actual drawings. I've had a nice letter from Rappard, who seems to be hard at work. He sent me some very good landscape sketches. I wish he would come back here for a few days.

This is a field or rather a stubble, where they are plowing and sowing [JH0037]. Have made a fairly large sketch of it with a gathering thunderstorm.

The other two sketches are poses of diggers. I hope to do several more of them.

The other sower has a basket [JH0025, F0865].

I am tremendously anxious to get a woman to pose with a seed basket, so as to find a little figure like the one I showed you last spring and which you can see in the foreground of the first little sketch.

Well, as Mauve says, the factory is in full swing.

If you like and are able to, please remember the Ingres paper, the colour of unbleached linen, the stronger kind if possible. In any case, write as soon as you can, and accept a handshake in my thoughts,

Ever yours, Vincent.