

The Hague, c. 28 – 30 December 1882

Dear Theo,

Before the year is up, I feel I have to thank you again for all your help and friendship.

I haven't sent you anything for a long time, but I am saving up for the time when you will come here.

I am sorry that I haven't succeeded in making a saleable drawing this year. I really do not know where the fault lies.

I wish you could come to the studio sometime. I think I wrote you in my last letter that I am at present drawing large heads because I felt the need of a more intimate study of the structure of the skull and the interpretation of the physiognomy. The work absorbs me greatly, and I found a few things lately for which I had been seeking for a long time. Well, whenever you come, you will see everything.

These days I am troubled with a bad toothache which sometimes affects my right eye and ear; however, it may be partly due to nerves. If one has toothache, one becomes indifferent to many things, but it is curious that, for instance, Daumier's drawings are so true that they almost make one forget the toothache. I have two new prints of his, "Un Train de Plaisir" [Excursion Train], travellers with pale faces and black coats in rough weather arriving on the platform too late, among them women with crying babies.

Do you know the little book Croquis à la Plume [Pen-and-ink Drawings], written by the draughtsman Henri Monnier (who created Mr. Prudhomme)? In it I read the "Journey by Coach," amazingly real.

I suppose you are still busy with your inventory, and I will not keep you from your work.

My very best wishes for a Happy New Year.

In the New Year shall I succeed better in making saleable drawings? or in getting some work from an illustrated paper? Of one thing I am sure, wrestling with nature is no idle work, and though I do not know what the result will be, there must be some result.

I wish you could come to the studio again – not because I can't go on or don't know what to do, but mainly because I am so afraid you will think I am not making progress. And though I cannot show you any definite result, you would see that it is slowly developing, and you would see that I am aiming high.

I perfectly agree with what you wrote recently, "There comes a time when one has mastered drawing so well that the size makes no difference and one knows the proportions by heart, so that one can work as well on a large as on a small scale." Not only do I absolutely agree with you in this, but, besides that, I believe that one must, and can, work till one is master of composition and the effects of light and shadow, so that in the sphere one has chosen, one can conquer the most diverse subjects: for instance, draw a first-class waiting room today, a rainy day in a poor quarter tomorrow, another time a workhouse, then again a saloon or a soup kitchen. I am not yet that far – but perhaps it takes a long time just because I look for the common root or origin of so many things.

Thanks for all your faithful friendship, boy, which has again upheld me for a whole year. I wish that for my part I could give you some pleasure, too. Sometime I shall succeed in this.

A handshake in thought. Write me again if you have a moment. Once more best wishes.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent