

Dear brother,

I didn't intend to write so soon again – but as you know, I am trying to do different kinds of drawings. And now again today I made another sketch with the rest of that little piece of crayon – and afterward washed it in with sepia. I think I find in this crayon all kinds of qualities which make it an excellent means of expressing things from nature. This morning I took a walk outside the town, in the meadows behind the Zuidbuitensingel where Maris first lived, and where the public ash dump is. I stood there a long time, looking at a row of the most twisted, gnarled, sorry-looking pollard willows I have ever seen. They bordered a path of vegetable garden – freshly dug up – and they were mirrored in a dirty little ditch – very dirty – but in which some blades of spring grass were already sparkling. But that rough brown bark, the freshly spaded earth, in which one could see the fertility, as it were – it all had something so intensely rich in the dark deep tones that it reminded me again of this crayon. So that as soon as I have some more, I hope to try my hand at landscape.

Though the enclosed sketch is very unfinished, it seemed to me there might be things in it compatible with your intentions – and again, it is a “sketch from life.” Don't think I consider it of good quality, even if it isn't detailed enough – far from it; but the elaborateness which you as well as I should like to see in it doesn't consist so much of details added later, but ought to be expressed at once, more than is the case now. For it must not lose its freshness that way, and, if only the impression is correct, sometimes there is expression even in unfinished things. But of course I shall try to bring more variation into the tones. “Y mettre des détails” leaves me rather cool, but “dégrossit” [take away the coarseness] is certainly my aim, that is, “serrer la forme de plus près” [concentrating the form more firmly]. Though this sketch is not sufficiently so, that little bit of sepia made so much difference in the general effect that, comparing it to yesterday's, I thought you could see the different ways in which that crayon can be used. I wrote Rappard about the crayon yesterday, because I had to write him about various things concerning lithography; and as I wanted to send him a few sketches done with it, I used it for some drawings of our baby, in different positions, and I found it is very well suited to sketching, too. One also can bring in demitones by means of breadcrumbs. Perhaps only the very deepest shadows can't be done very well with it, but in many cases one can use lithographic crayon then, which is also very rich in tone.

I think you will see from the figures how the studio has improved as to light. How beautiful everything out-of-doors is these days, don't you think so?

You can imagine that I am full of plans.

You know that I am working on many different things, for I should so much like to know many different techniques; because it stimulates one to work hard, and creates new ideas.

I wish I had thought of that crayon before, for it is preferable to many other things. Nor is it as hard as a conté pencil – that is, it doesn't scratch so.

I don't ask you to send me some because I could not work without it, but because with it, I could make many other things in addition to my usual work.

Did I already write you about those two large etchings by Israëls, a man lighting his pipe and the interior of a workman's home? How beautiful they are. I think it is so splendid of Israëls to go on with his etching, the more so because all the others have given it up, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which the etching club was originally started. At least, most of them haven't made any progress in etching, and if they make an etching now, it is no better or more perfect than what they did years ago. But father Israëls, notwithstanding his gray hairs, is still young enough to make progress – and great progress, too – and I call this real youth and lasting vitality.

Confound it, if the others had done the same, what beautiful Dutch etchings would have been given to the world. I have two little etchings by Israëls, perhaps his very first, a little girl with a spade in a garden, and a woman with a basket on her back; do you know them? I believe the Belgian Aquafortistes publish it.

So with that little bit of crayon I have already made two sketches, and some small croquis, too, and there is still some left. I think perhaps in the future I am going to use little else for the ordinary work.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

[Sketch ‘Public Soup Kitchen’ F 1020, JH 333 was enclosed in letter]