

Letter 165
Etten, 22 – 24 December 1881

Dear Theo,

As Father and Mother are sending you a letter, I'm enclosing a word, but I hope to write you at length soon, that is, after Mauve has been here; he is expected one of these days at Prinsenhage and will also come here. You must know, Theo, that Mauve has sent me a paintbox with paint, brushes, palette, palette knife, oil, turpentine – in short, everything necessary. So it is now settled that I shall begin to paint, and I am glad things have gone so far.

Well, I have been drawing a good deal recently, especially studies of the figure. If you saw them now, you would see in what direction I am going. Of course, I am now longing to hear what Mauve will have to say. The other day I made some drawings of children, too, and liked it very much.

These are days of great beauty in tone and colour; after I have made some progress in painting, I will succeed in expressing a little of it. But we must stick to the point, and now that I have begun drawing the figure, I will continue it until I am more advanced; and when I work in the open air, it is to make studies of trees, viewing the trees like real figures. I mean especially with a view to the outline, the proportion and the construction – that is the first thing one has to consider. Then comes the modelling and the colour and the surroundings, and it is about these that I need Mauve's advice.

But, Theo, I am so very happy with my paintbox, and I think my getting it now, after having drawn almost exclusively for at least a year, better than if I had started with it immediately. I think you will agree with me in this.

Now in my last letter I forgot to tell you that I think it's fine that you are going to London. I should not like you to go and stay there, but it is a good thing to become acquainted with it.

In the long run I do not think you would like it there, at least it becomes clearer and clearer to me that I never felt in my element there. Here in Holland I feel much more at home, yes, I think I shall again become a thorough Dutchman, and don't you think that's most reasonable, after all? I think I shall become quite a thorough Dutchman again, in character as well as in my drawing and painting style. But I think that my having been abroad for some time and my having seen a few things there which it is not superfluous to know will prove useful to me. When you get to London, I wish you would give my best regards to my old friends, George Read and Richardson.

I met Mr. Obach at The Hague this summer.

George Read is, if you like, a very ordinary man, in that he is not superior either in business or in knowledge; but if one knows him somewhat intimately, as a man and a personality, there is none more faithful, more kind-hearted, more sensitive than he. He is so humorous and so witty, and so smart in everyday things, that he is quite a valuable friend in that respect. If I might choose whom I should most like to see again of all my acquaintances in England, it would certainly be George Read. Therefore, if you would do me a favour, you must be sure to look him up and tell him that I hope we will renew our former acquaintance, and that I will write to him someday.

But I will do so only after you have seen him and after I have started painting.

For, Theo, with painting my real career begins. Don't you think I am right to consider it so?

And now adieu, a handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent