

Letter 222
The Hague, 5 August 1882

Dear Theo,

Still quite under the spell of your visit, I write you a word or two, not a little pleased that I can go ahead vigorously with my painting.

I should have liked to see you off at the station the next morning, but I thought you had already given me so much of your time that it would have been indiscreet to ask to see you again that morning. I am so thankful that you have been here. I think it a delightful prospect to be able to work a whole year without anxiety, and a new horizon has been opened to me in painting through what you gave me.

I think I am privileged over thousands of others because you removed so many barriers for me.

Of course many a painter cannot go on because of the expenses, and I cannot express to you in words how thankful I am to be able to go on working regularly. I began later than others, and I must work doubly hard to make up for lost time; but in spite of my ardour, I should have to stop if it were not for you.

I will tell you what I have bought.

First, a large-size moist-colour box containing 12 pieces or tubes of watercolours, with a double cover, one of which can be used as a palette; there is also room for about six brushes. It is an article which is of great value for working in the open air, and really absolutely necessary, but it is very expensive; and I had always put it off and worked with loose pieces on saucers, which, however, are very difficult to take with you, especially if one has to carry other things besides. So this is a fine thing which, now that I have it, will last a long time.

At the same time I stocked up on watercolours and renewed my brushes. Then, for oil painting, I now have everything which is absolutely necessary, and also a stock of paints, large tubes (which are much cheaper than the little ones); but you will understand that I limited myself to the simple colours in watercolour as well as in oil: ochre (red – yellow- brown), cobalt and Prussian blue, Naples yellow, sienna, black and white, completed with some smaller tubes of carmine, sepia, vermilion, ultramarine, gamboge.

But I refrained from choosing “nice” colours which one ought to mix oneself.

I believe this is a practical palette with healthy colours. Ultramarine, carmine, or the like are added when strictly necessary.

I will begin with little things, but this summer I hope to practice making large sketches in charcoal, so I can paint them later on a somewhat larger scale.

And therefore I ordered a new and I hope better perspective frame, which can be fixed in uneven ground in the dunes by two poles, in this way, for instance:

What we saw in Scheveningen together – sand, sea and sky – is something I certainly hope to express sometime.

Of course I didn't spend everything you gave me immediately, though I must say that the prices of the different things were much higher than I had anticipated, and on second thought, there are always more things needed than one at first expected. If I ask you kindly to send the usual allowance about the twentieth, it is not because I shall have spent all I have, but because I think it better to keep something in my pocket, in case I should need some more things while working – it guarantees my working in a very quick and orderly fashion.

The moist-colour box fits into my paintbox, so that I can carry everything necessary for watercolour and painting in one piece.

I attach great importance to having good stuff to work with, and I should like my studio to look well – not with antiques or tapestry or rugs, but simply because of the studies on the wall and because of good material; but this will come in time through hard work. Speaking about the village-policeman-style – I myself feel less like a policeman than like a kind of Delft bargeman, for instance, and I have no objection to making my studio look like a kind of comfortable barge.

Yesterday afternoon I was in the attic of the wholesale paper firm of Smulders on the Laan. There I found – can you guess? – the double Ingres, under the name of Torchon paper; the grain is even coarser than in yours. I'm enclosing a sample to show you. There is a whole stock of it, old and yellowed, very good. I took only half a quire now, but I can always get more later on. I went there to buy something else, the so-called honey paper which I use now and then. Very cheap, originally an undelivered Land Registry order. It is very suitable for charcoal drawing, and comes in large sheets about the same colour as the Harding. You can see this sample has a grain as rough as a piece of canvas, what you brought has a prettier colour and is delightful, for studies of banks and ditches or soil, for instance. But I am very glad I discovered this new kind, too.

Well, boy, thanks for everything, a handshake in thought. I'm back to work again. Give my warmest greetings to Father and Mother; thank them for what you brought me from them, and tell them I shall write soon, but as we agreed, not about anything personal.

Adieu, I wish you a pleasant time and a good return to your work, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent