

Dear Theo,

The weeks pass quickly and it is Sunday again.

I have often been to Scheveningen these last few days, and one evening I just hit that curious moment when a fishing smack was coming in. Near the monument is a little wooden shed in which a man sits on the lookout. As soon as the boat came in sight, the fellow appeared with a large blue flag, followed by a crowd of little children who just reached his knees. It was apparently a great pleasure for them to stand near the man with the flag, and I suppose they fancied they were helping the fishing smack come in. A few minutes after the man had waved his flag, a fellow on an old horse arrived who had to go and get the anchor.

Then the group was joined by several men and women – including mothers with children – to welcome the crew. When the boat was near enough, the man on horseback went into the water and came back with the anchor.

Then the men were carried ashore on the backs of men wearing high wading boots, and there was a great cheer of welcome at each new arrival. When they were all ashore, the whole troop marched home like a flock of sheep or like a caravan, with the man on the camel – I mean the man on the horse – towering over them like a tall spectre.

Of course I tried to sketch the various incidents most carefully. I have also painted part of it, namely, the group of which I enclose a little sketch.

Then I painted another study of a marine, nothing but a bit of sand, sea, sky – grey and lonely. I sometimes long for that quiet, where there is nothing but the gray sea – with a solitary sea bird – except for that, no voice other than the roaring of the waves. It is a refreshing change from the noisy bustle of the Geest or the potato market. For the rest, this week I have been working on sketches for watercolours.

I also carried the large one of the bench out further [F 951, JH 197], and then I made a sketch of women in the hospital garden, and part of the Geest.

You can see from the enclosed sketch what I want to make – groups of people who are in action some way or another. But how difficult it is to bring life and movement into it and to put the figures in their places, yet separate from each other. It is that great problem, moutonner: groups of figures form one whole, but in the head or shoulders of one rise above those of another; in the foreground the legs of the first figures stand out strongly, and somewhat higher the skirts and trousers form a kind of confusion in which the lines are still quite visible. Then to the right or the left, according to the point of view, the greater or lesser extension or shortening of the sides. As to composition, all possible scenes with figures – either a market or the arrival of a boat, a group of people in line at the soup kitchen, in the waiting room of the station, the hospital, the pawnshop... groups talking in the street or walking around - are based on that same principle of the flock of sheep, from which the word moutonner is surely derived, and it all depends on the same problems of light and brown and perspective. There is the same effect of the chestnut trees here as you describe in your last letter, as you will have seen from the drawing of the little bench; only here very little of the new green leaves is still visible, though some time ago I also noticed it, but here they are withered by the many gales.

Soon the leaves will really start to fall here, and then especially I hope to paint many studies of the wood and also of the beach, for though there are no effects of autumn leaves there, the peculiar light of autumn evenings has its own effect, and it is twice as beautiful there during this time of the year, as it is everywhere.

Am rather short of colours and other things, but you know how it is – I can vary my work in different ways, and there are always so many things to draw. For the group of figures in the enclosed sketch varies infinitely and requires innumerable separate studies and sketches of each figure, which one must catch quickly in the street. In this way it gradually gets character and vigour. Recently I made a study of ladies and gentlemen on the beach, a hustling crowd of people [F 980, JH 204].

Sooner or later, after some more study, I should love to do drawings for illustrations. Perhaps one thing will result from the other. The main thing is to continue working.

I certainly hope you are well, and that you will write me about yourself and the things which strike you in your surroundings. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely,

Vincent

I am so afraid that you are in great embarrassment because of the occurrence you wrote me about, and I hope things will settle themselves.

You see from the little sketch that I have started the thing I mentioned in my last letter, namely, regularly sketching the scenes of working people, of fishermen, which strike me – either drawing or painting them; and these are the very things which, with some practice, might serve as illustrations, I think.

Of course the characters must be much more vigorously executed for that purpose.

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I made about ten different sketches of the fishing smack's arrival, also of the weighing of the anchor which I sent you in my last letter.

[Sketch of People on Beach with Fishing Boat, JH 205, was enclosed in letter]