

Letter 307
The Hague, 29 and 30 July 1883

Dear Theo,

One of the causes of my sometimes thinking of moving might be eliminated in another way. Yesterday and the day before I have been strolling around the neighborhood of Loosduinen. I walked from the village to the beach, and found lots of cornfields there, not so beautiful as those in Brabant, but there must be reapers, sowers and gleaners, all those things which I have missed this year, which was the reason for my occasionally feeling the need for a change.

I do not know whether you have seen that region. I had never been there before. I painted a study there on the beach. There are some sea dikes or moles, piers, jetties, and very picturesque ones too, made of weather-beaten stones and wickerwork. I sat down on one of them and painted the rising tide till it came so near that I had to move my things in a hurry. Between the village and the beach are bushes of a deep bronzed green, tangled by the sea wind, and so striking that more than once one thinks, oh, now that's the "Buisson" by Ruysdael. A streetcar is running there now, so it is within easy reach when one has equipment or wet studies to carry home.

This is a scratch of the path to the beach.

My thoughts were with you all during the walk.

I know you will agree with me that the dunes around The Hague and Scheveningen have lost much of their typical character in the last ten years, and are getting another, more frivolous aspect, more and more each year.

Going back, not only ten, but thirty, even forty or fifty years, one comes to the period when they began to paint the dunes, etc., in their true character. At that time things were more Ruysdael-like than now. If one wants to see things with a Daubigny, a Corot atmosphere, one must go farther, where the soil is almost untrodden by bathing guests, etc. Undoubtedly Scheveningen is very beautiful, but nature is no longer untouched there; however, that same untouched quality of nature struck me enormously during that walk I told you about.

This will give you an idea of the pier.

Rarely has silence, has nature alone impressed me in such a way recently. These very spots where nothing is left of what one called civilization, where all that is definitely left behind, these very spots are those one needs to get calmed down.

But I would have liked to have you with me, because I think you would have had the same impression of being in surroundings such as I imagine Scheveningen must of been at the time when the first Daubignys appeared, and I found those surroundings full of a strong, stimulating vigour inducing one to undertake some manly work.

When you come, it will perhaps be fun to go there together, with no civilization around us, only a poor rickety shell cart on the white road; and for the rest, shrubs that look, every one of them, like the "Buisson" by Ruysdael. The landscape itself very simple, flat: stretches of ragged dune soil, hardly undulating. I think if we were together on that spot, it would put you and me into a mood such that we would not hesitate about the work, but feel decisive about what we have to do. Was it a chance harmony of my rather gloomy mood with those surroundings, or shall I find the same impressions there again in the future? I don't know, but when I again feel the need to forget the present and to think of the time when the great revolution in art began, of which Millet, Daubigny, Breton, Troyon, Corot are the leaders, I will go to that same spot once more.

I wish you could see it; perhaps when you come we might take a stroll there together – the streetcar brings one to Loosduinen in a moment, it even goes as far as Naaldwijk now. Those level grounds behind Loosduinen are exactly like Michel – and the lonely beach too.

Though, after our last letters, I think less about the future than about the present, and I still hope that when you come we shall decide that I shall make a number of small watercolours for you, and perhaps some small oil paintings, just as an experiment.

If I could only manage to have money enough to carry on my painting vigorously this year.

That walk, all by myself, far away in the dunes, has quieted me by making me feel as if I had not been alone, but had had a talk with one of the old painters from that time when Daubigny was beginning.

I shouldn't be surprised if you also remember that spot once you had walked there.

While writing this letter, I have started a watercolour of that bush; I painted a study of the other thing – the jetty – so at all events I have a souvenir of the walk, which I can show you when you come. And if you like, we can take a walk there together.

For the rest, I am not entirely myself yet; perhaps my stomach has become too weak, judging from the symptoms of dizziness, which is troublesome enough to make curing it urgent. But enough of this.

This is as far as I wrote yesterday. Now today – Monday – I can tell you that fortunately the torn banknote has been accepted in Paris, and I have lost but little on it, having cashed 23 guilders in all.

Now I have to talk something over with you which I hope you will approve of. In a previous letter I told you my definite opinion that it would be unwarranted for us not to try to profit by the wholesale prices of the colours, instead of always paying the regular retail price, in this way losing 33 1/3%. But because you didn't answer this year, I thought that it would perhaps be difficult to order things in Goupil and company's name that were destined for more private use, and on my side I made some arrangements, which I had already started tentatively before, in order to get the same thing without your being involved, and I hope for heaven's sake that you do not doubt its practicability.

You know that I give lessons to a land surveyor; well, his father has a drug store and deals in colours, has Paillard's colours in stock, and Mauve is a customer. I never got anything for those lessons to the son except many assurances of goodwill from the father. And availing myself of these, I spoke to him as follows: that undoubtedly he had in stock a certain number of unsaleable tubes. That I could use them, however, but would take them only at Paillard's wholesale price, provided that in the future he would sell me the popular tubes on the same terms.

At first he made some objections; then he looked over his stock, and we made the above arrangement. I take about 300 tubes from him, including several carmine and ultramarine, at less than Paillard's wholesale price (10 guilders less on the whole lot, which, at Paillard's wholesale price, would cost more than 50 guilders), so that those 300 tubes cost me 40 guilders. Besides, it gives me the right to order in the future all colours I need at Paillard's wholesale price, thus saving 33 1/3%. I have that reduction not only on the oil but also on the watercolours.

We can talk it over when you come. Of course I needn't take or pay for those 300 tubes all at once, but in as many installments as I like, monthly for instance. But I am glad of it, because 33 1/3% will make a great difference, especially in the long run. In this way it will be easier for me to continue my painting.

Today I have bought a tripod easel for sketching out of doors and canvas. The former is very convenient, because it keeps one from getting so dirty when one has to work on one's knees out of doors. For the moment I have about seven watercolours of this summer landscape. I used part of the money you sent to buy myself some nourishing food, but I do not have much appetite, as my stomach is upset, and I am afraid it will be some time before I get over it. I shall be glad when you come, I think it will be good for many reasons.

I hope you will be able to send the usual amount again by the first of August.

At all events I am glad I have some painted studies to show you when you come.

I have a model, a peasant boy, who lives here in the neighborhood, with whom I have already spoken about painting studies. For instance, he could manage to leave with me very early in the morning, and go quite far into the dunes. Adieu, all best wishes. Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent