

Letter 360
Nuenen, c. 12 February 1884

Dear Theo,

Last night I received your letter with the enclosed 100 francs. I can tell you that, having had less expenses through my temporary stay here, I am now at a point where I can cover my last year's deficit.

I draw your attention to this in order that you may see I hate carelessness in business as much as you do, and that I make a point of meeting my obligations to other people. And that I am in no mood to be careless in business matters, on the contrary, I assure you.

It is my firm intention to try to carry on my work, and you must not think I work less hard here every day than I used to.

All's well that ends well, says the proverb. Now, as to the misgivings I wrote you I felt about continuing to accept money from you. We can wind up now, at a moment when I can get off without a deficit; all the more reason for me always to call the way you dealt with me financially most generous. And I do not at all pretend it was your fault that I had a deficit at the end of last year. I only repeat that I am very glad no bill is left unpaid now.

Supplies of colours and other things have all been treated honestly and are paid.

I owe a great debt to you, however, and if I continued in exactly the same way, it would grow worse and worse. Now I want to make you a proposal for the future. Let me send you my work, and keep what you like for yourself, but I insist on considering the money I receive from you after March as money I have earned. And I quite approve of it being, in the beginning, less than I have received up to now. Toward the end of January or in the beginning of February I wrote you that, on my coming home, I was struck by the fact that the money I was in the habit of receiving from you was looked upon in the first place as something precarious, and secondly as what I will call charity for a poor fool. And I could establish the fact that this opinion was even communicated to people who had absolutely nothing to do with it – for instance, the respectable natives of this region – and I was asked at least three times in one week by absolute strangers, “Why is it that you never sell your work?”

Just how pleasant one's daily life can be under such circumstances, I leave to you to decide.

For my part, I say most decidedly that whatever you may think of what I have received from you up to now, I for my part consider it as a thing which I shall pay back if possible.

If I have some luck with my work, I shall most certainly pay it back. For the present, there can be no question of it, so we will not mention it.

Toward March I shall send you some watercolours from here. If you do not want them, I will take them to somebody else, but I prefer to deal with you.

Those watercolours will have their faults, yet I do not think it foolish of me to start showing my work, to bring it before the public's eye.

At a certain moment Rappard did the same, and carried it through from the very beginning.

I, for my part, do it rather reluctantly, but I must do it.

So from March on I shall begin to send my work here and there regularly. And first to you, but do not think yourself obliged to take anything which you do not really care for.

I should think that in consequence of this, however much our feelings might differ or come to differ, we should not be obliged to speak about such things, and still less quarrel over them, which in my opinion one is obliged to do if one has a relation with someone like the one we have had up to now.

I repeat, I should object to continuing on the same footing. But I should continue our relation in a somewhat modified way with the greatest pleasure.

I do not say that I want you to look upon the things you might accept from me as something you must try to sell at once.

If for the time being you should take my work, not in the first place in your capacity as a dealer, but more especially in the quality of one who has it in his heart to do something for fellows like me, who are only just starting – that is enough for me.

But after March I will accept no money from you – or at least absolutely as little as possible – for which I do not give some work in return.

I should not be able to continue on the same footing with animation, but I shall start on the new thing with animation as soon as the old thing is cut off – at least this is my opinion. If you do not want to entertain the other proposal, then leave it alone.

I want to feel free with you, but at the same time with equal sincerity I want you to feel free with me. If there should be something in my work that pleases you, I shall feel very happy; and if it should not please

you and you should not want to have anything to do with it, then I should not be able to say anything about it.

Moreover, whatever the difference in feelings may be, and the difference over this or that, we are brothers, and I certainly hope that we shall go on behaving like brothers.

I also hope that you and Father will not thwart me if I take no other studio for the present than the little mangle room here.

I shall take another, and not live with Father any longer, as soon as my work brings in enough money to pay for my taking a house again.

Since I have been here, not a day has passed, I think, when I have not been working from morning till night on the weavers or the peasants; I shall be very glad if you approve of my proposal. Then extremes will be avoided and we shall keep a straight course. If you know of a better plan, I shall be glad to hear it.

Goodbye, and thanks for what you sent. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent