

Letter 372
Nuenen, early July 1884

Dear Theo,

My hearty thanks for your letter, and the 200 francs enclosed. Thanks for giving the size of the frame, in which I intend to make a little woman spinning, after the large study.

I was glad to hear some good news about Breitner. The last impressions I had of him were, as you know, rather unfavourable, because of three large canvases which I saw at his studio, and in which I literally did not distinguish anything that might be located either in reality or in an imaginary world. But a few watercolours which he then had on hand, horses in the dunes, though very sketchy, were much better. And I saw things in it which make me understand quite well that the picture of which you speak must be good. As to the Society of Draughtsmen, firstly, I quite forgot it because I was busy painting those figures; secondly, now that your letter reminds me of it, I am not very keen on it, for, as I told you already last summer, I can only expect a refusal of my petition for membership, which refusal one can, however, consider as a kind of necessary evil that can be redressed next year and as such the request perhaps has its *raison d'être*.

Besides, as I quite forgot it, I have not one watercolour on hand, and should have to start new ones in a hurry, if it were not already too late for this year.

And when I tell you that I am just now quite absorbed again in two new large studies of interiors of weavers, you will understand I am in no mood for it. Especially as it might cause new disagreements if I applied again to the gentlemen at The Hague.

As to these two treatments of weavers, one shows a part of the loom, with the figure and a small window [F 024, JH 500].

The other is an interior, with three small windows, looking out on the yellowish verdure, contrasting with the blue of the cloth that is being woven on the loom, and the blouse of the weaver, which is again of another blue [F 037, JH 501]. But what struck me most in nature of late I have not started on yet, for want of a good model. The half-ripe cornfields are at present of a dark golden tone, ruddy or gold bronze. This is raised to a maximum of effect by opposition to the broken cobalt tone of the sky.

Imagine in such a background women's figures, very rough, very energetic, with sun-bronzed faces and arms and feet, with dusty, coarse indigo clothes and a black bonnet in the form of a barrette on their short-cut hair; while on the way to their work they pass between the corn along a dusty path of ruddy violet, with some green weeds, carrying hoes on their shoulders, or a loaf of black bread under the arm – a pitcher or brass coffee kettle. I have seen that same subject repeatedly of late, with all kinds of variations. And I assure you that it was really impressive.

Very rich, and at the same time very sober, delicately artistic. And I am quite absorbed in it.

But my colour bill has run up so high that I must be wary of starting new things in a big size, the more so because it will cost me much in models; if I could only get suitable models, just of the type I want (rough, flat faces with low foreheads and thick lips, not sharp, but full and Millet-like) and with those very same clothes.

For it demands great exactness, and one is not at liberty to deviate from the colours of the costume, as the effect lies in the analogy of the broken indigo tone with the broken cobalt tone, intensified by the secret elements of orange in the reddish bronze of the corn.

It would be a thing that gave a good impression of summer. I think summer is not easy to express; generally, at least often, a summer effect is either impossible or ugly, at least I think so, but then, as opposition, there is the twilight.

But I mean to say that it is not easy to find a summer sun effect which is as rich and as simple, and as pleasant to look at as the characteristic effects of the other seasons.

Spring is tender, green young corn and pink apple blossoms.

Autumn is the contrast of the yellow leaves against violet tones.

Winter is the snow with black silhouettes.

But now, if summer is the opposition of blues against an element of orange, in the gold bronze of the corn, one could paint a picture which expressed the mood of the seasons in each of the contrasts of the complementary colours (red and green, blue and orange, yellow and violet, white and black).

Well, I am longing to hear about your journey to London, etc.

Mother is making but little progress in walking. Goodbye, and once more thanks for your letter and the enclosed.

Believe me,

Yours, Vincent

The best thing I know – for the frame – is to take a few stretchers of that size, then we can see which turns out best.