

Letter 477a  
Arles, c. 21 April, 1888

[This letter to John Russell was written in English, and is reproduced without alterations.]

My dear Russell,

I ought to have answered your letter ever so long ago, but working pretty hard every day, at night I feel so often too weary to write. As it rains today I avail myself of the opportunity. Last Sunday I have met MacKnight and a Danish painter, and I intend to go to see him at Fonvieille next Monday. I feel sure I shall prefer him as an artist to what he is as an art critic, his views as such being so narrow that they make me smile.

I heartily hope for you that you will be able to leave Paris for good soon and no doubt leaving Paris will do you a world of good in all respects. As for me I remain enraptured with the scenery here, am working at a series of blooming orchards. And involuntarily I thought often of you because you did the same in Sicily. I wished you would one day or another when I shall send over some work to Paris exchange a Sicilian study with me – in case you should have one to spare.

You know I thought and think such a deal of those of yours. I don't gainsay that your portraits are more serious and higher art, but I think it meritory in you and a rare quality that together with a perfection as appeared to me the Fabian and McKnight portraits you are at the same time able to give a Scherzo, the *adagio con espressione*, the gay note, in one word together with more manly conceptions of a higher order. And I so heartily hope that you will continue to give us simultanément both the grave and elaborate works and those aforesaid scherzos. Then let them say if they like that you are not always serious or that you have done work of a lighter sort – So much the worse for the critics and so much better for you.

I have heard nothing of our friend Mr. Reid. I felt rather anxious on his account because I feel sure he was on a false track. My brother has received a letter from him but pretty unsatisfactory.

I was very much taken in by him during the first six weeks or two months, but after that period he was in pecuniary difficulties and in the same acted in a way that made on me the impression that he had lost his wits.

Which I still think was the case and consequently he not responsible even if his doings then were pretty unfair. He is very nervous – as we all are – and can't help being so. – He is prompted to act in his crisis of nerves to make money... whilst painters would make pictures...

So much to say that I consider the dealer stronger in him than the artist though there be a battle in his conscience concerning this – of the which battle I do not yet know the result. So much – *pour votre gouverne* – as I had the pleasure of introducing him to you [I] feel bound to warn you with the same sympathy however for him, because I found him artistic in pleading the Monticelli cause. In the which I took and take my part. Witnessing the very scenery which inspired Monticelli I maintain this artist has rights to public though too late appreciation. Surely Monticelli gives us not, neither pretends to give us, local colour or even local truth. But gives us something passionate and eternal – the rich colour and rich sun of the glorious South in a true colourist way parrallel with Delacroix' conception of the South viz. that the South be represented now by contraste simultané of colours and their derivations and harmonies and not by forms and lines in themselves as the ancient artists did formerly, by pure form Greeks & Michel Ange or by pure line or delineation Rafael Mantegna, Venetian primitives (Botticelli Cimabue Giotto Bellini). Contrariwise the thing undertaken by P. Veronese & Titian – colour. The thing undertaken by Velasquez and Goya to be continued and – more fully or rather more universally done by the more universal knowledge we have and possess of the prism and their properties.

Hoping to write you again and to hear of you pretty soon!

Yours very truly, Vincent