

Letter 501a
Arles, c. 17 June 1888

[Letter presented here in Vincent's unaltered English.]

My dear Russell,

For ever so long I have wanted to write you – but then the work has so taken me up. We have harvest time here at present and I am always in the fields.

And when I sit down to write I am so abstracted by recollections of what I have seen that I leave the letter. For instance at the present occasion I was writing to you, and going to say something about Arles as it is – and as it was in the old days of Boccaccio.

Well, instead of continuing the letter I began to draw on the very paper the head of the dirty little girl I saw this afternoon whilst I was painting a view of the river with a greenish yellow sky [F 426, JH 1468].

The dirty “mudlark” I thought yet had a vague Florentine sort of figure like the heads in the Monticelli pictures, and reasoning and drawing this wise I worked on the letter I was writing to you. I enclose the slip of scribbling that you may judge of my abstractions, and forgive my not writing before as such. Do not however imagine I am painting old Florentine scenery – no, I may dream of such – but I spend my time in painting and drawing landscapes or rather studies of colour.

The actual inhabitants of this country often remind me of the figures we see in Zola's work.

And Manet would like them as they are, and the city as it is. Bernard is still in Brittany and I believe he is working hard and doing well.

Gauguin is in Brittany too, but has again suffered of an attack of his liver complaint. I wished I were in the same place with him, or he were here with me.

My brother has an exhibition of 10 new pictures by Claude Monet – his latest works, for instance a landscape with red sunset and a group of dark fir trees by the seaside. The red sun casts an orange or blood red reflection on the blue green trees and the ground. I wished I could see them.

How is your house in Brittany getting on – and have you been working in the country?

I believe my brother has also another picture by Gauguin which is as I heard say very fine, two negro women talking, it is one of those he did at Martinique. McKnight told me he had seen at Marseilles a picture by Monticelli, flowerpiece.

Very soon I intend sending over some studies to Paris and then you can, if you like, choose one for our exchange.

I must hurry off this letter for I feel some more abstractions coming on and if I did not quickly fill up my paper I would again set to drawing and you would not have your letter.

I heard Rodin has a beautiful head at the salon.

I have been to the seaside for a week and very likely am going thither again soon. Flat shore sands – fine figures there like Cimabue – straight stylish.

Am working at a sower [F 422, JH 1470]:

the great field all violet the sky & sun very yellow, it is a hard subject to treat.

Please remember me very kindly to Mrs. Russell – and in thought I heartily shake hands.

Yours very truly, Vincent