

My dear friend Bernard,

I've just sent you another 9 sketches after painted studies. So you'll see subjects from the scenery that inspires old man Cézanne, because the Crau near Aix is almost the same as the countryside round Tarascon or the Crau here. The Camargue is even plainer, for often there is nothing, nothing, other than poor soil and tamarisk bushes and the coarse grass that is to these bare pastures what esparto grass is to the desert.

Knowing how keen you are on Cézanne, I thought you might like these sketches of Provence; not that a drawing of mine and one by Cézanne have much in common. No, indeed, any more than Monticelli and I! But I too love the countryside they have loved so much, and for the same reasons, the colour and the logical composition.

My dear friend Bernard, by collaboration I did not mean to say that I think two or more painters would have to work on the same pictures. What I was driving at was paintings that differ from one another yet go together and complement one another.

Just take the Italian primitives or the German primitives or the Dutch school or the real Italians, in short, take the whole of the art of painting!

Whether they want it or not, their work forms a "group," a "series."

Well, now, at present the impressionists also form a group, despite all their disastrous civil wars, in which both sides have been trying to get at each other's throats with a dedication they would have done better to reserve for other ends.

In our northern school, you have Rembrandt, who heads that school because his influence may be seen in anyone who comes to know him more closely. Thus we find Paulus Potter painting rutting and excited animals in equally exciting landscapes – in a thunderstorm, in the sunshine, in the melancholy of autumn – while that selfsame Paulus Potter, before he came to know Rembrandt, was rather dry and over-fussy.

Here are two people, Rembrandt and Potter, who belong together like brothers, and even though Rembrandt probably never touched a picture by Potter with his brush, that doesn't alter the fact that Potter and Ruysdael owe him all that is best in them – the thing that moves us so deeply when we have learned how to look at a corner of old Holland as if through their temperament.

Moreover, the material problems of the painter's life make it desirable that painters should collaborate and unite (much as they did in the days of the Guilds of St. Luke). If only they would ensure their material well-being, and love one another like friends instead of making one another's life hell, painters would be happier, and in any case less ridiculous, less foolish and less culpable.

However, I shan't labour the point, because I realize that life carries us along so fast that we haven't the time to talk and to work as well. That is the reason why, with unity still a long way off, we are now sailing the trackless deep in our frail little boats, all alone on the high seas of our time.

Is it a renaissance? Is it a decline? We cannot judge, because we are too close to it not to be deceived by distorted perspectives. Contemporary events, our setbacks and successes, probably assume exaggerated proportions in our eyes.

A hearty handshake from me and I hope to hear something from you soon.

Ever yours, Vincent