New York City, Jan. 13th, 1897.

Dear Mr. Carnegie:—

When Mr. Beatty sent me his circular and asked my co-operation in the exhibition soon to be held at Pittsburg, I wrote to him that I feared that the arrangements for the use of the purchasing fund, so munificently provided by you for the Pittsburg Gallery, were such that I feared that the end you had in view, i.e.—the acquisition by the city of the best examples of modern art—would not be reached. Mr. Beatty came down to Morgan Hall afterwards and I tried to explain why this was so, but I felt at the time that I had not made myself quite clear.

In the first place an artist of reputation rarely competes for a prize. While he is still a young man—before his spurs are worn—he may do so; but in justice to those who have paid him often large sums for his pictures, he guards, as well as he is able, against accidental depreciation of the money value of his work. If he finds that a picture of his is to be put up at auction for instance, he will take care—indeed it is his duty to take care—that his work is not sacrificed.

Of course in this country where different methods prevail, this is more difficult to manage. For reasons akin to this he would not compete for a prize. If his picture is not awarded one, it will depreciate the value of the picture.

A purchaser’s liking for a picture is often a matter of taste or caprice and not of real knowledge of the merit of the work. It is too often forgotten that the profession is a learned profession, and that constant and unceasing study and unremitting labor is the portion of anyone who seriously finds his vocation in its pursuit.

But the purchaser of a picture rarely looks further than this—that the picture possesses certain agreeable elements that give
him pleasure, a quality of tone that pleases him, or a charm of line, or grace of sentiment, etc. As an individual he has every right to please himself, but as one of a number who are to form a commission of taste—so to speak—higher qualifications are necessary than he could possibly possess who has not studied deeply and seriously the best art of all times. Certain of the greatest pictures in the world appeal only to students through their surpassing technical merit alone, and it would be almost impossible that they should find favor in the eyes of those who are ignorant of difficulties that have been overcome, or problems that have been solved, etc. For this reason, the award of a medal by a jury of gentlemen—who are persons of taste rather than experts in a profession that requires the devotion of a lifetime—would not have the value it is intended that such an award should have.

Again, a purchasing committee of gentlemen who should buy at their discretion, at the prices placed upon their works by the artists themselves, to the extent of a sum of money to be fixed, would be far more satisfactory to the best painters than the present system, which awards $5000 for the purchase of the best picture, which may happen to be purchasable at a much smaller sum.

I would submit that if a prize must be given, the jury that makes the award should be a national jury of experts.

Yours very truly,

[Signature]

[Address]