

## Paul Cézanne

Paul Cézanne (1839 - 1906) was a French artist and Post-Impressionist painter whose work laid the foundations of the transition from the 19th century conception of artistic endeavour to a new and radically different world of art in the 20th century. Cézanne can be said to form the bridge between late 19th century Impressionism and the early 20th century's new line of artistic enquiry, Cubism. The line attributed to both Matisse and Picasso that Cézanne "...is the father of us all..." cannot be easily dismissed.

Cézanne's work demonstrates a mastery of design, colour, composition and draftsmanship. His often repetitive, sensitive and exploratory brushstrokes are highly characteristic and clearly recognisable. Using planes of colour and small brushstrokes that build up to form complex fields, at once both a direct expression of the sensations of the observing eye and an abstraction from observed nature, Cézanne's paintings convey intense study of his subjects, a searching gaze and a dogged struggle to deal with the complexity of human visual perception.

The Cézannes came from the small town of Cesana now in West Piedmont, and it has been assumed that they were ultimately of Italian origin. Paul Cézanne was born on January 19, 1839 in Aix-en-Provence, one of the southernmost regions of France. On February 22nd, Paul was baptized in the parish church, with his grandmother and uncle Louis as godparents. His father, Louis-Auguste Cézanne (July 28, 1798 - October 23, 1886), was the cofounder of a banking firm that prospered throughout the artist's life, affording him financial security that was unavailable to most of his contemporaries and eventually resulting in a large inheritance. On the other hand, his mother, Anne-Elisabeth Honorine Aubert (September 24, 1814 - October 25, 1897), was vivacious and romantic, but quick to take offense. It was from her that Paul got his conception and vision of life. He also had two younger sisters, Marie, with whom he went to a primary school every day, and Rose.

At the age of ten, Paul entered the Saint Joseph boarding-school, where he studied drawing under Joseph Gibert, a Spanish monk, in Aix. In 1852 Cézanne entered the Collège Bourbon (now Lycée d'Aix), where he met and became friends with Émile Zola, who was in a less advanced class. He stayed there for six years, though in the last two years he was a day scholar. From 1859 to 1861, complying with his father's wishes, Cézanne attended the law school of the University of Aix, while also receiving drawing lessons. Going against the objections of his banker father, he committed himself to pursuing his artistic development and left Aix for Paris in 1861. He was strongly encouraged to make this decision by Zola, who was already living in the capital at the time. Eventually, his father reconciled with Cézanne and supported his choice of career. Cézanne later received an inheritance of 400,000 francs from his father which made him banish all money fears.

In Paris, Cézanne met the Impressionists, including Camille Pissarro. Initially the friendship formed in the mid 1860s between Pissarro and Cézanne was that of master and mentor, with Pissarro exerting a formative influence on the younger artist. Over the course of the following decade their landscape painting excursions together, in Louveciennes and Pontoise, led to a collaborative working relationship between equals.

Cézanne's early work is often concerned with the figure in the landscape and comprises many paintings of groups of large, heavy figures in the landscape, imaginatively painted. Later in his career, he became more interested in working from direct observation and gradually developed a light, airy painting style that was to influence the Impressionists enormously. Nonetheless, in Cézanne's mature work we see the development of a solidified, almost architectural style of painting. Throughout his life he struggled to develop an authentic observation of the seen world by the most accurate method of representing it in paint that he could find. To this end, he structurally ordered whatever he perceived into simple forms and colour planes. His statement "I want to make of impressionism something solid and lasting like the art in the museums", and his contention that he was recreating Poussin "after nature" underscored his desire to unite observation of nature with the permanence of classical composition.

Cézanne was interested in the simplification of naturally occurring forms to their geometric essentials (a tree trunk may be conceived of as a cylinder, a human head a sphere, for example). Additionally, the concentrated attention with which he recorded his observations of nature resulted in a profound exploration of binocular vision, which results in two slightly different simultaneous visual perceptions, and provides us with depth perception and a complex knowledge of spatial relationships. We

see two different views simultaneously; Cézanne employed this aspect of visual perception in his painting to varying degrees. The observation of this fact, coupled with Cézanne's desire to capture the truth of his own perception, often compelled him to render the outlines of forms so as to at once attempt to display the distinctly different views of both the left and right eyes. Thus Cézanne's work augments and transforms earlier ideals of perspective, in particular single-point perspective.

Cézanne's paintings were shown in the first exhibition of the Salon des Refusés in 1863, which displayed works not accepted by the jury of the official Paris Salon. The Salon rejected Cézanne's submissions every year from 1864 to 1869. Cézanne continued to submit works to the Salon until 1882. Through the intervention of fellow artist Antoine Guillemet, Cézanne exhibited *The Portrait of the Artist's Father*, 1866 (National Gallery, Washington), his first and last successful submission to the Salon.

Before 1895 Cézanne exhibited twice with the Impressionists (at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 and the third Impressionist exhibition in 1877). In later years a few individual paintings were shown at various venues, until 1895, when the Parisian dealer, Ambroise Vollard, gave the artist his first solo exhibition. Despite the increasing public recognition and financial success, Cézanne chose to work in increasing artistic isolation, usually painting in the south of France, in his beloved Provence, far from Paris. He concentrated on a few subjects and was highly unusual for 19th-century painters in that he was equally proficient in each of these genres: still lifes, portraits, landscapes and studies of bathers. For the last, Cézanne was compelled to design from his imagination, due to a lack of available nude models. Like the landscapes, his portraits were drawn from that which was familiar, so that not only his wife and son but local peasants, children and his art dealer served as subjects. His still lifes are at once decorative in design, painted with thick, flat surfaces, yet with a weight reminiscent of Courbet. The 'props' for his works are still to be found, as he left them, in his studio (atelier), in the suburbs of modern Aix.

Although religious images appeared less frequently in Cézanne's later work, he remained a devout Roman Catholic and said, "When I judge art, I take my painting and put it next to a God-made object like a tree or flower. If it clashes, it is not art."

One day, he was caught in a storm while working in the field. Only after working for two hours under a downpour did he decide to go home; but on the way he collapsed. He was taken home by a passing driver. His old housekeeper rubbed his arms and legs to restore the circulation, as a result he regained consciousness. On the following day, he intended to continue working, but later on he fainted; the model he was working with called for help; he was put to bed, and he never left it again. He died a few days later, on October 22, 1906. He died of pneumonia and was buried at the old cemetery in his beloved hometown of Aix-en-Provence.

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