

Edward Hopper

Edward Hopper (1882-1967) painted the independence and the loneliness of 20th-Century America. He was a realist in the days when most painters tended toward the abstract. Yet his paintings incite the imagination far more than the works of any abstract expressionist. His enigmatic images force the viewer to wonder what is going on:

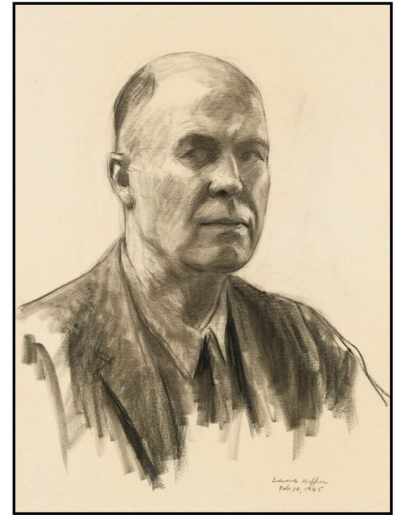
Hopper was neither an illustrator nor a narrative painter. His paintings don't tell stories. What they do is suggest—powerfully, irresistibly—that there are stories within them, waiting to be told. He shows us a moment in time, arrayed on a canvas; there's clearly a past and a future, but it's our task to find it for ourselves. (Block, 2016, p viii).

More than any other painter, Hopper has inspired writers to find the stories and meanings behind his paintings. This post summarizes his life, describes his working methods, and presents some of his pictures together with the writings they have stimulated.

Early Life

Hopper was born in Nyack, a town on the Hudson River some 25 km north of the upper end of Manhattan (Levin, 1980a, 2007). He decided early to become an artist and studied at the New York School of Art and Design in Greenwich Village, where he was taught by William Merritt Chase and Robert Henri, among others. Hopper considered Thomas Eakins his artistic hero.

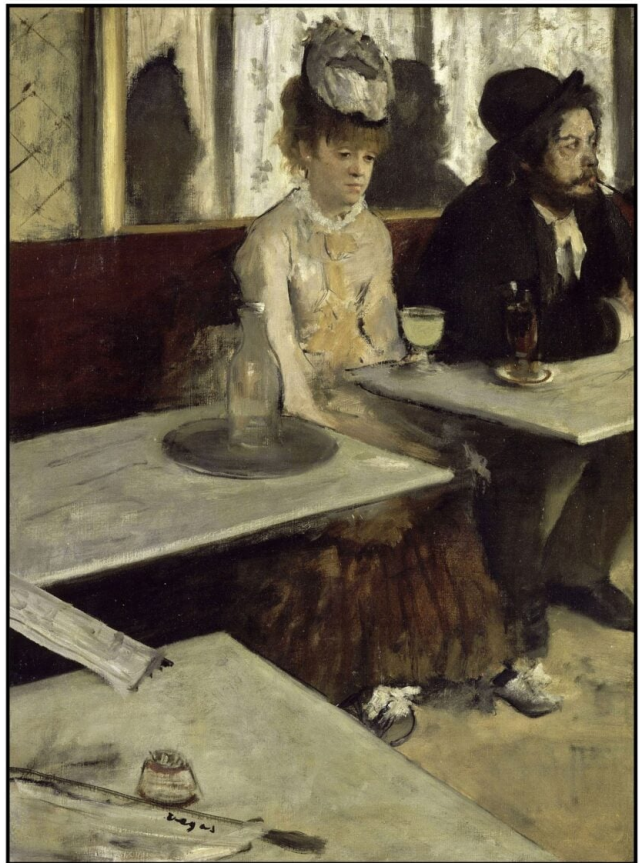
The 1903 self-portrait, illustrated on the left below, shows the conscientious young student. The others are from 1930, when he was becoming successful, and from 1945 after he had become famous.



In 1906 Hopper made his first trip to Paris, where he stayed for almost one year, making occasional journeys to other cities in Europe. He returned for two further shorter visits in 1909 and 1910. In Paris, he visited the museums, attended classes, and sketched and painted *en plain air*. The illustration on the right from the graphic biography by Rossi and Scarduelli (2021) was derived from a 1907 photograph of the young student sketching (Levin, 2007, p 68).

Hopper was influenced by the impressionists, in particular Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas (Kranzfelder, 2002, p 150). His later painting *Automat* (1927) shows similarities in mood and

structure to Manet's *The Plum Brandy* (1877) and to Degas' *The Absinthe Drinker* (1876):



Another influence was Eugène Atget who had photographed the empty streets of Paris (Llorens & Ottinger, 2012, p. 263). Since his camera required long exposure-times, Atget chose to photograph early in the morning before there were any people moving around in the streets. His haunting images foreshadow Hopper's lonely city-scenes. Walter Benjamin in his *Little History of Photography* (1931) remarked that Atget's photographs sometimes seem to portray the "scene of a crime." The same can be said of many of Hopper's paintings.

The ongoing modernist revolution in Paris had no effect on the young American. Hopper paid little attention to the post-impressionists (Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin), and was apparently unaware of the current work of painters like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

One of the last paintings from Hopper's time in Europe was entitled *Soir Bleu* (1914). Various characters interact on a café terrace:



On the left is a *macquereau* (French: mackerel, slang for "pimp"). In the center, a garishly made-up prostitute attempts to entice a client from a table where three men are seated:

someone who appears from his beret to be an artist, a soldier with epaulettes on his uniform, and a clown in full make-up and costume. On the right a bourgeois man and woman survey the scene. One is tempted to consider Hopper as the clown, out of place and without voice among the French. Three of the figures are smoking: the clown, the pimp and the artist. This may suggest something similar in their livelihoods: they all survive by selling to the rich and powerful: the couple on the right and the soldier. Hopper exhibited the painting when he returned to New York, but it was never sold and stayed in storage at his studio until his death.

The painting's title may come from a poem *Sensation* (1870) by Rimbaud, which in its second verse talks of being mute like the clown.

*Par les soirs bleus d'été j'irai dans les sentiers,
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue :
Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraîcheur à mes pieds.
Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue.*

Je ne parlerai pas ; je ne penserai rien.
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme ;
Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
Par la Nature,—heureux comme avec une femme.

Summer's deep-blue evenings I will go down the lanes,
Tickled by the wheat-berries, trampling the short grass:
Dreaming, I will feel the coolness at my feet.
I will let a northern wind bathe my bare head.

I will not stir my tongue; I will think of nothing.
Yet love infinite shall at once mount in my soul;
And I will go far, very far, like a gypsy,
Through Nature,—enchanted as with a woman.
(translation by Gregory Campeau)

Back in New York, Hopper was unable to sell more than an occasional painting. He therefore supported himself by

providing illustrations for magazine stories and advertisements. For a while he learned etching with Martin Lewis. From these studies, he developed a better sense of how light plays on surfaces, especially at night. He also began to define spaces more distinctly than the impressionists that he had hitherto been following.

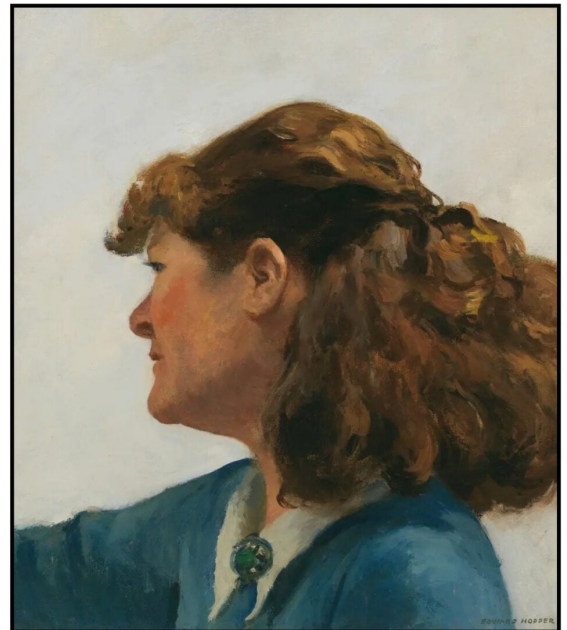
In 1913, Hopper moved into the top floor of Number 3, Washington Square North, Greenwich Village. This was his studio and residence for the rest of his life. The following illustration shows the building, the roof-top view from the top floor (Levin, 1985) and Hopper's 1932 painting *City Roofs*:



Jo Nivison

In the summer of 1923 on a painting trip to Gloucester, Massachusetts, Hopper re-encountered Jo Nivison, who had been

a fellow-student at the New York School of Art and Design. They both painted water-colors and on their return to New York, Nivison was instrumental in getting Hopper's work exhibited. They enjoyed each other's company and were married in 1924. Both were 41 years old. They were physically and psychologically different: he was 6 ft 5 inches while she was just 5 ft; "she was gregarious, outgoing, sociable and talkative, while he was shy, quiet, solitary, and introspective" (Levin, 2007, p 168). The following illustration shows a 1906 portrait of: *The Art Student Miss Josephine Nivison* by Robert Henri, a photograph of Jo and Edward (from the 1930s), and a 1936 painting of *Jo Painting* by Hopper.



Edward painted and Jo took care of things. She modelled for his figure paintings, and kept meticulous records of his paintings in a set of notebooks. She sometimes rebelled against her help-mate status, and urged her husband to promote her own artistic career. There were arguments, some of which degenerated into physical fights. Nevertheless, their marriage lasted until Edward's death in 1967. Jo died a year later, leaving all her husband's unsold paintings to the Whitney

Museum of American Art. The museum also accepted her paintings, but many of these were discarded. Jo Hopper was not given the recognition that she deserved (Colleary, 2004; Levin, 1980b, 2007, pp. 717-728; McColl, 2018).

Working Methods

Although Hopper worked *en plein air* in France and during his summer excursions to New England, most of his pictures were painted in the studio from sketches made *in situ*. His images are thus based on reality but tempered by the imagination. The perspectives are altered; the surfaces are simplified and flattened; the colors are changed to what they might have been rather than what they were. His 1946 painting *Approaching a City* shows the rail lines of the Metro-North Railroad entering the tunnel at 97th Street to travel under Park Avenue to Grand Central Station. The painting provides a heightened representation of what a traveler might experience coming into a city for the first time. The illustration below shows the painting together with contemporary (Conaty, 2022, p 13) and more recent (Levin, 1985) views of the scene.

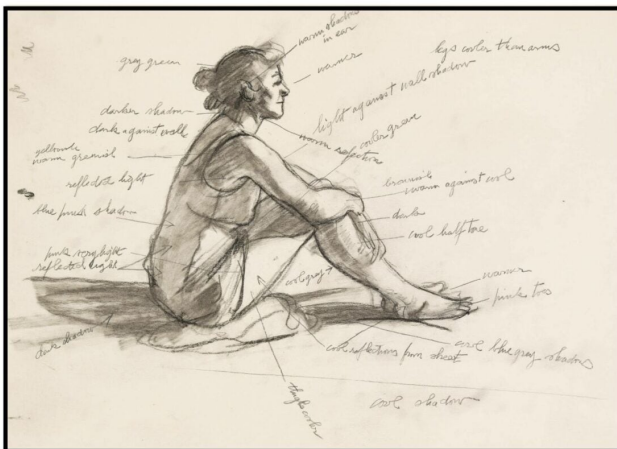


The perspective of the painting would only be possible from

the level of the rail-lines. Hopper has tried to see from the point of view of a passenger in a train rather than a pedestrian on Park Avenue. Even if the graffiti were erased, the opposite wall is (and was) not as it appears in the painting. Hopper has flattened its texture and removed the cables. The buildings above the wall are not those on Park Avenue, either now or when the painting was made. Conaty (2022, p 13) remarks

Here. the building types – from the nineteenth century brownstone to the modern industrial structure at the far left – suggest the passage of time in the histories that coexist, pictured as a single mass of forms seen from the train track below.

The illustration below shows Hopper's 1954 painting *Morning Sun*. The preparatory sketches show both the general layout of the room the effects of the bright morning light, and a more accurate representation of the model (Jo) with extensive details about shading and color:



The Lonely City

Although Hopper painted many different subjects, he is best known for his pictures of lonely urban surroundings. The most recent exhibition of his work at the Whitney Museum focuses on his depiction of New York City (Conaty, 2022).

The 1930 painting *Early Sunday Morning* shows a deserted New York Street. Though long considered to represent 7th Avenue in

Greenwich Village, recent evidence has pointed to a source on Bleeker Street (Marcum 2022). The painting has a wonderful visual rhythm: the repetition and variation between the different units and their windows reminds me of the stanzas and rhymes of poetry.



John Updike (2005 p 199) describes the painting:

Early Sunday Morning is a literally sunny picture, with even something merry about it: bucolic peace visits a humdrum urban street. We are gladdened by the day that is coming, entering from the right, heralded by the shadows it throws. The glow on the sidewalk is picked up by the yellow window shades. The barber pole is cheerful, the hydrant basks like a sluggish, knobby toad. But the silent windows, especially the darkened big shopwindows, hold behind them an ominous mortuary stillness. The undercurrents of stillness threaten to drag us down, even as the day dawns. The diurnal wheel turns, taking the sun on one of its sides. But the other side, the side where sun is absent, has its presence, too, and Hopper's apparently noncommittal art excels in making us

aware of the elsewhere, the missing, the longed-for. He is, to use a phrase generally reserved for writers, a master of suspense.

The painting takes liberties with the shadows. Neither 7th Avenue nor Bleeker Street run directly east-west, and the morning sun could not cast shadows so long and so parallel to the buildings in either place. As noted by the poet John Hollander (in Levin 1995 p 43), the long shadow on the sidewalk is especially mysterious:

Long, slant shadows
Cast on the wan concrete
Are of nearby fallen
Verticals not ourselves.
Lying longest, most still,
Along the unsigned blank
Of sidewalk, the narrowed
Finger of shade left by
Something, thicker than trees,
Taller than these streetlamps,
Somewhere off to the right
Perhaps, and unlike an
Intrusion of ourselves,
Unseen, long, is claiming
It all, the scene, the whole.

A striking aspect of the painting is its overwhelming silence: the calm before or after the storm of normal life. Ward (2017, p 169) remarks

Hopper's paintings are uniquely silent, conveying a sense of unnatural stillness. The silence is more active than passive, mainly because it suggests little of the calmness, tranquility, or placidity commonly associated with it. Hopper's silences are tense-hushed decorums maintained with terrific strain.

Probably Hopper's most famous painting is *The Nighthawks* (1942), wherein a man and a woman sit at the counter of an all-night diner. They are served by a young waiter and observed by a solitary man at the other end of the counter. The diner is brightly lit; outside it is dark. The streets are deserted: it is likely long past midnight. We sense the couple's anxiety and we are grateful for the light.



Hopper may have based the painting on a restaurant near the intersection of Greenwich Avenue and 7th Avenue (now Mulry Square). More likely it is an amalgam of various diners in the area. The title apparently comes from the beak-like nose of the man sitting with the woman.

The poet Mark Strand (1994, pp. 6-7) described the general effect of the picture:

The dominant feature of the scene is the long window through which we see the diner. It covers two-thirds of the canvas, forming the geometrical shape of an isosceles trapezoid, which establishes the directional pull of the painting, toward a vanishing point that cannot be witnessed, but must

be imagined. Our eye travels along the face of the glass, moving from right to left, urged on by the converging sides of the trapezoid, the green tile, the counter, the row of round stools that mimic our footsteps, and the yellow-white neon glare along the top. We are not drawn into the diner but are led alongside it. Like so many scenes we register in passing, its sudden, immediate clarity absorbs us, momentarily isolating us from everything else, and then releases us to continue on our way. In *Nighthawks*, however, we are not easily released. The long sides of the trapezoid slant toward each other but never join, leaving the viewer midway in their trajectory. The vanishing point, like the end of the viewer's journey or walk, is in an unreal and unrealizable place, somewhere off the canvas, out of the picture. The diner is an island of light distracting whoever might be walking by—in this case, ourselves—from journey's end. This distraction might be construed as salvation. For a vanishing point is not just where converging lines meet, it is also where we cease to be, the end of each of our individual journeys. Looking at *Nighthawks*, we are suspended between contradictory imperatives—one, governed by the trapezoid, that urges us forward, and the other, governed by the image of a light place in a dark city, that urges us to stay.

Night makes us aware of our insignificance. A café can fend off these feelings. The older waiter in Hemingway's story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* (1933) notes how his café provides an elderly customer with some sense of security in the night:

It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it

needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was *nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada*. [nothing and then nothing and then nothing]

Strong (1988) remarks on the similarities between the isolation of Hopper's images and the loneliness of Robert Frost's poems. Hopper read and admired Frost's poems. Jo Nivison painted a picture of him reading Frost in 1955 (Levin, 1980b). Frost's poem *Desert Places* (1934) ends:

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less –
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

There is something essentially American about the lonely individualism – the internal desert places – of Hopper, Hemingway and Frost.

Ecphrasis

Ecphrasis (Greek: words about) is the verbal description of a work of art, either real or imagined, expressed in vivid poetic language (Heffernan, 2015; Hollander 1988, 1995; Hollander & Weber, 2001; Panagiolidou, 2013). Ecphrasis is concerned with the effects the art on the viewer whereas "interpretation" deals with the what and how of these effects (Carrier, 1987).

Perhaps more than any other artist, Hopper has stimulated the imagination of poets and writers. Poems and stories written in response to his paintings have been collected in several anthologies (Block, 2016; Levin, 1995; Lyons et al., 1995),

and individual poets have composed whole books inspired by his images (Farrés, 2009; Hoggard, 2009; Strand, 1994). The following are three examples of Hopper's images and the poetry and prose that they have evoked.

Hopper's 1921 etching *Evening Wind* shows a nude woman about to lie down in bed as the wind blows the curtain into the room. The viewer feels that he is in the same room as the woman, and this intimacy recalls Degas' paintings of women bathing. The Hopper website suggests that the sudden interruption of the wind might be akin to the appearance of a god, like the annunciation to Mary or the shower of gold that fell upon Danae.



Robert Mezey (Levin, 1995, p 24) describes the etching in a beautifully constructed sonnet:

One foot on the floor, one knee in bed,
Bent forward on both hands as if to leap
Into a heaven of silken cloud, or keep
An old appointment – tryst, one almost said –
Some promise, some entanglement that led
In broad daylight to privacy and sleep,
To dreams of love, the rapture of the deep,
Oh, everything, that must be left unsaid –

Why then does she suddenly look aside
At a white window full of empty space
And curtains swaying inward? Does she sense
In darkening air the vast indifference
That enters in and will not be denied,
To breathe unseen upon her nakedness?

Hopper's 1939 painting *New York Movie* depicts an usherette at one of the grand movie theaters in New York. She is standing beautifully and pensively near the side exit.

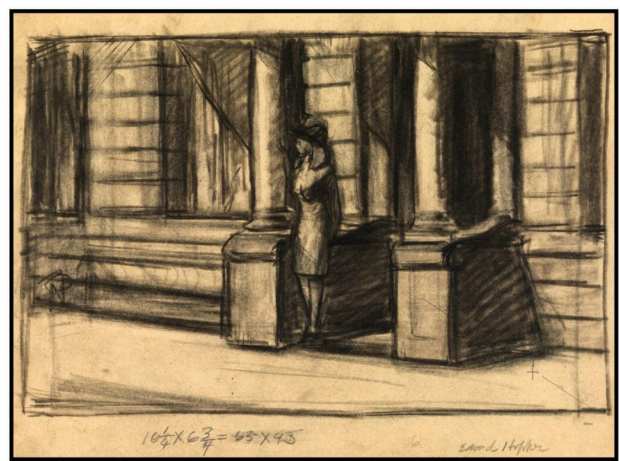


Leonard Michaels (Lyons et al, 1995, p 3) wonders about who she might be:

Of course, she wasn't going anywhere. I mean only that there was drama in the painting, a kind of personal story, and it was more engaging, more psychologically intense, than the movie on the distant blurry screen, a rectangle near the upper left corner of the painting, like a window in a dark room. The usherette isn't looking at that movie, isn't involved with any movie drama, any mechanical story told with cuts and fades while music works on your feelings. Her drama is mythical, the myth of Eurydice doomed to wait at the edge of darkness. The red flashes in the shadows of the painting are streaks of fire and streams and gouts of blood. Eurydice stands at the edge of Hades waiting for Orpheus.

This movie theater, like many others in Hopper's day, is called the Orpheum.

The 1943 painting of *Summertime* shows a young woman in a thin dress standing at the door of a New York building. She is about to face the day. She feels warm but a cooling breeze blows the dress against her body.



James Hoggard (2009) imagines Hopper talking about his painting:

It's good you noticed, if you did
A number, I'll say, have not come close
This one's a nude, the clothes a guise,
a mask, a witty, illusory stab
at idiot propriety – imagination strips
everything bare, as I've done here:
the nipples and heft of breasts in view
and the screaming delight of thighs
rising toward the truth between them,
as suggested by the curtain's cleft –
all this a celebration of my mood,
and my mood trumps anything that's yours

This lass, who looks sweetly nubile now,
is Jo, my wife, whose age has been reduced
by the cleverness of my brush and paint
I've stripped her nearly bare, but I
have also preserved defiant ghosts
in the willful set of her swelling lips

The tensions and songs here are mine
You can do with your own what you will

Homage in Film and Photography

Hopper's work has had a large influence on the visual arts as well as on poetry. Many of Hopper's paintings depict large ornate 19th-Century houses – often standing isolated from other buildings. One such picture is *House by the Railroad* (1925). According to Levin (1985) this was likely partially based on a house in Haverstraw just north of his home in Nyack (lower left of the illustration below). This house is across the street from the railway: Hopper often compressed the distances

between things in his paintings. The Mansard roof and central tower and columned porch were also found in other houses that Hopper painted. These houses defiantly insists on their isolated existence.



Variations on this house have appeared in several movies: most importantly Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Terrence

Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978). These sets are shown in the illustration above (lower middle and lower right).

Many photographers have been profoundly influenced by Hopper's pictures. Phillip Lorcia diCorcia photographs isolated people in urban settings: his images suggest what Hopper might have seen he had lived a further fifty years (Llorens & Ottinger 2012, pp. 306-309). Even more recently, the photographer Richard Tuschman has recreated many of Hopper's paintings in photographs. The illustration below shows Hopper's 1926 painting *Eleven a.m.* together with Tuschman's *Woman at a Window*, 2013. The chair has changed from blue to pink and the model now wears heels. Most importantly her face is visible.



Empty Rooms

Hopper was always intrigued by the play of light in empty rooms. His 1951 painting *Rooms by the Sea*, shows an empty room leading through an open door to the sea. The image derives from the Hopper's studio in Truro on Cape Cod. The door does not directly open onto the sea: Hopper has compressed the space. The main room in the painting is completely bare. On the left, however, another room can be glimpsed with a couch, a chest-of-drawers, and a painting on the wall. Hollander (2001, pp. 72-25) suggests that the two rooms might represent the memories of the past and the presentiments of the future.



One of Hopper's late paintings *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963) is devoid of detail. The room contains nothing but the light. The

stark simplicity almost approaches the abstract, though Hopper would insist that the image is still tied to reality.



Strand (1994, pp. 57-58) remarks:

In the later painting, *Sun in an Empty Room*, there is nothing calming about the light. It comes in a window and falls twice in the same room—on a wall close to the window and on a slightly recessed wall. That is all the action there is. We do not travel the same distance—actual or metaphorical—that we do in *Rooms by the Sea*. The light strikes two places at once, and we feel its terminal character instead of anything that hints of continuation. If it suggests a rhythm, it is a rhythm cut short. The room seems cropped, as if the foreground were cut away. What we have is a window wall, with the window framing the highlighted leaves of a nearby tree, and a back wall, a

finality against which two tomblike parallelograms of light stand up-right. Done in 1963, it is Hopper's last great painting, a vision of the world without us; not merely a place that excludes us, but a place emptied of us. The light, now a faded yellow against sepia-toned walls, seems to be enacting the last stages of its transience, its own stark narrative coming to a close.

Last Things

Hopper's last painting, *Two Comedians* (1965) portrays two actors taking their bows on a stage raised high above the audience. The actors are the artist and his wife. Representing himself as a comedian refers back to his earlier painting *Soir Bleu*. The illustration below shows the painting together with Scarduelli's impression of the elderly couple in their studio (Rossi & Scarduelli, 2021).



The Portuguese poet Ernest Farrés (translated by Lawrence Venuti, 2006) imagines Hopper's comments on the painting

Perhaps it's the costume
that lets me laugh,
or smile as it were –
for me they've been the same

Perhaps it's the clown's disguise
that lets me be
looser than I usually am
strutting cock-proud now,
goofy-eyed at a crowd,
the illusion of a crowd
no one sees but you and me

Clowns, we move toward stage's edge,
a place I've made like a roof's edge,
with threat or promise of a fall

But the moment seems sweet,
our domestic wars almost done,
and white-clad and foolscapped,
we seem blest as we press
toward the last edge we'll meet,

our lyrical selves always in France,
our final days just bibelots:
Nous sommes, Jo et moi, les pierrots

Final Words

Hopper painted the real world, but he allowed his imagination to interact with his perception. Conaty (2022, p 14) remarks that he often felt torn between working from the fact and improvising upon what he saw. Hopper argued against abstract expressionism, insisting that art should always have its source in "life." The following is his 1953 statement on art from the short-lived magazine *Reality* (quoted in Llorens & Ettinger, 2012, p 275):

Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the

artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world. No amount of skillful invention can replace the essential element of imagination. One of the weaknesses of much abstract painting is the attempt to substitute the inventions of the intellect for a pristine imaginative conception. The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm and does not concern itself alone with stimulating arrangements of color, form, and design. The term "life" as used in art is something not to be held in contempt, for it implies all of existence, and the province of art is to react to it and not to shun it. Painting will have to deal more fully and less obliquely with life and nature's phenomena before it can again become great.

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Cézanne

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) learned to experience nature with the vividness of the Impressionists but evolved his own individual style of painting. How he perceived the world was as important as the way it appeared. For most of his life he lived and painted in Aix-en-Provence. He had no students and his work became recognized only toward the end of his life. Nevertheless, many of the proponents of the modernist movement that began in the first decade of the 20th Century acknowledged Cézanne as their artistic father (Hook, 2021). This post comments on some of his paintings.

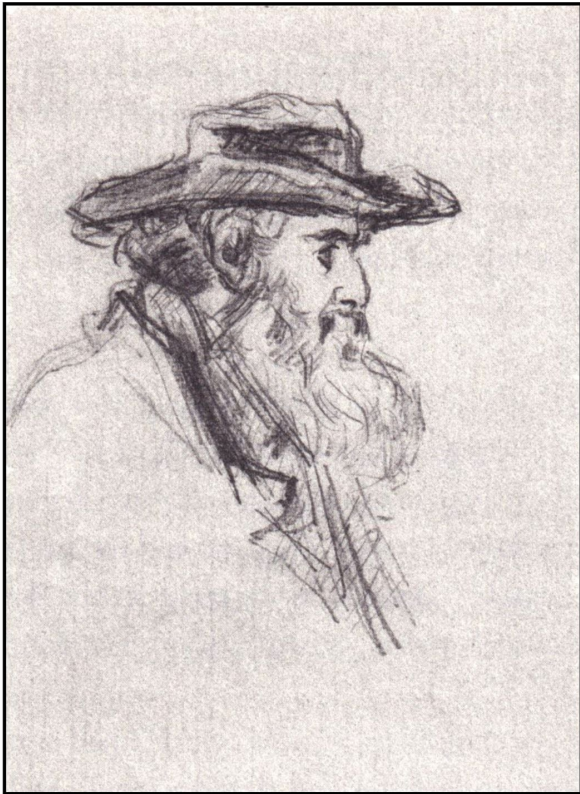
Early Life

Cézanne's father, a successful businessman and banker in Aix-en-Provence, wanted his son to carry on the family's banking business. However, Cézanne wished to become a painter and his

father eventually gave in to his stubbornness. The young man came to Paris in 1861, took lessons in some of the painting studios and spent time studying and drawing in the Louvre (Schapiro, 1952; Danchev, 2010). He was impressed by the emotional force of Delacroix and intrigued by the iconoclasm of Manet. He later made his own versions of Manet's *Olympia* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (both exhibited in 1863). He brooded and made paintings of rape and murder. His style was generally dark and heavy. He seemed destined to be just another angry young man without significant talent.

Friendship with Pissarro.

However, during his studies in Paris, Cézanne became friends with Camille Pissarro (1830-1903). Pissarro was older but both were outsiders: Cézanne was an unsophisticated provincial and Pissarro was a Jew from the island of St Thomas in the Caribbean. Pissarro had taken up the idea of painting directly from nature (*en plein air*), molding shapes in colors rather than defining them with outlines. He was one of the founding members of the Impressionists and exhibited with them from 1874 to 1886. He was full of enthusiasm for this new movement and loved to discuss its theories with his younger colleague. Despite their different personalities – Pissarro was gentle and congenial, Cézanne rough and unsocial – the two painters became fast friends, exchanging pencil portraits of each other (from around 1874, Pissarro on the left and Cézanne on the right).



In the decade from 1871 to 1881, they often worked together in the environs of Paris (Pissarro, 2005). Pissarro lived in Pontoise, and for a while Cézanne lived in nearby Auvers. Sometimes Cézanne directly copied his colleague's paintings, sometimes they worked simultaneously, and sometimes Cézanne would revisit a scene that Pissarro had painted before. Under the tutelage of Pissarro, Cézanne lost his youthful darkness and began to paint what he saw rather than what he imagined.

However, the two painters maintained their individual styles. Pissarro worked continuously adding tiny points of color to the canvas. His paintings vividly portray the atmosphere of a landscape, capture the color of its light, and accurately delineate its perspective. Cézanne would often spend a long time contemplating what he saw before adding paint to the canvas. His colors were perhaps brighter than reality and they were put on the canvas in "patches" rather than dots. His perspective never really fit a single point of view.

The following illustration shows two paintings of *The Road at*

Pontoise. The upper painting by Pissarro was made in 1875 and the lower by Cézanne about a year later. Cézanne's painting has a more limited field of view, his colors show more contrast and less definition, and his landscape contains no people.



Nancy Locke (2021) recounts the observations of a peasant who once watched the two painters at their easels in the countryside:

“M. Pissarro, en travaillant, *piquait* (et mon paysan faisait le geste), et M. Cézanne *plaquait* (autre geste).”

Selon cet observateur contemporain, Pissarro était plus susceptible de travailler avec un pinceau perpendiculaire à la toile, l’approchant avec un mouvement de tamponnage ou de piqûre, alors que Cézanne était plus enclin à se déplacer latéralement avec son pinceau ou son couteau à palette, travaillant ainsi dans le même plan que la toile.

[M. Pissarro, while working, “stung” (and my peasant made the gesture), and M. Cézanne “plastered” (another gesture). According to this contemporary observer, Pissarro was more likely to work with a brush perpendicular to the canvas, approaching it with a dabbing or stabbing motion, whereas Cézanne was more inclined to move his brush or palette knife laterally, thus working in the same plane as the canvas. (my translation)]

Cézanne later described his method of painting to Joachim Gasquet. However, Gasquet wrote down these conversations long after Cézanne had died and the words are likely as much Gasquet as Cézanne:

[L]entement les bases géologiques n’apparaissent, des couches s’établissent, les grands plans de ma toile, j’en dessine mentalement le squelette pierreux. Je vois affleurer les roches sous l’eau, peser le ciel. Tout tombe d’aplomb. Une pâle palpitation enveloppe les aspects linéaires. Les terres rouges sortent d’un abîme. Je commence à me séparer du paysage, à le voir. Je m’en dégage avec cette première esquisse, ces lignes géologiques. La géométrie, mesure de la terre. Une tendre émotion me prend. Des racines de cette émotion monte la sève, les couleurs. Une sorte de délivrance. Le rayonnement de l’âme, le regard, le mystère

extériorisé, l'échange entre la terre et le soleil, l'idéal et la réalité, les couleurs! Une logique aérienne, colorée, remplace brusquement la sombre, la têtue géométrie. Tout s'organise, les arbres, les champs, les maisons. Je vois. Par taches. L'assise géologique, le travail préparatoire, le monde du dessin s'enfonce, s'est écroulé comme dans une catastrophe. Un cataclysme l'a emporté, régénéré. Une nouvelle période vit. La vraie ! Celle où rien ne m'échappe, où tout est dense et fluide à la fois, naturel. Il n'y a plus que des couleurs, et en elles de la clarté, l'être qui les pense, cette montée de la terre vers le soleil, cette exhalaison des profondeurs vers l'amour. Le génie serait d'immobiliser cette ascension dans une minute d'équilibre, en suggérant quand même son élan. Je veux m'emparer de cette idée, de ce jet d'émotion, de cette fumée d'être au-dessus de l'universel brasier. Ma toile pèse, un poids alourdit mes pinceaux. Tout tombe. Tout retombe sous l'horizon. De mon cerveau sur ma toile, de ma toile vers la terre. Pesamment. Où est l'air, la légèreté dense? Le génie serait de dégager l'amitié de toutes ces choses en plein air, dans la même montée, dans le même désir. Il y a une minute du monde qui passe. La peindre dans sa réalité ! Et tout oublier pour cela. Devenir elle-même. Être alors la plaque sensible. Donner l'image de ce que nous voyons, en oubliant tout ce qui a paru avant nous. (Gasquet, 1921, pp. 136-137)

[S]lowly geographical foundations appear, the layers, the major planes form themselves on my canvas. Mentally I compose the rocky skeleton. I can see the outcropping of stones under the water; the sky weighs on me. Everything falls into place. A pale palpitation envelops the linear elements. The red earths rise from an abyss. I begin to separate myself from the landscape, to see it. With the first sketch, I detach myself from these geological lines. Geometry measures the earth. A feeling of tenderness comes over me. Some roots of this emotion raise the sap, the

colors. It's a kind of deliverance. The soul's radiance, the gaze, exteriorized mystery are exchanged between earth and sun, ideal and reality, colors! An airborne, colorful logic quickly replaces the somber, stubborn geography. Everything becomes organized: trees, fields, houses. I see. By patches: the geographical strata, the preparatory work, the world of drawing all cave in, collapse as in a catastrophe. A cataclysm has carried it all away, regenerated it. A new era is born. The true one! The one in which nothing escapes me, where everything is dense and fluid at the same time, natural. All that remains is color, and in color, brightness, clarity, the being who imagines them, this ascent from the earth toward the sun, this exhalation from the depths toward love. Genius would be to capture this ascension in a delicate equilibrium while also suggesting its flight. I want to use this idea, this burst of emotion, this smoke of existence above the universal fire. My canvas is heavy, a heaviness weighs down my brushes. Everything drops. Everything falls toward the horizon. From my brain onto my canvas, from my canvas toward the earth. Heavily. Where is the air, the dense lightness? It would take genius to discover the amity of all these things in the open air, in the same ascent, in the same desire. A minute of the world goes by. To paint it in its reality! And to forget every-thing else. To become reality itself. To be the photographic plate. To render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that came before. (Cochran translation in Doran and Cochran, 2001)

Je peins. Par taches. The French word *tache* most commonly denotes a spot, stain or blemish. In painting it means a patch of color. With these patches Cézanne was able to portray on the canvas what he perceived. Pissarro (2005), the grandson of the painter, remarked about how the French word is close to *touche* (touch) and that this brings to mind how touch is both a sensation and an action. Cézanne's painting was an active participation in his experience, not so much a representation

as a recreation of reality.

Over the years Cézanne began to distance himself from the Impressionists (Shiff, 1984). Verdi (1992) called him the “reluctant impressionist.” As well as heightening his color contrasts, he portrayed space quite differently. Each part of the painting existed on its own plane, and these planes intersected to form the structure of the scene. Cézanne was more interested in the underlying form of what he saw rather than its immediate appearance. His differentiation from the impressionists is visible below in two paintings made in the gardens of the Hermitage at Pontoise: Pissarro’s from 1867, and Cézanne’s from 1881. After 1881 Cézanne retired to Provence only coming to Paris occasionally.



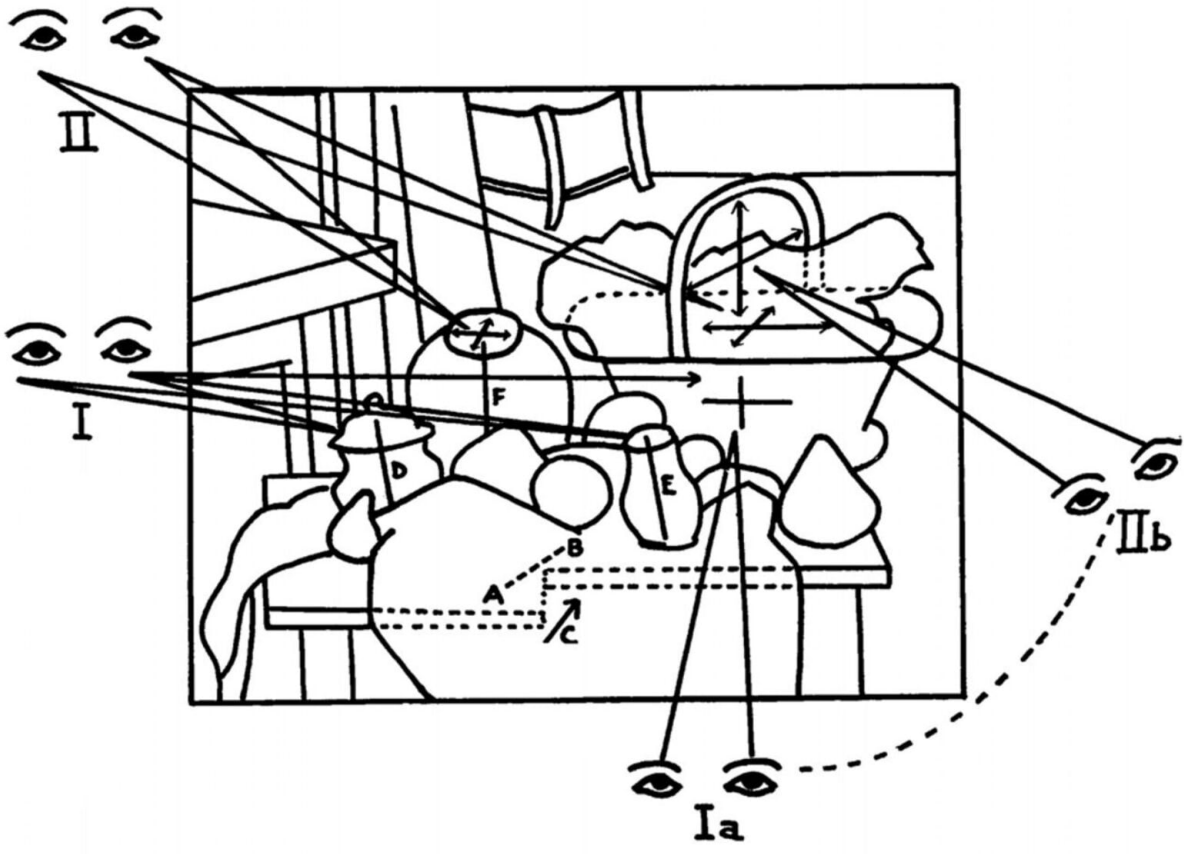
Still Lives

During his association with Pissarro in the 1870s, Cézanne developed his own individual technique for portraying still lifes. French painters had followed the Dutch in their enthusiasm for still life. The illustration below shows paintings by Chardin (1764), Manet (1864), Pissarro (1872) and Cézanne (1874). All contain a paring knife. In Cézanne's painting, the objects do not simply exist. The space tips upward. The objects seem to move towards the viewer, but are restrained by the rumpled tablecloth.



Multiple points of view were characteristic of Cézanne's later still lifes. The following figure shows his 1890 painting of *The Kitchen Table* as analyzed by Erle Loran (1943). The

diagram shows that the objects are viewed from two main heights (I and II on the left); the lower point of view is then located either directly in front or on the right (Ia and IIb). Some of the objects tilt as though they are about to fall (D and E) whereas others stand upright (F). The tabletop on the left is lower than on the right (ABC). These problems of perspective are not due to clumsiness. Cézanne considered each section of the painting by itself and then pieced the scene back together. Such an approach to reality was to become the driving force of Cubism.



The following illustration shows two more of Cézanne's still lifes. In the upper painting – *The Basket of Apples* (1893) the bottle leans to the left, the biscuits tilt upward, and the table top again has two different heights. This instability becomes even more marked in the lower painting of *Still Life with Apples* (1895), about which T. J. Clark (2022, p 75)

The whole array ... is disturbed and unstable (those spilling red spheres, that tipping plate, that earthquake landscape of blue and white cloth) yet composed and crystalline at the same time. And both the orderliness and the disturbance can strike us as features of seeing and features of manufacture – inventions, impositions, flashes of grim wit. Take the crisp fold at the top of the tablecloth, continuing the dark line of the dado [lower portion of a wall]. Or the whole brilliant hard decisiveness of the made pattern – made by machine and then by Cezanne the re-folder – on the blue-and-black drape. Or the anti-colour of the ice-block wall. </p>



The spatial instability of the paintings can make the viewer uneasy. The uncertainty of the artist is palpable. The critic Gustave Geffroy was perhaps the first to mention this *inquiétude* in a review of Cézanne's 1895 exhibition:

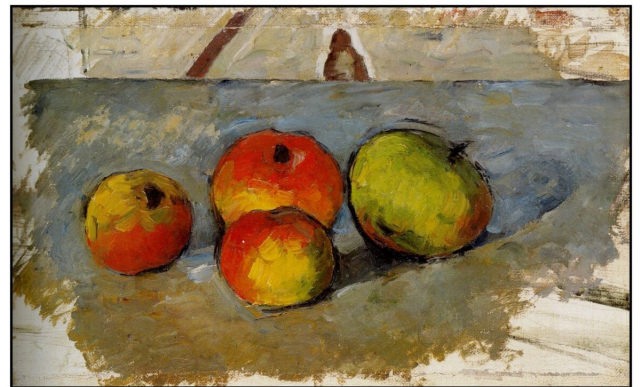
L'inquiétude de l'artiste l'a dominé. Cézanne n'en a pas moins raconté sa sensation profonde au spectacle de l'univers. Il importe peu que sa personnalité ait pris, pour s'exprimer, telle forme plutôt que telle autre. Regrettons qu'il n'ait pas doté son pays et son temps de l'oeuvre grandiose qui était en lui. Mais son individu ne subit de ce regret aucune déperdition, puisqu'il est présent, et bien présent, par toutes ces oeuvres où se mêlent, comme on ne l'a jamais vu davantage peut-être, la réflexion et la spontanéité. (Geffroy, 1900, p 218). </p>

[The anxiety (unease, disquiet) of the artist overcame him. Cézanne nevertheless recounted his deep experience of the universe. It matters little that his personality took, in order to express itself, one form rather than another. We are sorry that he did not endow his country and his time with the great work that was in him. But his achievement suffers no loss from this regret, since he is present, and very present, in all these works which mingle, more than we have ever seen before, reflection and spontaneity. (my translation)] </p>

Cézanne's Apples

At school in Aix, Cézanne had once come to the defence of the young Emile Zola who was being bullied by older students. The next day Zola brought Cézanne a basket of apples (Schapiro, 1968). The two became fast friends and Cézanne's apples became a recurring *motif* in his paintings, many of which simply show a group of apples on a surface (Leca, 2014). As illustrated below, each apple is defined by its colors. There are no outlines, only shadows. They represent things as they exist unto themselves (Armstrong, 2018). In his poem *To an Artist*,

Seamus Heaney (1984) describes “his coercion of the substance from green apples”

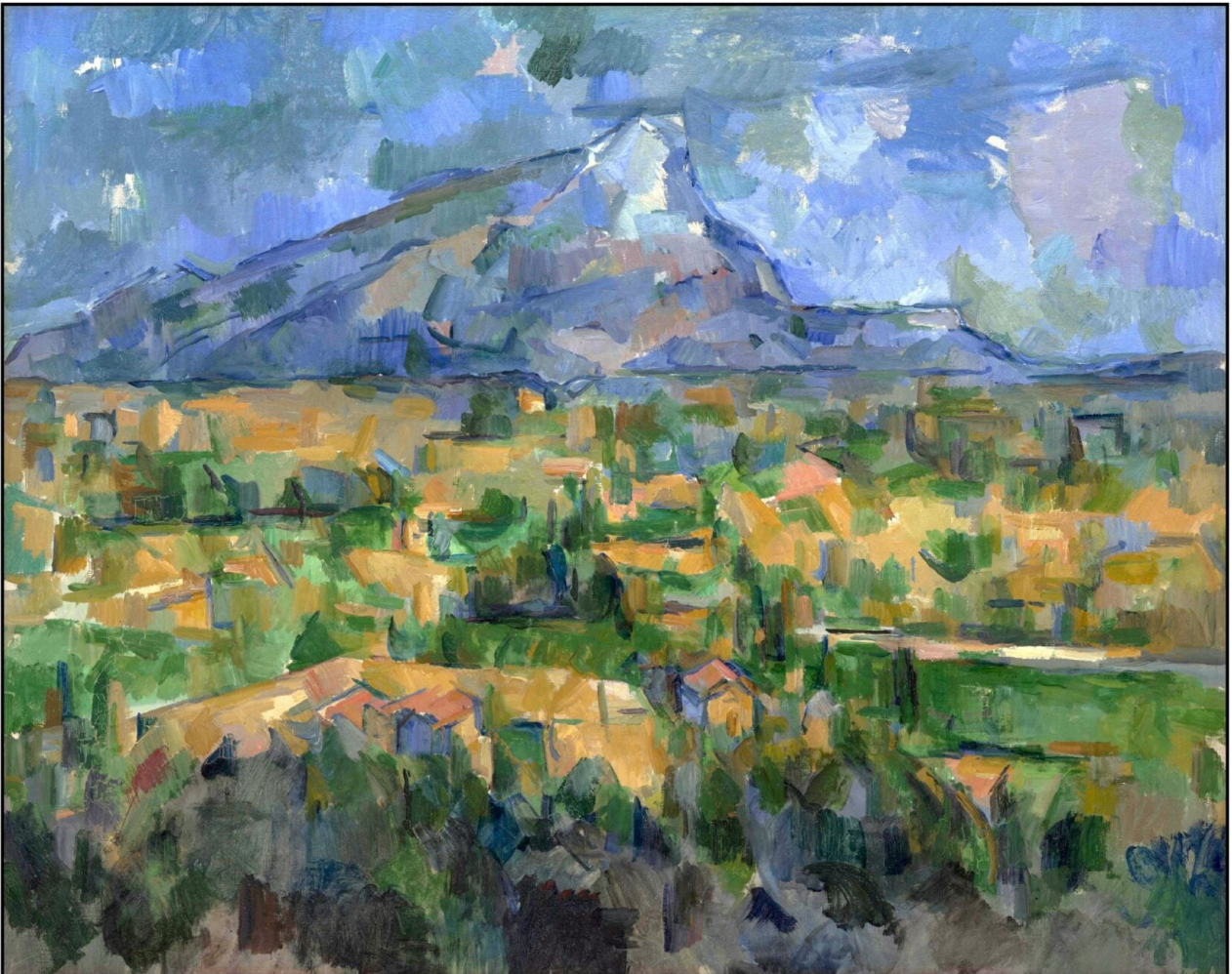


Mont Sainte Victoire

After he returned to Provence, Cézanne began a series of paintings depicting the mountain to the east of Aix-en-Provence: Mont Sainte Victoire. The following illustration shows two paintings from the mid 1890s, the upper one now in the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia and the lower in the Courtauld Collection in London.



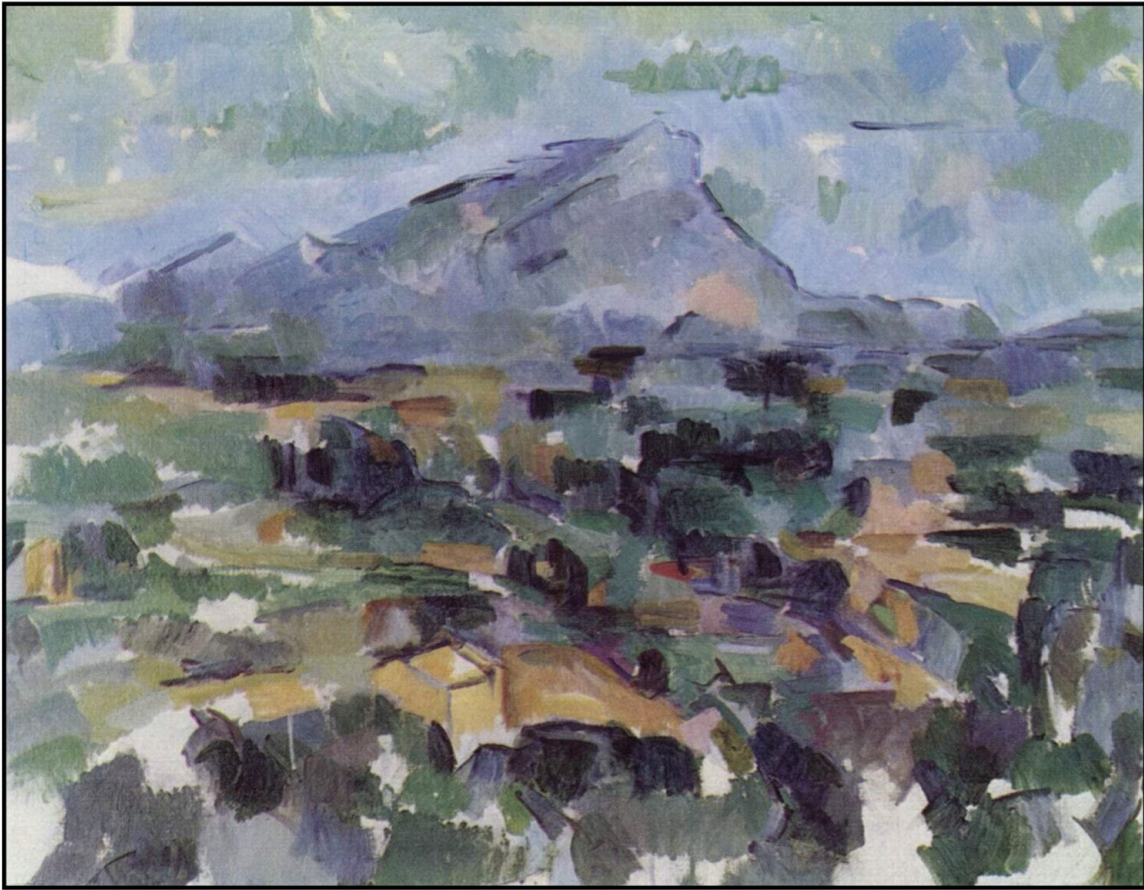
As the years went on the depictions of the mountain became more abstract. The color patches expanded and the structure simplified. The following illustration shows a modern photograph of the mountain together with Cézanne's 1904 painting:



William Wilson commented on the multiplicity of the depiction:

the deep space represented in Cézanne's paintings is not the space of historical events; he has altered that space, bringing the distant nearer, and pushing the near back. As we look towards Mont Sainte-Victoire it is brought towards us, but Cézanne doesn't show the cross that had been erected on it. Anything might happen in historical space, but Cézanne did not want that; he wanted painting to be about what was happening, when what was happening was an experience of successive spontaneous visual sensations which include a feeling of earlier and later, of before and after, along with *now*. Looking at a landscape by Cézanne, it is as though in that space we would go a few yards to the left, some yards back, some more yards upward, and several yards *later*. (Wilson, 1988, p 193)

As the years went by, the paintings of Mont Sainte Victoire became more monumental. The following illustration shows two late depictions.



The paintings have become independent of their source, creations in their own right. The following is a statement by Cézanne as reported (much later) by Gasquet. It is likely exaggerated. The comment that *le paysage se pense en moi* does not ring true as something that Cézanne would have said, but it does depict the way that the critics and painters began to consider his achievement:

L'art est une harmonie parallèle à la nature. Que penser des imbéciles qui vous disent: le peintre est toujours inférieur à la nature! Il lui est parallèle. S'il n'intervient pas volontairement... entendez-moi bien. Toute sa volonté doit être de silence. Il doit faire taire en lui toutes les voix des préjugés, oublier, oublier, faire silence, être un écho parfait. Alors, sur sa plaque sensible, tout le paysage s'inscrira. Pour le fixer sur la toile, l'extérioriser, le métier interviendra ensuite, mais le métier respectueux qui, lui aussi, n'est prêt qu'à obéir, à traduire inconsciemment, tant il sait bien sa langue, le texte qu'il déchiffre, les deux textes parallèles, la nature vue, la nature sentie, celle qui est là... (il montrait la plaine verte et bleue) celle qui est ici... (il se frappait le front) qui toutes deux doivent s'amalgamer pour durer, pour vivre d'une vie moitié humaine, moitié divine, la vie de l'art, écoutez un peu... la vie de Dieu. Le paysage se reflète, s'humanise, se pense en moi. Je l'objective, le projette, le fixe sur ma toile. (Gasquet, 1921, pp. 131-132)

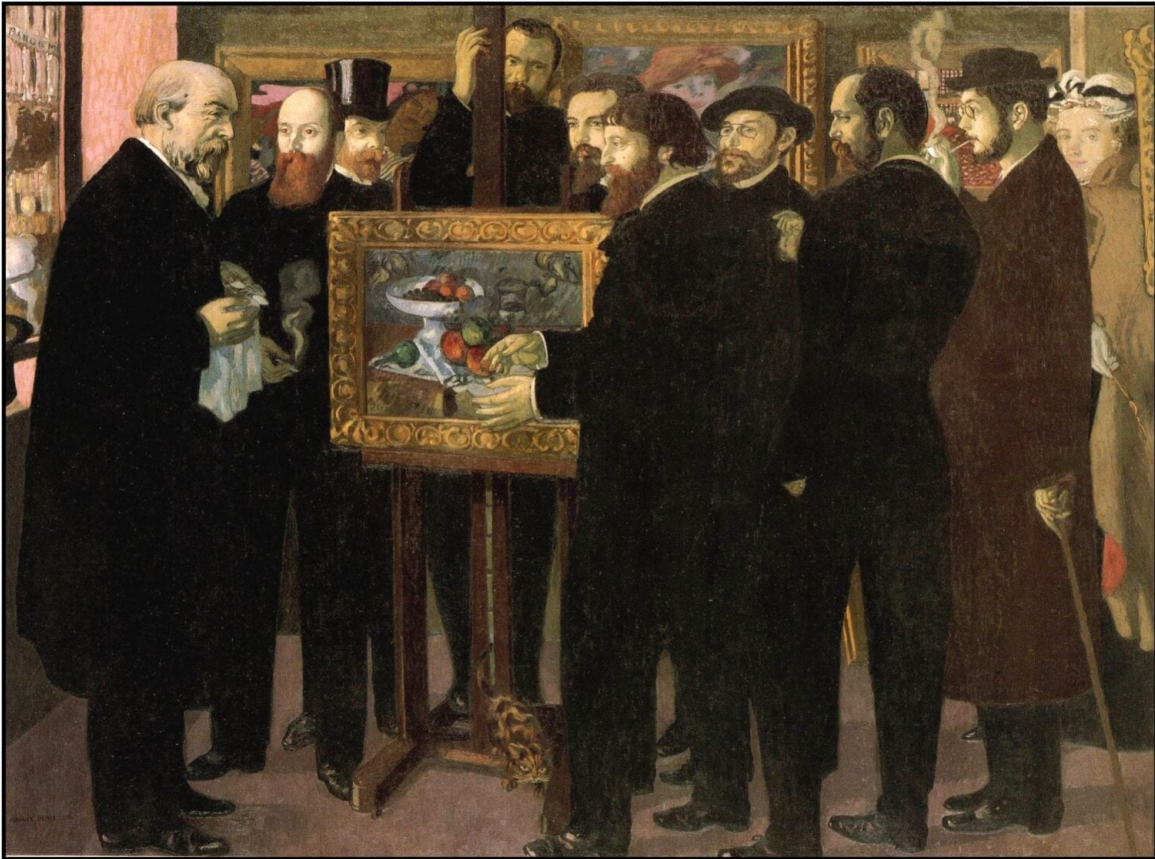
[Art is a harmony parallel to nature. What would you think of idiots who would tell you, the painter is always inferior to nature! They are parallel, if the artist doesn't intentionally intervene ... hear me well. His entire will must be silent. He must silence all prejudice within himself. He must for-get, forget, be quiet, be a perfect echo. Then the full landscape will inscribe itself on his photographic plate. In order to fix it on his canvas, to exteriorize it, his craft comes into action. But it must be a respectful

craft which, itself also, is ready only to obey, to translate unconsciously so long as it knows its language well, the text it deciphers, these two parallel texts: nature seen and nature felt, the nature which is out there ... (he indicates the blue and green plain) and the nature which is in here ... (he taps himself on the forehead) both of which must unite in order to endure, to live a life half human, half divine, the life of art, listen a little ... the life of God. The landscape is reflected, becomes human, and becomes conscious in me. I objectify it, project it, fix it on my canvas. (Cochran translation)

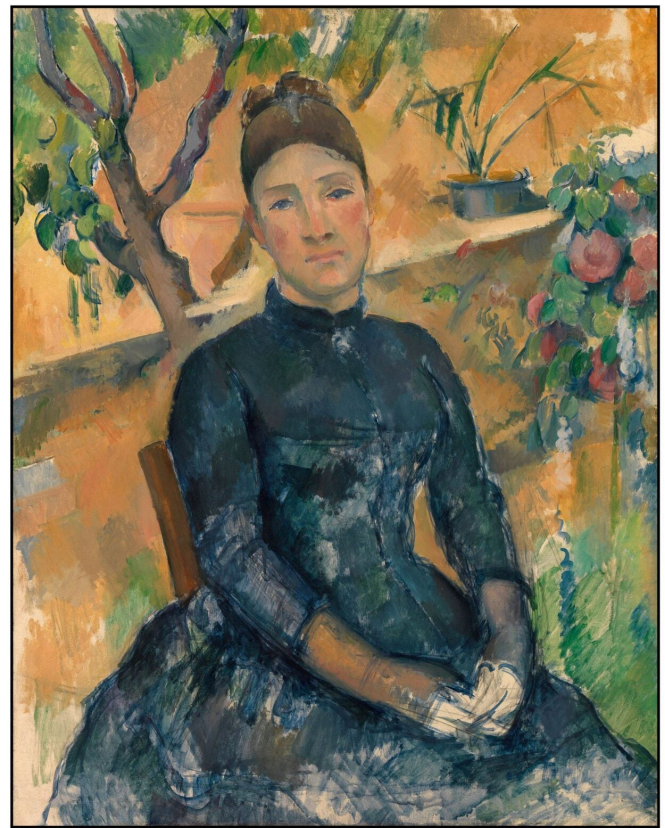
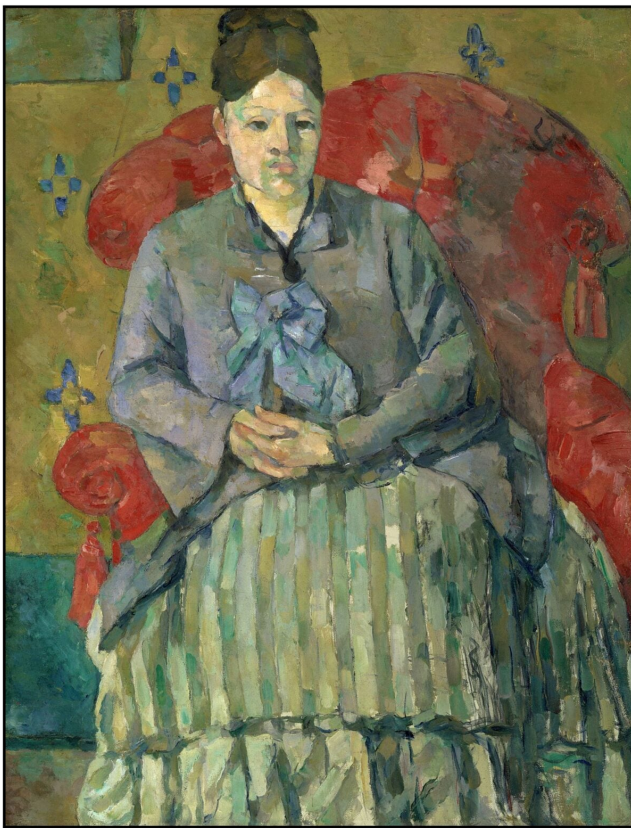
First Recognition

Cézanne bought his paint supplies from Julien Tanguy (the same Père Tanguy that was painted by Vincent Van Gogh) in Paris, and left some paintings with him for possible sale. When Tanguy died in 1894, the dealer Ambroise Vollard obtained some of Cézanne's paintings from the sale of his estate. He then contacted Cézanne, and arranged for his first solo exhibition in 1895. Cézanne suddenly became a success.

Younger painters found inspiration in the vividness and the uncertainty of Cézanne's still lifes. In 1900 Maurice Denis painted his *Hommage à Cézanne* showing Cézanne's 1880 painting *Still Life with Compotier* being admired by artists and critics. The persons illustrated are from left to right: Odilon Redon, Edouard Vuillard, André Mellario (in top hat), Ambroise Vollard (behind the easel), Maurice Denis, Paul Ranson, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Pierre Bonnard (with pipe) and Marthe Denis.



Several portraits were included in Cézanne's first exhibition (Elderfield, 2017). Below are shown two 1891 portraits of Madame Cézanne (Marie-Hortense Fiquet, his one-time model and mother of his son). The portraits lack the fine detail that characterized the paintings of classical artists. Yet facial perception depends more on general form than on details, and Cézanne's paintings grasp this form. The portraits have a monumentality – as if the sitter was as important to the painter as his beloved Mont Sainte Victoire.



The poet Rainer Maria Rilke was impressed by the portrait on the left:

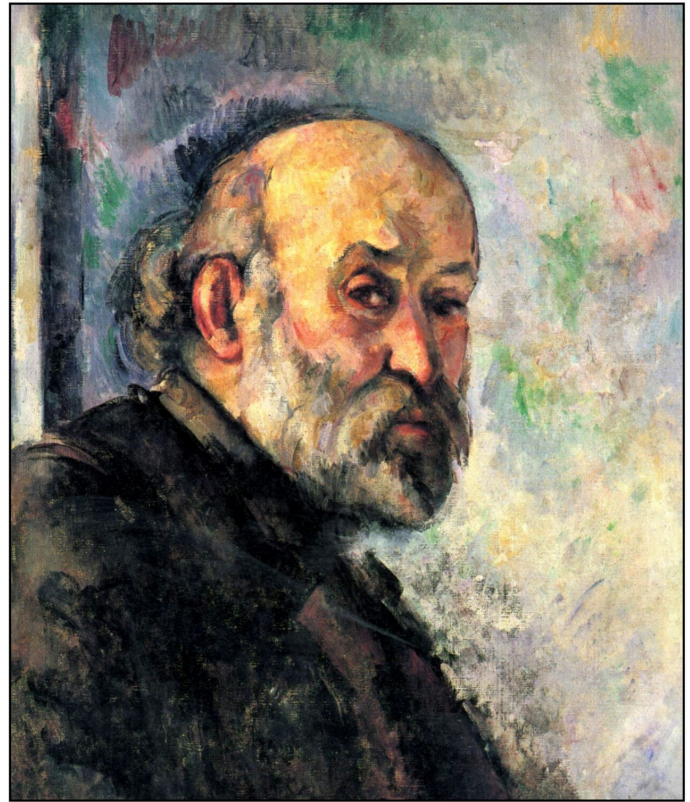
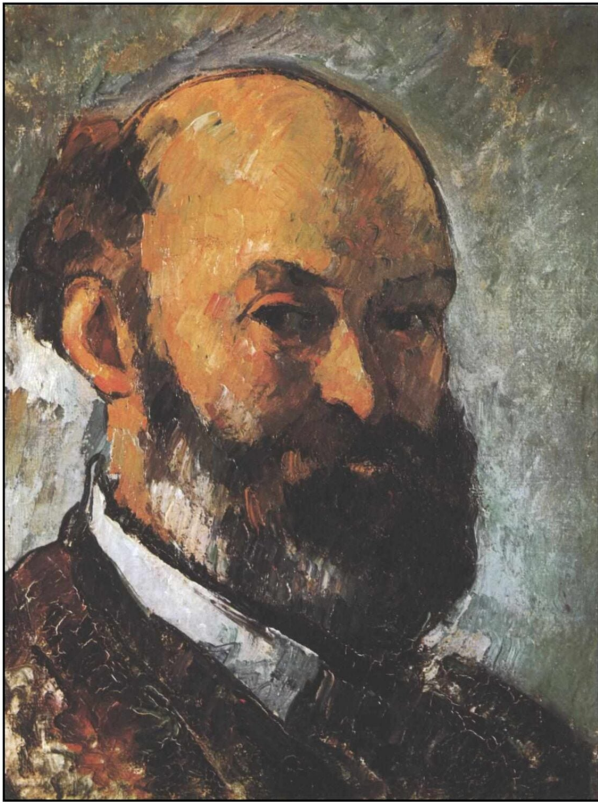
A red, upholstered low armchair has been placed in front of an earthy-green wall in which a cobalt-blue pattern (a cross with the center left out) is very sparingly repeated; the round bulging back curves and slopes forward and down to the armrests (which are sewn up like the sleeve-stump of an armless man). The left armrest and the tassel that hangs from it full of vermillion no longer have the wall behind

them but instead, near the lower edge, a broad stripe of greenish blue, against which they clash in loud contradiction. Seated in this red armchair, which is a personality in its own right, is a woman, her hands in the lap of a dress with broad vertical stripes that are very lightly indicated by small, loosely distributed flecks of green yellows and yellow greens, up to the edge of the blue-gray jacket, which is held together in front by a blue, greenly scintillating silk bow. In the brightness of the face, the proximity of all these colors has been exploited for a simple modeling of form and features: even the brown of the hair roundly pinned up above the temples and the smooth brown in the eyes has to express itself against its surroundings. It's as if every part were aware of all the others—it participates that much; that much adjustment and rejection is happening in it; that's how each daub plays its part in maintaining equilibrium and in producing it: just as the whole picture finally keeps reality in equilibrium. (Rilke, 1907, translated 1985 pp 70-71)

The following illustration shows Cézanne's portrait of the critic Gustave Geffroy (1896) seated at a desk that expands irrationally toward the reader and the unfinished eyeless portrait of the dealer Ambroise Vollard (1899).

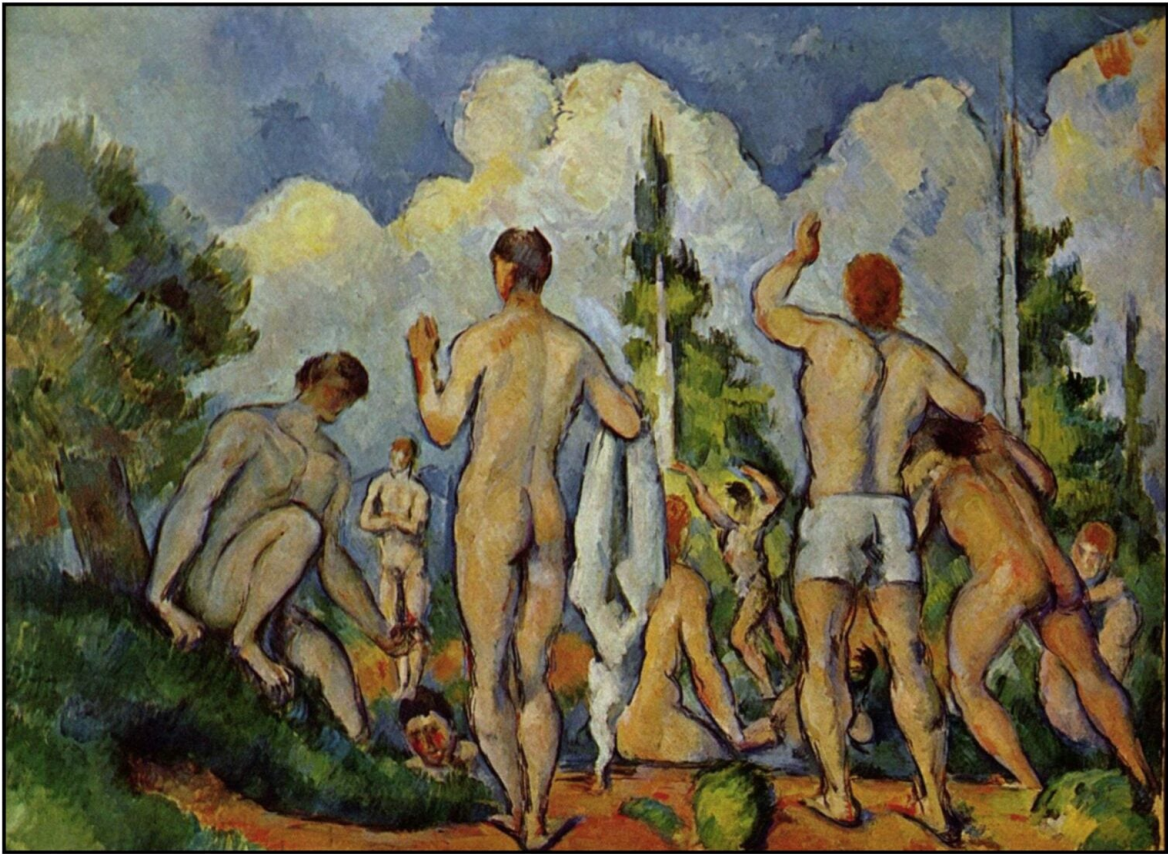


Cézanne produced many self-portraits. Those illustrated below are from 1880, when he had decided on his way of painting, and from 1895, when he had attained success but had begun to doubt his ability to make it significant.



The Bathers

Cézanne's fondest memories of childhood were the times he spent swimming with Zola and other friends in the rivers and lakes near Aix-en-Provence. Throughout his life he painted scenes of bathers (Krumrine, 1989; Garb1996)). In the early years of the 20th Century, he worked on several large paintings of bathers which were left unfinished at the time of his death in 1906. He did not use models. His figures were based on drawings he had made as a student in Paris, on photographs and on prints of the old masters (Verdi, 1992, Chapter 6). The following illustration shows a painting of male bathers from 1894, and one of the large paintings of female bathers unfinished at his death:



The very incompleteness of the late works became part of their appeal. Cézanne was attempting to find humanity's lost innocence. His inability was later interpreted as reflecting the difficulty of perceiving a world that may not be where we wish to live. This conflict between consciousness and reality became a major part of the later philosophy of existentialism – the search for meaning in a meaningless world. Merleau-Ponty remarked in his 1948 essay on *Cézanne's Doubt*

The meaning of what the artist is going to say *does not exist* anywhere– not in things, which as yet have no meaning, nor in the artist himself, in his unformulated life.

The artist must attempt to create this meaning in his work (Alsdorf, 2010; Rutherglen, 2004). The following is from the poem *Morning in the Studio: Les Grandes Baigneuses* by Maitreyabandhu (2019).

They were like dinosaurs in the swaggering green,
insecurely sexed with their hands above their heads.
He wanted earthed Etruscan statuary; he wanted
voluptuaries of the sun, but some were missing limbs
or had their heads blown off, others had broken
wrists
and severed fingers. They were like crippled monkeys
under cathedral trees: they were the century to
come.

The final illustration shows Emile Bernard's 1904 photograph of Cézanne in front of one of his unfinished paintings of *Les Grandes Baigneuses*. The detail on the left of the painting (now in the Barnes Collection) was later changed but the painting remained incomplete at the time of his death.



The Creative Artist

Medina (1995, pp 122-125) remarks on how a Cézanne's painting becomes independent of the experience that led to it. She likens it to *The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain*, one of the last poems written by Wallace Stevens (1954).

There it was, word for word,
The poem that took the place of a mountain.

He breathed its oxygen,
Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

It reminded him how he had needed
A place to go to in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactnesses
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home.

Death of an Artist

Cézanne tried continuously to make his painting meaningful. His art was his life. He painted right up to his death:

he was caught in a storm while working in the field. Only after having kept at it for two hours under a steady downpour did he start to make for home; but on the way he dropped exhausted. A passing laundry-wagon stopped, and the driver took him home. His old housekeeper came to the door. Seeing her master prostrate and almost lifeless, her first impulse was to run to him and give him every attention. But

just as she was about to loosen his clothes, she stopped, seized with alarm. It must be explained that Cezanne could not endure the slightest physical contact. Even his son, whom he cherished above all ("Paul is my horizon," he used to say), never dared to take his father's arm without saying, "Permit me, papa." And Cezanne, notwithstanding the affection he entertained for his son, could never resist shuddering.

Finally, fearing lest he pass away if he did not have proper care, the good woman summoned all her courage and set about to chafe his arms and legs to restore the circulation, with the result that he regained consciousness without making the slightest protest—which was indeed a bad sign. He was feverish all night long.

On the following day he went down into the garden, intending to continue a study of a peasant which was going rather well. In the midst of the sitting he fainted; the model called for help; they put him to bed, and he never left it again. He died a few days later, on October 22, 1906. (Vollard, 1919)

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