

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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"CEZANNE: THE EARLY YEARS 1859-1872" AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington, DC, December 12, 1988 - The least-known period of Paul Cézanne's art will be revealed to American audiences in a show at the National Gallery of Art in Cézanne: The Early Years 1859-1872, January 29 - April 30, 1989. The exhibition is the first to provide a thorough examination of the formative years of the painter Cézanne, a key figure in the impressionist and post-impressionist movements whose art heralded the beginnings of cubism and modern painting. The show also contributes to the resolution of critical dating problems and provides important evidence for a more secure chronology for the artist's development.

The National Gallery will be the only venue in the United States for the exhibition which opened at the Royal Academy of Arts in London on April 22, 1988 and is currently on view at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris through January 1, 1989. The National Gallery exhibition, which includes 57 paintings and 15 works on paper, is supported in part by Gerald D. Hines Interests and by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

"Cézanne's early work has long been viewed as problematic," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery. "Cézanne: The Early Years makes an important contribution to our appreciation of this extraordinary artist," he added.

Cézanne was born in Aix-en-Provence, France, on January 19, 1839, the son of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, a prosperous banker. As a young student, Paul Cézanne showed an enthusiasm for art, but no special aptitude for it. While he later studied law at his father's behest, he also continued to study art. The exhibition includes The Four Seasons, a series of panels that he painted at the age of 20 on the walls of Jas de Bouffan, his family's country home. In 1861, Cézanne left law school and followed his childhood friend, the writer Émile Zola, to Paris.

Throughout the 1860s, Paul Cézanne moved between Paris, where he studied art at the Académie Suisse, and Aix, where he painted many of the works in the exhibition. Receptive to the influences of artists such as Courbet, Manet, Pissarro, Daumier, and Delacroix, Cézanne often varied his artistic style throughout his twenties. In 1872, at the invitation of Pissarro, he settled in Auvers-sur-Oise with his wife and infant son. The experience of working with Pissarro transformed Cézanne's art.

From the brooding, intense Self-Portrait (1860-61) to the enigmatic, dignified The Black Clock (1870), the paintings in the exhibition reflect Cézanne's early self-doubts, emotional turbulence, and a resolve to discipline his powerful talent. His predilection for eroticism is represented in paintings such as The Feast (The Orgy) (1870). In contrast, the show also includes the landscapes he painted directly from nature while avoiding service in the Franco-Prussian War in the early 1870s.

Cézanne: The Early Years 1859-1872 reveals the richness of the artist's quasi-expressionist technique that characterizes his work prior to the influence of orthodox impressionism and the emergence of his 'constructive' brushstroke of the 1870s. The exhibition includes many of his palette-knife paintings, such as several of the portraits he painted of his Uncle Dominique and Portrait of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, Father of the Artist, reading l'Événement (1866), a major work that was given to the National Gallery in 1970 by Paul Mellon.

Selected from public and private collections in Europe, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the U.S.S.R., and the United States, the show has been organized by eminent British art historian Sir Lawrence Gowing, curatorial chairman of The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. and former Samuel H. Kress Professor at the National Gallery (1986-87). He also wrote and compiled the exhibition catalogue, Cézanne: The Early Years 1859-1872.

The fully-illustrated exhibition catalogue includes essays by Gowing; noted Cézanne historian John Rewald, who is preparing a catalogue raisonné of Cézanne's oil paintings; M.L. Krumrine, professor at Pennsylvania State University; Mary Tompkins Lewis, recently a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington; Götz Adriani, director of the Kunsthalle, Tübingen, and Sylvie Patin, curator at the Musée d'Orsay.

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National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

EXHIBITION BACKGROUNDER

Cézanne: The Early Years 1859-1872
National Gallery of Art
January 29-April 30, 1989

... For the Cézanne of the formative years, the Cézanne before the mature Cézanne, was a man of major achievements, an artist who would have left a name even if he had not reached the glorious mastery of his subsequent, especially late, years.

John Rewald

Uncertainty and growth, which marked France's Second Republic of the 1860s, also characterized Paul Cézanne's career during the same period. His turbulent adolescent anxieties were revealed in the erotic, somber, and violent works of his twenties. His early exploration of quasi-expressionist brushwork and other techniques were a prelude to the later, more disciplined stages of his art which made him one of the most brilliant, revolutionary, and influential painters. Yet, despite the abundance and importance of Cézanne's early works, little attention has been paid to his formative years as an artist.

Cézanne was born in Aix-en-Provence in the south of France on January 19, 1839, the son of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, a banker, and Anne-Elisabeth-Honorine Aubert, a local shopgirl. Louis-Auguste Cézanne's financial success enabled him to rent and later purchase a 37-acre estate with an eighteenth-century manor house called Jas de Bouffan, Provençal for "Habitation of the Winds."

The young Paul Cézanne was terrified of his domineering father and overly dependent on his mother who, with one of his two sisters, supported his struggle to become a painter. While the insecurities stemming from his familial relationships troubled him throughout his adult life, his childhood friendships, particularly the one with Emile Zola, had a lasting and positive impact.

Cézanne was a good student and attended the town's drawing academy when he was 15. While he later studied law at his father's behest, he continued to study art. At the age of 20 he painted The Four Seasons (cat. 1a-1d)*, a series of panels, on the salon walls of Jas de Bouffan.

At Zola's urging, and with his father's reluctant permission, Cézanne gave up his law studies and followed Zola to Paris in 1861 to realize his dream of becoming an artist. He spent long hours at the Académie Suisse, a studio with no instructors, and lived on a tight allowance provided by his father. The unrestrained but somber-toned Self-Portrait (1861-62, cat. 2) he painted from a photograph taken in 1861 reveals the brooding conviction he felt at this time. Cézanne soon became discouraged with his work and returned to Aix. After a brief stint working as a clerk, he realized that he would never become a banker or a lawyer. He continued painting and returned to Paris with renewed confidence in November 1862.

The art-buying public's taste was shaped by the rigidly conservative Académie and the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Predictably, Cézanne's application to the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the paintings he submitted to the Salon of 1863, and later on a yearly basis from 1865 through 1870, were rejected.

Cézanne, Edouard Manet, and other artists who were rejected by the Salon of 1863 exhibited in the first and only Salon des Refusés of

1863, which drew harsh criticism from the critics and the public. The experience brought together a number of rebellious painters -- including Cézanne, Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and Edgar Degas -- who, one decade later, were in the forefront of the impressionist movement.

Painting became a compulsion for Cézanne. He tackled a variety of problems, and did not follow a strict line of progress. He seldom signed or dated his paintings and sometimes abandoned incomplete paintings and returned to them many months later. In the exhibition catalogue, Cézanne: The Early Years 1859-1872, art historian Lawrence Gowing presents important evidence for a more secure chronology for the artist's development during his formative years than has been previously available.

Cézanne's paintings in the early 1860s reflect a variety of influences. He learned the traditional skills of figure drawing at the Académie Suisse in the company of Pissarro and was drawn to the robust technique of Gustave Courbet. He spent many hours in the Louvre, copying works by artists such as Eugène Delacroix. He also began to use a dense, curving brushstroke that he further developed in the late 1860s in his compositions of eroticism and violence and in his paintings of religious themes, such as Christ in Limbo (1867) and Sorrow, or Mary Magdelene (1867, cat. 33), originally a single painting.

Cézanne's inspired palette-knife technique of the mid-1860s was strongly influenced by the work of Courbet. Most of his palette-knife paintings (cat. 16, 18-24) are portraits, including an astonishing series of portraits of his Uncle Dominique and a major work, Portrait of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, Father of the Artist, reading l'Événement (1866, cat. 21). The stability of the palette-knife paintings is echoed

several years later in what many consider to be the most accomplished still life of his early period, The Black Clock (1870, cat. 49). With its strong linear definition and carefully-balanced composition, The Black Clock reveals a new phase in Cézanne's development.

Before moving to L'Estaque, near Marseille, in 1870 to avoid the Franco-Prussian War, Cézanne painted a series of landscapes with figures, allegorical illustrations of the actual events and erotic frustrations of his own life. During the war he painted landscapes directly from nature. A series of structured and symmetrical landscapes and portraits of his friends painted after the war display his increasing progress as a painter.

Cézanne painted Self-Portrait (1872, cat. 63) during a watershed year in which he became a father. He also was searching for a method of rendering nature accurately and with feeling. At Pissarro's invitation, Cézanne, his mistress, Marie-Hortense Fiquet (whom he later married), and his son, Paul, moved to the Oise valley. There he and Pissarro worked intermittently from 1872 to 1874, an experience that, along with the impressionist movement, confirmed Cézanne's inclination toward landscapes and still lifes, and the shortened, rhythmic brush strokes that soon began to dominate his work.

One day Cézanne was discovered on the banks of the Oise River by the established landscape painter Charles Daubigny who later wrote to a friend, "I have just seen an extraordinary piece of work. It is by a young and unknown man, a certain Cézanne."

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* - Refers to catalogue exhibition number.