

# PAUL CEZANNE

## 1839 - 1909

### Contents

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Contents .....          | 1  |
| INTRODUCTION.....       | 2  |
| Chronology.....         | 2  |
| HIS LIFE.....           | 3  |
| Beginnings .....        | 3  |
| The Young Painter ..... | 4  |
| Maturity .....          | 6  |
| HIS PAINTINGS.....      | 8  |
| Introduction .....      | 8  |
| Still Lives .....       | 9  |
| Landscapes.....         | 11 |
| Portraits.....          | 12 |
| Figure Paintings .....  | 13 |
| HIS INFLUENCE .....     | 14 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....      | 15 |

## INTRODUCTION

Cézanne is regarded as one of the prime influences in the development of twentieth century art. His life spanned sixty-seven year: from 1839 until 1906, beginning and ending in Aix-en-Provence, a village in southern France. Since the development of an artist is inextricably bound to his life experiences and emotional development, the following is an exploration of Cézanne's life and art. By examining his life through his letters and the people and experiences which through his letters which affected him, parallel developments can be seen in the growth and mastery of his work as a painter. From his works can see the roots of art movements that flourished after his death (i.e. Cubism, Fauvism).

In his earlier years the Impressionists had a strong impact on the formation of Cézanne as a painter, but by 1886 his divergence from them was clear. During his latter years he worked in virtual isolation, developing and refining his own vision of painting. In this way he opened new doors and created a strong impact upon the art world when a showing of his mature works was displayed in the early 1900s. Who was the man behind these paintings? What were the influences that affected his life? Many of his paintings were never finished. Those that were, explored colour and form in a way that re-created the natural world. What was he trying to achieve?

### Chronology

- 1839 - born in Aix-en-Provence
  - educated at College Bourbon where he made friends with Emile Zola
- 1861 - abandoned study of law and went to Paris
  - met Pissarro
- 1862 - devoted himself to painting
- 1869 - met Hortense who became his mistress
- 1870 - left Paris and went to Estaque
  - studied theories of colour and light
  - his son, Paul, born
- 1872 - joined Pissarro at Pontoise and began pointing in Impressionist manner
- 1874 - exhibited with impressionists but never wholly adopted their techniques or aims
- 1886 - married Hortense
  - father died and he inherited family estate
- 1895 - given one-man show by dealer, Vollard
  - began to achieve recognition
- 1906 - died in Aix-en-Provence

## HIS LIFE

### Beginnings

Although France had to some degree lagged behind much of Europe in the industrial revolution of the 19th century, the sweep of change - of factories, of increasing urbanisation - was changing the face of the western world and with it the tone and direction of art. It was an era that saw the birth of photography which altered the role of the artists as a replicator / historian. It also altered the world's perception of nature and motion, being able to freeze an instant of the rising mists, or of a running horse, or smoke rising from a chimney.

The sciences and industry were gaining power. The role of the church was beginning to lose power. The god-focus of life and art was wavering. Nature and the ideals of rural life were gaining a new importance aside the threats of industrialisation. Landscape painting became an art form and an exploration in itself, rather than a background to painting. It was into this century that Paul Cézanne was born. He grew up within these changes and influences. Although the latter years of his life were spent in the essentially untouched country of southern France, near the end of his life he wrote: *I remember perfectly well...the once so picturesque banks of l'Estraque...what we now call progress is nothing but the invasion of bipeds who do not rest until they have transformed everything into hideous quays with gas lamps - and what is still worse - with electric light. What times we live in.*<sup>1</sup>

Aix-en-Provence is a small town in southern France. The full impact of the industrial revolution largely bypassed it and it remained conservative and church oriented, attempting to keep up a role as an academic town. Louis Cézanne (father of the painter) was among the rising class of 'nouveau riche'. He was a shrewd, tight-fisted, self-made businessman who became a successful hat merchant. In 1848 he sold out and bought the only bank in the town at a time when banks were just beginning to be centres of financial dealings and exchange. In 1844 he married his mistress, Elizabeth, who already the mother of his two children, Paul and Marie. A third child, Rose, was born in 1854.<sup>2</sup>

Paul Cézanne was born on 18 January 1839. Being the illegitimate son of a self-made, domineering father and growing up in a conservative back-water town which would have questioned both the illegitimacy and the position of the family position as a new middle-class, must have had its impact on the over-sensitive, moody, young Paul. Essentially though, his childhood was unremarkable.

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<sup>1</sup> Wadley N; THE PAINTINGS OF CEZANNE; Page 7

<sup>2</sup> Linsay J: CEZANNE: HIS LIFE AND ART; Page 6

## The Young Painter

In 1852 he entered the College Bourbon, where a strong and lasting friendship with Emile Zola began. By 1858, Zola was in Paris and Cézanne had entered law school in Aix, in accordance with his father's wishes. Long letters were exchanged between the friends in which Cézanne wrote poems, drew and painted in watercolours. He was not happy studying law and painting began to attract him more and more. He enrolled at the municipal drawing school and began studying the model, gradually giving up his law studies. It was Emile Zola who finally persuaded Paul to take up the study of art in Paris. By 1861 Cézanne finally obtained his father's permission and went to Paris.

Cézanne's first sojourn in Paris lasted about a year. The adjustment from small town to large city resulted in a lonely, depressing time. He practised life drawing during this time and did some painting but returned to Aix to take up a clerical position in his father's bank. The daily grind of work again persuaded him that it was painting he had to do and he resumed his drawing and painting classes in Aix before returning to Paris in 1862.

Paul Cézanne had a natural instinct for colour and by this time had gained a stimulus from the paintings of Delecroix, one of the first of the dissident artists of the time to have an impact on the young painter.<sup>3</sup>

He applied for admission to the school of Beaux Arts and was rejected. Such repeated rejections had a strong impact on the solitary, morbidly shy, young man. Paul was known for his sudden temperamental outbursts and periods of long depression. He continued painting, while gradually adopting a bohemian style of dress and life. During this spell he met many of the other young painters of Paris - notably Manet, Renoir, Degas and Pissarro. It was the ensuing friendship with Pissarro that was to change the course of Cézanne's paintings.

The energy and freedom that was being felt among the young painters of Paris had its influence on Cézanne and began to adopt a bold explorative style. His portrait of his father is a strong, heavily modelled painting and his *Modern Olympia*, painted in tribute to Manet is powerful both in energy and imagination. Although still immature, the potential shines through and colour and composition are strong.

It is not known which paintings Cézanne submitted and had rejected at the Salon in the early 1860s but the boldness and aggressiveness of his palette knife paintings, which lacked any conventional sense of finish would certainly have been at odds with the academic conventions of the time.

By 1869 Paul had met Hortense (likely one of the models in his life drawing sessions) who became his mistress. Few details are known about their relationship. It is generally considered '*unsatisfactory and partial*'.<sup>4</sup> Cézanne's prime dedication of energy

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid; Page 86

<sup>4</sup> Linsay; CEZANNE: HIS LIFE AND ART; Page 131

and interest was always towards his art. It is also during the early years of his relationship that he began to develop the fear of being touched. Details of this perversion are sketchy but by 1899 it had reached such a point that his then housekeeper said, "*I have orders never to touch him...not even with my skirt as I pass*".<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless Cézanne supported Hortense and she remains a background figure for the rest of his life.

In 1870 war was declared between France and Germany and to avoid conscription, Cézanne and Hortense left for Estraque. He continued painting and was acquiring a greater maturity of style. The palette knife effect was gradually replaced by short, directional brush-strokes. An increasing subtlety was replacing the stark light/dark, over-dramatic effect of earlier works. After the war, the couple returned to Paris and on 4 January 1872 a son, Paul, was born. The tone of Paris had altered since the war. Cézanne no longer felt comfortable in the artistic society and went with his son and mistress to Pontoise, outside of Paris, to be near Pissarro.

The next three years saw dramatic developments in Cézanne's style of painting. He absorbed much of the Impressionist theory of light and colour (e.g. never use anything except the three primary colours and their derivatives<sup>6</sup>). Paul began to experiment with bright, clear colours. The outlines and harsh isolation of areas and objects began to disappear. A more patchwork use of brushwork was used to achieve a sense of form or modelling. In this way he gradually gained a sense of levels or planes, by treating various areas differently - the strokes in each area being parallel but at different angles from others.

The First Impressionist Exhibition took place in 1874. Cézanne's work in particular, met with hostility and ridicule. Three years later, at the Third Impressionist Exhibition, he met with the same fate. Afterwards he chose to paint on in solitude. He did not exhibit with them again.<sup>7</sup>

Despite absorbing much of the Impressionist theory of colour and light, Cézanne's paintings were already diverging. He began painting in fine, long strokes, using layer upon layer of transparent colour. With Pissarro, he painted outdoors much of the time but also continued to paint portraits, still lives and his figurative composition (the latter of which often sprang from imaginative or mythic concepts, rather than reality). From this early stage we see Cézanne's instinct to construct, making almost monumental compositions as opposed to the single unity; the underlying structure as opposed to the fragment perception that characterized much of impressionism. Cézanne's view was more like a series of perceptions gathered into a cohesive whole. His paintings began to take longer and longer in their construction. His aim is reflected in a comment he made later in his life: "*I want to make of Impressionism something more solid and durable, like the art of museums*".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 144

<sup>6</sup> Linsay; CEZANNE: HIS LIFE AND ART; Page 19

<sup>7</sup> Brion; CEZANNE; Page 19

<sup>8</sup> Wadley; PAINTINGS OF CEZANNE; Page 33

Another comment that showed the direction Cézanne was heading, which he wrote at a later date, was: "*All painting lies in this dilemma, whether to give way to the atmosphere or resist it. To give way to it is to deny local values; to resist it is to give local values their full force and variety.*"<sup>9</sup> He was not trying to capture the moment of sun and shadow. He was searching for the greater permanence beneath - that which was always there despite the sun and shadow, despite the day or night or change of seasons.

During the latter part of the 1870s Paul again ran into conflict with his father. For reasons not fully known, he had kept the fact of Hortense and his son a secret from his family and was determined that his father not know of his liaison. At one point his father strongly suspected and reduced Paul's allowance, forcing the painter to borrow money rather than admit he had a mistress and son. Whatever his fears of this father, it was until 1886, shortly before his father's death, that he finally admitted the truth and married Hortense in April of that year. His son was then 14 years old. Although he seems to have devoted to his son, his wife remains a distant character in Paul Cézanne's life. Add this to the phobia of being touched that Cézanne developed from the 1870s onward and the relationship seems to be one of convenience rather than devotion.

## **Maturity**

1886 was a turning point for Cézanne. It was the year of his marriage and the death of his father. It was also the year that Zola's novel, *l'Oeuvre*, came out. The book, with its central character that of an abortive genius and failure, seemed a thinly disguised portrait of Cézanne. It put an abrupt end to a friendship of letter writing and visiting that had lasted for over thirty years.<sup>10</sup>

His father's will left him one third of the family estate and from this time Cézanne secluded himself in Aix, painting on in virtual isolation, exploring and achieving mastery of his own vision. His was an intellectual approach involving careful layering of brush strokes and colour. It was a slow, painstaking approach, canvasses often taking months to complete and often abandoned before they were finished. His portrait of M Geffroy required 90 sittings, and that of Vollard, an art dealer, was abandoned after more than 100 sittings, with the comment "*the front of the shirt is not bad*".<sup>11</sup>

In 1895 a showing of Cézanne's works, organised by Vollard, consisted of some 150 paintings. It was a retrospective of Cézanne's painting career and though there was still criticism, there was also enthusiasm and at long last, a beginning of recognition of one of the great artists of the time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid; Page 37

<sup>10</sup> Lindsay; CEZANNE: HIS LIFE AND ART; Page 226

<sup>11</sup> Craven; FAMOUS ARTISTS AND THEIR MODELS ; Page 113

<sup>12</sup> Thomson; THE POST IMPRESIONISTS; Page 170

Although he had always used watercolours, towards his later years Cézanne made more and more use of the medium, and the transparency and the ability to overlap colours in achieving a sense of planes. This use of paint is reflected more and more in the later oils. In his attempt to define nature through planes of colour, a mystical, near abstract quality shows.

In 1897 his mother died, which led to the sale of the family home. Cézanne moved into rented rooms near Aix. On his periodic visits to Paris all personal contacts were shunned. It was the young artists who sought him out with admiration and respect that drew him out of his shell somewhat, during his later years. He would talk with them of painting and his ideas. He wrote to his son, "*I think the young painters are much more intelligent than the others. The old ones only see in me, a dangerous rival*".<sup>13</sup>

In 1900 three of Cézanne's works were hung in the Petit Palais during the International Exhibition. At last an official form of recognition was his.<sup>14</sup> In 1901 he exhibited again and the prices of his paintings and the outward impact of his paintings was established. He continued to paint almost daily, nearly to the point of exhaustion. It was as if fears of a time limit were within him and he had much to do.

When Zola died in 1902 he was deeply upset. His own health was no longer good and he suffered from diabetes but continued to paint.<sup>15</sup>

It was in his last years Cézanne achieved a certain spontaneity along with his mastery. He would apply large brush strokes of colour and leave spaces of white canvas beneath, almost as if they were bonding the areas of brushwork.

Cézanne continued to paint right up until the end of his life, despite his poor health. Nervous strain showed from overwork. On 15 October 1906, after painting and being caught in a violent rainstorm, he caught a chill, which developed into pneumonia. He kept trying to get out of bed to paint but shortly after, died of his illness on 22 October 1906.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rewald; CEZANNE; Page 225

<sup>14</sup> Lindsay; CEZANNE: HIS LIFE AND ART; Page 306

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; Page 323

<sup>16</sup> Brion; CEZANNE; Page 71

## HIS PAINTINGS

### Introduction

Cézanne's painting career can be seen to encompass four distinct stages - although the actual division between stages is blurred.

His early works can be said to have taken up to the early 1870s. Before this time his paintings were essentially emotional and agitated in style. His paintings reveal both a search for theme as well as search for technique of expression. Often the ideas of his early works were borrowed from literature, from adolescent fantasy and from other paintings he had seen and admired. *The Judgement of Paris* is such a painting, with the young shepherd having chosen his mate from a small gathering of women and the two rejected women still reaching back. Vivid colours, draperies, clouds all reach towards a drama of youthful imagination. Even in the rawness of execution (usually applied with a palette knife) there is a coherency of composition and a feeling for colour balance.

He copied and experimented after the paintings of Delacroix and expressed admiration for the works of Edouard Manet.

Although he painted a few still lifes and portraits during this period, most of his work was still studio bound, experimental and often reflecting the drama of youth - bold outlines, strongly silhouetted lights and darks, a darkness of tone and an unfocused energy.

The contact with Pissarro in the early 1870s introduced Cézanne properly to the Impressionist's theories of colour and light which had a far ranging impact on his paintings. The Impressionists recognised that different shades and tones of one or more colours could be enhanced by placing certain ones side by side. Each primary colour (red, blue, yellow) has its complement formed by mixing the other two colours and each primary colour has its complementary colour in the shadow cast by it. (This was already known and practised by Delacroix.)<sup>17</sup> Greys were developed and enhanced by mixtures of the complementary colours.

But where the Impressionist aim was to achieve a greater naturalism through the play of light and thus capture the fleeting impression of bright colours via a sketchy brushwork, Cézanne was already searching for something more durable and solid in his painting. He seemed to be concentrating more on the structure than the atmosphere.

Through Pissarro, Cézanne began to paint more outdoors, directly from nature. Landscape took on an increased importance in his paintings.

It was also with Pissarro that Cézanne's brush strokes began to shorten and become more rhythmic and directional. In later years he commented, "*We are perhaps all*

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<sup>17</sup> PENGUIN DICTIONARY OF ART AND ARTISTS; Page 230

*derived from Pissarro...Already in '65 he had eliminated black, bitumen, sienna and ochres".<sup>18</sup>*

Cézanne's paintings can be broadly separated into four categories; his landscapes, his still lives, his portraits and his figure paintings. Cézanne is essentially a realist. He usually painted from a model whether it was his wife, an apple or a scene, but never hesitated to depart from the model while organising the composition. This often led to distortions in the painting which in themselves balanced the impact of the whole.

## Still Lives

He brought the still life back as an art form. It was in the late 1870s that his directional brush strokes began to form a unity. An organisation and balance between horizontals and verticals and diagonals. In this way the agitation of his earlier work is eliminated. Colours lighten. A sense of calm and timelessness ensues.

Cézanne's approach to painting can be appreciated by the understanding of two words he frequently used: *realisation* and *modulation*.

In *realisation* Cézanne was referring to the scene or object of his painting. He wanted a perception that had no association with the idiosyncrasies of seasonal variance or the transient play of light and shadow. Nor did he want the mood of the artist to be translated in the sense of anger, enthusiasm, excitement, etc. A far cry from the energetic and moody outbursts of his earliest paintings.

He disdained the idea of 'pretty' pictures or decoration such as Gauguin painted. He referred to Gauguin as "*just a maker of Chinese images*".<sup>19</sup> He was searching for the revelation in the scene before him. A truth within or beneath. Almost an objectivity stripped of emotional content.<sup>20</sup>

The substructure beneath the visual tricks of the eye and light was what he searched for. The painting would then be constructed by the essential components he perceived as creating this vital essence. From this point, the composing and construction of the painting could begin, with unnecessary details being eliminated.

Instead of traditional modelling, Cézanne substituted what he called *modulating*. By careful use of colour he defined advancing and receding surfaces. In his words: "*Drawing and colour are by no means two different things. As you paint, you draw. The more harmoniously colours are combined, the more clearly the outlines stand out. When colour is at its richest, form is at its fullest*".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 60

<sup>19</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 72

<sup>20</sup> Read; A CONCISE HISTORY OF MODERN PAINTING; Page 16

<sup>21</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 90

His was an intellectual and intuitive approach, which led to an impression of *flat depth*. Flatness, by use of his bold colours and firm strokes; depth, by means of tone and the use of warmer or cooler colours, and by his use of detail. Cooler colours tend to predominate for distance, while warmer colours and detail increase in the middle and foreground. Since the placement of each colour was so important to the composition, Cézanne would sometimes stand "*for a quarter of an hour or more, staring at the canvas without touching it*".<sup>22</sup>

He brought still lives back into the world of gallery art. They were an ideal theme through which he could create colour and harmony. Despite the seemingly random placement of items, each element is vital to the composition. Nothing is surplus. Often edges of a table do not meet and perspective is broken, but such deviations reinforce the composition and help to push the viewer's eye through the picture. Apples look as if they are about to roll out of the canvas, jugs are tipped and the conformity of bowl and plate edges is askew. Yet each aspect is carefully structured to give coherency to the whole composition.

By the repetition of colours throughout the painting he attempted to tie together the various planes of the painting. Since every colour in the canvas modified every other colour, careful placement was of paramount importance.

Cézanne was known to use silk flowers for still lives because, with the slowness of his painting, real flowers never lived long enough. Week after week, sometimes for months, he would paint and over paint surfaces, altering shapes and redefining forms and colours, literally building up his paintings.

Cézanne's mastery reaches a height in his still lives, making them into works of art that still life paintings had never been before.

## **Landscapes**

His landscapes have become landmarks in the painting of nature. He did not want to paint decorative pictures. As he progressed the emotional element was a factor that he progressively eliminated. He was seeking for an order that was both objective and permanent. As if trying to unveil the permanent moment - a space without past or future - without date or season or hour. The eternal now.

Cézanne's landscapes were painted from nature. He had a firm belief in sitting in the countryside, trying to translate the heart of the scene in front of him. Certain motifs he returned to numerous times, such as *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, painting it with different colours, from different angles, capturing different moods.

Cézanne worked by balancing and re balancing and counter-balancing colours throughout his composition. In such a way, colour achieved a sense of solidity as he

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid; Page 83

built up *modulated* the forms within the picture. A sense of volume emerged gradually as colour was laid upon colour both locally and throughout the canvas, so that the total picture emerged as a unity.

Whether painting buildings or sky or water, he was searching for a sense of the solid. Hence his skies and his lakes have a sense of opacity and flatness. A solidity and endurance suggesting permanence. Colours build up this denseness with an almost mathematical precision and grid-like unity.

Cézanne looked to reduce his subjects to geometric forms. In his landscapes there were no people, no animals. Nothing to disrupt the changeless permanence he was trying to capture. His search for the underlying cylinder, cone or sphere can be seen in his rendering of the landscape. The sphere. The cylinder. The cone. The essence out of which the scene is constructed. Overlapping, within, beside, beneath. "*Everything in proper perspective so that each side of an object is directed towards a central point*".<sup>23</sup>

His great achievement lay in the subtle analysis of colour and tone. This proved a long and laborious procedure because he wished to use colour as a means of modelling - or *modulating* - thus expressing the underlying solidity of objects. The permanence that defies atmospheric effects.

He would lay transparent areas of colour and when dry would overlay the next colour so as to gradually build up a sense of form and depth. In the 1890s Cézanne turned more and more to the use of watercolour. The transparency of the medium and the ability to lay colours aside and over one another without losing the brilliance of the ground beneath suited the direction of Cézanne's search in his painting. He found in it, an ability to work with a new spontaneity and confidence. Since each mark was indelible, mistakes could not be over painted.

It was during the early twentieth century that the fourth stage of Cézanne's painting was achieved. His use of colour and brushwork became much freer in application. He achieved in his paintings a feeling of vibration - a loosening of borders and boundaries, a near abstraction. He would apply large patches of colour, overlapping one and other and spaced so that the white canvas showed through. The architectural base and search for the real is still apparent, but the final unity acquires an almost prismatic, unsettled quality. The impression is of a series of two-dimensional planes whose unity in the picture gives the scene an almost shifting essence. The union of colour and composition is faultless but the three dimensional aspect is no longer so carefully structured.

His forms attained a greater freedom and the splashes of colour introduced a new energy to his work which was transposed into his oil painting, giving more clarity of pure colour, a looser sense of form and less overworking. Colour became more and more the unity which tied his compositions together. During his later years he painted with a

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<sup>23</sup> Read: A CONCISE HISTORY OF MODERN PAINTING; Page 14

greater spontaneity and aimed more for a vitality of form as opposed to literal representation.

Cézanne painted two types of watercolours. The first type was a basic outline sketch splashed with colour to accentuate areas within it. They look like colour accented drawings, with the colour applied in splashes and dashes.

The other kind of watercolour was built up by numerous light touches, with patches laid over one another. One colour had to be completely dry before superimposing the next. The result is something like looking through a prism of layers, suggesting shape and position rather than form. Such innovations were new to water-colour, and to look at them is to have a sense of the impermanence of the moment - the moment caught at the point of change - shifting and never still.

## Portraits

His portraits have a frozen, timeless quality that presents people more as objects than personalities. Cézanne is essentially a realist. He usually painted from a model but never hesitated to depart from the model while organising his painting - often leading to distortions in the construction of a picture.

Cézanne showed no interest in developing character in his portraits, yet his use of colour does evoke a sense of the mood of his sitter. It is as if he has distilled the emotional content of the sitter to its essence. By removing all obvious opposites (e.g. happy/sad, anger/excitement, energy/tiredness) we are left with the person beneath - the person within. A rare stillness. A cool objectivity.

In his paintings there is always a distance maintained between the viewer and image portrayed. The observer remains an observer, never a participant in the painting. Due to Cézanne's aversion to people, his portraits were most frequently of himself and his wife. Over a thirty year period, Cézanne painted or sketched himself at least thirty-six times (until his early fifties). His wife, he painted twenty-seven times.<sup>24</sup>

The use of colours offers a sense of mood to his paintings - with cooler, more sombre colours predominating in some pictures and warmer, richer colours in others. But it is always an objective moodiness rather than an emotional one. Each individual colour stroke is an integral part of the composition, so has to be related to every other stroke throughout the canvas. A dab of red must not only belong to one corner of the canvas but has to be repeated through in relation to all the other colours, maintaining and reinforcing the balance and unity of the composition. Hence the painstaking slowness of Cézanne's work.

He is said to have over painted some pictures more than a hundred times but such was his ability with paint, that such over painting enhanced the final result and did not dull

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<sup>24</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 106

the brilliance or spontaneity of his colours. On the other hand, he frequently abandoned or threw away paintings that he felt he had ruined by breaking the continuity and balance of colour. At his death he is said to have left more than a hundred incomplete paintings.

## Figure Paintings

Cézanne's reputation for being unable to get along with people was well known. Yet he had a fascination for painting groups of people. Small groups such as his *Card Players* and larger groups such as his *Bathers* were themes he kept returning to.

His imaginative figure paintings tend to reflect his own frustrations, imagination and psychological growth over the years. Cézanne's nudes and figure paints form a psychological profile. In his earlier years they portrayed a tension and exploration that reflected an adolescent type of anger and intensity. He frequently painted himself in as the spectator, as in *A Modern Olympia*.

As he progressed in his life his fascination for painting nudes was transposed into painting bathers. It was a theme he returned to time and time again, finally culminating in such paintings as his *Great Bathers* painted between 1898 and 1905.

By following through the mythic and erotic and often violent themes of his earlier works, through to his bathers and the to the mellower, almost timeless creations of his latter years, the growth and approach of Cézanne's own psyche can be seen. In earlier paintings the emotional tone is paramount, both in colour and composition - but in later years he seems to be after a sense of humanity as a oneness with nature itself.

Cézanne's earlier paintings of bathers have a heaviness about them. Almost too solid and immobile. Often strongly outlined against the background. They overshadow the landscape as if two separate paintings had been overlaid. In the earlier paintings there is a sense of disproportion that jars. Although still strong in colour and composition, a cohesiveness is lacking. The theme of the bathers was one that seemed to haunt Cézanne. Time and time again over the years he returned to it, his handling of figures becoming lighter and more confident - the background becoming more significant.

He never worked from the nude model after his early Paris years, but from statues, old masters and the occasional photograph. He was reaching out more for a unity of the human form rather than a graphic representation. Both his male and female figures in his bathing scenes are similar in construction. The erotic element fading and more of a natural sense (i.e. akin to nature) coming forth.

Cézanne's reputation for being unable to get along with people was well known. Yet he had a fascination for painting groups of people. Small groups such as his *Card Players* and larger groups such as his *Bathers* were themes he kept returning to. In his paintings of *Card Players*, as usual, there is no story telling. Only a recording of shapes and forms. Faces have no animation or reaction. Detail is minimised. The figures are

almost mannequins set around a table in a frozen spectacle of how people gathered to play cards. Action is eliminated.

The paintings are structures that seem to freeze reality while at the same time revealing the reality beneath the atmosphere of the moment. It is the permanent moment, that exists beneath emotion and activity. The people within the painting are no more and no less important than the cards on the table, or the table, or the chairs they sit upon.

Cézanne's canvases were painted, flat surfaces. He was not looking to create illusions of reality in the photographic sense. He attempted to translate reality onto the flat surface without denying the flatness. Using short, directional brush strokes, he created form by colour and tone, altering the directions of the strokes to balance areas throughout the canvas. He was reaching into the structure of his motif by means of brush and colour. In his bathers, Cézanne's lack of interest in conventional representation shows. He figures often seem to have no faces and sex is almost indeterminable. His aim, as his art progressed, was to "*marry the curves of women's bodies to the shoulders of the hills*".<sup>25</sup>

In his later years, Cézanne was looking to integrate figure painting and landscapes. This integration was realised in his painting known as *The Great Bathers*. It stands some seven feet tall and eight feet across. Structure and Geometry come across strongly. As always, Cézanne has constructed this painting almost architecturally. The trees form a pyramid above the bathers and everything is reduced to its simplest representation. There is no sense of eroticism or sensuality in the bathers. They gather beneath the trees without any strong impact of maleness or femaleness. It is simply a gathering that is as much a part of the landscape as the trees and the pond. There is a sense of beingness. Everything is of equal interest. The pond and the trees hold the same importance as the buildings in the distance, the sky, and the people laying on the ground. All parts are linked and inseparable. Form grows out of colour. Unity is found in structure.

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<sup>25</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 147

## HIS INFLUENCE

Cézanne today remains something of an enigma, whether he is regarded as a genius or looked at as a technical innovator and experimenter.

He tried to create solidity out of colour and tone, treating them as one unit. By painting layer upon layer, he attempted to translate reality. By the beginning of the twentieth century, his canvases became increasingly freer and more abstract. Through exhibitions of his paintings the impact of his innovations reached the young artists of the early 1900s, inspiring them to even greater innovations.

The Cubist movement enlarged upon the planes of Cézanne's pictures and extended them to create an effect of splinters and cubes, as can be seen in the works of Braque and Picasso.

Fauvists (e.g. Matisse) earned their reputation by the use of exaggerated colour techniques, again strongly influenced by the preceding Post-Impressionists. Matisse claimed that Cézanne made him realise that the tones are the force in a painting.<sup>26</sup>

Cézanne's strength was not in instigating new schools of thought. His strength was in remaining true to his own vision of art. In his words: "*There is a passing moment in the world. Paint it in all its reality. Forget everything else but that*".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Murphy; THE WORLD OF CEZANNE; Page 179

<sup>27</sup> Ibid; Page 171

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