

The Museum of Modern Art

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A CEZANNE TREASURE: THE BASEL SKETCHBOOKS

March 10 - June 5, 1988

The Basel sketchbooks comprise one of the finest single collections of Paul Cézanne's drawings, spanning virtually the artist's entire career, from about 1858 to after 1900. A CEZANNE TREASURE: THE BASEL SKETCHBOOKS, highlighting selections from that collection, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on March 10, 1988. Organized by Bernice Rose, curator, Department of Drawings, the exhibition provides the American public with its first opportunity to see this unique body of work, on loan from the Kupferstichkabinett of the Kunstmuseum in Basel, Switzerland.

On view through June 5, the exhibition and its accompanying publication have been generously supported by Knoll International Holdings, Inc.

The exhibition consists of 114 drawings, selected from Basel's collection of 152 sheets, which were excerpted originally from five sketchbooks. The drawings reveal the artist's day-to-day preoccupations, as well as the development of the subjects of his life's work. All of his major themes are represented: landscape, still life, portrait, and figure composition, including bathers and copies from Renaissance and neoclassical sculpture. But amid these varied contents, there are very few studies for specific paintings; rather, they seem to be Cézanne's private rehearsals for the act of making pictures. Through them the artist learned how to enact a new order and structure in art.

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The sketchbook drawings are prized because they document the development of a modern master. In the early years Cézanne's drawings were private reveries. Later, more than half of his drawings were based on his observation of other works of art, in particular the paintings and sculpture in the galleries of the Louvre, where he spent a great deal of time.

In the catalogue essay,* Sir Lawrence Gowing writes, "The habit of dreaming and the habit of drawing were at the outset closely related in Cézanne's art--and in his life. He alone was working in his twenties (he was born in 1839) against the current of objective observation as Monet and Pissarro and their respective friends understood it." Regarding the later drawings, he writes, "In the second half of Cézanne's work most of his drawings were of a new kind, a kind that was both observed and in another sense imagined or reimagined. It engaged, that is to say, both visual acuity and imaginative vision--the vision of another artist's vision."

Shortly after Cézanne first arrived in Paris, in 1861, he met Camille Pissarro, and a close friendship developed. Through Pissarro, Cézanne became familiar with the Impressionist doctrine of working from observation and recording immediate sensations, which in turn freed him to draw with greater independence.

Drawings dated from the early 1870s reflect Cézanne's mood during quiet evenings at home with his mistress, Hortense Fiquet, and their son, Paul, born in 1872. Portraits of the child appear regularly in the notebooks, and occasionally share a sheet with the artist's self-portrait. Years later, the teenage Paul appears in Study of Bathers (1886-89), assuming the same pose as the figure in The Bather (1885), the well-known painting in The Museum of Modern Art's collection.

The drawings of the 1880s reveal a shift away from Impressionism toward a more classical construction. His ordering of natural phenomena to conform to an idealized conception is evident in the landscape Hillside with Houses and Trees (1880-83). Cézanne's approach to representing reality is decidedly modern--opening the way to the twentieth-century developments of Matisse, Mondrian, Picasso, and many others--but it is important to recognize how much he was inspired by antique and Renaissance art.

In this period Cézanne turned more frequently to sculptural motifs. For an artist who preferred not to work with models outside of his family circle, the heroic sculpted nudes and Roman and Renaissance portrait busts provided him with subjects full of human character and intense physicality. Filippo Strozzi, for example, sculpted by Benedetto da Maiano in the fifteenth century, is reimagined--and reanimated--in Cézanne's drawing of four centuries later.

During the 1880s Cézanne's drawing gradually becomes more elusive, as the contours of objects dissolve into parallel strokes. Late in life the artist said, "There is no such thing as line and modeling. Drawing is a relationship of contrasts or simply the relationship between two tones, black and white." The assured strokes of the drawing Hercules Resting (after Puget) (1894-97), for example, convey both the potential strength of the mythical hero and the modulated surface of Pierre Puget's marble that Cézanne found so compelling. Yet toward the end of his life, after years of observing and copying from masterpieces as if from life, some of the subjects of his drawings recall the charged eroticism imagined in the earliest sketchbooks, and achieve a new synthesis, unique to Cézanne, of his gifts of imagination and observation.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Sir Lawrence Gowing, the preeminent authority on the life and work of Paul Cézanne, discusses the Basel sketchbooks

on Thursday, May 12, at 8:30 p.m. Tickets for the lecture, held in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, are available at the Museum Information Desk for \$8.00, \$7.00 members, and \$5.00 students. For more information please call 212/708-9795.

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