



**cézanne**  
and  
the modern  
vision

**art &  
man**

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**“A mocking, republican,  
bourgeois, cold,  
meticulous, stingy man.”**  
Emile Zola

Louis-Auguste Cézanne.



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867).  
Portrait of Comte de Nieuwerkerke, 1856.  
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University,  
Cambridge. Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest.



The Artist's Father, 1866. National Gallery  
of Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

COVER:

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). The Artist's Son, Paul, 1885.  
National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection.

# 'a dog's profession'

"Think of the future, for one dies with genius but eats with money." These were the favorite words of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, advising his son Paul against becoming a painter. But deep in his proud and stormy soul Paul knew that, despite his father's wishes, he had to paint.

Paul Cézanne grew up in the small, unsophisticated town of Aix-en-Provence in the south of France during the 1840's and 50's. His father was a prosperous and pompous bank owner (photograph far left, top) and an overbearing man who could see things only his own way. He wanted Paul to follow in his footsteps. But Paul resisted his father's establishment expectations and turned just as stubbornly in his own direction.

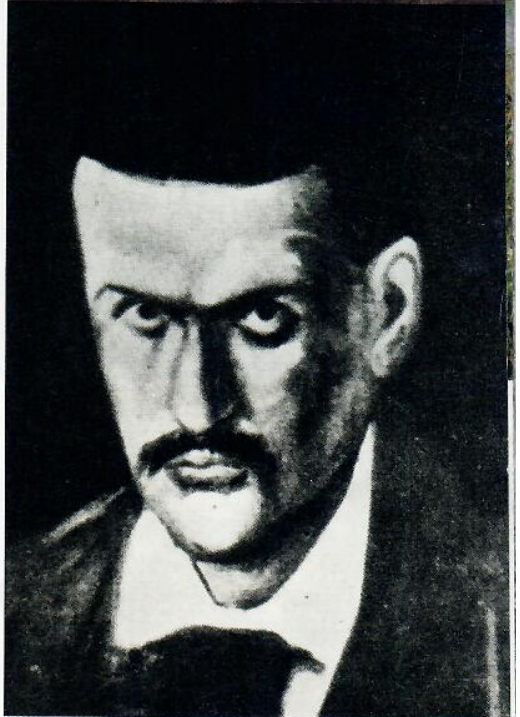
For Paul, becoming an artist was a way of breaking out of the middle-class mold of a petty, materialistic life. He began to attend art school in Aix and soon wanted to go to Paris to learn the craft of painting from the master artists themselves. But Paul's stampeding romantic ideals just kept bumping up against his father's bank-vault values. And Paul was brow-beaten into going to law school in Aix.

This defeat, however, bred new fury. In spite of having to attend classes, Paul became vengefully devoted to his painting. Finally Louis-Auguste Cézanne gave way to his son's determination. He grudgingly agreed to support Paul in Paris.

Comparing Paul's earliest self-portrait on the bottom right with the photograph from which it was painted, above it, we can get a sense of how Paul felt about himself during those early years in Paris. The photograph of an intense young man with dark eyes is transformed into what looks like a painted mug shot of a fierce and brooding soul.

Other paintings Paul Cézanne did around that time have been described as the work of "a wildman." He used murky and sour colors and painted with violent, impulsive strokes, going after the canvas like a dog pawing for a bone in the mud. But the Parisian critics and exhibition judges such as Count Henri de Nieuwerkerke (bottom left), who selected the paintings for the annual "Salon" show could appreciate only the most elegant and restrained paintings of the time. These were often done in the hard-edged style in which he himself is depicted by the earlier classical French artist Ingres. Cézanne's paintings were, of course, rejected and ridiculed. He doubted his talents and felt beaten down to the point of describing painting as a "dog's profession."

But in a playful mood Cézanne could say "it's as though I tickle myself when I paint." In the calmly composed portrait of his father (left) he seems to have released his angry resentment in violent and swirling brushstrokes. His father is depicted reading the Parisian newspaper *L'Événement*, for which Paul's closest boyhood friend Emile Zola had just begun writing art criticism. Monsieur Cézanne had once accused Zola of corrupting Paul's future by filling his head with dreams of art and Paris, and Zola, who went on to become a distinguished novelist, answered the charge with a pungent description of the old man. This painting suggests that one day the banker father will be reading Zola's praise of his rebellious son's art.



Self-portrait, about 1862.  
Private collection.

TOP:

Paul Cézanne at 22. Photograph  
courtesy John Rewald.

Cézanne's frustrations in Paris made him turn his back on the big city. In 1872, when he was 33, he joined an older friend, Camille Pissarro, to paint with him in the country. Pissarro was a leader of the Impressionists, who tried to reproduce visual effects as closely as possible. They tried to capture the shimmer of natural light and atmosphere with bright, clear, unmixed colors (far right).

Though their aims were different, Cézanne gained much from Pissarro, including the affection and encouragement that the insecure young artist had never gotten from his real father. Cézanne learned patiently to observe nature. He worked directly out of doors,

whose portrait appears on the cover, was born to his common-law wife Hortense Fiquet. Family life, too, had its rewards and Cézanne no longer so avidly craved the praise he never got from insensitive critics. And his new responsibilities as a father gave added stability to his life.

Stability was something Cézanne always sought, both as a person and as an artist. He especially admired the sense of order and solid structure in the paintings by his great 17th-century French predecessor Nicholas Poussin (below). The classical spirit of Poussin reflected Cézanne's own ideals of form and composition. He resolved to "redo Poussin from nature," which meant



carrying his paints and brushes and easel with him (right). He learned to paint out of feelings of love and joy, instead of wrath and frustration.

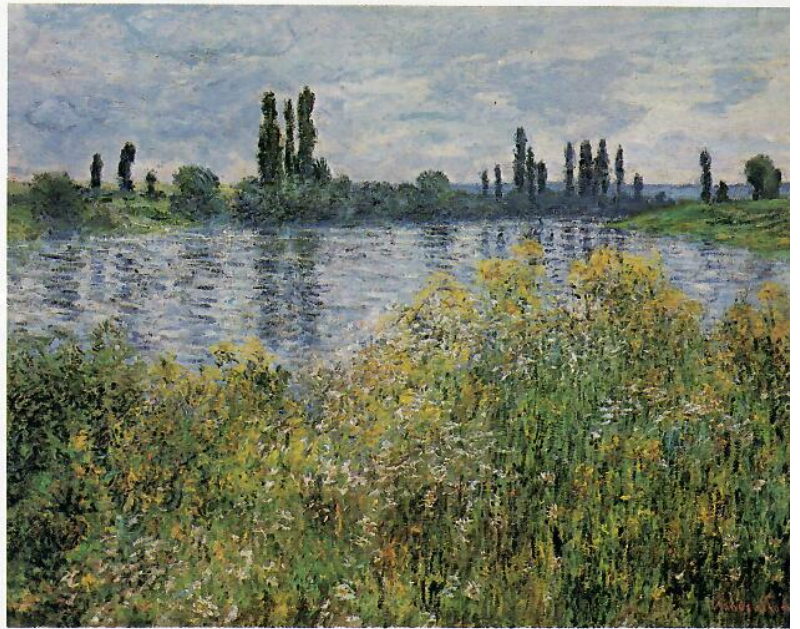
Cézanne settled and matured in the months he spent under Pissarro's fatherly guidance. And in the same year he himself became a father. A son,

to reveal the balanced, geometrical forms that underlie the changing, shimmering surface of reality. This distinguished him from the Impressionists, who sought to give a momentary "impression" of the play of mingled light and color. Paul Cézanne, however, was striving for new form.

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# the striving eye



Claude Monet (1840-1926). *Banks of the Seine, Vétheuil, 1880*. National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection.

FAR LEFT:

Nicholas Poussin (1594-1665). *Landscape with Funeral of Phocion* (detail), about 1648. Private collection, Oakley Park, England. Photograph Scala.

LEFT:

Paul Cézanne in his thirties. Photograph courtesy John Rewald.



# 'Lucid before nature'

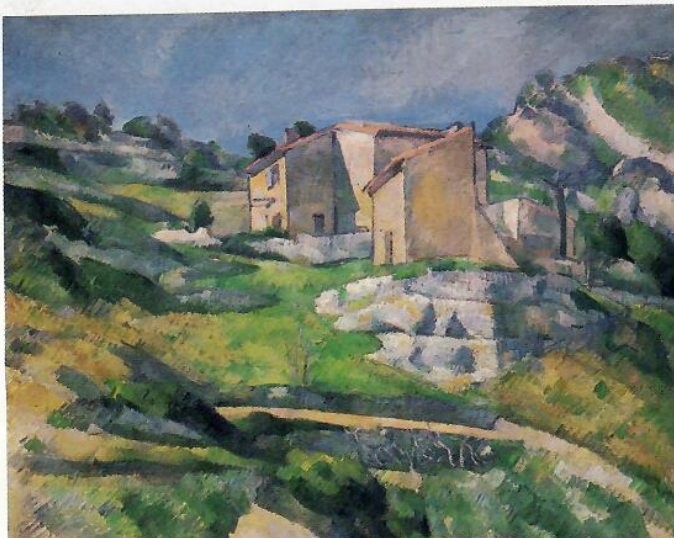
Cézanne's restlessness goaded him to move about the country. But eventually he went back home to the bright, stony land of his native Provence. There he stayed to paint the landscape that he found endlessly fascinating.

A small, plain stucco farmhouse with red tile roof nestled into a rock-ribbed field: Out of this quiet, ordinary material Cézanne could construct a powerful symphony of color and form. As the detail (right) shows, the life pulse of the picture is the systematic, highly visible brushstrokes which Cézanne derived from the Impressionists. Their patterns build up the massive shapes of walls, rocks, and rolling terrain; there are few drawn lines. But unlike the Impressionists, Cézanne's strokes accentuate the strong, clear, geometrical forms and relate them into a single, stable structure.

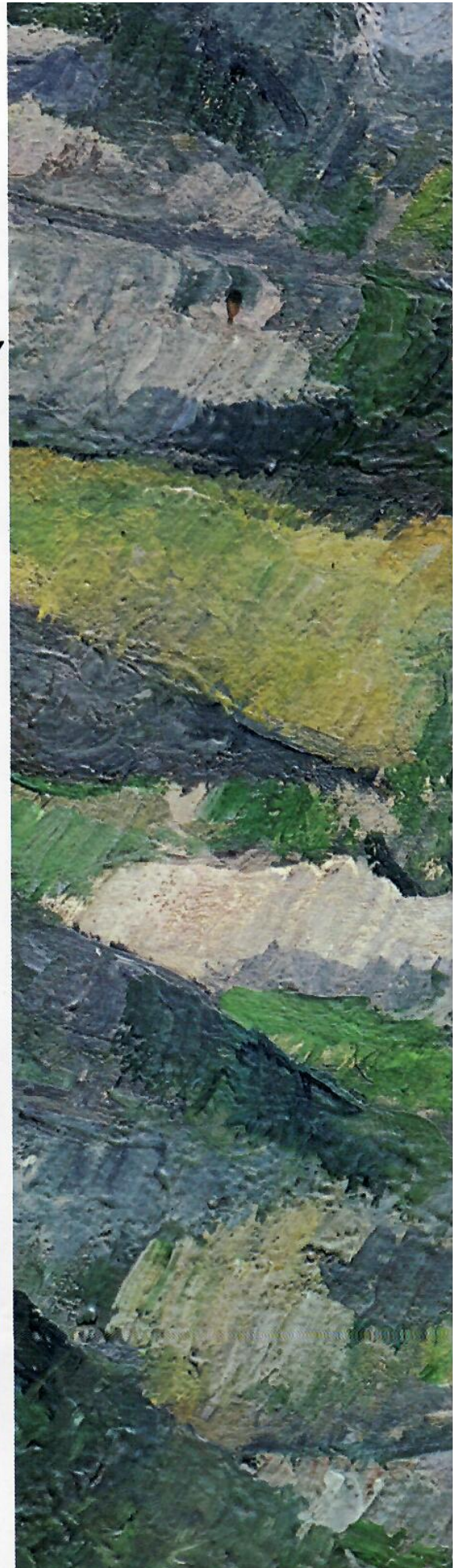
"All that we see in nature disperses, vanishes. Our art... ought to make us taste it eternally," said Cézanne. And this was his true aim: to see beneath the fleeting surface of life, and reveal the underlying reality in a permanent, timeless way.

Gone was the heavy, impassioned drive of his early paintings. But somehow he still felt a sense of unrest, of an ideal perceived, but never quite reached. "The realization of my sensations is always very painful," he sorrowfully admitted. "I can't attain the intensity that is developed in my senses." But what made this frustration bearable, what turned it into the inspiration for great art, was the serene feeling of harmony and order that he discovered in nature.

"I believe," he said, "that I grow more lucid before nature." And he made nature more lucid for us.



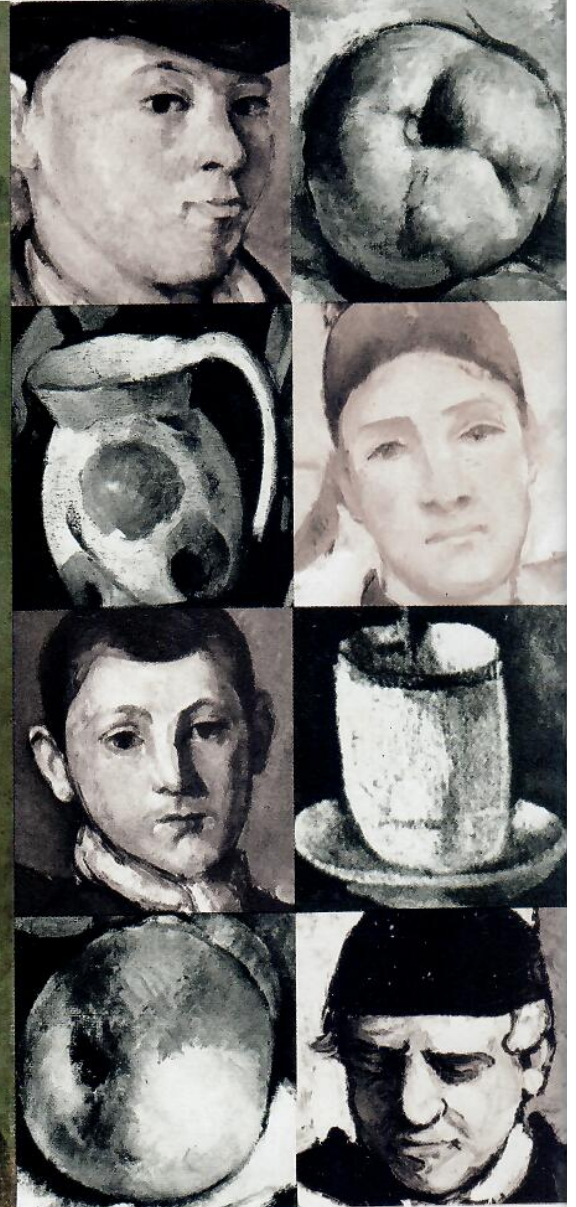
Houses in Provence, about 1880. From the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia. Detail at right.





# still life

Louis Guillaume, 1879-1882. National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection.



A young boy (above) is locked in stillness. His stony features in the icy space seem incapable of tears or giggles or frowns. Cézanne makes us read eternity in that masklike face.

How does he do it? Through his painstaking arrangements of colors, tones, shapes, and lines he makes every element in the picture relate in some formal way to every other element. The up-climbing contour of the boy's left shoulder continues through the curving band of his neckerchief into the arched back of his chair. The ends of the neckerchief fall along the rhythmic folds on his costume. The ornaments on the wall above that shoulder echo the form of the

Details from left to right: Cover, *Still Life with Apples*, 1888-90. Nat'l Gallery of Art, Gift to U.S. Gov't in memory of C. A. Loeser; *Still Life with Apples and Peaches*, c. 1895. Nat'l Gallery. Gift of E. and A. Meyer; *Mme Cézanne in the Conservatory*, c. 1890. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of S. C. Clark; *Louis Guillaume*, p. 8; *Woman with Coffee Pot*, 1890-94. Louvre; *Still Life with Apples*; *The Artist's Father*, p. 2.

neckerchief itself, and even the features of the face seem to fall in line with its knot. That knot holds the neckerchief in place but holds the composition together too, by relating to all the patterns and forms splayed around it. It is the key to the composition. Nothing could be any place else in this picture without shattering your sense of a grave permanence of order.

In the still life (above) there is the same



BELOW:  
*Still Life*, about 1890. National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection.



perfection of order but the objects themselves seem less stable. They are animated by their more active relationships in space. The two apples near the edge of the table and lodged in the blue drapery seem to nod to each other; their mottled colors reflect the other three apples and the table legs. The curvy wine bottle spires up in alignment with the vertical edge of the wall behind it. The horizontal bevel of the harmoniously distorted potbellied flask runs into the strip of molding across the wall. And then the snowdrifts of white cloth seem to slip up on the apples and flow into the tumbling folds and swirling patterns of the blue drapery. Near

and far elements are all brought together in a tightly knit formal pattern. And our eyes travel all around this playground full of pictorially energetic but inanimate objects.

When we compare some portrait heads and still-life objects taken from Cézanne's paintings (center) we notice that they are all painted similarly: patchworks of tonally varied strokes of color. We gain a sense of the solidity and individuality of these forms best when we see them knitted into the spatial patterns of their respective compositions. Here, we can see how it could be said that Cézanne "painted the heads of people as though they were apples."

His fellow-artist Renoir recalled the "ardent, concentrated, attentive, and respectful" way that Cézanne studied whatever subject he was painting. This almost painful concentration enabled him to reveal the structure of form that lies hidden beneath the veil of appearances. He believed that all the forms of nature could be broken down into certain clearly defined three-dimensional shapes. It was the artist's job to pull away the veil and discover these ideal forms, in the spirit of an explorer searching for new lands or an archeologist digging for the buried civilizations of the past.

Cézanne often painted the same landscape from several different angles. He felt that he could best find the hidden structure of a scene by looking at it in different ways. He was determined to find something stable, something that lasts in a world that is changing, de-

caying, and renewing itself before our very eyes. The reason Cézanne's idealistic art has stood the test of time, the reason his paintings are still refreshing and new, is because he succeeded in communicating to us his sense of the eternal in this temporary life.

Comparing Cézanne's *View of Gardanne* with a photograph taken from the same point of view (above and right) we can begin to see just how Cézanne extracted and revealed the essence of the scene. What

fascinated him most was the prismatic play of the rooftops in their complex relationships to one another. This network of forms is practically invisible in the photograph. Cézanne reconstructs the scene as a balanced and harmonious composition of flickering angles, planes, and lines in space. The picture heightens our awareness of the underlying structure of the photographed scene. If that city were bombed or crumbled into dust it would be Cézanne's carefully built



# 'primitive of a new art'

painting that would tell us more about the way that city really looked than any photograph ever could. Above all Cézanne wanted "to produce pictures that will be a teaching."

What he taught the people of the 20th century was to look far into their own souls and deep beneath the appearances of the world. In the early Cubist painting (below) by Pablo Picasso,

done around 1911, we can see quite plainly his debt to Cézanne. But he has gone some steps further than Cézanne in his analysis of the forms that lie beneath the skin of what we superficially see. Picasso's painting of the accordion player looks nothing like an accordion player as any camera would see it. It is, very nearly, an abstract composition. It is all structure like the

diagram of a machine, or a building's blueprint, or the grammatical rules of a language without the words. Picasso even abolishes colors to make us more aware of this crystal-like inner structure. He tries to make us know an accordion player by making us see, from different angles, lines, shapes and planes that make up an accordion and its player.

Picasso has said that "what is of interest to us is Cézanne's restless striving." Cézanne himself felt that he was only a beginner in the search for the real. He bemoaned that "old age and failing health will see to it that the dream of art I have pursued all my life will never come true." He died in 1906 shortly after a storm caught him painting a landscape outside his home town of Aix. For the 20th century one of Cézanne's last statements has proved prophetically true: "I am the primitive of a new art."



TOP LEFT:  
View of Gardanne,  
Photograph Erle Loran  
from Cézanne's Composition  
(University of  
California Press, 1970).

ABOVE:  
View of Gardanne, 1885.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art.  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs.  
Franz H. Hirschland.

RIGHT:  
Pablo Picasso (b. 1881).  
Accordionist, 1911. Solomon  
R. Guggenheim Museum,  
New York.





# 'father of us all'

Cézanne's work did not appeal only to the analyzing eye of the Cubist painters. At the beginning of the 20th century there were others—"wild beasts," the critics called them—who were painting with brilliant glaring colors and dynamically flowing brush. They wanted to restore the qualities of spontaneous expression to art and they too sought out Paul Cézanne as their master. His emotionally charged colors and active, angular forms inspired them. Their leader, Henri Matisse, spoke for all the 20th-

Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *Bather*, 1909. Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.



Paul Cézanne. *The Bathers* (detail), about 1895. Baltimore Museum of Art, Cone Collection.

century innovators in art when he proclaimed that Paul Cézanne was “the father of us all.”

In Cézanne’s painting of a bather (above left) we can see how the absence of strong outlines allows the figure to become fused with nature. He seems to be made out of the same stuff as the rocks and sky and trees. A friend of Cézanne’s once said that he set out “to marry the curves of women’s bodies to the shoulders of the hills.” It is in this marriage that his bathers seem to endure eternally.

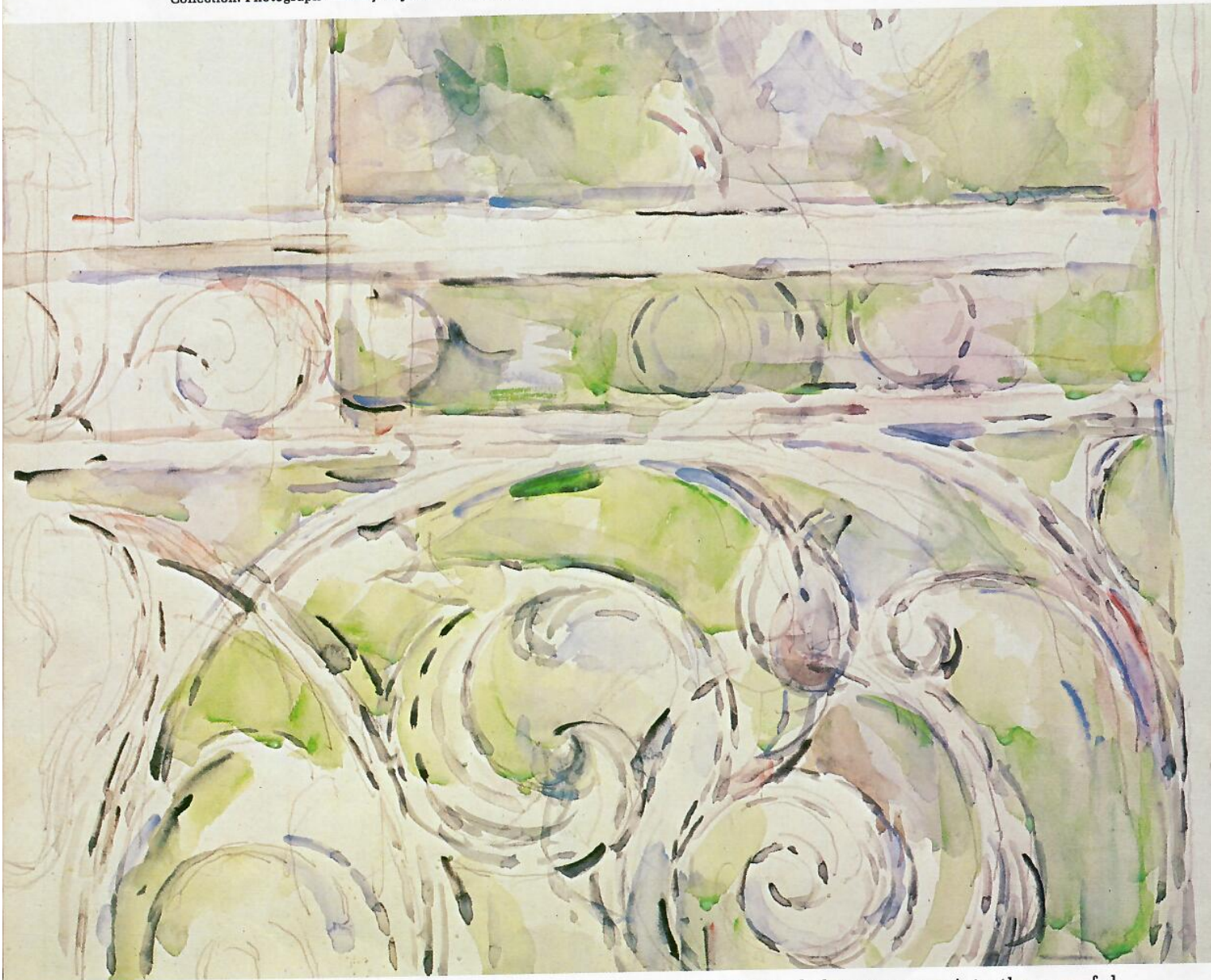
Though Matisse’s bather (above right) is strongly drawn with a wiry, bounding outline, which is never to be found in Cézanne, he too is seeking some quality that expresses the eternal. Instead of the rocklike permanence of Cézanne’s figure, Matisse’s bather seems to be suspended in a moment of breakaway action. Instead of form that lives forever, here time stands still. The charged but frozen gesture catches us up between the echo of a past moment and the anticipation of the next.

Paul Cézanne and his painting, *Bathers*. Photograph courtesy John Rewald.

Paul Cézanne. *The Balcony* (detail), about 1895.  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin  
Collection. Photograph Alfred J. Wyatt.

It wasn't just the early masters of modern art that Cézanne influenced. He caught and focused a basic direction in art and thought of his time: away from illustration, away from decoration, and toward appreciation of pure form. His vision reached decades ahead, and now it is very much our own.

own sake. This is a taste that has become almost completely dominant in our own time. It's a strong, continuing force in modern painting and sculpture. It affects the design of furniture, skyscrapers — and even everyday objects like toys. But it also helps us find beauty in things we don't think of as art at all. It

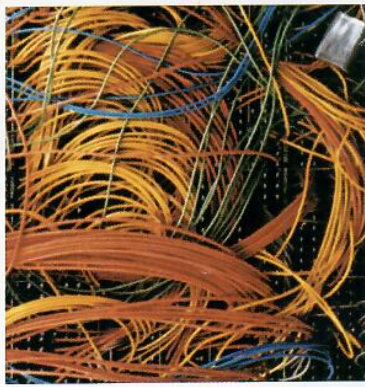
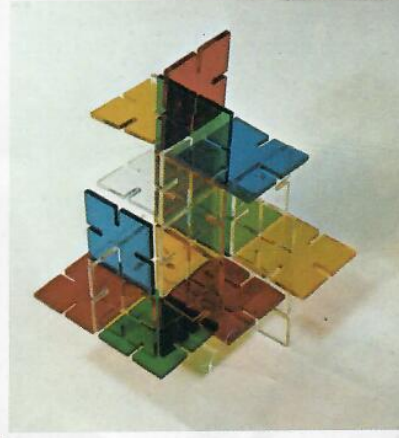
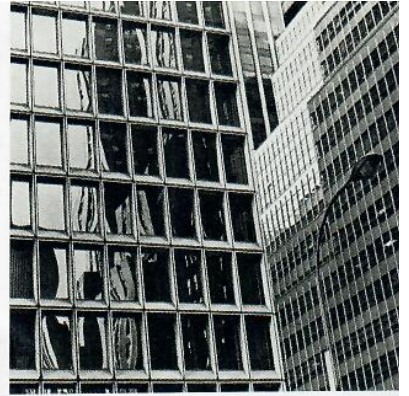
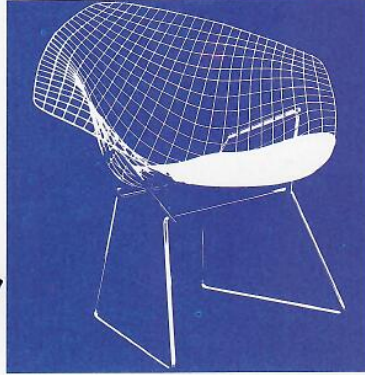
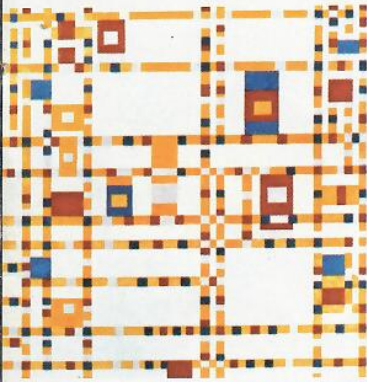


We can see this very clearly in his late watercolors (above), delicate as painted cobwebs. The German poet Rilke aptly compared them with "the echo of a melody." The subject matter doesn't really matter at all—what's important is the formal, interweaving pattern of color and shape.

This, also, Cézanne helped us to see: the beauty of colors and lines and shapes, considered for their

helps us appreciate the graceful rhythms of color-coded wires on a computer panel. It adds to our sense of awe when we see photographs of the curving surfaces of the moon and earth, taken from outer space. Pure, plain, uncluttered form plays a large part in the look of today, and Cézanne played a large part in teaching our eyes to see it, and to appreciate it.

# the look of today



TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT:  
 Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-1943. Museum of Modern Art; Robert Delaunay (1865-1941). *Sun Disks*, 1912-1913. Museum of Modern Art; Frank Stella (b. 1936). *Chodorow III*, 1971. Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; Harry Bertola (b. 1915). *Armchair*, 1952. Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Knoll Associates; Control panel for IBM 305, 1950. Museum of Modern Art, gift of International Business Machines Corp.; *Cityscape*. Photograph Dan Nelson; Patrick Rylands. *Playplax*. Trendon Ltd.; *Earth and moon*. Photo NASA.

BACK COVER:  
 David Smith (1906-1965). *Cubi XVII*, 1963. Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Eugene and Margaret McDermott Fund. Photograph Dan Budnik.



