



## Cézanne *Site / Non-Site*

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**4 February to 18 May 2014**

**Curator:** Guillermo Solana

The Museo Thyssen is presenting the first retrospective on Cézanne to be held in Spain in thirty years, following the one at the MEAC in 1984. The exhibition, curated by Guillermo Solana, includes 58 works: 49 oils and 9 watercolours lent by museums and private collections around the world (including the USA, Australia and Japan), many not previously seen in Spain. They are shown alongside nine works by artists such as Pissarro, Gauguin, Bernard, Derain, Braque, Dufy and Lhote.

Born in Aix-en-Provence, Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) was the son of a wealthy hat manufacturer and later banker of whom Cézanne would say, with some irony: "My father was a man of genius; he left me an income of 25,000 francs." Cézanne was a fellow school pupil of the future writer Émile Zola, with whom he maintained a close and complex friendship for many years. Although Cézanne followed his father's wishes and embarked on studying law, he soon moved to Paris to follow his true vocation of painting. There he made friends with Pissarro, ten years his senior, who would be the closest to a teacher that he had. He also met Manet and took part in the Impressionists' informal debates at the Café Guerbois.

Every year from 1863 onwards Cézanne sent his paintings to the official Salon but they were never accepted. In 1874 he took part in the first Impressionist exhibition but would subsequently only exhibit with them once, in 1877. Critics considered him the clumsiest and most eccentric of the group. The negative words employed to describe his painting – *brutal, coarse, infantile, primitive* – would eventually become terms of praise for the originality of his work.

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**Images, from left to right: Paul Cézanne.** *Avenue at Chantilly*, 1888. The Toledo Museum of Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William E. Lewis, 1959; *Hillside in Provence*, ca. 1890-1892. National Gallery, London. Bought, Courtauld Fund, 1926; *Still Life with Cherries and Peaches*, 1885-1887. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Gift of Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc., and Mr. and Mrs. Armand S. Deutsch.



**More information and images:**

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<http://www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2014/cezanne/index.html>

While his fellow painters, led by Monet and Renoir, would enjoy increasing success, Cézanne, who had abandoned the capital for Aix, would continue to be ignored until 1895. Between November and December of that year his first solo exhibition of around 150 works at Ambroise Vollard's gallery earned him the respect and admiration of his colleagues and made him a key reference point for young painters. By the time of his death ten years later Cézanne was acknowledged as a key figure in modern art.

The predominant genre in Cézanne's work is landscape, which accounts for half his total output and which he, like his Impressionist colleagues, identified with the practice of outdoor painting. In contrast to the Impressionists, however, Cézanne also conceded a crucial importance to a genre characteristic of the studio, namely the still life. Throughout his career he produced both landscapes and still lifes, which respectively represent direct contact with nature and the *laboratory* of composition. The subtitle of this exhibition, *site/non-site*, derived from the artist and theoretician Robert Smithson, refers to this dialectic between exterior and interior, between outdoor painting and studio work.

### 1. Portrait of an Unknown Man



*Portrait of a Peasant*, 1905-1906.  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

The first section in the exhibition comprises a single painting, *Portrait of a Peasant* from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, which is the only portrait in the exhibition. It is one of the last canvases that Cézanne worked on before his death. He left the face of the old peasant unpainted, creating a mysterious void. We know that when he lacked a model, Cézanne would sometimes pose before the mirror. Is this in fact an indirect self-portrait of the artist?

*Portrait of a Peasant* is located on the terrace of the artist's last studio, between the interior and the outdoors. However, this distinction is overcome in the painting. The blue jacket partly fuses with the blue-green vegetation in the garden, as we see in the artist's views of Mont Sainte-Victoire where mountain and sky interconnect. The

borderline between figure and background is thus broken down while the continuity between man and nature is restored.

### 2. The Bend in the Road

The exhibition's second section focuses on roads, particularly on bends and curves. Cézanne was a tireless walker who would go out into the countryside in search of his motifs and who walked around the outskirts of Aix in sun or rain, climbing Mont Sainte-Victoire with his rucksack on his back. The artist hated modern roads, preferring paths that adapted their lines to the landscape, with their changes of viewpoint that created a sense of surprise and expectation. One of his most recurring motifs is the bend in the road, which landscape painters traditionally used to attract the viewer's gaze into the pictorial space. However in Cézanne's painting this entry into the painting is frustrated: blocked by some trees and rocks

or by the topography itself. Cézanne's paths go nowhere. Even when the sky is visible in the background it rather seems to resemble a wall.

*The Forest Road, 1870-1871.*  
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main



### 3. Nudes and Trees

The third section juxtaposes scenes of bathers and landscapes with trees. Within Cézanne's oeuvre, the paintings of bathers are the only ones that were not painted from life and as such they have always been considered as separate. However, by reinterpreting them in the context of his tree-filled landscapes, particularly those painted at the Jas de Bouffan, the Cézanne family's country house, they take on another meaning. What if the nudes were just a daydream provoked by the trees?



*Bathers, ca.1880.* Detroit Institute of Arts.  
Bequest of Robert H. Tannahill

In the work of Cézanne, trees have an anthropomorphic significance. In his scenes of bathers, trees and nudes combine closely together: a figure hides behind a tree or embraces it or lies back against it; at times the tree seems to emerge from a body. On other occasions the human figure in one painting is replaced in another by a tree, probably inspired by the plant and tree metamorphoses of classical mythology.

### 4. The Phantom of Sainte-Victoire

Cézanne's still lifes are filled with echoes of his landscapes, particularly of Mont Sainte-Victoire, which is the almost obsessive protagonist of his compositions. The painter André Masson said: "Look at these still lifes, they follow the advice of the Sainte-Victoire: they are geological."



*Mount Sainte-Victoire, ca.1904.*  
Cleveland Museum of Art. Bequest of  
Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., 1958



*Still Life with Flowers and Fruits,*  
ca.1890. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,  
Nationalgalerie

In many of Cézanne's still lifes the tablecloth has hollows in it, bulging out in the form of a mountain and thus evoking the familiar form of the Sainte-Victoire. In *Still Life with Flowers and Fruits* (ca.1890, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie) the tension between the large bunch of flowers and the diagonally arranged tablecloth finds its parallel in the dialogue between the pine and the mountain in *Mount Sainte-Victoire* (ca.1904, Cleveland Museum of Art). In Cézanne's still lifes, tablecloths and curtains would increasingly

cover the top and legs of the table and the studio walls, eventually concealing them completely. They ultimately bury the Cartesian coordinates of the interior space, a symbol of the artist's rational control, beneath the natural forms of a landscape.

This section includes four still lifes from the major series on an earthenware pitcher. This unadorned object of no particular style has a unique feature: its rounded belly, a *mother-form* around which things gravitate. Unlike Cézanne's tablecloths, the earthenware vessel does not resemble the Sainte-Victoire but it is an equivalent to the mountain due to its manner of *being a centre*.

## 5. Construction Game

Just as Cézanne transformed his still lifes into landscapes, his landscapes without figures or movements can easily become still lifes.



*House in Provence*, ca.1881. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. James W. Fesler in memory of Daniel W. and Elizabeth C. Marmon

It is said that a still life is characterised by its tactile perception. The ideal of tactile perception is a regular, geometrical object. With landscape, Cézanne obtains this effect by making use of architecture. *House in Provence* (ca.1885, Indianapolis Museum of Art) brings to mind Giorgio de Chirico's words: "The Greek temple is within our grasp; it seems that we can pick it up and take it away with us like a toy on a table." Cézanne's landscapes are dotted with red roofs, toy-like houses that function almost as apples arranged on the pieces of cloth in a still life.

While in Cézanne's still lifes the table becomes concealed by the textiles that simulates a landscape, in his landscapes the artist imposed a structure similar to a tabletop: a vertical foreground, a horizontal plane and another vertical plane in the background. He evolved this stepped construction, which pushes the gaze upwards and towards the background, from the time of his landscapes of L'Estaque up to his views of Gardanne. It would have a decisive influence on the beginnings of Cubism, represented in the exhibition through various works by Braque, Derain, Dufy and Lhote.



*The Village of Gardanne*, ca.1886. The Brooklyn Museum, Ella C. Woodward Memorial Fund and the Alfred T. White Memorial Fund

## RELATED ACTIVITIES

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum has organised a **series of lectures** (5 March to 9 April) to be given by members of its curatorial team. They will take place on Wednesdays at 5.30pm in the Auditorium. In addition, on 8 and 9 May an **international symposium**

led by Guillermo Solana will bring together various experts in the work of Cézanne to discuss the issues addressed in the exhibition.

### **EXHIBITION INFORMATION**

**Title:** Cézanne *Site /Non-Site*

**Organiser:** Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

**Venue and dates:** Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 4 February to 18 May 2014

**Curator:** Guillermo Solana, Artistic Director of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

**Technical Curator:** Paula Luengo, Curatorial Department, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

**Number of works:** 67 (58 Cézanne and 9 by other artists)

**Publications:** catalogue, published in Spanish and English; Educational Guide, published in Spanish; Exhibition App, available for tablets and Smartphone, in Spanish and English

### **VISITOR INFORMATION**

#### **Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza**

**Address:** Paseo del Prado 8. 28014, Madrid

**Opening times:** Tuesdays to Fridays and Sundays, 10am to 7pm. Saturdays, 10am to 9pm. Last entry one hour before closing time

#### **Ticket prices:**

##### Temporary exhibition:

- General ticket: 10 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 6 Euros for visitors aged over 65, pensioners, students with proof of status and Large Families
- Free entry: Children aged under 12 and unemployed Spanish citizens with proof of status

##### Temporary exhibition + Permanent Collection:

- General ticket: 15 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 8 Euros
- Free entry: Children aged under 12 and unemployed Spanish citizens with proof of status

**Advance ticket purchase** at the Museum's ticket desks, from its website and on tel: 902 760 511

**More information:** [www.museothyssen.org](http://www.museothyssen.org)

**Audio guide:** available in various languages

### **PRESS INFORMATION**

<http://www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2014/cezanne/index.html>