
Analysis Of Different Viewpoints On The Bay Of Marseilles, Seen From L'Estaque By Paul Cezanne

The painting *The Bay of Marseilles, Seen from L'Estaque* (1885), by Paul Cezanne is displayed at the Art Institute of Chicago Illinois. This two dimensional, oil on canvas is measured at 80. 2 X 100. 6cm. It is apart of a series of paintings that depict a bay in Marseille, a small village in the south of France. Using a high vantage point Cezanne positions the image so that the viewer is looking down on to the village rooftops. Stretched out behind the buildings in the foreground is a large body of water with hills off in the distance. Cezanne retreated to the Bay of Marseille on several occasions throughout his life, inspiring him to create this series of paintings.

The image is divided into four zones; the architecture in the foreground, with red and brown rooftops. The deep blue body of water which takes up the majority of the center space, giving a flatness to the image, the distant mountains and the sky above. Mountains softened by their wavy appearance and use of light. Cezanne describes how the landscape configuration and colors here fascinated him saying, "It is like playing cards with it's simple shapes and colors. Red rooftops over the blue sea... the sun is so terrific here that it seems to me as if the objects where silhouetted not only in black and white but in blue, red, brown, and violet. "

Roger Fry was an English painter and critic who studied Cezanne's work and who rejected the prevailing modes of criticism. He believed that a painting was just a painting and that the key to Cezanne's work was form, not subject matter; Form for Fry should be the primary expressive element within all art. Cezanne's works came close to that formal expression, with his use of tone and line to create a sense of structure throughout his compositions. Cezanne played with the idea that form could be achieved by color. Painting with heavy layers and observing that there are no contour lines when looking at nature. Cezanne creates contour is with a blueish gray tone of paint, laying it up so the paint acts with the space around it giving it amplitude. His expressive brush strokes also create a vibrating effect within his contour line, which appear slightly separated from the edge of his forms. With this affect the objects give off a feeling of weight, thus giving the piece an impressive solidarity. Fry also makes a point as to how the use of simplicity in structure and objects create a comprehensible image while still able to communicate a vivid sense of life.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, being a philosopher, take a different approach to Cezanne's application. In his article *Cezanne Doubt*, Merleau-Ponty discusses how our sensations tend to produce spontaneous and chaotic appearance and how our brain is wired to organize those into a whole. He believes that Cezanne captures the very process of 'being' before it is tainted by

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our minds biases and preconceived ideas. Merleau-Ponty experiences Cezanne as a way for him to make sense of the world; Cezanne's work for him reflects on the phenomenon of experience, how confusing and vibrating appearances are being transferred. Cezanne's work used color and form to convey a more "lived-perspective" nature of the human experience.

Merleau-Ponty also notes how Cezanne's use of local tones create a contrast between objects and how these colors bring out a more natural way of how we perceive nature. The appearance of complementary tones heightens one another; this effect can be seen in *The Bay of Marseilles*, with the use of contrasting red-browns and blue-greens. It is difficult to describe the phenomenon of the act of seeing, for it differs with each individual person. Merleau-Ponty reads deeply into the overall sensations of Cezanne's work, due to his background and understanding of perception and how perception can be transformed into the process of art making. For Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenon is an event this is presented to us, we have to experience it and Cezanne paints that experience.

Both Fry and Merleau-Ponty take on Cezanne's work in very different ways. Fry seeing the art for what it is, art, and not reading further into it that technique in form and application. Merleau-Ponty attempts to put the painting into a deeper context, our physical phenomenon's of seeing are put through processors to be organized in our minds and how Cezanne captures that exact moment before this transfer. The process of the art itself is where Fry and Merleau-Ponty have some similarities in view. Merleau-Ponty believing that Cezanne captured his lived experience in that moment with the application of paint. Whereas Fry calls attention to Cezanne's process of paint application, by noting the different effects given with brush strokes and expressive techniques. Saying how Cezanne's brave brush strokes, hatching techniques and the use of a pallet knife is apart of the key element that calls attention to the process behind the work.

Paul Cezanne, *The Bay of Marseilles, Seen from L'Estaque* is a theme of pure looking that invites no action. It is a balance of warm and cool colors that create a rich contrast; using block like brush strokes to build the space. In analyzing the work of Cezanne, Roger Fry and Merleau-Ponty embrace different viewpoints of what is the key element to his compositions, but come together on the idea of art as a process of your personal experience.

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