

## PAUL CEZANNE

Paul Cezanne was born in 1839 at Aix-en-Provence, a small town a few miles inland from Marseilles, in the south of France. His father was a prosperous hat retailer who later, in 1848 became proprietor of Aix's only bank.

Paul's mother had been Louis-Auguste's mistress until they married in 1844 when Paul was five.

Throughout his childhood, Cezanne lived in fear of his powerful, overbearing father. He grew up an angry, intense and unsociable man, whose only real attachment was to his art.

At the age of 13, he became a boarder at Bourbon College in Aix. He was an excellent scholar and though not very sociable, formed some close friendships that were to last for most of his life. In their free time Cezanne and his friends swam and fished. These times remained his happiest memories, and the many bathing scenes in his later paintings are touched with nostalgia.

At first, Cezanne and his friends believed he was destined to be a poet. Gradually, however, his interest shifted to art and he began to attend free classes at the local drawing academy. He dreamt of going to Paris to study and work, but because he lived in fear of his domineering father, he spent a year as a law student before confessing to his family that he really wanted to become an artist. Eventually, he was allowed a small allowance and permitted to go to Paris.

Six months later he returned home because of fits of depression in which he ripped up his canvasses. But after a year of tedious work spent in his father's bank, he decided to return again to Paris. Unfortunately, he failed to pass the entrance examination to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the official painting school. He never tried again but was much more persistent in submitting paintings to the Salon, the annual exhibition for artists to become known to the general public. Although year after year they refused to show Cezanne's paintings.

It was typical of his character to proclaim the stupidity of the official system and he wrote rude letters to the superintendent of fine Arts.

He was a difficult and timid person, who hated interference and had a pathological loathing of being touched. When his friend Bernard tried to help him to his feet when he tripped, he flew into a rage, swore and ran off, looking back as if he had tried to kill him.

His paintings in the 1860's mirror his inner turmoil: corpses, murders and orgies dominated his easle.

Then, at the age of 30, he radically changed both his habits and his painting style. In 1869 he met a young model called Hortense Fiquet, who became his mistress. He turned increasingly to landscape subjects and started painting in the open air like the Impressionists. They were a group of French artists

who revolutionised painting by their new ideas on the use of bold colour, expressive brushwork and working directly from nature in the open air.

In 1872 Cezanne had a son but he remained so terrified of his own father that he did not dare tell him he had a family. He therefore had to support Hortense and his son from his small allowance and this situation amazingly remained unchanged for years.

When Cezanne was in Aix, he would lodge Hortense elsewhere. He kept his secret for 17 years but eventually married in 1886 when his father died leaving him a comfortable fortune.

Cezanne met Pissarro, another Impressionist, who was nine years older and became a benevolent father figure to him. He taught him a lot of painting techniques and after this, Cezanne began to develop his own style.

In the last 20 years of his life he rarely left his home in Provence. He became more and more touchy and suspicious, almost a recluse, even though his paintings began to sell well. He died in 1906 after catching pneumonia while painting outdoors and being caught in a storm.

He painted many still lifes and hundreds of works of Mont Ste-victoire. His whole life with art was a constant struggle to perfect his paintings. His famous saying "Treat nature by the cylinder, sphere and cone" is practised by all student artists today. He is known as the father of modern art because of his revolutionary ways of painting, distorting images by depicting objects from several angles at once, and exploiting the visual phenomenon whereby warm colours (red and yellow) appear to come towards us, while cold colours (blues and greens) seem to recede.

He moulded form by colour and in blocky dash-like strokes. He didn't want to imitate the real world and called his paintings 'constructions after nature'. He would sometimes work on paintings for years, painstakingly dabbing on patches of colour until he was satisfied with the results.

During the final 10 years of his life, Cezanne worked, among other things, on 3 major paintings of women bathers set in landscapes, and they were worked over for many years. The theme of nudes in the landscape has a long history and many artists also did this. Cezanne was exceptionally reticent with the idea of using live models. In fact, he is only known to have worked directly from a model once during the time of these bathing paintings. His sources for his figures tended to be from past art. Either from his own student studies, or from Old Masters. Surprisingly, even these images were either copied from other artists or from sculptures. As he found it almost impossible to draw a live model, this reserve shows in his pictures of the bathers, particularly. Many of the figures are separated by contour lines and not one of them has a mouth. Even their eyes are obscure.

lacks detail  
vibrant colours that I prefer  
there is no atmosphere to the piece  
one of many

There are two 'Large Bathers' pictures. The largest, 7'x8' (208 x 250cms) is in Philadelphia and the other 127 x 195cms is in the National Gallery, London.