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Cézanne, the formal approach

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CÉZANNE

The Formal Approach

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FOREWORD

As a meager expression of my
gratitude, I should like to try
to thank my tutor, Professor
James M. Carpenter for his help.
His quiet patience and understanding
and his steady guidance and advice
provided the control which kept my
project alive and interesting, and
made it, I feel, profitable.

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INTRODUCTION

The understanding and illustration of the most important formal principles in the work of Paul Cézanne was the object of my study program, beginning with the approach to form of two other periods before Cézanne in order to get a perspective view of his place in the time-stream of art.

My study focused on still life because of its expediency of handling in the studio and also because the still life painter is more directly involved with the formal techniques of painting, including design and execution. He is more involved with how he paints than what he paints; he must interpret the dead visual facts of a still life set up into an independent expression of living art.

Painters have found several equally valid solutions to this problem. In my own paintings I have traced the change of emphasis on various formal considerations, concentrating on three major phases: Vermeer, 17th century Dutch; Manet, 19th century French; and Cézanne, 19th century French. During these periods, the desire for experimentation with new concepts or techniques prompted artists to externalize these concepts in a way which placed more emphasis on the style or manner of

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painting than on what was being painted. The Dutch,
for example, had discovered light effect; the Impres-
sionists, visual perception; and Cézanne, effective
truth.

VERMEER

The Dutch Approach; Verisimilitude

The first painting was an attempt to recapture the
technique of a Vermeer. In setting up the still life there
were several things to keep in mind. First, the objects
had to be things of beauty in themselves, - particularly
the kind of sensuous beauty of color, shape, or texture,
for the Dutch liked to paint ojects of everyday beauty
which made their homes pleasurable, - glass, flowers,
fruit, silver, - it gave them a chance to paint beautifully
things which at the same time appealed to the senses of
sight, smell, taste, and touch. In this way, their
paintings had a human appeal.

The composition itself had to be thought of primari-
ly in big patterns of light and shade, emphasizing con-
trasts. This was suggested by arranging the tapestry so
that it would rise up into the front plane of the picture
in front of the source of light on the left side. This di-
vided the picture into two main areas of light and shade
with a series of gradations front to back at the right.

Then the back plane was made to shade in a gradation
of dark to light by placing a canopy to screen the light
source over the backdrop. These two tricks established

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The main areas of light and shade.[1] The next step was
to select a number of objects to fit into this enframe-
ment which would be consistent with the tactile approach;
that is, which would both harmonize with each other and
provide contrasts in textures and colors.

The blue and white oriental vase was one similar to
the particular type common in Holland. The Delft pot-
teries copied orintal vases like this one and they were
as common in the Dutch still life as in the Dutch home.
Therefore, this vase was to be the central object in the
painting, and the plan was to find other objects which
would more or less complement it, or at least harmonize
with it. The Chinese red vase was an amazing discovery:
it was almost the same red as the tapestry, and would
balance the composition beautifully because it was taller
than the blue and white vase. Its redness would permit
me to use the technique called _rappel_, which means recall-
ing a featured color in another part of the painting.
Besides, its height, coupled with its warm color, would
take attention away from the blue and white vase in

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1. For examples of this use of a shaded background
in Vermeer, see especially plates 18-21 in the Phaidon
Edition, _The Paintings of Jan Vermeer_ (London: Harrison
and Sons Ltd., 1940).

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order to disperse interest over more of the picture surface, a significant trait in Vermeer, especially.[2]

The green bottle was put in because of its transparency, its smoothness, and its interesting shape. Its greeness was again a happy coincidence for rappel with the different greens in the tapestry. The grey jug on the right was almost an afterthought, and yet its grey tone does complement the whiteness of the large vase besides emphasizing the translucency and reflection of the green bottle.

The particular care in setting up the still life was necessary because the Dutch approach stressed the sincerity of copying the direct visual impression of the motive. Therefore the set up should be as close as possible to the appearance of the objects when painted on canvas.

The first layer of paint was a thin layer of a neutral ground tone of burnt sienna and yellow ochre over the dead white canvas. Then followed an underpainting with deeper values of the same paint mixture, the purpose of which was to delineate the forms and contrast the major

2. Op. cit., especially plates 18-21. In Vermeer, there is usually something at head level to attract the eye's attention away from the naturally more interesting figure.

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tonal area in light, dark, and half-tone, similar in ef-
fect to a black and white photograph, and close to the
way which Doerner[3] says the Dutch painters in general
underpainted; that is, they underpainted in tones of grey
over which they laid their transparent glazes and scumbles.
Vermeer, however, presumably approached his paintings dif-
ferently. In a picture called: The Artist in His Studio,
he shows an artist (himself, we assume) painting a por-
trait of a woman. The easel and canvas with the start of
the painting is shown. The area of the canvas that is
painted is the central upper quarter, and is obviously
an exact reproduction of the top part of the girl's head.
The rest of the canvas is bare. We assume, therefore,
that he painted directly onto the canvas alla prima,
without a preliminary underpainting, reproducing as ac-
curately as possible each visual impression of color as
it appeared to him in contemplation.

Pope[4] stresses the point, however, that he was not a
complete realist. In my picture this fact is demonstra-
ted in the painting of the large shadow area of the tapes-
try. If one were observing a similar scene in nature,

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3. Max Doerner, The Materials of the Artist and Their
Use in Painting, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company,
Inc., 1934) p.365.
4. Arthur Pope, The Language of Drawing and Painting,
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) p.95.

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looking beyond a dark into a lighted area, the dark mass
would merge into a silhouette. And yet in the painting,
the shadows are given a play of color, although more neutral
and of deeper value, of course, than in the lights. This
is beyond realism, - a super-realism as Mr. Pope calls it.
Each area of the painting is given the full attention of
the artist at the time it is being painted. The artist's
eye is adjusted to the tonal value of the area he is pain-
ting, creating a picture which a piling up of visual data,
assimilated and related at leisure. The dark area of the
tapestry is approximately as detailed as other lighter
areas. There is no blurring of the pattern into a single-
hued tonality. Instead, the same hues that are used in
the light parts are gradually darkened through a series of
transitions towards the darkest plane. In the lightest
hues there has been white paint added to each color to
heighten value and suggest the effect of reflected light,
whereas in the area of half-light, the paint was used al-
most directly from the tube, with several transition hues
to relate two neighboring patches of color made by mixing
these two colors into a grey of the same value and inten-
sity. The two relatively pure patches were first laid
side by side and then the greyed neutral was superimposed
over both edges while the paint was still wet. In this

way the effect of a Vermeer was approximated, but not copied. Vermeer would have laid the patches down side by side by side with a precise sure touch resulting from a long contemplation of each exact hue.

The lower right hand corner is a good example of the transition of half-light into shadow, the colors becoming more nearly of the same value, eliminating as consistently as possible as many contrasts of hue, value, and intensity as necessary progressing towards the shadow area. The middle ground of middle value has the greatest contrasts. In the lights, the colors approach a neutral white; in the shadows, the colors approach a neutral black.

In order to effect an over-all intensity of interest in the three main areas of the tapestry, the colors in the light were restricted, cool yellow-greens being dominant. In the half-light, colors were more intense with contrasts of hue (warm and cool) and value. In this painting, the shadow area was made relatively warmer. The light areas, then were made mostly yellow and yellow-green, green, green-blue, and blue, - mostly cool. The darker areas are restricted to neutralized yellow ochre, deeper-valued mars violet, and an intense blue-green, played over mars violet, with small intense patches of cerulean blue and yellow ochre.

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In order to make the contrast more effective at the
left edge where the dark tapestry meets the light tapes-
try, the edge of the dark was blurred by neutralizing the
hues at the edge to more or less a single greyed tonality.
Then the further plane was generalized to a single area of
light by adding more white to the pigment at the edge,
and fuzzing the sharpness of the color patches, reducing
contrasts part to part. The final effect is that of a
dark reddish area in the near plane against a light yellow-
ish area in the further plane. The blurred edges are close
to the way one perceives foreground-distance contrasts;
that is, no sharp delineation.

All in all, the tapestry presented the most chal-
lenging painting problem because of its importance in est-
ablishing space and the spatial placing of all the other
objects in the painting.

Each object was painted from start to finish separ-
ately. The background was painted first. It was kept a
warm neutral grey, shading from light in the left to
darker to the right in three main stages. Partially this
was accomplished through the actual shadows cast by the
vases. Yet the darkest part of the background could not
be darker than the dark blue patterning on the vase in
order for the vase to be more important, to pull itself

out of the dark. Situating the more concentrated pattern
on the shadow side also helped to model the vase, besides
balancing interest between light-dark contrasts and pattern.

The vase itself was painted first in its own back-
ground color of grey-blue, modeling it from dark to the
extreme white of the highlight in a series of smooth tran-
sitions. The pattern was overlaid afterwards. A close
look will reveal that the pattern itself is a combination
of tones through black to a more intense lighter blue.

The extreme right edge is almost outlined with a
lighter blue than the surrounding dark of the shadow in
order to separate the vase from the background. Higher up
on the same side, where the vase rises above the darkest
value of the background, the pattern is allowed to get
darker, forming an equally attractive contrast. Because
this vase has the greatest value contrast of any object in
the painting and would command more of the eye's attention
if its values were copied exactly, the blues of its pat-
tern were neutralized in order to push it back into space.

In contrast, the red vase was painted by glazing an
alizarin over a cadmium red, and then adding white and
black to the reflections and shadows respectively. The
wetness of the direct paint gave the representation the
same smoothness of the object's own red glaze.

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The right hand pot was modeled so that its position on the edge of the painting would not be too noticeable. Mainly it provided a stop for the eye and a means of reading space diagonally and by overlapping. The pot was modeled in three tones of grey all close in value. Even the highlight is not pure white. This makes it seem less eye-catching.

The green bottle was painted by stages. First the areas of what was more or less the local tone were painted in. Then the darkest darks were laid over it thinly. The lights were rubbed into the green, blending the two together. The red vase showing through was achieved by neutralizing the local tone of the vase and adding white to it for the light and then adding green-black for the dark. Then the green of the bottle was intensified where it came into contact with the darker red for emphasis.

In order to make the bottle stand out clearly, its bottom edge was outlined strongly in black. The highlights on the rim and on the red vase were painted in an opaque, intense white, simulating the contrast which makes glass sparkle. As a general rule, the stronger the light effect, the greater the degree of value contrasts, the greater the sparkle.

While these objects were painted, as this account sug-

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gests, by arbitrarily arranging or designing the visual
sensory data, it should be remembered that the first aim
was to go beyond what the eye sees directly and to paint
a perceptive fusion of this visual data.

SUMMARY:

In this painting, I tried to sublimate all other
formal considerations to the concept of a unifying light
effect. The composition was arranged primarily in terms
of light and dark masses. The objects were chosen for
their sensuous visual and tactile appeal revealed by the
all-encompassing light. The colors and textures in each
part of the painting were rendered with a jewel-like pre-
ciseness of tone, yet preserving a consistency of tonality.
This over-all impression goes beyond the adjustments of
the normal eye to changes of light, yet approximates the
reality of contemplative vision.

MANET:

The Impressionist Approach; Visual Perception

Looking at the second painting, its impact is of two main areas, light and dark, with two smaller areas of bright hues, yellow and red. This painting tries to emulate the simplicity and directness of Manet, and the Impressionists' handling of light.

The simplicity is emphasized by limiting the number of objects to be painted and by their individual simplification into masses of tone. The composition stresses horizontal and vertical lines, relieved by the one major diagonal of the knife. In the same way, space is read by the checkerboard projections of the lines of the white cloth, and by the knife's diagonal. There is a distinct separation among the three planes whereas the first painting emphasized the transitions between planes.

There is a directness in the recording of the immediate visual sensations, a stopping of one instant of time among the changing myriads. The fresh brushstrokes and the piled up paint testify to a quickness of execution. The objects (lemons or glass) are modeled in a limited number of colors: extreme dark, extreme light, local tone, and half-light. The paint is laid on in broad

patches with a square brush. The local color is not defiled by playing other hues into it. There is a decisiveness of statement, a modeling of one particular local color from extreme light to extreme dark in quick, unblended steps.

The directness is felt too in the flat silhouette quality of the light-valued objects looking as though they were pasted on to the background. This flatness is one way the Impressionists approached the concept that an object seen in light is seen more or less as a flat plane with slight modeling. The modeling is played down on most of the object, and is read mostly by a quick transition to dark at its edges.

The various areas of the picture were painted by laying a color, the local tone, over the whole surface of the object (excluding the highlights) . Then a thinner dark was superimposed for modeling. For example, the white cloth was modeled with white and two shades of neutrals, one warm, one cool. Manet appears to have worked his darks into his lights. The same procedure appears in this painting: a general tonal area over which are laid the darks for modeling. (Cézanne worked the other way around, following the general European tradition, working lights into and over his darker areas.)

The Impressionists had discovered that dots of pure color laid side by side most closely approximated the way that the eye and mind work together to achieve the idea of color and space in actuality. The eye sees myriads of distinct color impressions which are transmitted to the brain and interpreted by it. Therefore, the Impressionists felt that if they laid areas of pure color close together, the mind would assimilate them into a readable painting. This is what this painting tries to do, particularly in the lemons.

The approach is very similar to the Dutch technique of recording the exact hue that the mind perceives except that Manet abstracts by simplification. The lemons were modeled in two ways. Yellow is a very intense color. To model a yellow down into a deeper hue one can go to either side of the so-called color wheel; i.e., to the warm oranges and reds down to red-violet, or to the cool greens and blues down to blue-violet. Both methods were used by the Impressionists. The left lemon was modeled with a warmer half-tone, the right lemon with a greenish half-tone, but both are of about equal attraction, and simulate the Dutch full modeling of light into shadow.

The glass and knife were painted with the idea of showing sparkle, - emphasizing value contrasts, although

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hues and intensities are limited. The effect is similar
to and as readable as a Dutch still life from a given
distance, for although the detail is missing, this actual-
ly works to approximate the way the eye blurs detail into
masses of tone in a single glance.

SUMMARY:

The Impressionist concern for rendering the direct-
ness and simplicity of a moment of actual visual per-
ception dominates this painting. The means used to achieve
this include a big patterning of local color in light and
dark, the composition, a silhouetted cut-out effect ac-
centuating simple verticals and horizontals, approxi-
mating the flatness of objects perceived in strong light;
and the fresh recording of impressions of pure color in
broad areas with a limitation of deeper-valued warm and
cool modeling to a thin overlay of paint at the edges of
objects.

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CÉZANNE

The Formal Approach; Effective Truth

"To paint a flower is to paint a lie;
"To paint a picture is to paint a flower."[5]

A painting by Cézanne exists as a record of the immutability of the particular, now significant as a segment of time existing in reality out of the context of time. In his work, Cézanne eliminates the transitory: He effects an a-temporal verity.

In my three Cézanne paintings there were several formal principles inherent in the art of Cézanne which I tried to illustrate. The main area considered had to do with the means for achieving a three-dimensional structural form on a unified two-dimensional surface, particularly through the use of color and paint itself.

The composition of each painting was of great concern, for there were several points to keep in mind: the general surface should be patterned geometrically, and this was emphasized in the big painting by arranging the white

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5. Richard Poussette-Dart, from a lecture delivered at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, July 27, 1956.

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cloth in a pyramidal shape, plus having the successive
folds themselves more or less parallel to the picture
plane. The table itself is squarely oriented to the pic-
ture plane. The volumes and shapes have been simplified
to near geometric repitition in the pears and there is an
exaggerated rotundity in the pot. The other two paintings
also exhibit the same parallel orientation plus simplif-
ication of the fruit.

Next, discounting the more obviously repeated shapes
of the same kinds of fruit, shape repetition is again
more prominent in the arrangement of the triangle shapes
in the white cloth of the big painting, echoed by the
parallel lines of the tapestry. Notice, however, that these
triangles are graded in direction, size, and inteval for
interest.

In the first Cézanne-type painting there is evident
the principle of omission of distracting elements, but to
the point of dullness. The second painting was a step
towards allowing more pattern (background and plate) to
come in, and in the third, the obvious patterning in the
tapestry helps the dark areas to hold their own on the
picture surface. There is a difference between simpli-
fication into a mass or into a tone. The drapery in the
first loses its single tonality because of an excessive

interest in play of tone, and thereby loses its feeling of
unified mass. Its table-top is closer to a single tonali-
ty and is felt more as a solid, just as is the table in
the second picture. This principle, that a single tonali-
ty gives a strong feeling of mass is a building block in
Cézanne. The hues within the tonality may vary, but the
general impression remains the same. This principle is
vaguely reminiscent of the Manet cut-out effect (with vari-
ations). It does, however, give a directness and strength
to the objects painted and to the composition as a whole.

Interest was purposely dispersed over more of the
picture surface by using off-center groupings, assymetri-
cal organization. However, in the first painting where the
two groups are located off center, there is dis-unity be-
cause of the area of dead space between them which is not
explained or justified. The second painting works around
this problem in a series of steps reading into depth with
the added interest of the plate at the extreme left. In
the large painting, the flower and the apex of the triangle
are both assymetrically oriented to the right of center,
giving a strong focal point. But during one of the last
stages of painting, it became increasingly evident that
the combination of the two was too powerful. Therefore,
the fold over the top central pear was painted in to give

added support to a contrary diagonal.

The disjointed quality of the first two paintings denies the Cézanne tendency to use a compact center grouping. Interest is dispersed instead through closure and likeness groupings. The third painting uses a combination of a compact center, likeness and closure groupings plus adding a feature of lines radiating from this central core to the frame edges.

The positioning of the objects themselves in relation to the picture plane was thought of primarily in terms of planes parallel to the picture plane, with these in turn connected by simple diagonals. This is clearly shown in the large painting where the pears are separated by variations of parallel folds of the white cloth, which also folds conveniently to create diagonal projections, especially noticeable at the left.

The recession of planes was accomplished by using several means, mainly by emphasizing edges, either by lightening or darkening them depending on what they were against and how far back it was. The white cloth is whitest at its edges where it comes against the contrasts of pear or pot.

In order to achieve a timeless quality, a specific

light effect was avoided. Although all of these paintings were painted with the same conditions of light, the Cézanne ones ignored light effect in order to stress the structural solidity of the forms. Also, in the representation of space and form, the elimination of light effect tends to unify the picture surface instead of separating the parts into tonal areas.[6]

Also, the simple overlapping of fruit and cloth gives the reading of space a strong impetus. Overlapping is a simple but effective means of rendering space.

To further clarify form and space, the objects were drawn and re-outlined in the third painting, particularly to re-establish edges. This reliance upon line contributes to the solidity of the represented objects and to the geometric linearity of the picture surface, as well as helping the reading of depth.

The perspective in painting three is not accurate. The cloths were drawn from a seated position, more or less at eye level, but the fruit and pot were drawn from a standing position. This is not noticeable in the painting itself, yet it actually gives more of a feeling of solidity to be able to see most of the pears and to see

6. See Cézanne's The Blue Vase: shadows are minimized, close to background tone in hue and value.

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into the pot. It also places more importance in the
core of the painting.

There are other kinds of distortions in the first
two paintings. In the first painting, the background
lines do not coincide exactly, a result of considering
primarily the spatial effect on either side of the jug
independently. Also the plate is tilted slightly in order
to see more of it. This approaches a cubistic concept of
rendering an object as we think of it; we seldom see just
the edge of a plate, we think of it more as an ellipse,
at least, therefore it is painted as an ellipse.

Of course, the real problems were solved with paint.
The first aim was to cover each area of the canvas with
sufficient interest in order to approximate overall e-
quality of attraction. This meant to play color partic-
ularly in the shadows and broad unpatterned areas. The
big painting is the most successful in this regard. The
pattern of the tapestry is most evident along the necessary
counter-diagonal and at two relatively unattractive edges
of the canvas. The rest of the tapestry, especially the
the lower right edge, becomes mere patches of the same
colors as the rest of the pattern but with no linear or
floral design to attract attention. The tapestry, it is

true, rarely goes into light, but at its lightest points
(upper left and lower right) the pattern has been so ne-
glected that the light, attractive as it is to the eye,
reads as an undetailed area, and in the upper left, bare
canvas.

The tabletop is a good example of play of color in a
flat area. There are at least four tones played against
each other, but at such nearly equal values that the area
remains flat. This is not true of the background of pic-
ture one. The constant alternation of color patches breaks
up the unity of the plane surface. In the second pic-
ture, the blue of the background is too monochromatic,
threatening dullness.

Next, the use of gradations of color, both hue and
value, accompanying the modeling creates much of the sur-
face interest. The pears in number three are good exam-
ples of this: notice the right hand pear. First there is
the impact of its single tonality of yellow-green at a
distance. Then, as you examine it more closely, you will
notice that the modeling is done with a warm, deeper-
valued orange and purer greens. The technique used is
just the opposite of a Manet. The deeper color patches of
the shadows were laid on first at the edges, and then each
successive stage of the modeling was floated over the

previous stage (by adding a drop more oil to the brush
full of paint). The modeling itself was kept pretty
close to the main color value of the pear, depending for
its complete readability as a solid upon the superimposed
bluish line of its contour, and its distinct color sep-
aration from its surroundings.

Compared to the at least somewhat successful rendi-
tion of the fruit in the third painting, the apples and
pears of pictures one and two are unsuccessful. In
number one there was too great a range in value in each
fruit. Also, the individual patches of modeling were of
too great differences in value part to part. In the
second painting, the patches become closer in value, but
too many changes of hue occur, giving the same jig-saw
puzzle effect.

Unlike the Impressionists, Cézanne rarely allowed
his pigment to come out to high intensities, except for
small intense patches of reds or orange. His yellows,
mostly ochres, are kept neutral, as in picture three,
along with cool green-blues and blues. (In his land-
scapes, he leaned strongly upon more intense yellow-
greens and greens.) There are small areas of intense ul-
tramarines and red-violets in surprising places.

The first impression of a Cezanne is that its colors

are of high intensities and values, but a closer exami-
nation shows that while the general impression of a tone
is that it is light and bright, it is actually composed
of big areas of more neutral colors. Also, the play of
color gives the whole surface a synthetic sparkle.

Part of this sparkle is purely the physical trans-
mittance of light through the thin layers of oily paint,
one over the other. (Oftentimes these two colors will
be complementaries, mixing to an optical grey.)

Color helps in the reading of space. As an example
of the use of contrasts of color or intensities to place
objects spatially, notice the difference in spatial place-
ment in the different areas of the tapestry. Where it
comes into prominence, the colors become warmer; that is,
more reds and yellows, reserving deeper greens and blues
for the shadows. This is evident in the general tonality
of the upper left area: its warmth both brings it for-
ward and gives it two-dimensional importance. This mani-
pulation of the local colors is fairly arbitrary. Areas
may become warm or cool, patterned or detail-less, light
or dark inorder to effect maximum surface interest com-
bined with form and space play.

Associated with this is the strong use of rappels
to tie in all the various parts of the composition. In

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the big picture, we notice, for example, how the mars
violet and yellow ochre pop up in unexpected places,
especially around the edges of the picture. Also included
in this category is the case for blending the local tones
of two objects which overlap back and forward in depth,
uniting them by use of a single tonality, then separating
them through the use of a delineation of contour.

There are other more important ways of effecting a
unity of the picture surface, particularly through con-
sistency of the scale and texture of the paint itself.
For example, the actual texture of the tapestry is not
felt as strongly as is the texture of paint on canvas.
This is what a painting is.

SUMMARY:

In summary of the means used to arrive at a kind of
timeless, beauty we might say:

There is a unity of the picture surface in two and
three dimensional terms. Three-dimensional space is ex-

pressed by planar recession, the emphasis on edges through
lightening and darkening, a gradual omission of detail in
further planes, simple overlapping, the situating of ob-
jects parallel to the picture plane connected by dynamic
planes, and perspective used more or less accurately.

Three-dimensional form; that is, the structural solid-
ity of objects is felt through the addition of outlines
particularly emphasizing edges, the simplification of main
directions in the picture and its shapes, plus the use of
approximate mono-tonality in each object, the avoidance of
detail.

The two-dimensional compositional means include:
repeated surface shapes which tend to be more or less
geometrically simple but varied; lines breaking from the
central masses to embrace all four edges of the painting;
opposition of diagonals; emphasis on planes parallel to
the picture plane and lines horizontal and vertical echo-
ing the lines of the frame.

The color works two-dimensionally by an approximation
to overall surface equality of visual attraction by a
considerable play of color, especially in the flat areas
and shadows; limiting the range of intensity of colors
towards an overall consistency of tone; and including free
manipulation of local tones, warm and cool, light and dark;

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also important are the surface vibrations of the consis-
tency in handling the texture and scale of the brushstroke,
and the transparency and broken quality of the paint
patches themselves.

CONCLUSION

The main line of progression in these three segments
is from verisimilitude towards abstraction. Verisimili-
tude is the super-real detailing of individual sensations
of color as light reacts upon objects, with particular
concern for sensuous, tactile beauty. Next comes the broad-
er Impressionistic approximation of visual perception, -
simplification into pure color and flat tone.

Subtracting from this the transitory effects of
light and period style, Cezanne abstracts from nature and
manipulates visual data to effect a semblance of reality
synthesized from its independent facets, then analyti-
cally organized into new relationships meaningful in them-
selves, - divorced from the subjective realities, existing
as effective truth.

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pictorial sources of my study of Cezanne:

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Abstract From

CÉZANNE

The Formal Approach

The understanding and illustration of the most
important formal principles in the work of Paul Cézanne
was the object of my study program, beginning with the
approach to form of two other periods before Cézanne in
order to get a perspective view of his place in the time-
stream of art.

My study focused on still life because of its expedi-
ency of handling in the studio and also because the still
life painter is more directly involved with the formal
techniques of painting, including design and execution.
He is more involved with how he paints than what he paints;
he must interpret the dead visual facts of a still life
set up into an independent expression of living art.

Painters have found several equally valid solutions
to this problem. In my own paintings I have traced the
change of emphasis on various formal consideration, con-
centrating on three major phases: Vermeer, 17th century
Dutch; Manet, 19th century French; and Cézanne, 19th cen-
tury French. During these periods, the desire for exper-
imentation with new concepts or techniques prompted artists

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to externalize these concepts in a way which placed more
emphasis on the style or manner of painting than on what
was being painted. The Dutch, for example, had discovered
light effect; the Impressionists, visual perception; and
Cézanne, effective truth.

The first painting was an attempt to recapture the
technique of a Vermeer. In this painting, I tried to
sublimate all other formal considerations to the concept
of a unifying light effect. The composition was arranged
primarily in terms of light and dark masses. The objects
were chosen for their sensuous visual and tactile appeal
revealed by the all-encompassing light. The colors and
textures in each part of the painting were rendered with
a jewel-like preciseness of tone, unified by a consistency
of tonality. This over-all impression goes beyond the
adjustments of the normal eye to changes of light, yet
approximates the reality of contemplative vision.

The Impressionist concern for rendering the direct-
ness and simplicity of a moment of actual visual percep-
tion dominates the second painting. The means used to
achieve this include a big patterning of local color in
light and dark, the composition, a silhouetted cut-out
effect accenting simple verticals and horizontals, approx-
imating the flatness of objects perceived in strong light;

and the fresh recording of impressions of pure color in
broad areas with a limitation of deeper-valued warm and
cool modeling to a thin overlay of paint at the edges of
objects.

In my three Cézanne paintings there were several
formal principles inherent in the art of Cézanne which
I tried to illustrate. The main area considered had to
do with the means for achieving a three-dimensional
structural form on a unified two-dimensional surface,
particularly through the use of color and paint itself.

A painting by Cézanne exists as a record of the
immutability of the particular, now significant as a
segment of time existing in reality out of the context
of time. In his work, Cézanne eliminates the transitory:
He effects an a-temporal verity.

In summary of the means used to arrive at this kind
of timeless truth, we might say:

There is a unity of the picture surface in two and
three dimensional terms. Three dimensional space is
expressed by planar recession, the emphasis on edges
through lightening at darkening, a gradual omission of
detail in further planes, simple overlapping, the situating
of objects parallel to the picture plane connected by
dynamic planes, and perspective, used more or less accur-

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ately.

Three-dimensional form; that is, the structural
solidity of objects is felt through the addition of
outlines particularly emphasizing edges, the simplification
of main directions in the picture and its shapes, plus the
use of approximate mono-tonality in each object, the avoid-
ance of specific light effect, and the avoidance of detail.

The two-dimensional compositional means include:
repeated surface shapes which tend to be more or less geo-
metrically simple, but varied; lines breaking from the
central masses to embrace all four edges of the painting;
opposition of diagonals; emphasis on planes parallel to
the picture plane and lines horizontal and vertical
echoing the lines of the frame.

The color works two-dimensionally by an approximation
to overall surface equality of visual attraction by a con-
siderable play of color, especially in the flat areas
and shadows; limiting the range of intensity of colors
towards an overall uni-tonality; and including free mani-
pulation of local tones, warm and cool, light and dark;
also important are the surface vibrations of the consisten-
cy in handling, the texture and scale of the brushstroke,
and the transparency and broken quality of the paint
patches themselves.

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The main line of progression in these three segments is from verisimilitude towards abstraction. Verisimilitude is the super-real detailing of individual sensations of color as light reacts upon objects, with particular concern for sensuous, tactile beauty. Next comes the broader Impressionistic approximation of visual perception, - simplification into pure color and flat tone.

Subtracting from this the transitory effects of light and period style, Cézanne abstracts from nature and manipulates visual data to effect a semblance of reality synthesized from its independent facets, then analytically organized into new relationships meaningful in themselves, divorced from the subjective realities, existing as effective truth.