

New York, Museum of Modern Art
Cézanne sketchbooks from Basel

In Spring 1906, half a year before his death, Paul Cézanne attended the dedication ceremony in Aix-en-Provence of a portrait bust of Emile Zola, the companion of his youth. Cézanne's face was flooded with tears as another old friend, Numa Coste, spoke of their childish hopes, their dreams of conquering Paris. Coste quoted Zola's statement that 'one thinks one has revolutionised the world, and then one finds out, at the end of the road, that one has not revolutionised anything at all'. But, while such an assessment may have been true for Zola, it was certainly not for Cézanne, who did effect the kind of momentous change in his art-form that can only be termed revolutionary. It has generally been accepted that his oil and water-colour paintings marked the pivotal point of inevitability for Modernist painting, but it is only now, with the current **Museum of Modern Art**¹ exhibition of his drawings (closes 5th June) that we can see how he revolutionised that medium as well: he made drawing an art of sculpting light from the paper sheet.

No longer the 'art of making beautiful lines' – Ingres's definition of drawing according to Degas – drawing for Cézanne became a spatial art in which the white of the paper appears like a cloud, its volumes demarked negatively in soft, painterly strokes of the pencil. His lines are really tones, shadows, directions, space-shifters, analogous to the strokes of his pigment-laden brush on canvas. Unlike those of Degas or Lautrec, Cézanne's lines have little intrinsic aesthetic interest. He almost invariably used a blunt, softish pencil straight on. No longer an art of contour and enclosure in which the things of the world are depicted as discrete objects against a ground, for Cézanne drawing became a way of mediating between the object and the space in which it was situated. No single contour edges a shape, but rather three – or five or six or nine – parallel curves indicate the shifting, interpenetration of solid matter and space. Like the Cubism which grew out of his researches, Cézanne's concept of form in space is reciprocal, elastic, and profoundly dialectical in its absolute ambiguity.

Cézanne draws the way other great colourists draw, his marks magically conjuring up colour in your mind's eye. In Van Gogh's drawings, for example, streaking dashes, staccato dots and rhythmically dancing arcs are such perfect graphic equivalents for the colours he saw as he drew that you can feel the heat of the sun on the hayfield and the cool blue-grey shadow of a passing cloud. But Van Gogh gives your senses no relief, no respite from streaming molecules of living matter, no quiet place of refuge. Every millimetre of the paper contains some kind of mark. Cézanne balances mark against white space, definition against suggestion, dark against light to give a satisfying feeling of completeness in even his slightest sketches. A section of a tree, a fragment of a Chardin still life, the top half of a statuary group are sufficient,



95. *After Pigalle: Love and friendship*, by Paul Cézanne. 1879-82. 20.8 by 13.1 cm. (Kunstmuseum, Basel; exh. Museum of Modern Art, New York).



96. *After Pigalle: Love and friendship*, by Paul Cézanne. c.1895. (Collection Budd Hopkins, New York).

even though only a few marks have been made. In the same way, a Cézanne painting always seems finished no matter how little paint has been applied to the canvas.

If the selections from the Basel sketchbooks at MoMA are proportionately representative of Cézanne's drawing output as a whole, which seems to be the case, then we learn two more things from the exhibition: first that Cézanne drew for himself – drawings as dreaming² and as a private form of research³ rather than as studies for paintings or as major statements in their own right – and, second, that he drew from life less often than from old master paintings and sculptures. Whether 'in the flesh' or in reproduction, paintings provided a man afraid of women (and any form of physical contact) with thousands of pre-posed nudes. The statues must have seemed alive to him, though conveniently frozen and unalterable. In his drawings they often look like real people because he tended to omit the details of costume and hairstyle, the accoutrements and the supporting plinths that would betray their non-contemporaneity. As a result, a classically thematic sculpture like Pigalle's *Love and friendship* (C.501; Figs.95-96) seems 'as if the mother and child were observed at a park bench'.⁴

Cézanne made no less than five drawings from this particular statue. The fact that he often made multiple studies from a given work over the years and from different angles is not brought out clearly in the exhibition. For that reason, the viewer is not made fully aware of the startling range of stylistic approaches Cézanne took to a subject, sometimes, perhaps, even on the same day. In the Basel version (Fig.95) he gives the fullest treatment of the *Love and friendship* group in terms both of relative realism and of completion, particularly of the woman's face. In no version is the child's face detailed. The woman's breasts are emphasised in two versions, but ignored as forms in the other three. Straight or long swinging lines predominate in the Basel drawing and two others, while sheaves of short, strong arcs delineate most of the forms in the two most abstract versions. In fact, the version in Budd Hopkins's collection (Fig.96), with eyebrow curved downward to echo eyelid, with cheek, chest, chin and breast all in repeating interchangeable curves, is astonishingly proto-Cubist.

The overall sensation one derives from Cézanne's drawings is one of aliveness, even of motion, although his subjects are invariably still. His many parallel pencil strokes lead us to imagine him shifting forward and back or from side to side, seeing the subject's contours in multiple locations. A tree branch seems to shiver in the breeze while a figure appears to reach and twist, bend or shudder. Drawing from 'dead' and dusty plaster casts, the bane of every young art student's experience, became, in Cézanne's hands, an invigorating, participatory activity which absorbed him all his life. Slow-motion photography, the stop action and multiple exposures of Muybridge and Marey, as well as their painted counterparts in Futurism, Delaunay and

97. *Peasant woman sitting*, by Rufino Tamayo. 1939. Gouache on paper, 42.5 by 34 cm. (Exh. Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City).



Duchamp have all conspired to make us see Cézanne's drawing style retroactively as a metaphor for, even a sign of life.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why, despite the general sense of tradition and the air of classical calm that suffuses the exhibition, Cézanne's drawings as a whole seem eminently modern. They please the eye trained to fill in the gaps, to jump over the cuts, to read between the lines for hidden meanings. Our aesthetic sensibilities have been conditioned by Cubism to relish the fragmented and the suggestive. For us, viewing is a participatory activity. Once Cézanne opened us up to the ambiguities which now delight us, all the verities went by the board. It took most of his lifetime for Cézanne to receive even a modicum of understanding for his paintings outside the art world, and it has taken far longer – even within that world – for his drawings to be appreciated.

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¹ *A Cézanne Treasure: The Basel Sketchbooks*, at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 10th March to 5th June 1988. Text by Lawrence Gowing. 152 pp. + 127 b. & w. ills. (Thames and Hudson, London), ISBN 0-87070-235-1, \$45.00 cloth; \$18.95 PB, £25 HB. The exhibition, curated by Bernice Rose, contains 141 sheets drawn from the Collection of the Kupferstichkabinett, Kunstmuseum Basel.

² This formulation is Gowing's, in the catalogue, p.11.

³ John Rewald stresses this notion in his biography of Cézanne.

⁴ GOWING [1988], p.24.

Mexico City Rufino Tamayo

When a Mexican artist achieves the status of national hero, he or she is accorded a large retrospective exhibition at the **Palacio de Bellas Artes**, the huge *beaux-arts* theatre and *kunsthalle* complex in Mexico City. That devoted to Rufino Tamayo (*Rufino*

Tamayo: 70 años de creación, closed 29th March) was even more spectacular than usual, taking place in two venues, Bellas Artes and the **Museo Rufino Tamayo** in Chapultepec Park. Organised by the National Institute of Fine Arts (*INBA*), the exhibition marked the final step in the complete official recognition of an artist who is one of Mexico's most prolific and best-known modern masters. For many years, however (especially in the 1930s and 40s) Tamayo felt himself obliged to live in virtual exile abroad (from 1936 to 1949 in New York and later in Paris). Muralism was the quasi-official art of Mexico and Tamayo consistently criticised the emphasis on political content in the work of Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and the many other practitioners of fresco painting. Although he continued to receive commissions for works in both the public and private sector in Mexico (where he would often spend summers during his years of residence abroad) the popularity of socially committed art overshadowed his achievements in his native country. It was only after Tamayo's definitive return to Mexico in 1961 that he was accepted as a major force in Mexican cultural life. By that time both Rivera and Orozco, Tamayo's principal aesthetic adversaries, were dead and younger Mexican painters were attempting to open up the country's artistic borders to accommodate the international *avant-garde*.

The exhibition provided a complete panorama of Tamayo's achievement. There were over 600 works, evenly divided between easel paintings (most of these on view at the Tamayo Museum), drawings and the various print media developed by the artist. Several models for two large sculptures commissioned for the city hall of Monterrey (Mexico) and the San Francisco airport were shown, as were four other small sculptures in bronze. A large room of the posters