

Cezanne Legend

Wed., June 17, 2026 — Wed., April 7, 2027

Pola Museum of Art, Gallery 5

Open Daily (Closed on Tue., December 1)

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Art is a harmony parallel to nature.

Paul Cezanne, 1897

Cézanne had no conception of beauty.
He had only a conception of truth.

Émile Bernard, 1907

Foreword

Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) was born in Aix-en-Provence in the south of France. After studying art in that provincial town, he moved to Paris, where exposure to the latest developments in art, and to modernity more broadly, set him on the path to an original style of his own. He took part in two of the Impressionist exhibitions but distanced himself from the Impressionist pursuit of the fleeting moment. Settling back in his native Provence, where he refined his practice over the years that followed, Cezanne pursued a single overarching aim: to make of art “a harmony parallel to nature.”

Cezanne expressed form and space through color and built his images with constructive brushstrokes. Rooted in close observation of nature yet detached from it, his achievement stands as a self-sufficient art consisting of purely pictorial elements, and his works have drawn enduring acclaim and shaped generations of artists who followed. He died at his home in Aix on October 23, 1906, and this year marks the 120th anniversary of his death. To mark the occasion, the Pola Museum of Art presents a selection of works by Cezanne from the collection together with works by painters who inherited his legacy and carried forward his legend.

The Spelling of Cezanne’s Surname: From “Cézanne” to “Cezanne”

In recent years, the painter’s surname has appeared as “Cezanne,” without the acute accent of the established “Cézanne.” In the Provençal dialect, long spoken in his native region, an unaccented “e” was pronounced the same as the accented “é” in French. This regional spelling without the accent is the form Cezanne himself used to sign his works and letters and fill out official documents, and it appears as well in records relating to his father, his mother, and his sister.

The accented form “Cézanne” entered the written record only after the painter moved to Paris in the 1860s. Parisians and others from outside Provence appear to have adopted it to clarify the pronunciation, and as more writers followed suit over the decades, “Cézanne” came into general use. In response to the wishes of the painter’s descendants, who have sought to restore the original Provençal form of the family name, “Cezanne” is now in use once again. Here, the accented “Cézanne” is retained when quoting historical sources.

Exhibit Notes

The Painter of Apples

Cezanne's first solo exhibition, held at Galerie Vollard in 1895, included a large number of still lifes featuring apples. Reviewing the show, which gave a Paris audience its first comprehensive view of his work, Thadée Natanson called him "the painter of apples," writing: "He is the painter of apples [...] whose color seems to undulate, not those that we should like to eat or whose *trompe l'oeil* holds the attention of gourmands, but forms that delight the eye."

"With an apple," he proclaimed, "I want to astonish Paris !"

Gustave Geffroy, 1922

Veneration

Veneration of Cezanne gathered real momentum around the turn of the century. Maurice Denis's *Homage to Cézanne* (1900, Musée d'Orsay) is a group portrait of Les Nabis, a circle of painters that looked to Gauguin as their guiding spirit, showing admirers such as Odilon Redon and Pierre Bonnard gathered around a Cezanne still life. In this homage, Denis gathered friends who shared his reverence for Cezanne and declared a common artistic cause.

I like Redon's talent enormously,
and from my heart I agree with his feeling for and admiration of Delacroix.

Paul Cezanne, 1904

The Father

Pablo Picasso produced a great many works showing Cezanne's influence in the early years of his career. His Cubist method dismantled everyday objects, landscapes, and figures, broke them into geometric facets, and reassembled them, and the origins of this revolutionary approach, which did away with traditional perspectival space, lie in Cezanne's art. Picasso is quoted as saying: "He was my one and only master ! [...] Cézanne ! He was like the father of us all. He was the one who watched over us."

Treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone,
everything brought into proper perspective.

Paul Cezanne, 1904

God of Painting

"Cézanne, you see, is a sort of god of painting." Henri Matisse spoke of Cezanne in terms that approach a confession of religious faith. As a young man Matisse bought a Cezanne painting of bathers in 1899, keeping it until 1936, when he donated it to the Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris. He recalled: "In moments of doubt, when I was still searching for myself, frightened sometimes by my discoveries, I thought: 'If Cézanne is right, I am right.' Because I knew that Cézanne had made no mistake."

Faced with the motif, Cézanne had a solid idea of what he wanted to do,
taking from nature only what was relevant to his idea. [...]
He could wait until things had once again become as they were when he conceived them.

Pierre Bonnard, 1947

Featured Works

Paul Cezanne

Still Life with Bottle

ca.1890 Oil on canvas 006-0392

Multiple Viewpoints

The left side of the table is seen from above, the right from a vantage point just higher than eye level. Tracing the right edge of the table backward, one finds the surface tilting up sharply as it nears the wall. Cezanne's well-known practice of adopting multiple viewpoints, viewing a subject from a range of angles and combining them on the canvas, frees the painting from any obligation to reproduce the world as it appears. A white tablecloth occupies each of the seams between these competing perspectives, stitching them into a single picture. With its undulating folds and weight, the cloth functions as stage scenery for a drama wherein the characters are fruit.

Paul Cezanne

Portrait of Antony Valabregue

ca.1874-1875 Oil on canvas 006-0427

Flatness and Volume

The background, set in gradations of gray, and the dark clothing, sketched in with broad confident strokes, are treated as emphatically flat. The white shirt is another matter: highlights at the folded right collar and just below the bowtie on the left reveal a painter whose concerns extend beyond pure flatness. That interest in volume comes through most clearly in the face, where carefully placed rectangular strokes and graduated shifts in color give the sitter's features their full sculptural weight.

Paul Cezanne

Sugar Bowl, Pears and Tablecloth

1893-1894 Oil on canvas 006-0426

Autonomous Art

A white sugar bowl sits at the center of the composition, ringed by pears and other fruit. The tabletop tilts down toward the lower right, and the tops of the fruit lean that direction too, giving the impression that the whole arrangement is on the verge of sliding out of the picture. Holding the space steady against this downward pull is the heavy tablecloth on the left, with a single apple peeking out from behind it. Cezanne handles color and form, movement and mass with complete assurance, and from these elements he composes a world governed by a pictorial order all its own. This is a defining example of Cezanne's unique achievement.

Paul Cezanne

Harlequin

1888-1890 Oil on canvas 006-0345

Cropping and Abstraction of Form

The face and hands of the model are handled with deliberate economy, withholding nearly everything one might take for personality or likeness. What dominates instead is the harlequin's costume, with its red and black diamond lattice imposing a geometric order on the picture. The wall and floor meet at a right angle but are treated as one continuous plane. The figure's crescent-shaped hat is cropped at the top, its right foot at the bottom. Cut off by the frame, these fragmented motifs read as abstract forms composed of line and color.

Paul Cezanne

Four Women Bathers

1877-1878 Oil on canvas 002-0019

The Constructive Stroke

Four women bathers strike various poses in a lush stand of trees rendered in many shades of green. The painting is built up from regular diagonal strokes, and their steady accumulation gives the picture its cohesion. Cezanne's unique technique known as "constructive stroke" consists of short marks laid down in the same direction, tightly bound together to reinforce the painting's internal order. Trees on either side define the picture's triangular composition, and Cezanne's interest lay in how best to arrange figures of varying postures within it.

Paul Cezanne

Landscape in Provence

1879-1882 Oil on canvas 016-0032

Perspective and Plane

Under the fierce sunlight of Provence, the red roofs of the farmhouses, a classic sight in the region, are rendered as flat planes in sharp contrast to the blue of the sky. A dense thicket of trees in the foreground blocks the view, and although a path back to the farmhouses is suggested at the lower left, it too disappears into the shadow of the trees. Entering Cezanne's pictorial space can take time and requires that the viewer set aside the conventions of perspective for an order of the painter's own making. Entry into this space begins with the diagonal strokes that define the foreground trees. Tracing the planes built by those parallel strokes, stage by stage, the eye at last reaches the houses behind.

List of Works

- 1 Pierre Auguste Renoir *Anemones* ca.1883-1890 Oil on canvas 46.2×38.1 cm 006-0476
- 2 Vincent van Gogh *Flower Vase with Thistles* 1890 Oil on canvas 40.8×33.6 cm 016-0020
- 3 Paul Gauguin *The White Tablecloth* 1886 Oil on panel 54.4×58.2 cm 006-0378
- 4 Odilon Redon *Flowers in a Japanese Vase* 1908 Oil on canvas 92.7×65.0 cm 016-0033
- 5 Paul Cezanne *Still Life with Bottle* ca.1890 Oil on canvas 54.2×65.7 cm 006-0392
- 6 Paul Cezanne *Sugar Bowl, Pears and Tablecloth* 1893-1894 Oil on canvas 50.9×62.0 cm 006-0426
- 7 Paul Cezanne *Portrait of Antony Valabregue* ca.1874-1875 Oil on canvas 64.1×52.8 cm 006-0427
- 8 Paul Cezanne *Harlequin* 1888-1890 Oil on canvas 62.3×47.2 cm 006-0345
- 9 Paul Cezanne *Four Women Bathers* 1877-1878 Oil on canvas 38.0×46.2 cm 002-0019
- 10 Paul Cezanne *Landscape in Provence* 1879-1882 Oil on canvas 54.7×65.5 cm 016-0032
- 11 Georges Braque *Houses at l'Estaque* 1907 Oil on canvas 60.3×49.3 cm 006-0270
- 12 Pablo Picasso *Nude* 1909 Oil on canvas 92.5×62.2 cm P08-0084
- 13 Henri Matisse *The Lute* 1943 Oil on canvas 60.0×81.5 cm 006-0218
- 14 Pierre Bonnard *Stairs with Mimosa* ca.1946 Oil on canvas 80.8×68.8 cm 006-0363