

Mont Sainte-Victoire: The Enduring Motif

Celebrated as the hallmark motif of Paul Cézanne's mature style, Mont Sainte-Victoire has been regarded as no more than a convenient landmark that provided the artist with the opportunity to pursue the formal and spatial concerns stemming from his stated intent to reconcile the color of the Impressionists with classical tradition and "redo Poussin after nature."¹ Even historians who do not deemphasize the importance of content in Cézanne's paintings after the mid-1870s turn to psychology and declare the mature landscapes an effort by the artist to sublimate his Romantic impulses in the concerted analysis of objective reality and Classical form, thus relegating Mont Sainte-Victoire to the status of a personal symbol in the artist's search for calm. Take, for example, this quote by Meyer Schapiro:

The peak of Mont Sainte-Victoire near Aix attracted Cézanne all his life. He identified with it as the ancients with a holy mountain on which they set the dwelling or birthplace of a god. Only for Cézanne it was an inner god that he externalized in his mountain peak – his striving and exaltation and desire for repose.²

Such formal, narrative, and psycho-biographical interpretations of Cézanne and his work rely on the artist as the sole author and source of information about his intentions based on the record he left in his correspondence and in his paintings themselves. This narrative, originating in Roger Fry's *Cézanne: A*

¹ Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 51

² Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cezanne*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1962), 74.

Study of his Development, is implicit in the next generation of writings by authors like Schapiro and Clement Greenburg, and has, by its tendency to absolve the artist in his mature work of a directed concern for external content, contributed to the trend of apocryphally identifying Cézanne as a proto-Fauve, a proto-Cubist, and a proto-Abstract Expressionist. Yet the case of Mt. Ste. Victoire points toward a different understanding of Cézanne's intentions and achievements in which the formal inventions of his mature and late styles are the result of a complex dialectic between the artist's logical and intuitive faculties and between the artist himself and the external reality in which he lived. Objective external content asserts itself in the Mont Sainte-Victoire paintings in a way that is incompatible with the Modernist reading of Cézanne, and forces a reconsideration of the traditional understanding of the artist's plastic means.

Cézanne's preference for Mont Sainte-Victoire as a motif results not from a desire to sublimate his temperaments in indifferent content, but rather from a complex synthesis of contextual meanings organized by a directing intelligence – Cézanne – who was deliberate in his choice of subject matter and at least partly aware of how his motif's external meaning related to his formal goals, and was also influenced by historical, regional, and social pressures that determined his relationship to the external, symbolically-charged object. This assertion is supported by the strikingly sympathetic poetic correspondence between the geological nature of Mont Sainte-Victoire and the formal goals professed by Cézanne, which shows that the plastic means that characterize Cézanne's style are not ends in themselves. But rather the result of the artist's response to the motif.

Mont Sainte-Victoire juts from the dry, rocky hills east of Aix-en-Provence in the Bouches-du-Rhône département in the region of Provence in Southern France. The mountain is part of the Sainte-Victoire Massif, an immense hunk of ancient limestone rising to a height of 3,316 feet at its highest point.³ Though of modest height – it is not even the highest mountain in its department, being shorter than

³ Georges Corroy and Georges Denizot, La Provence Occidentale. (Paris, France: Hermann & C^{ie}, Éditeurs, 1943), 57.

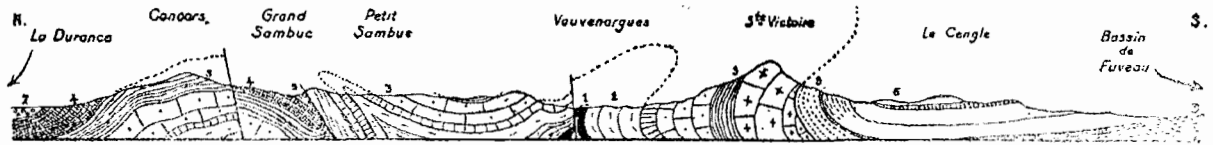


FIG. 10. — Coupe à travers les Chaînons de Concoars, Sambuc, Sainte-Victoire, Le Cingle (en partie d'après L. COLLOT).
1 Lias, 2 Jurassique moyen, 3 Jurassique supérieur, 4 Néocomien, 5 Crétacé supérieur, 6 Eocène, 7 Miocène. Ech. 1/100.000.

Fig. 1. Cross-section of geological strata in the region of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Source: Georges Corroy and Georges Denizot, *La Provence Occidentale*. (Paris, France: Hermann & C^{ie}, Éditeurs, 1943), 57.

the Sainte-Baume massif by almost 450 feet⁴ – its geological history, not to mention its aesthetic character, makes the peak worthy of study. In geological terms, a massif is an internally cohesive structure of ancient rock surrounded by faults and fissures (Fig. 1): when the earth's tectonic forces rearrange the crust, a massif is displaced and moved whole, as a stable unit adrift on a shattering, crumbling limestone sea roiling in the slow-time of geology.⁵ Thus the Mount Sainte-Victoire visible today is a survivor of the tectonic forces and the effects of weathering that wore down the region's landscape and thrust the mountain high into the shimmering blue sky of Provence. Importantly, it is the individual character of this particular hunk of limestone – its unusual solidity, structure, and stability – that resulted in its resistance to the ravages of time and its permanence despite the vast changes to the landscapes surrounding it.⁶

Solidity and durability were qualities Cézanne aspired to and which he identified in the classicism of masters like Nicolas Poussin. Yet among his many motifs, no external object so embodies these qualities as Mont St. Victoire. Cézanne's career – and his artistic concern – bares an uncannily synergistic relationship to the mountain. His often-repeated reflection, reported by Maurice Denis, that he wanted to make of Impressionism something "solid and durable"⁷ is a valuable insight into his formal concerns, but

⁴ Corroy and Denizot, 46.

⁵ Robert L. Bates and Julia A. Jackson, eds., *Dictionary of Geological Terms*, Third Edition. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 313.

⁶ John Challinor, *A Dictionary of Geology*. Third Edition. (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press/N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1967), 156.

⁷ Judith Wechsler, *Cézanne in Perspective*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 50.

his numerous paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire suggest a deeper personal meaning behind his choice of motif. For Cézanne, the mountain, looming powerfully over his childhood home, was a stable and enduring presence throughout his life. Cézanne's preference for the mountain, beginning in the early 1880s,⁸ is a key moment in the development of his mature style and reflects important developments in his art that would concern him for the rest of his career. Moreover, his obsession with Mont Sainte-Victoire is indicative of important elements of Cézanne's personality that affected the course of his life and his art: namely, a dislike for change and a nostalgic attachment to his youth.

Though to the modern mind, sentiments may seem an insufficient impetus for the choice of a motif (especially one returned to as often as Sainte-Victoire), French society in Cézanne's time considered such nostalgia to be of great importance. In nineteenth-century France, the medical establishment paid considerable attention to nostalgia, and in fact considered it a pathological condition as late as the 1870s. French medical literature from the time cites numerous cases of children and adults becoming physically ill and often dying due to nostalgia, which caused patients, in the throes of extreme melancholy, to neglect to eat⁹. Cézanne's nostalgia did not present itself as a pathology, but his life in a society that placed great importance on the sentimental associations between place and past allows for an understanding of the emotional investment Cézanne had in the landscape around Aix and provides a framework for examining how such paintings reflected the artist's personal responses while also existing in a broader cultural context in which such sentiments were widely understood. Such an understanding also provides insights into the connection between the "stability" of form Cézanne strove for in his painting and the stability of place that he sought in life.

⁸ Michel Hoog, Cézanne: Father of 20th Century Art. (N.Y.: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1994), 79.

⁹ Suzanne Nash, ed., Home and its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), 25-44.

The course of Cézanne's life, and evidence in his correspondence, suggests an intimate nostalgic attachment to the memories of his youth as symbolized by a number of places and buildings in and around Aix: his family home of the Jas des Bouffan, certain places where he and his friends swam on the Arc River, and, in particular, Mont Ste. Victoire.

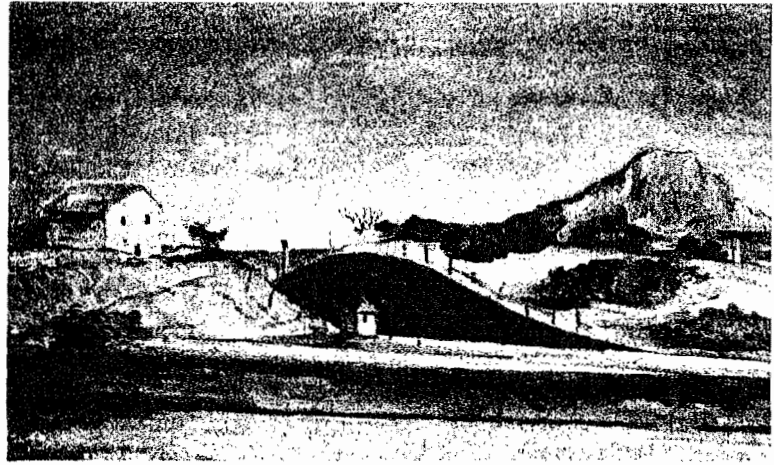


Fig. 2. Cézanne, *La Tranchée avec la montagne Sainte-Victoire*, c. 1870, oil on canvas. Bayerische Staatgemäldesammlungen, Munich. Source : Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cezanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 154.

Moreover, Cézanne's lifelong affiliation with Aix – his many visits when he lived in Paris and his final, permanent return to the city – shows the considerable pull his childhood home had for him, unlike his friend Emile Zola who easily and permanently forsook the city for the capital.

Cézanne's nostalgia for the places of his youth was marked by intense anxiety about the encroachment of time and change, a condition recognized as a common presentation of the affliction by French physicians in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Mont Sainte-Victoire became the signifier of these anxieties in Cézanne's painting and correspondence. In two of his earliest depictions of the peak, Cézanne contrasts Mont Sainte-Victoire's permanence with the way industry was reshaping Provence. *The Railroad Cutting* (Fig. 2), painted in 1870 from a location just outside the Jas des Bouffan estate which his father had recently purchased, depicts a recently-constructed railroad line that cuts, violently, through a hill which would have otherwise directed the viewer's eye gently from the foreground to the mountain in the distance.¹¹ The mountain is unreachable, separated from the viewer by the march of progress. With

¹⁰ Nash, 34.

¹¹ Albert Boime, "Cézanne's Real and Imaginary Estate." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 61 (1998): 552-567

this unflattering depiction of modern advancement, and the way it isolates the viewer from the natural world, Cézanne emphasized the gulf between the viewer and the mountain – the past and the present – mirroring the anxiety borne of change threatening an icon of his youth.

Cézanne uses the same formal device in a slightly earlier painting, *Usines pres du Mont de Cengle* (Fig. 3): a

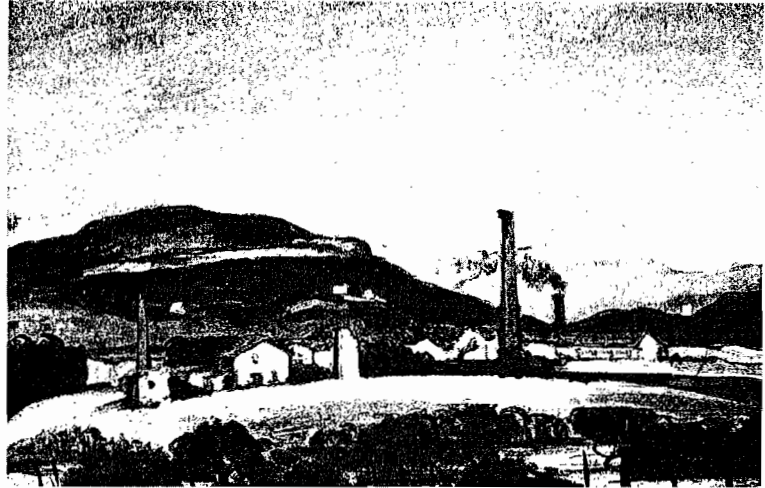


Fig. 3. Cézanne, *Usines près du Mont de Cengle*, 1867-69, oil on canvas. Priv. Coll., Zurich. Source : Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cezanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 154.

factory occupies the foreground of the picture, its smoke stacks competing in height against Sainte-Victoire's southern abutment – Mont de Cengle – and belching noxious-looking smoke into the sky.¹²

Cézanne's distrust for industrial encroachment on the icon of his youth outlived such direct depictions of his anxieties. In 1904, Emile Bernard visited the artist for the first time and accompanied him on a painting expedition to Sainte-Victoire: "It was two kilometers away with a view over a valley at the foot of Sainte-Victoire, the craggy mountain which he never ceased to paint in watercolor and in oils. He was filled with admiration for this mountain. [Cézanne said] 'And to think that pig Menier came here and wanted to make soap for the entire world from it!'"¹³ The artist is probably referring to the pharmaceutical company, Menier et C^{ie}, one of the first French companies to adopt large scale industrial techniques to produce its soaps. The company would have burned the calcium carbonate-rich limestone of

¹² Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cezanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 154.

¹³ Rewald, 56.

the area in order to produce lye for the production of soap, though by the mid-nineteenth century the company had sold off its pharmaceutical interests to concentrate on the production of chocolate.¹⁴

The many references Cézanne makes to Sainte-Victoire in his correspondences, beginning in 1858, serve to elucidate how the artist associated the joys of his childhood with the peak. In one important passing reference in a letter to Emile Zola, Cézanne mentioned a tree they had known on the bank of the river Arc in view of Sainte-Victoire, expressing his hope that the tree would never be felled.¹⁵ The tree, almost forty years later, would itself become a motif rife with nostalgic connotations in the artist's *The Great Pine*.¹⁶

After moving to Paris, Cézanne's frequent visits to Aix provided him with opportunities to revisit the scenes of his youth. In an 1868 letter to his friend Numa Coste, who remained in Paris, Cézanne expressed a profoundly wistful sentiment triggered by thoughts of his childhood. The 29-year-old Cézanne recorded how he had roamed around the countryside, visiting friends and sights familiar to him. After wandering as far as the village of Saint-Antonin, at the foot of Mount Sainte-Victoire, he reminisced to Coste: "I remembered our attempts at climbing. Shall we not try them again? How bizarre our life, how dispersed and how difficult it would be for us at this hour when I speak ... to be where we were before, only a few years ago."¹⁷

In another letter to Coste in the fall of 1868, Cézanne spoke of a "lovely expedition" to Sainte-Victoire that failed "because of excessive heat, and in October because of the rains."¹⁸ The artist regretted the lack of fortitude on behalf of himself and of the friends with whom he'd planned the hike: "...you can see from this what softness begins to spread in the will-power of the little comrades. But what can one do,

¹⁴ Michael Stephen Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise, 1800-1930*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 279.

¹⁵ John Rewald, ed., *Paul Cézanne, Letters*. (N.Y.: Da Capo Press, 1995), 17-18.

¹⁶ Schapiro, 108.

¹⁷ Rewald, 122-123.

¹⁸ Rewald, 124.

that's how it is, it seems that one is not always fully responsive, in Latin one would say *semper virens*, always vigorous, or better, always strong-willed."¹⁹ His letter expresses a nostalgic desire for a return to the activities of childhood, and dismay at the passage of time that has aged Cézanne and his friends and made a return to the slopes of Sainte-Victoire impossible. The artist depicts the mountain as the symbol of his unapproachable idyllic past.

Writing to Zola in 1878, Cézanne mentions Mount Sainte-Victoire as a potential motif for a painting, presaging his obsession with it in the following decade. "Where the train passes close to Alexis's country house, a stunning motif appears on the East side: Ste Victoire and the rocks that dominate Beaucueil."²⁰ Shortly after, in the early 1880s, the artist was settled into the new studio his father built for him at the Jas des Bouffan. His father's estate, with its views of Mont Sainte-Victoire, provided Cézanne with the setting where he began to develop his mature style, concurrent with the beginning of his obsession with the mountain as a motif. In a May 1881 letter to Zola, Cézanne reports "I have begun several studies [of the mountain], some in overcast weather, some in full sunlight."²¹

Over the next twenty years, the mountain became an integral part of Cézanne's artistic development, embodying his independence from his former Impressionist colleagues in Paris and becoming an essential motif in his new style. Cézanne engaged in an artistic dialogue with Sainte-Victoire, in which his increasingly geometric brushstrokes and planar simplifications found their real-world equivalents in the barren flanks of the mountain. The mountain's hard limestone, so unsuitable for forests, made its geometry plainly visible: Sainte-Victoire's bone-like whiteness provided a blank canvas for the plastic exploration of color. The remarkable synergy of plastic exposition and geological structure suggests more than coincidence: Cézanne's architectural, constructive brushstrokes bear such a close

¹⁹ Rewald, 124.

²⁰ Rewald, 158-159.

²¹ Hoog, 79.

resemblance to the unique structure of Sainte-Victoire that the motif seems to dictate the very evolution of the artist's style.

Indeed, Cézanne's understanding of the mountain's form extended far beyond its mere appearance. In the person of his good friend Antoine-Fortuné Marion, Cézanne was thoroughly instructed in the geology and natural history of Sainte-Victoire.²² Marion, the foremost natural scientist of Provence, was another Aix-native and early friend of Cézanne who, like Zola and Cézanne himself, won considerable fame for his professional achievements and was named the head of Marseille's Museum of Natural History.²³ Moreover, Marion was also an amateur painter who often accompanied Cézanne on forays to the mountain in the 1860s (Fig. 4).²⁴ On such trips, the scientist lectured Cézanne and his friends on geology;²⁵ some telling pages of drawings survive on which Cézanne and Marion have jointly drawn, the artist producing sketches and the scientist recording geological strata and data (Figs. 5, 6).²⁶



Fig. 4. Cézanne, *Marion et Valabrégue partant pour le motif*, 1866, oil on canvas. Priv. Coll., Mexico. Source : Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cezanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 156.

²² Philip Conisbee and Denis Coutagne, *Cezanne in Provence*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press and National Gallery of Art, 2006), 281.

²³ Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 157.

²⁴ Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 155.

²⁵ Conisbee and Coutagne, 281.

²⁶ Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 160-161.

in his early works with an allegiance to the scientific grandeur of his own age. Cézanne treated Mont St. Victoire as the conceptual nexus of a painterly exercise that sought to penetrate the surface of things, just as Marion penetrated the soil and stone of Provence, in order to understand their essence. By professing such an artistic aim, Cézanne tied the execution of his Mont St. Victoire paintings to the properties of the object itself, thus removing his plastic formal explorations from the realm of pure painting and placing them as subordinate to the artist's experience and knowledge of the motif itself.

Though Cézanne professed to understanding Mont St. Victoire as a symbol of his artistic goals, the mountain served as a touchstone for other social and regionalist meanings that surrounded the artist in his Aix milieu. In addition to his work studying the geology of Provence, Marion was both an anthropologist who discovered important Mesolithic and Neolithic sites in the the Bouches-du-Rhône département and a vehement Provencal regionalist who considered Provence's landscape and historical record as parts of a legacy that tied the region to the roots of western civilization.²⁹ Though Cézanne never identified with the radical regionalist and nationalist movements of the time, he was nevertheless proud of his identity and would have known the many meanings Sainte-Victoire had for the identity of Provencal character. For instance, the very name of the mountain may honor the historical victory of the Roman consul and general Gaius Marius over the Teutons in the area of Aix in 102 B.C., a historical connotation that must have been appealing to Cézanne, whose affinity for the Roman classics reached back to the poetic aspirations of his youth.³⁰ Moreover, Provencal regionalism that looked to a long history oriented toward the rich cultural heritage of the Mediterranean basin gave Cézanne a connection to an alternative cultural and artistic tradition separate from the artistic milieu the artist rejected when he left Paris for Aix and grounded in Greek and Roman Classicism. Indeed, Mont St. Victoire was widely identified as a symbol of the independence of the native Provencal from its capital to the north: sometime between the end of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 and 1875, a massive iron cross – The Cross of

²⁹ Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 157-158.

³⁰ Conisbee and Coutagne, 281.

Provence – was placed on the summit of the mountain to celebrate the end of the Prussian military campaign, which culminated with the Prussian army’s siege of Paris, thus preventing another wave of Teutonic invaders from descending south. The mountain also had numerous religious connotations: it was the site of an old Christian hermitage, the destination of local pilgrimages, and the site for religious festivals (Fig 7).³¹



Fig. 7. Meunier, *Pilgrims at the Summit of Sainte-Victoire*, c. 1790, ink and watercolor on paper. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Source: Philip Conisbee and Denis Coutagne, *Cezanne in Provence*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press and National Gallery of Art, 2006), 282.

The multiple personal, historical, and regional meanings of Sainte-Victoire that combine synergistically in Cézanne’s paintings provide an alternative to the Modernist explanation of the plastic handling of form and color that characterize Cézanne’s mature style. Modernism interpreted Cézanne’s formal goals as efforts to deemphasize the content of the image in order to reassert the object-ness of the painted surface. Roger Fry believed Cézanne achieved greatness by rejecting deliberate content: “There is here no appeal to any poetical associations of ideas or sentiments. It is a triumph of that pictorial probity which it is the glory of modern art in France to have asserted – its refusal to the assistance which romantic interpretations offer.”³² Schapiro acknowledged the influence of Fry in his writings on Cézanne: “For the criticism and interpretation of Cézanne, I have received the greatest stimulus from Roger Fry ...”³³ Schapiro also considers Cézanne’s greatest paintings to result from the sublimation of his romantic drive for content: “His detached contemplation of his subjects arises from a passionate aspiring nature that

³¹ Conisbee and Coutagne, 282.

³² Roger Fry, *Cezanne: A Study of His Development*. (N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 73.

³³ Schapiro, 30.

seeks to master its own impulses through an objective attitude to things. The mountain peak is a natural choice for him, as is the abandoned quarry, the solitary house or tree, and the diversity of humble, impersonal objects on the table.”³⁴ Greenberg also cites Fry in his opinion that Cézanne had excluded “human interest” in order to allow all elements of the picture plane to have equal importance.³⁵

Such descriptions of Cézanne’s “objective” relationship to his motif fail to explain why a single landmark like Sainte-Victoire should so occupy the artist, and do not take into account the many subjective meanings the peak had for him. The linchpin for the Modernist critique is the idea that Cézanne’s best paintings of his mature period result from the absence of “a priori invention” stemming from detached contemplation of the motif.³⁶ Yet Cézanne was anything but detached in his relationship to the peak, and brought multiple subjective meanings to bear on his depictions of it. Formal Modernist interpretations of Cézanne must be reconciled with the evidence that the artist conceived of his favorite motif as a symbol rich with meanings. Erle Loran’s 1943 book “Cézanne’s Compositions” gives the most thorough analysis of Cézanne’s plastic means, and is thoroughly Formalist in its procedures and conclusions. Loran, a former student of Hans Hoffman, draws on the push/pull theories of his teacher while placing great emphasis on the artist’s drawing to show how Cézanne’s spatial distortions and plastic color serve to integrate the picture plane and flatten perspectival depth while guiding the eye, via overlapping planes, through the compositions.³⁷ Greenberg cited the influence of the text on his own understanding of Cézanne’s plastic means³⁸, and calls it a “(r)really valuable” text.³⁹ Loran’s exhaustive analysis of Cézanne’s formal mechanics aims to show that Cézanne’s goal was to reconcile three-

³⁴ Meyer Schapiro, Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries. (N.Y.: George Braziller, Inc., 1978), 40.

³⁵ Greenberg, 54.

³⁶ Fry, 77.

³⁷ Erle Loran, Cézanne’s Compositions. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1950), 25-34.

³⁸ Greenberg, 56.

³⁹ Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 46.



Fig. 8. Cézanne, *The Sainte Victoire, Seen from the Quarry Called Bibemus*, 1897, oil on canvas. Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland. Source: Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1950), 62.



Fig. 9. Erle Loran, *Photograph of the Motif*, 1944. Source: Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1950), 60.

dimensional volumes with the two dimensions of the picture plane; however, in the case of the paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire, it also shows how Cézanne's plastic means allowed him to reassert the importance of the motif against the diminishing effects of spatial recession and atmospheric perspective. Cézanne's plastic exposition gave him the means to monumentalize Sainte-Victoire: it protrudes to the surface of the picture plane just as its rich symbolic meanings caused it to stick out in the consciousness of the artist.

The Sainte-Victoire, Seen from the Quarry Called Bibemus (Fig. 8), is a prime example of the way Cézanne's plastic handling of the motif allowed him to reassert the presence of the mountain against the forces of scale, perspective, and recession that threaten to diminish its importance. Loran's photograph of the motif shows how the mountain shrinks in importance compared to the foreground elements of the quarry (Fig. 9).⁴⁰ By increasing the relative size of the mountain, and by simplifying its form, he instills it with a sense of monumentality that allows it to loom over the relative complexity of the foreground (Fig. 10). Furthermore, as Loran shows, Cézanne's planar distortions guide the eye through

⁴⁰ Loran, 60.

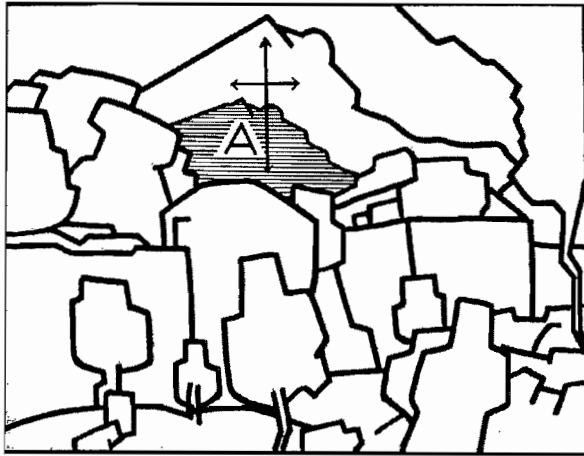


Fig. 10. Diagram by Erle Loran showing the change in scale of Mont Saint-Victoire in Cézanne's depiction versus the photographic scale of the motif. Source: Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1950), 61.

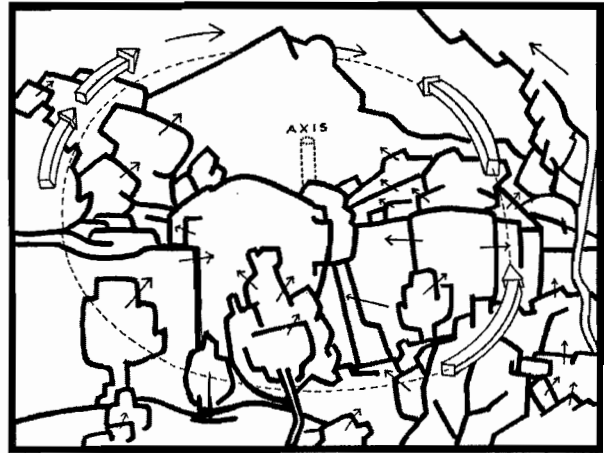


Fig. 11. Diagram by Erle Loran showing the effect of Cézanne's plastic exposition which places the mountain as the central axis of his painting. Source: Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1950), 61.

the foreground elements to the mountain, which is the largest static form in the composition (Fig. 11).⁴¹

Finally, through the use of his color system, Cézanne stops the mountain from receding as a result of aerial perspective by incorporating cool colors in the foreground and warm colors in the mountain, locking them together in a dynamic relationship.⁴²

Loran gives an effective example of the way Cézanne reasserts the importance of the mountain by comparing it with a painting of the same motif by Renoir, and juxtaposing both paintings against a photograph of the motif. In their versions of *The Sainte Victoire* (Figs. 13, 14), both artists depict the mountain in similar light and atmospheric conditions.⁴³ Renoir, however, with a typically Impressionist use of aerial perspective, paints the mountain as a hazy mass. The peak becomes an adjunct element to the dominance of the foreground forms, lessening its importance and weakening the composition. Cézanne, through the plastic means, retrieves the mountain from the sky and anchors it firmly in a static position to the picture plane. The values are emphasized more clearly, and the mountain is integrated firmly with the

⁴¹ Loran, 61.

⁴² Loran 62-4.

⁴³ Loran 100-101.



Fig. 10. Cézanne, *The Sainte Victoire*,
Source: Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions*.
(Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press,
1950), 100.



Fig. 11. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Mont Sainte
Victoire*, 1889, oil on canvas. The Barnes
Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania. Source : Erle
Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions*. (Berkeley, Calif.:
University of California Press, 1950), 100.

landscape around it. Again, through the use of overlapping planes in various degrees of stasis and activation, Cézanne directs the viewer's eye to the mountain and back again.

Cézanne's enigmatic plastic exposition, and the conflicting theories he expounded, have contributed to a narrative that explains the striking difference between the artist's early and mature styles. Yet such a narrative is insufficient to explain the artist's obsession with Mont Sainte-Victoire from the 1880s until his death. However, the mountain's plethora of subjective meanings, both personal and societal, provides a compelling explanation for Cézanne's preference for it as a motif, and suggest that his painterly dialectic with the peak influenced his style and understanding of his formal means.

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