Modern Landscapes

Paul Cézanne (French, Aix-en-Provence 1839 - 1906)

Viaduct at l'Estaque (Le Viaduct à l'Estaque), 1882
Oil on canvas
17 3/4 x 21 1/8 in. (45.1 x 53.6 cm)
R. T. Miller, Jr. Fund and Mrs. F. F. Prentiss Fund, 1950
AMAM 1950.3

The steep, dry terrain of l'Estaque rises behind the equivocating horizontal of a train viaduct. With its formal simplifications and spatial ambiguities, this close, frontal view of a scrupulously observed motif typifies Cézanne's painting of the 1880s.

From the early 1870s, Cézanne frequently sojourned at the Mediterranean fishing village of l'Estaque, near the painter's home in Aix-en-Provence. The Viaduct at l'Estaque was almost certainly painted in the early months of 1882, during a visit to the site by Auguste Renoir.1 Renoir stopped in l'Estaque in January 1882 en route to Paris from Italy, and worked alongside Cézanne for a short time between late February and mid March.2 Ellen Johnson has established that Renoir's Rocky Crags at l'Estaque, signed and dated 1882 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts)3 was painted from nearly the same spot as Cézanne's Viaduct.4

Johnson's photographs show the slopes of the massive crags that dominate the views chosen by Cézanne and Renoir, and the tufts and clusters of pines that are still a distinctive feature of the site. In positioning himself slightly to the left of Cézanne, Renoir chose a view of the crag that partly concealed the abrupt projection of the cliff on the right. Renoir's preference for soft landscapes, rolling hills, curved shapes, and gentle transitions also accounts for the great differences between his canvas and Cézanne's Viaduct.5 While Renoir offers a landscape in which the viewer may wander and rest, Cézanne's Viaduct emphasizes the density and resistance of landscape as both a physical topography and a field of painterly perception and transcription.

Anchoring the composition and passing through the rock is the low horizontal of the viaduct which, in Rewald's words, "could easily thwart any attempt at 'penetrating' into the picture's depth." The viewer's points of entry and perusal are explicitly pictorial: "The subtle variations of colors and the vivacious brushwork, no longer rigidly slanted, smoothly lead the eye from the foreground trees to the remote craters set against the sky."6 The short, parallel strokes of the pine trees, and the blue, violet, and ochre patches of rock, enact the light, relief, and declivities of the landscape, and the process of transcribing these incidents—in pigment, on canvas—as an organized field of vision. As Johnson wrote in 1950, "the balance of the thrusts and counter-thrusts in the large planes is enriched by the action of these countless small ones and by their color and value modulations...this tension and resolution, has been carefully brought into unified relationship with the two-dimensionality of the picture surface."7

Cézanne painted at least one other view of the viaduct at l'Estaque that Rewald dates between 1879 and 1882, Le Viaduct à l'Estaque in Helsinki.8 The facture of that painting includes much of the diagonal stroke that characterized Cézanne's work shortly before the moment of the Oberlin canvas. Cézanne also painted at least three other views of the crags at l'Estaque during this period.9 From the mid '80s onward, the artist favored more expansive motifs from l'Estaque that frequently included a view of the bay.10

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Biography
Paul Cézanne was born in Aix-en-Provence and attended the local Collège Bourbon, where he met the writer
Emile Zola. Later he became a student at the École Municipale de Dessin, before studying law, as his father
wished, at the Université d'Aix. Leaving his law studies early, Cézanne moved to Paris in 1861 and began to
paint with Camille Pissarro. Consistently rejected by both the Paris Salon and various art schools, Cézanne
returned to the south of France in 1870, thus also avoiding conscription in the war with Prussia. There he
began to study nature and to experiment with landscape painting. In 1872, Cézanne joined the ranks of the
and again worked closely with Pissarro before participating in the First Impressionist Exhibition in 1874.
Cézanne's paintings were singled out for particularly harsh criticism by the French press, and he again
retrreated to Aix, where he focused on painting still lifes. In the mid 1870s, Cézanne began to explore the
theme of the bathers in major paintings. He regularly visited Pissarro, Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), and
Auguste Renoir in northern France. Between 1882 and 1895 Cézanne turned away from Impressionism and
began his radical and influential transformation of the physical forms of his subjects into a measured,
weighty, and personal pictorial order. His intense and extended project focused on still lifes and landscape
motifs, most notably the nearby Mount Sainte-Victoire. Towards the end of his life, Cézanne created many
portraits and again focused on the theme of the bathers. These late paintings are seen as foreshadowing
Cubism. Although several prominent collectors (including Dr. Paul-Ferdinand Gachet, Ambroise Vollard, and
Paul Durand-Ruel) purchased Cézanne paintings during the artist's lifetime, his work was largely ignored or
attacked. In the late 1890s, his paintings began to be noticed by younger artists, such as Émile Bernard
(1868-1941). He is now considered one of the masters of nineteenth-century painting and his paintings have
been extremely influential for many artists of the twentieth century.

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General References


366-76.


Provenance
With Ambrose Vollard, Paris (stockbook no. 3486)11 With Paul Cassirer, Berlin (stock no. 2039; purchased
31 March 1913?)12 Collection Oskar Schmitz, Dresden (1913?-36; placed on temporary deposit at the
museum in 1950

Exhibitions
Berlin, 1913. XXVI Ausestellung der Berliner Secession. Cat. no. 30.

Zurich, Kunsthast, 1932. Sammlung Oskar Schmitz. Cat. no. 29.

Zurich, Kunsthast, 1933. Französiche Malerei des XIX. Jahrhunderts. Cat. no. 78.

Paris, Wildenstein Galleries, 1936. La Collection Oskar Schmitz (also shown at New York, Wildenstein
Galleries). Cat. no. 12.


Fort Worth, Art Center, 1954. *Inaugural Exhibition*. 8 - 20 October. Cat. no. 8.


Zurich, Kunsthain, 1956. *Paul Cézanne, 1839-1906*. 22 August - 7 October (also shown at Munich, Haus der Kunst, cat. no. 31). Cat. no. 25.


Berkeley, University Art Museum, University of California, 1960. *Art from Ingres to Pollock*. 6 March - 3 April. Cat. no. 22.


**Literature**


Seile Arte, no. 53 (September - October 1961), p. 69.


**Technical Data**

The paint surface is even and of moderate thickness, with vigorous brushwork evident throughout. The white ground is thick enough to fill the mesh and much of the texture of the plain, tabby weave of the canvas. The canvas was reinforced, probably in the early twentieth century, with an aqueous lining. The original tacking margins have been cut off, probably during the lining process. The ground, surface, and paint are in good condition. Slight losses of ground and paint at the edges were inpainted at the ICA (Intermuseum Laboratory) in 1961, mainly along the bottom edge. A natural resin varnish was removed in 1961 and replaced with PVA-AAYAA.

**Footnotes**


2. On 23 February 1882, Renoir wrote Durand-Ruel: "I was at l'Estaque, a little place like Asnières, but on the seacoast. Since it's so beautiful, my goodness, I'm staying here another two weeks. It would really be a pity to leave this beautiful country without bringing something back from it. What weather! Spring with a sweet sun and no wind is rare in Marseille. What's more, I met Cézanne here and we're going to work together." They could not have painted together a great deal on this occasion, for Renoir soon fell ill. On 2 March, he wrote Victor Choquet that he was convalescing in Cézanne's care, and that Cézanne would shortly go up to Paris. Cézanne left sometime in March, and Renoir went to Algiers. John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne, a Biography* (New York, 1948), pp. 133-34; cited in Ellen Johnson, "Viaduct at l'Estaque: A Footnote," *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (Fall 1963), p. 25.

3. Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 81.9 cm; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, inv. 36.678; reproduced in Nicholas Wadley, ed., *Renoir: A Retrospective* (New York, 1987), colorplate 79.


7. Ellen Johnson, "The Viaduct at L'Estaque of Paul Cézanne," *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 7, no. 1 (1949), pp. 353-54. This article offers an extensive visual analysis of this work, while placing it within the formal context of modernist painting in the practice of both Cézanne and Picasso.


12. This date appears in John Rewald's notes for the catalogue raisonné, which he sent to the AMAM in 1989, but no dates are included in the provenance for this work in the 1996 (posthumous) catalogue raisonné. In Wolfgang Stechow, *European and American Paintings and Sculpture in the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College* (Oberlin, 1967), p. 30, the 1913 purchase by Cassirer is followed by a question mark.

13. Schmitz's ownership is documented between 1930 and 1936; according to Rewald's notes of 1989, Schmitz bought the work in 1913 at the *Berlin Secession* exhibition.