

Mont Sainte-Victoire, 1886-87

Oil on canvas, Acquired 1925

“I occupy myself . . . for months . . . by leaning once a little more to the right, once a little more to the left.” — *Paul Cezanne*

Paul Cezanne painted *Mont Sainte-Victoire* more than 60 times, and from the early 1880s to 1906, he featured this favorite subject in at least 25 canvases. This scene was observed near Aix-en-Provence between Bellevue and Montbriand, properties at one time owned by Cezanne family members. Cezanne would walk to this site from his family



Fig. 1: The Path of the Viaduct, Aix, 1903
Henry Ely Studio, Courtesy of the National Gallery Archives



Fig. 2: *Mont Sainte-Victoire* seen from Bellevue, c. 1935
Photo by John Rewald/Leo Marchutz, John Rewald Archive, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington, DC

residence Jas de Bouffan and position himself beneath the shade of trees to paint a vast panorama framed by two pines: at left a diagonal railway (from Aix to Rognac) leading to a small house, at right the Arc River valley railway viaduct (from Aix to Marseille), and *Mont Sainte-Victoire* in the distance (Figs. 1-2). Two related works have a similar composition (Figs. 3-4). The light brushwork and a bright color palette show the influence of mentor Camille Pissarro who painted with Cezanne outdoors beginning in the 1870s.



Fig. 3: *Montagne Saint-Victoire (The Arc Valley)*, c. 1885
Watercolor, with graphite, on buff wove paper, Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Marshall Field, IV



Fig. 4: *The Montagne Saint-Victoire with Large Pine*, c. 1887
Oil on canvas, The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

ACQUIRING THE PAINTING

Duncan Phillips purchased this picture in 1925 for \$45,000, and displayed it that year. In 1931 he declared: “*Mont Sainte-Victoire* is a world in itself . . . Perfect equilibrium is established . . . a symmetry like the Parthenon.”

REMOVING THE VARNISH

In 2023, a deteriorated, yellowed varnish along with airborne grime were removed for the first time since the painting was acquired in 1925 (Fig. 5). After cleaning, the appearance of *Mont Sainte-Victoire* was transformed: Cezanne’s colors appear more vibrant, the brushwork more distinct, and the landscape recedes further in



Fig. 5: Old, discolored varnish removed from left side; right side still uncleaned

space, restoring the artist’s intent for his composition. Apart from two old, repaired tears in the upper right (detectable in the infrared image, Fig. 7) and a few other small, scattered losses, the work is in pristine condition.



Fig. 6: Sketched lines for the tree trunk visible in infrared image



Fig. 7: Underdrawing for branches and distant landscape apparent in infrared image



Fig. 8: Loosely drawn placement of the trees in lower right can be seen in infrared image

LOOKING BELOW THE SURFACE

Infrared imaging was used to see below the surface of the painting, which revealed underdrawing and changes made by the artist. Cezanne seems to have first loosely sketched in the landscape with graphite pencil. Although he made notations for the location of the trees that frame the landscape in the initial drawing, he did not strictly follow these outlines as he painted them (Fig. 6). Also visible in the underdrawing are contours of the hill and mountain tops, houses, railroad tracks, and viaduct in the center of the composition (Fig. 7). Hastily applied circular pencil marks fix the location of the trees and foliage at lower right (Fig. 8).

DEVELOPING THE COMPOSITION

After he finished the pencil sketch, Cezanne used a fine pointed brush and blue paint to outline the mountains and other elements, generally following the initial graphite lines. He then built up the composition using hatched brushstrokes ranging from thin washes to richer layers in hues of blue, green, yellow, and orange. He left the white ground layer visible throughout the canvas and did not bring the landscape to the same degree of completion around the edges. This is particularly noticeable along the center right edge, where the train bridge fades and is left incomplete (Fig. 8). Examination of the sides of the picture reveals that it was cut down, presumably by Ambroise Vollard, his dealer, to present a more completed look.

Self-Portrait, c. 1877

Oil on canvas, Acquired 1928

“Cezanne attained clarity and simplicity of form and construction entirely by means of modulated color, one touch laid across another, even as a builder works....Here he looks every inch the builder interrupted at his work.” —*Duncan Phillips*

There are 27 known self-portraits by Cezanne. This example, painted either in Paris or Aix, depicts the artist as an aging man. Thick color patches and thin parallel brushstrokes construct his face, beard, and hair, techniques he established while working with the Impressionists. His jacket appears sketched and the background is unadorned. When the picture was exhibited at the Paris Salon d'Automne in 1904, a critic described it as having “rough and aggressive sincerity.”

ACQUIRING THE PAINTING

In 1928, it was acquired for \$45,000 from Paul Rosenberg Gallery through dealer Josef Stansky, who, along with prominent German art critic Julius Meier-Graefe, declared it “one of the greatest paintings in the world.” With its acquisition, the Phillips became the first US museum to own a self-portrait by Cezanne. It went on view that year in the exhibition *Art Is International*, and in 1929, Phillips lent it to the Museum of Modern Art's inaugural show. For Phillips, *Self-Portrait* affirmed how Cezanne was “constructing a world in painting with its proper building material—color.”

REMOVING THE VARNISH

Multiple varnishes were applied to the painting 50 years ago during a conservation treatment. Over time, the varnish became dull and turned yellow, muting the paint colors and flattening the three-dimensional qualities of the composition (Figs. 1-2). Now, with the varnish removed, the portrait takes on a new clarity and increased boldness. The energetic brushwork that was lost under the darkened surface coating has become visible and the focus that Cezanne gave to the area around his eyes has emerged. He clearly reworked the face several times using impastoed brushstrokes, inviting the viewer to focus on his outward gaze (Fig. 3).



Figs. 1-2: Before (left) and after (right) treatment

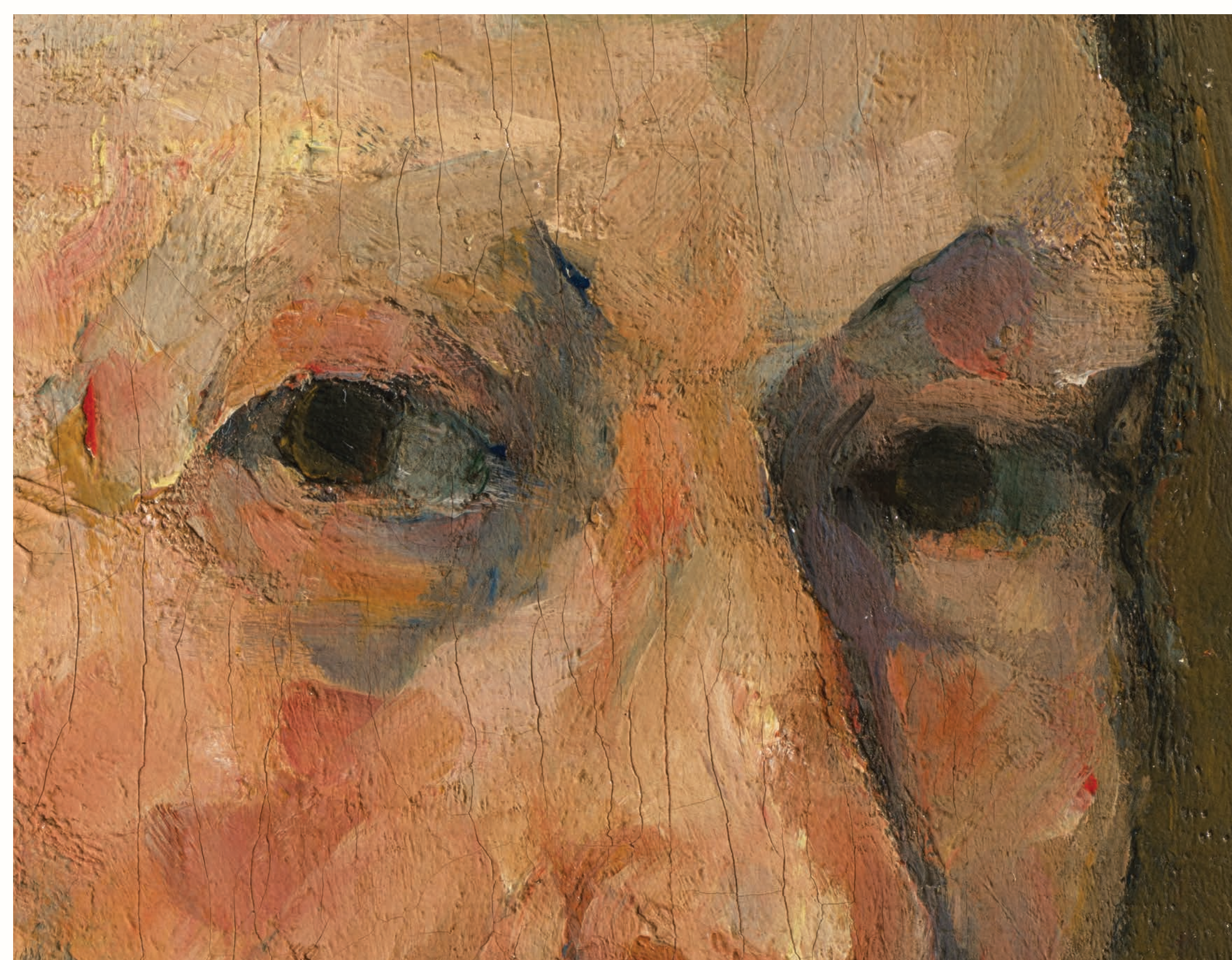


Fig. 3: Close-up of the eyes

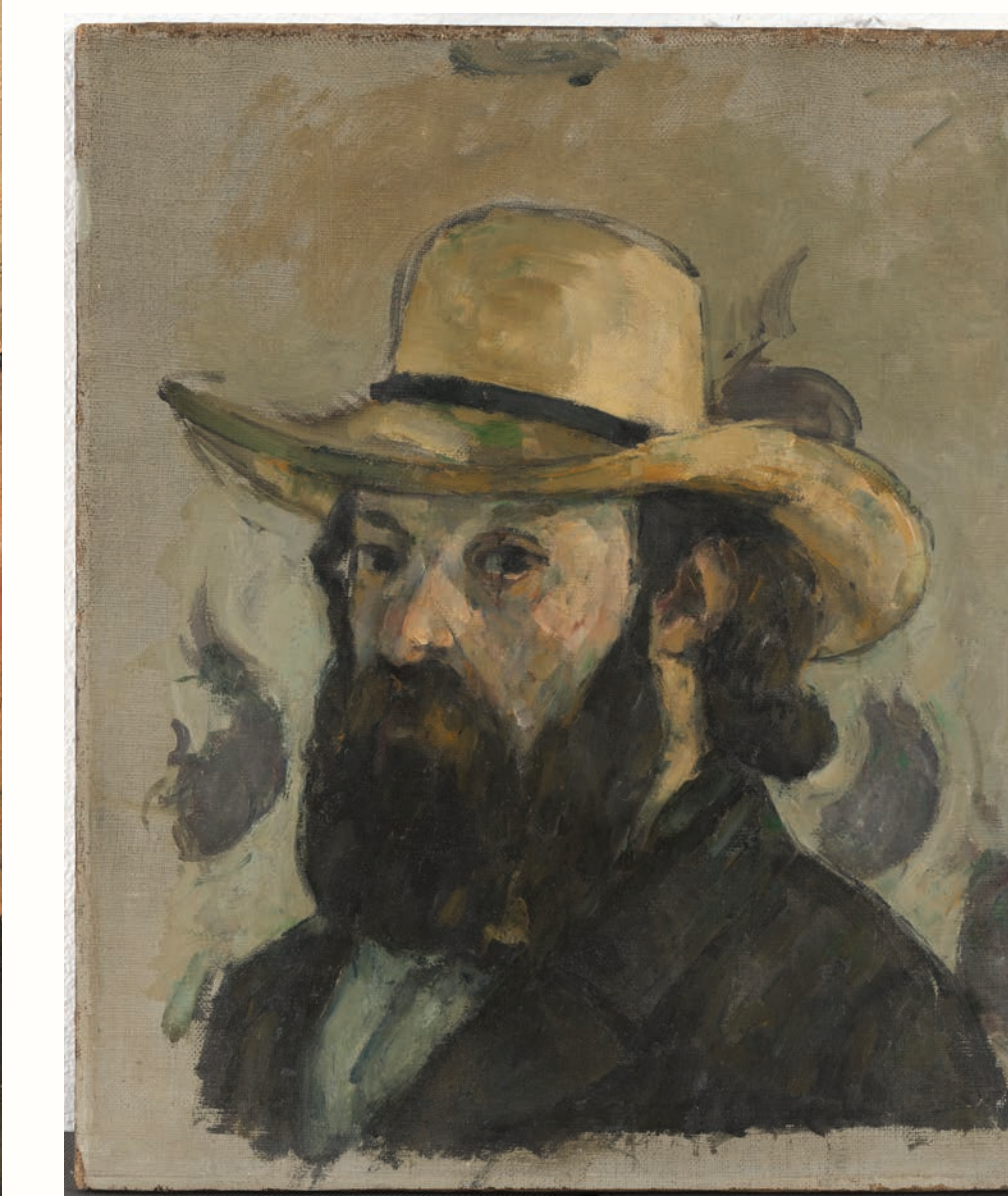
EXAMINING THE EDGES AND THE REVERSE

Examination of the edges of the picture reveal that the canvas was cut down from a larger size, presumably by the request of Cezanne's dealer Ambroise Vollard who was known to hire restorers for such a task. To make the composition look more complete, a restorer also added thin blue paint along the left and top sides (Fig. 4) where the canvas was left unpainted by Cezanne. At one time, the painting's perimeter may have looked like *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat* (1875-76) (Fig. 5). Vollard's handwritten inscription, “Portrait de l'artiste par lui-même tête nue” (Self-portrait with bare head), is found on the brown paper that covers the stretcher on the reverse (Fig. 6), along with an inventory sticker of “4162,” which matches Vollard's stock book listing (Figs. 7-8).



Fig. 4: Detail of top and left side showing thin blue paint

Fig. 5: *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat*, 1875-76
Oil on canvas, 13 3/4 x 11 3/8 in.,
Museum of Modern Art, The William S. Paley Collection



RIGHT: Fig 6: Inscription on back of *Self-Portrait*

Entrée									
Numéro	Date	Provenance	Nom de l'artiste	Description de l'œuvre	Quantité	Reçu par	Caract.	Observations	Autres
4.104			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.102			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.103			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.104			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.105			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.106			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.107			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.108			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.109			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		
4.110			Cezanne	Portrait de l'artiste	1		huile		



Figs. 7-8: Ambroise Vollard stock book and inventory sticker on back of *Self-Portrait*. Stock book A, 1899-1904; Ambroise Vollard Records [uqgkofqj], The Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Inc.

VARNISH: A thin solution of natural or synthetic resins applied to a finished painting to saturate the colors. Initially transparent, most varnishes discolor yellow or grey and need to be replaced over time, generally every 50 to 100 years.



The Garden at Les Lauves, c. 1906

Oil on canvas, Acquired 1955

“I, nearly seventy years old, find the colors sensations which give us light are the source of abstractions which do not allow me to cover my canvas nor to pursue the delineation of objects...thus my image and picture is incomplete.” —Paul Cezanne

Cezanne painted roughly 320 landscapes, and this is one of his last, found with the artist's estate after he died. Likely painted in one sitting, its loosely defined horizontal bands of color suggest the southern view from his studio where he worked from 1902–06. There, he painted on his 20-foot-wide gravel terrace, which was bordered by a low retaining wall and a small garden. In the distance he could also see Aix and, further afield, the Chaine de l'Étoile mountains. Scholars consider the violet patches at the painting's lower register to be the beginnings of the terrace wall, also represented in a related watercolor (Fig. 1). Phillips acquired *Les Lauves* from Wildenstein Gallery in 1955, which included trading an earlier Cezanne painting *Harvesters* (1875–78). He described *Les Lauves* as achieving “the painterly excitement and sense of adventure to which our best, our most poetic abstract expressionist aspire.”

Throughout his career, Cezanne left paintings in various stages of completion—with portions of the white ground layer unpainted around the perimeter—a practice that grew from his experiments with watercolors. There are no signs of underdrawing on *Les Lauves*. The artist describes his process: “To read nature is to see it under the veil of its interpretation as colored patches following one another according to a law of harmony.” Cezanne's initial impressions began with daubs of a thin wash of brown paint, seen on the left side and center (Fig. 2). Evidence that the same thin brown paint lies beneath other passages can be found in the drips of brown coming from beneath blue and green paint along the lower part of the picture.

When Phillips purchased this picture, the bottom two inches were covered by the frame (Fig. 3) to prevent the unpainted canvas from being seen. When the painting was cleaned in 1980 to remove a yellowed varnish, the picture was reframed to return the work to its original appearance.



Fig. 1: *Terrace of the Garden at Les Lauves*, 1902–06
Watercolor over graphite, 17 x 21 1/2 in., The Mogran Library and Museum, Thaw Collection



Fig. 2: Brown wash visible on top left side, and brown drips on bottom center and right



Fig. 3: *The Garden at Les Lauves*, with bottom two inches covered by frame, on view in *Cezanne, An Exhibition in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Phillips Collection* (February 27–March 28, 1971)



GROUND LAYER: A coating applied to the support (typically canvas, cardboard, or wood panel) to seal and prepare it for the paint layer. It is typically white and is also called the priming layer.

Ginger Pot with Pomegranate and Pears, 1890-93

Oil on canvas, Gift of Gifford Phillips, in memory of his father James Lauglin Phillips, 1939

Throughout his career, Cezanne painted still lifes filled with modest objects from his home. Examples from the 1890s show him using a lighter palette and widening the space around the objects and the table, taking in more of the room. He meticulously set up fruits of contrasting color, tilting and balancing them using coins or other items to explore line, volume, and depth. Of his almost 190 still lifes, Cezanne painted the ginger pot (a popular decorative jar) at least six times (Fig. 1). The red band at the bottom right indicates the ornamental wall treatment at Jas de Bouffan, where this work was painted. The fabric in the background is the same textile featured in *Seated Woman in Blue*.

Claude Monet purchased this painting in 1898, four years after Cezanne's visit to Giverny, Monet's home. Phillips knew the work and saw it displayed with *Self-Portrait* in MoMA's inaugural exhibition. With financial assistance from his nephew, Gifford Phillips, Duncan Phillips acquired the painting from Wildenstein Galleries for \$40,000 in 1939, and it went on view that fall.

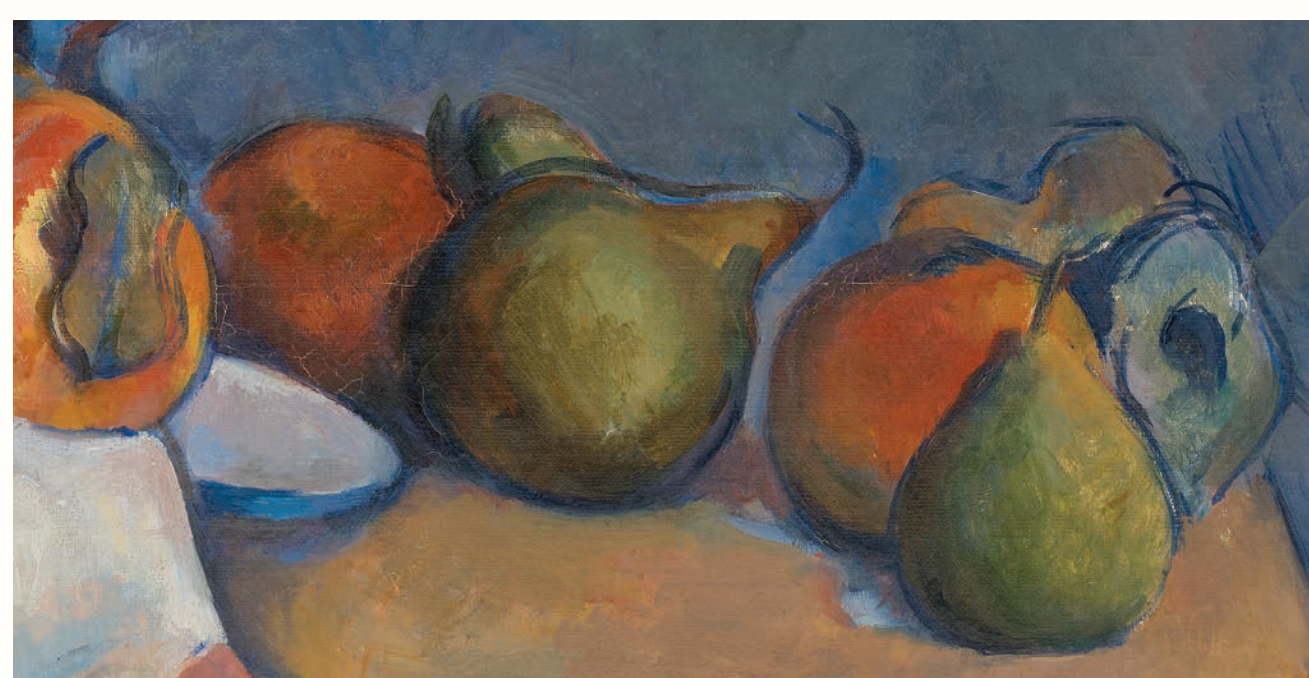
This picture has remained in pristine condition in large part because Monet purchased it directly from the artist and displayed it in his bedroom for decades (Fig. 2). Along the lower left quadrant are unpainted portions of the off-white ground layer. Infrared imaging reveals that Cezanne initially sketched the composition using graphite pencil, as underdrawing appears around the pears (Fig. 3) and in the folds of the drapery (Fig. 4).



Fig. 1: Paul Cezanne, *Ginger Jar*, c. 1895
Oil on canvas, 28 15/16 x 23 13/16 in., Barnes Foundation



Fig. 2: Reproduction of *Ginger Pot* displayed where the original once hung at Giverny (now a museum)



Figs. 3-4: Infrared imaging showing graphite pencil underdrawing in lower left and center right

INFRARED IMAGING: A camera sensitive to infrared light can be used to detect underdrawings and changes made by the artist. Many pigments are transparent or semitransparent in infrared light, making it possible to see through certain paint layers. Others reflect (and appear white) or absorb (and appear dark) in an infrared image. The differences in transparency, reflection, and absorption frequently allow a view of what lies beneath the upper layers of paint.

Fields at Bellevue, 1892-95

Oil on canvas, Acquired 1940

“Render nature with the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone, arranged in perspective so that each side of an object or of a plane is directed toward a central point.”—*Paul Cezanne*

Situated on a hill near Aix and Mont Sainte-Victoire is Bellevue, a property acquired by Cezanne’s sister Rose Conil in 1886. This canvas may depict the Arc River valley below it, where the artist focused his attention on the structures of the farmhouses and other abandoned buildings, constructed with flat translucent geometric planes. His palette captures the longer shadows of the late afternoon.

This work was privately acquired during the artist’s lifetime. In 1939, it made its US debut at the centennial exhibition of Cezanne’s birth presented by Marie Harriman Gallery, New York. Phillips purchased it from the gallery in 1940 for \$14,000, and included it in the 1941 *Functions of Color in Painting* exhibition, and later with examples by Pierre Bonnard, Marjorie Phillips, and Berthe Morisot. For many years this picture hung in the Phillips family’s home on Foxhall Road.

The labels on the back of *Fields of Bellevue* reveal its past ownership and where it was exhibited (Fig. 1). Three labels document its inclusion in the 11th Internationale Exposition des Beaux Art in Venice in 1920: a handwritten inscription noting the owner at that time as Egisto Fabbri, Florence; a customs label; and an Italian label indicating the painting’s inventory number as 1055 (Fig. 2). Ambroise Vollard’s stock book number for the work, 3401, is on a label in the center of the stretcher crossbar, and below it, an indecipherable handwritten label in black ink may refer to a previous owner or an exhibition (Fig. 3). Customs stamps indicate that it was shipped in and out of France (Fig. 4). A torn label in the upper right can be assigned to the French shipping company De la Rancheraye et Cie (operating in Paris from 1912-24) (Fig. 5).



Fig. 1: Reverse of *Fields of Bellevue*



Fig. 3: Vollard stockbook label and other indecipherable label



Fig. 4: Customs stamp



Fig. 2: Italian exhibition labels



Fig. 5: De la Rancheraye et Cie label

Seated Woman in Blue, 1902-04

Oil on canvas, Acquired 1946

Paul Cezanne produced almost 1,000 paintings and about 160 of them are portraits. Here, a woman wearing a tailored blue suit and a decorative hat reclines in a chair before a patterned curtain. With a book on her lap, she gazes into the distance, her features, posture, and mood appear detached. Cezanne demanded many sittings from his models. In 1904, he wrote to artist Émile Bernard, “I proceed very slowly . . . One must observe one’s model and feel very accurately, but also express oneself with distinctiveness and force.”

When Phillips purchased this work, it was thought to be a portrait of the artist’s wife. Now scholars believe that it depicts either his housekeeper Madame Brémond, or his sister Marie, known to wear fashionable dresses like this example. It is related to a larger composition (Fig. 1); both were painted at Cezanne’s residence at 23 rue Boulegon near his studio Les Lauves. Phillips acquired this work in 1946 for \$25,000 from Wildenstein Gallery.

Cezanne labored over *Seated Woman in Blue*, as indicated by the thickly painted and heavily impastoed surface. The drapery in the background seems to be the same one pictured in *Ginger Pot* (also on view), a prop that he used over and over in his works. An in-depth examination of this picture reveals that the lower right was painted by another hand—while the colors appear similar, the brushwork does not match Cezanne’s unique constructions of color patches, especially when examined using infrared imaging (Fig. 2). The painting was initially purchased by Ambroise Vollard from the artist’s son. The dealer may have hired a restorer to cover the unpainted portions of the canvas to give it a more finished appearance.

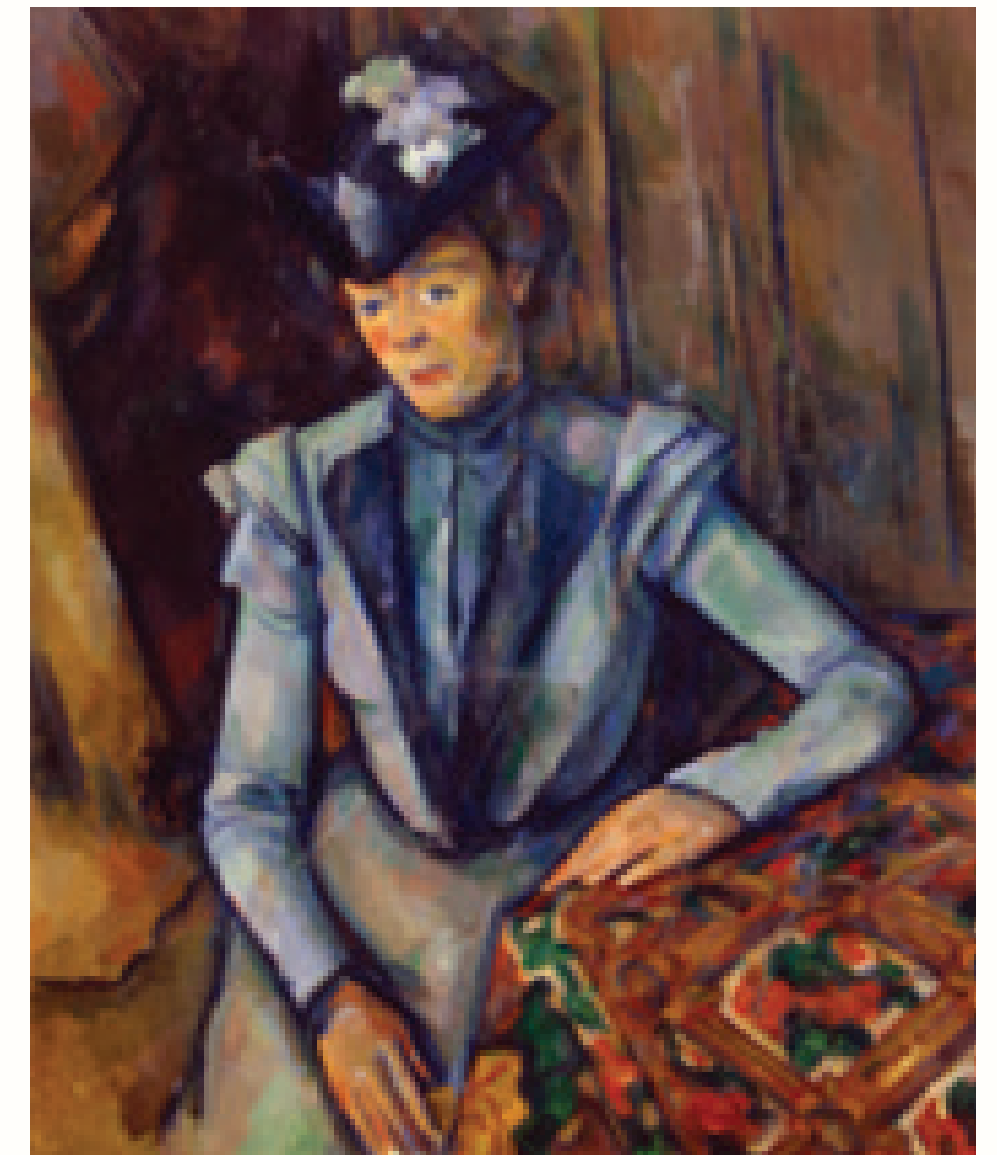


Fig. 1: *Lady in Blue*, c. 1904
Oil on canvas, 34 7/8 x 28 3/8 in.,
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg,
Russia



Fig. 2: Comparison of the lower right section of the painting with the infrared image

Duncan Phillips on Paul Cezanne

In the mid-1900s, as a young critic drawn to more representational art, Duncan Phillips initially criticized Paul Cezanne, calling him a “heavy-handed bungler” and “a radical.” But after his museum opened in 1921, Phillips’s growing interests in color and abstraction, his discussions with artists and dealers, his visits to exhibitions, and his readings on Cezanne helped shift his thinking. By 1924, Phillips had embraced Cezanne’s art and declared the artist a “great innovator.”

As few American museums pursued late-19th-century art, inventory was plentiful in New York. Dealers sought out Phillips, and he took action. Writing to dealer Josef Stransky in 1925, Phillips stated: “Cezanne belongs in our collection by right of his towering genius for decorative abstraction.” Stransky replied that *Mont Sainte-Victoire* was obtainable for \$45,000; that fall, the first Cezanne entered the collection.

As Phillips continued to buy, he wrote more about Cezanne’s process, saying in 1931: “[Cezanne] drew with color and thus built up his spatial designs, superimposing touches of his brush to model his world.” Phillips’s advocacy for Cezanne led to the world-renowned group of six paintings and one lithograph. Following the purchase of *The Garden at Les Lauves*, his last example, Phillips concluded: “After years of research and discipline . . . [Cezanne] had finally made himself so much the intimate master of his unique method of color construction and color design.” In 1971, a Cezanne exhibition was organized to celebrate the museum’s 50th anniversary, in honor of one of Duncan and Marjorie’s favorite artists.

Cezanne's Process and Paints

“There is no line, there is only modeling; there are only contrasts. When color is at its richest, form is at its fullest.” —*Paul Cezanne*

The works in this gallery illustrate the full range of Cezanne's techniques. In both *Self-Portrait* and *Seated Woman in Blue*, parts of the figures are heavily worked while other sections of the painting are less fully realized. Technical studies of *Mont Sainte-Victoire* and *Ginger Pot with Pomegranate and Pears* indicate some planning with graphite pencil; *Fields at Bellevue* and *The Garden at Les Lauves* show little planning, with his ideas painted directly on the canvas. Examinations also show Cezanne's experiments with paint application—from small broken brushstrokes to marks arranged in more ordered parallel lines and geometric patterns, which he called the “constructivist stroke.”

Cezanne used commercially primed, standard French sized canvases; *The Garden at Les Lauves*, for example, measures 81 x 65 cm—a “No. 25 figure” canvas. Other works purchased by Phillips have had their sizes altered in early restorations and therefore are not standard sizes.

Cezanne bought his supplies from color merchants Jean Tanguy, Briault, and Maison Chabod. He wrote to a color merchant in July 14, 1905: “Monsieur, I have received your various deliveries and now request you send to me: 5 burnt lake no. 7 (Masion Chabod), 5 Veronese green no. 7 or 8 from Bourgeois - and 5 cobalt from the same house, same number.” Artist Émile Bernard described Cezanne's palette as “the real painter's palette,” listing these colors: Yellows: Brilliant yellow, Naples yellow, chrome yellow, yellow ochre, raw sienna; Reds: vermilion, Indian red (red earth), burnt sienna, madder lake, carmine lake, burnt crimson lake; Green: Viridian (Veronese green), emerald green, green earth; Blues: Cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, Prussian blue, peach black.