

I Cézanne: Sketch for a series of male bathers, ca. 1890.
Private collection, New York

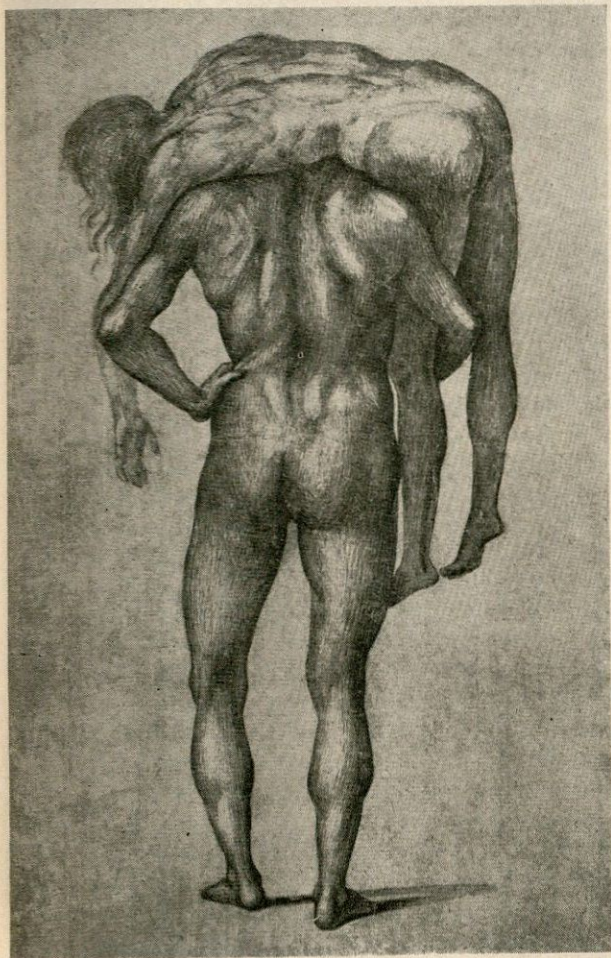
By Theodore Reff

Cézanne: the enigma of the nude

Conflicts implicit in his bathers are clarified
by their sources in art history; seen
in this month's loan exhibition in New York

Cézanne's bathers often have seemed unsatisfactory and, with the exception of such famous examples as the monumental pictures in Philadelphia and Merion, less representative of his achievement than his landscapes and still-lives—those familiar images of Mont Ste. Victoire or a bowl of massive apples that have become the precious symbols of his art. In the exhibition at Wildenstein's [for the benefit of the National Organization for Mentally Ill Children], the paintings of these subjects and the portraits of himself and of his few acquaintances—"Uncle Dominic," Henri Gasquet, the anonymous clock-maker—will probably attract more interest than the half-dozen scenes of bathers scattered through the galleries.

Certainly the small *Bathers* of the Jonas Collection [fig. 6], a typical example of the mid 1880s when such exemplary landscapes as the views of Gardanne were painted, seems strange and disappointing at first sight. We may respond to its flickering brush strokes and subtle colors, its range of blues, greens



2 Signorelli: *The Living Carrying the Dead*, drawing, ca. 1500.
Louvre



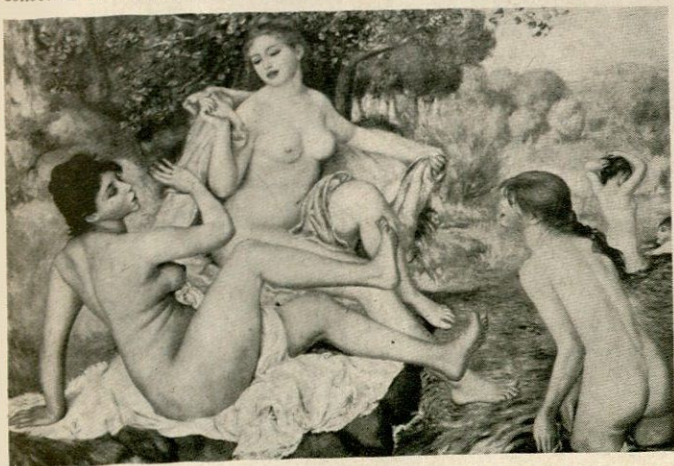
3 Cézanne: drawing after Michelangelo.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ira Haupt, New York



4 Michelangelo: *Dying Slave*, 1513.
Louvre, Paris

Cézanne's *Bathers* [1, 6, 7] are frequently misunderstood; their apparent coarseness and ambiguity put off spectators accustomed to the Gallic verve and grace exemplified by Renoir [5]. But instead of Renoir's Rococo models, Cézanne went to historical sources of severe form [2, 4, 9] which he incorporated into consistently architectural compositions.

5 Renoir: *Bathers*, 1884-87.
Collection Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Jr., Philadelphia



6 Cézanne: *Bathers*, ca. 1883-87.
Collection Mrs. H. H. Jonas, New York



and warm flesh tones delicately modulated to suggest air and light, and still find the figures themselves awkward, heavy, almost primitive in their intense lunging or crouching postures.

Already during Cézanne's lifetime critics accustomed to the naturalistic detail and slick finish of academic drawing were shocked by the brutality of his distortions; even recently they were considered by one writer as "crudities that resulted from Cézanne's torturing struggles with the drawing and modeling in the human figure . . . merely the butchering of naturalistic appearances." Apart from these distortions, there is an air of tension and unsociability in Cézanne's bathers which seems utterly foreign to the occasion. Traditionally it is a scene of relaxation and pleasure in contact with nature, its rejuvenating water and sun: that is the spirit of Renoir's version [fig. 5], which also dates from the mid 1880s. In a typical early Impressionist landscape, open and sunny, Renoir places nude women whose elegance and joyousness recall Rococo nymphs; they are in fact partly based on a seventeenth-century model—Girardon's relief sculptures for the *Bain des Nymphes* at Versailles. Hence their playful momentary poses, their sophisticated variation in size and position, and their interception by the frame, which suggests a space much broader than Cézanne's enclosed river bank affords. Less concerned with the charm of the moment, Cézanne arranges his bathers in a small circle of evenly spaced elements in the center of the canvas. In doing so, he attains a greater closure and stability, a more cohesive surface unified through the regular distribution of small flickering touches and chromatic sequences in both figures and foliage. (For all its skill, Renoir's work lacks this unity. There is a marked contrast between the smoothly painted figures with precise contours and the Impressionistically flecked landscape forms, the result of his self-conscious attempt to imitate the draftsmanship of Ingres.)

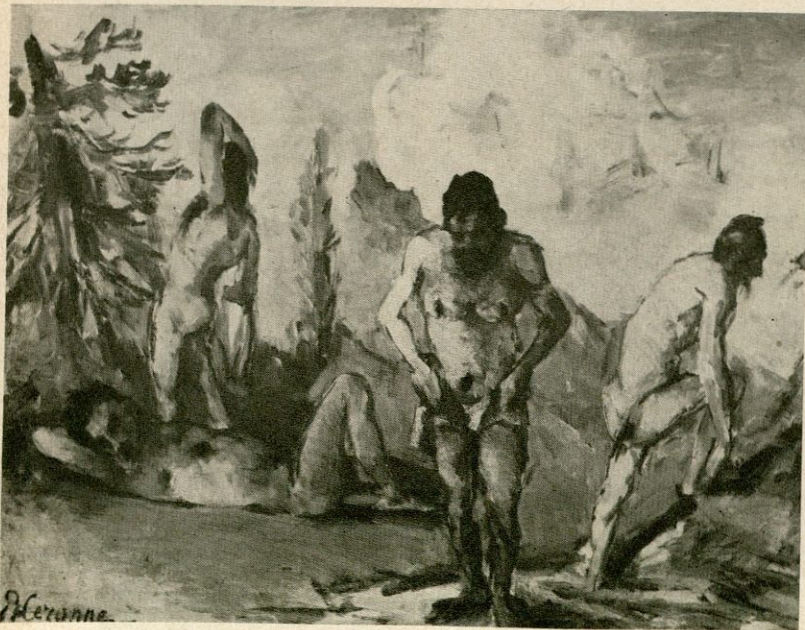
Throughout his life Cézanne grappled with the problem of unifying the figures and their space, often painting variations of

the same composition, seeking an ideal rhythm and completeness. It was this intense preoccupation that once led Pissarro to remark that Cézanne had been painting the same picture all his life. His successive solutions to this problem, beginning in the 1870s with a few small figures and culminating in the ambitious compositions of his last years, deserve to be studied in detail. At the same time, however, they are images of people and reveal his attitude toward the expressive significance of the human body. In following the history of these figures, we gain insight into his deepest thought, both its conscious lifelong goals and its hidden continuity of spirit.

One of the earliest examples, a small composition of four bathers done about 1875-6 [fig. 7], is in the current exhibition. It contains three standing figures almost equally spaced, the center one frontal, the others in profile toward their respective edges, and a fourth figure reclining parallel to the bottom edge. A somewhat schematic grouping apparently intended to emphasize the variety of directions, it nevertheless results in their total estrangement from each other. They gravitate toward the margins: as in early medieval art, which is governed by a similar awareness of the frame, one figure stands on the bottom edge and another touches the left edge with his raised arm. Yet in their isolation all assume highly expressive postures, inhibited or self-constraining at the right, more expansive at the left; the twisting figure at the extreme left (is it male or female?) is very strange. In Renoir's picture, there is also a bather with arms above her head seen from behind, but hers is the natural gesture of adjusting her hair, while Cézanne's seems strained, oddly twisted, motivated by some feeling we cannot identify.

His colors, too, are more turgid, including many mixed tones of brown and dull green; Renoir's are clear and light with large areas of yellow in the foliage, glints of white in the water, and a smooth cream tone for the nudes. In a preliminary drawing (Venturi 899), an astonishing sketch which anticipates much

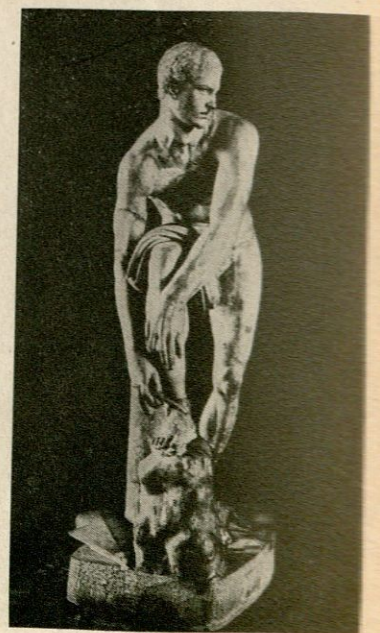
7 Cézanne: *Bathers at Rest*, 1875-76.
Collection Mrs. Nate B. Spingold, New York

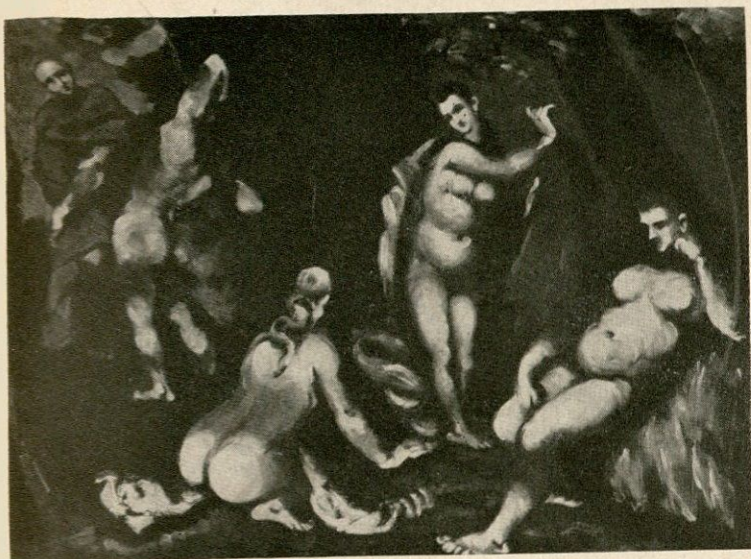


8 Cézanne: drawing from *Hermes*.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ira Haupt



9 Roman copy: *Hermes*.
Louvre, Paris





10 Cézanne: *Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1869-70.
Private collection (not in the exhibition)



11 Cézanne: *Fantastic Scene*, 1873-75.
Collection Mrs. Howard White, Northport, N. Y.

The nude is a subject that recurs throughout Cézanne's career from the 1870s until his death. At first it is frankly erotic, aggressive [10]; later it is an element in a landscape, often it is even hard to tell if it is male or female (as in the bather at the left in fig. 7). But despite emphasis on the plastic problem of figures in the countryside [11], the conflict of desire and remorse is always evident.

twentieth-century draftsmanship, Cézanne's slashing pen strokes and boldly streaked washes convey vividly his conflicting emotions.

As in the individual's discovery of himself, we may look for explanations of the hidden tensions in these figures by recognizing their "parents"—their antecedents in his first figure paintings. The reclining bather appears but a few years earlier in the drawing *The Painter and the Woman* (V. 1206), where she lies voluptuously on a sofa while an intense young artist (bearded like Cézanne) strains to capture her likeness. Confronting the nude, he would resolve his tension by assimilating her to the controlled artistic process. Both the woman's pose and the subject itself are reminiscent of Renaissance images of Venus, but what distinguishes Cézanne's version is its outspoken intensity.

The standing bather at the left also has its origin in an earlier work, appearing as a symbol of lust in *The Temptation of St. Anthony* [fig. 10] of 1869-70. In this unusual conception, contemporary with the writing of Flaubert's famous novel but quite different from its metaphysical spirit, the hermit is dwarfed by four enormous nudes who fill the dark setting. The postures of those in the foreground, none of whom is necessary to the narrative, seem to indicate Cézanne's own mingled feelings of desire and remorse. In the later bather painting [fig. 7], the saint is replaced by a tree whose gesticulating branches convey something of his anguish, though the torsion of the figure beside it has become inexplicable. Nor is this a unique instance: in a slightly later version of *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (V. 241), the nude is seen from the front, her body curving provocatively toward the kneeling saint; in a bather study made a few years after (V. 1288), she stands before a tree at whose base sits a contemplative young man, though again the erotic strain of the original remains in her posture. Indeed, so important was this theme to Cézanne (see also V. 240, 1214, etc.) that Meyer Schapiro was led to ask whether all his women bather

paintings may be considered transpositions of the early *Temptation*.

Intermediate between the violent or passionate images of the 1860s and the first bathers is a series of strange compositions, half genre and half fantasy, done around 1873-5; they are well represented in the Wildenstein exhibition by the so-called *Fantastic Scene* from the White Collection [fig. 11]. Already in 1877 when it was first shown, the critic Georges Rivière who saw it among works by the other Impressionists was struck by its symbolic character: "It is of an astonishing grandeur and a wonderful calm; this scene seems to take place in the memory, as if leafing through its life." Painted during the period of Cézanne's association with Pissarro, it is Impressionist in the activities of the figures, their minuteness in relation to the landscape, and their absorption into the fabric of large paint strokes. But the brilliant and enamel-like colors—emerald green in the trees, pure red in the sailor's shirt—belong less to Impressionism than to Cézanne's visionary conception of the scene.

Around 1875 he began copying extensively after older art, an investigation that continued to the end of his life. Drawing in the Louvre or from engravings, he entered into the closest contact with the masters he admired, learning techniques of representation or construction, but above all forming an ideal of high art. His bathers are the most obvious product of this inspiration—an attempt to equal the older religious or mythological images in terms of a modern secular subject without narrative content. They also contain signs of a more specific inspiration: figures derived from those in the Louvre which he had copied in his sketchbooks. It is often said that Cézanne employed no models for the bathers, either for fear of offending his provincial neighbors in Aix or from fear of the nude women themselves. Although this is not entirely true—in the Wildenstein exhibition there is an oil study (V. 710) obviously done from life—many of his figures are based on copies. Already in the early *Bathers at Rest* [fig. 7], one such figure appears: that at the right derives from the antique sculpture *Hermes Attaching His Sandal*, of which at least one copy—though later than the painting—exists [figs. 8, 9]. (The same figure recurs some thirty years later in the great *Women Bathers* in Philadelphia.)

For the central bather with hands on hips, Cézanne used a photograph of an academic model; it was recently found pasted on the back of one of his drawings, [Continued on page 68]

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music in this vast shell would sound like Disneydämmerung. Wright must have felt that if a man is so dense that he wants any art but Wright's in the museum, he should go downstairs to an elegant little auditorium and hear lectures. Upstairs it is all The Master, until vertigo sets in.

The vulgarity has its grandeur; today museums have become stodgy and banal; empty rectangle to be filled with tasty morsels, over and over again, from India to Amsterdam. It takes Wright's kind of egomania to smash the pattern. Perhaps the idea of a museum will now be thought about again, and as a new concept, not an old palace or standard laboratory with or without chintz.

You leave the museum as Charlie Chaplin left the revolving door, still spinning, around the sales desk, by the columns, out to the sidewalk. There are circles set all over the floors to help you spin. T.B.H.

Cézanne continued from page 29

and also inspired a later version of this figure alone (V. 548). In its four figures, then, the *Bathers at Rest* seems to combine both Cézanne's earlier and later attitudes toward the body: those at the left are more expansive and associated with older erotic fantasies, those at the right more self-contained, their postures deriving from the world of museums and academic models.

Not all the figures in Cézanne's work have such interesting case histories; some reproduce the calm graceful postures of classical sculpture, others are freely invented to complete a rhythm or shape within the composition. Yet it is surprising how often the figures in even his most "constructive" period reveal vestiges of his earliest passionate feelings, though this is perhaps more evident in the works he chose to copy than in his final adaptations. For a sketch of a series of male bathers done around 1890 [fig. 1], the sources of several figures are known: interestingly enough, they are all images of death or dying. The standing bather at the left derives, as John Rewald has shown, from a Signorelli drawing in the Louvre of which Cézanne owned two reproductions; it represents *The Living Carrying the Dead* [fig. 2]. In transposing it, he substitutes a towel for the corpse but retains the enigmatic quality of the burdened man seen from behind. Similarly, the seated bather on the far bank is based on Alonso Cano's *Dead Christ*, which Cézanne copied from an engraving in a history of art he owned; in this transformation he omits the angel supporting Christ but preserves the body's sagging pose. And finally, the standing bather at the right in fig. 1 may be related to Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* in the Louvre—a work Cézanne copied several times, perhaps once from a viewpoint closer to that of the bather than the version reproduced here [figs. 3, 4]. In this adaptation the serpentine flow of the Renaissance work, at once graceful and pathetic, becomes a stiffer, more intense posture. (When Degas used the same figure, which he too had copied, in his *Women Ironing*, he transformed it with characteristic irony into a yawning middle-aged woman.)

The pose itself of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* must have had a particular significance for Cézanne, for it is found in many of his other copies, among them of such favorites as the "Victory" figure in Rubens's *Apotheosis of Henry IV* and the plaster cast, still in his studio, of a flayed man twisting violently with both hands locked behind his head. It occurs also in a painting based on Delacroix's *The Toilet* (V. 254)—perhaps a closer source for the bathers sketch [fig. 1]—and in several other compositions (V. 543, 726, etc.). Although now associated with the tragedy of a struggling or dying figure and seen from a different viewpoint, it is essentially the same pose as that in the early *Bathers at Rest* and in *The Temptation of St. Anthony* considered previously. Whether erotic or tragic in implication—and the two are not easily distinguished in Cézanne's imagery—such a figure clearly belongs to a family of highly expressive types recurring throughout his work, and helps define his attitude toward the significance of bodily states.

It was this intensity of expression that appealed to young artists in the early twentieth century: at once primitive and modern, Cézanne's figures inspired such dissimilar artists as Matisse and Picasso, whose paintings of prostitutes and bathers around 1907 owe a considerable debt to his daring example.

El Greco and Goya continued from page 32

ca. 1570-72, painted either in Venice or more probably in Rome, with the inscription and pedestal at left added by another hand. The latter is deduced from the fact that, with an account of his exploits as commander in defense of Malta against the Turks, it commemorates the sitter's death in 1586. At this time—fifteen years after the portrait was presumably painted—Greco had already been living in Toledo for at least nine years.

During the cleaning of the painting, officials of the Frick state that "once the darkened varnish had been removed, the heavy uneven lettering of the inscription, set off by the light tone of the pedestal, appeared a major disfigurement . . . It was clear that the pedestal was, in this respect, destroying the artist's intention." Instead of the drastic alternative of removing the

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inscription, which at the very earliest was added fifteen years later, an ingenious procedure was employed. It was decided to simply obliterate it by temporary overpaint intended to reconstruct as closely as possible Greco's own surface. Since the X-ray failed to reveal anything other than continuous wall and floor surface, a few soundings were scratched through the pedestal repaint which seemed further to corroborate the color of these areas. On the basis of this the pedestal was painted over [fig. 4] by the Frick's restorer, with attempted reconstructions of the window-shutter and curtain at upper left. From technical examination, the museum decided that the large Maltese cross was also a later addition. "The white pigment of the cross," it was announced, "was clearly superimposed over the original paint film, and interfered with El Greco's highlighting of this area. The same fraternal zeal which permitted the historical inscription to be added would easily have condoned the inclusion of this symbol of the Order." And again it was decided temporarily to paint over the cross a hypothetical reconstruction of El Greco's original paint surface.

Caligula, 1959 continued from page 41

able sin is to commit the fatal *faux pas* of the tightrope dancer. His career should end abruptly for it is in the nature of enchantment to be contained within an interval which detracts attention from work and play, from prayer and sacrifice. The spell of Caligula was brought to an abrupt end when his subjects whom he had turned into his private property ceased to be fascinated. The fool, forever seduced by his own virtuosity is like the giddy driver who forgets that the machine is more than a piece of property and that by following its movement it can kill him.

How deafening is the ensuing silence. The private life of a public figure has come to an end. It is said that poets laid wreaths every year on Nero's tomb: it is said that beatniks sleep with earphones plugged to noise boxes so as to detect the motion of sound. Instead of Dostoevsky's sound of action all that reaches us is noise. For poets who color words or canvas not to be choked by their own verbosity there is a magic filter, but the diviners who know how to make sound pulsate with silence are few. It is said that when Heraclitus was asked to explain action to a group of wise men, he raised his finger several times and then departed.

Biala continued from page 42

is referred to the background and back again. Interstice counterpoints substance. In these paintings color is less subdued than before, the somber tans accented by blues and pinks have given way to open light contrasts; and in general they are neither ambiguous nor is any loose roughness left behind. \$200-\$1,800. E.B.

Zorach continued from page 42

amples of which, along with watercolors and drawings, are in the retrospective. His paintings were influenced, without much sympathy, by the Fauves and Cubism and Gauguin.

In the early 1920s, Zorach became a professional sculptor based on the solicitation of commissions. He had discovered his affinity for direct carving in stone and found those naturalistic figurative forms which are the hallmark of monumental sculpture in this country, and from which his work has not deviated even in his more personal, intimate expressions. His style, he has said, owes most "to the great periods of primitive carving in the past, not to the moderns or to the classical Greeks, but to the Africans, the Persians, the Mesopotamians, the archaic Greeks and, of course, to the Egyptians."

This is true only in the sense that the features of those depersonalized styles were easily useful in accommodating the retrograde taste of patrons. Zorach in the 1930s, modeled two large works in clay to be cast in bronze. *Spirit of the Dance*, a nude female figure, was commissioned for the Radio City Music Hall. First rejected by S. L. Rothafel ("Roxy") as too sexy for his public, it was later accepted when Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery, his dealer for thirty years, exhibited it and caused sufficient protest against Roxy's opinion among artists, critics and collectors that it was installed.

The following year Zorach modeled *Embrace*, a brazen heroic work: a male and female are holding each other in a *yab-yum* position, although the general attitude of the lovers is more grasping than the classic Oriental meditative intercourse. This work has not yet found a buyer, but now that it is on exhibition it could very well find its way into the collection of some Nabob of the Beat Zen sect who is in need of an idol.

Zorach's retrospective shows that he is a journeyman sculptor who has put his considerable energies, techniques and talent into the employment of that handful of dependable sentiments that can be traded among that indifferent public who pay cash and lip service to art that is a likeness of its own Philistine image. H.C.

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