

TEACHERS' RESOURCE

CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS
21 OCT 2010 - 16 JAN 2011



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The Teachers' Resources are intended for use by secondary schools, colleges and teachers of all subjects for their own research. Each essay is marked with suggested links to subject areas and key stage levels. We hope teachers and educators will use these resources to plan lessons, help organise visits to the gallery or gain further insight into the exhibitions at The Courtauld Gallery.

FOR EACH ESSAY SUGGESTED CURRICULUM LINKS ARE MARKED IN GREEN.

To book a visit to the gallery or to discuss any of the education projects at The Courtauld Gallery please contact: education@courtauld.ac.uk
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WELCOME

The Courtauld Institute of Art runs an exceptional programme of activities suitable for young people, school teachers and members of the public, whatever their age or background.

We offer resources which contribute to the understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of art history based upon the world-renowned art collection and the expertise of our students and scholars.

The Teachers' Resources and image CDs have proved immensely popular; my thanks go to all those who have contributed to this success and to those who have given us valuable feedback.

In future we hope to extend the range of resources to include material based on the permanent collection in The Courtauld Gallery which I hope will prove to be both useful and inspiring.

With best wishes,



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Cover image:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Player (detail)
c.1890-92
Oil on canvas
© Musée d'Orsay

This page:
The Card Players (detail)
c.1890-82
Oil on canvas
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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1: CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

Paul Cézanne's famous paintings of peasant card players and pipe smokers have long been considered to be among his most iconic and powerful works. This landmark exhibition, organised by The Courtauld Gallery in London and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is the first to focus on this group of masterpieces. Described by Cézanne's early biographer, Gustav Coquiott, as being "equal to the most beautiful works of art in the world", this is a unique opportunity to enjoy these remarkable paintings in unprecedented depth. The exhibition will bring together the most comprehensive group of these works ever staged, including three of the *Card Players* paintings, five of the most outstanding peasant portraits and examples of the exquisite preparatory drawings, watercolours and oil studies the artist produced. Cézanne's *Card Players* stand alongside his *Bathers* series as the most ambitious and complex figurative works of his career.

The first mention of the *Card Players* series comes in 1891 when the writer Paul Alexis visited Cézanne's studio in Aix-en-Provence and found the artist painting a local peasant from the farm on his estate, the Jas de Bouffan. A number of different farm workers came to sit for him during these years, often smoking their clay pipes. They included an old gardener known as le père Alexandre and Paulin Paulet, who posed as the figure seated on the left in two figure *Card Players* compositions, a task for which he was paid five francs. Cézanne's depictions of card players would prove to be one of his most ambitious projects and occupied him for several years. It resulted in five closely related canvases of different sizes showing men seated at a rustic table playing cards, the exhibition includes two-figure versions from The Courtauld Gallery and The Musée d'Orsay and a more complicated composition from The Metropolitan Museum.

Alongside these he produced a larger number of paintings of the individual farm workers who appear in the *Card Players* compositions.

Cézanne devoted himself to his peasant card players, often repeating his compositions, striving to express the essence of these sun-beaten farm workers

whom he found so compelling. Rather than posing his models as a group playing cards, Cézanne made studies of them individually and only brought them together as opponents on the canvas itself. For him, the local peasants of Aix were the human equivalent of his beloved *Montaigne Sainte-Victoire* that presided over the town – steadfast, unchanging and monumental. As he later put it, "I love above all else the appearance of people who have grown old without breaking with old customs".

Cézanne's card players are not shown as rowdy drinkers and gamblers in the way that, for centuries, peasants had been depicted in rural genre paintings. Rather, they are stoical and completely absorbed in the time-honoured ritual of their game. As the famous English critic Roger Fry wrote in 1927: "It is hard to think of any design since those of the great Italian Primitives... which gives us so extraordinary a sense of monumental gravity and resistance – of something that has found its centre and can never be moved."

The monumentality of the works epitomise Cézanne's stated aim to produce "something solid and durable, like the art of the museums". Appropriately, one of the first works by Cézanne to enter a museum collection was Musée d'Orsay *Card Players*, which was accepted by the Louvre in 1911, five years after the artist's death.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Cézanne's card player and peasant works is that their evocation of unchanging traditions was achieved by pushing the boundaries of painting in radical new directions. Cézanne painted freely and inventively, rendering his peasants through a vibrant patchwork of brushstrokes which animates the surface of the paintings.

For most nineteenth-century viewers Cézanne's technique would have appeared as coarse as his peasant subject matter but the *Card Players* would prove an inspiration to later generations of avant-garde artists. For Pablo Picasso, Cézanne's peasants were a touchstone for his Cubist portraits and their example resonates throughout the twentieth century with particular homages paid to them by artists as diverse as Fernand Léger and Jeff Wall.

The Courtauld Gallery's world-renowned Cézanne collection includes two of the masterpieces from this series, a two-figure version of *The Card Players* and *Man with a Pipe* (see right). The exhibition also includes major loans from international collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which will be the second venue for the exhibition from February 2011.

Cézanne's creation of a relatively large number of preparatory works for the *Card Players* paintings was highly unusual and indicates his commitment to this ambitious series. In preparation for the exhibition, The Courtauld and The Metropolitan Museum collaborated on the first technical research project to look systematically at this group of works. This has shed fresh light on Cézanne's working practice. Most importantly, by examining the extent of underdrawing on each canvas it has challenged established views about the sequence in which he produced the paintings. Whereas it has traditionally been assumed that he worked from the largest paintings to the smallest, gradually simplifying the scenes, it now seems clear that he started the series with the smaller canvases, using them to establish his iconic compositions.

Right:
Man with a Pipe
c.1892–96
Oil on canvas

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS3+
Art and Design, History, Art History,
Sociology, and other Humanities**



EQUAL TO THE MOST
BEAUTIFUL WORKS OF
ART IN THE WORLD...



2: IN THE MAKING

A CLOSE STUDY OF THE PAINTINGS AND REORDERING THE SEQUENCE

Paul Cézanne's five *Card Players* paintings have long been considered as some of his most important and iconic works. The series was a major undertaking and, unusually for the artist, he made a significant number of preparatory works, including drawings, watercolours and oil studies.

There are very few contemporary accounts which illuminate Cézanne's approach to producing his *Card Players* compositions, or indeed that reveal the order in which they were painted. This exhibition has provided a rare opportunity to undertake a technical and scientific study of the materials and techniques Cézanne used in creating these engaging works; one that provides fascinating insights into his unconventional approach to drawing and painting.

Many scholars have thought that Cézanne began with two multi-figure groups before moving on to three paintings that showed only a pair of card players. The multi-figure groups are now in the collection of the Barnes Foundation and the Metropolitan Museum, and the two-figure compositions now belong to the Musée d'Orsay, The Courtauld Gallery and a private collection. In each instance Cézanne was thought to have gradually refined his compositions reducing their scale in order to produce the smaller, simpler canvases.

These judgments – based on stylistic grounds – assumed that Cézanne worked against conventional 19th century painting practice. More usually, artists gradually increased the scale of their compositions. But new evidence suggests that, while still moving from the multi-figure groups to the two-figure versions, Cézanne was perhaps not quite so different to his contemporaries. Like them, it seems, he too worked from smaller to larger works.

IN THE MAKING

Written by Gabriella Macaro, a recent post-graduate diploma student of conservation at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

CURRICULUM LINKS: KS3/4+ Art and Design, Art History, History, Technology and other material sciences..

DRAWING AND PAINTING

Cézanne used farm labourers from his family estate at the Jas de Bouffan in Aix-en-Provence to model for his *Card Players* paintings. Interestingly, however, none of the studies show them arranged as a group. It is likely, then, that Cézanne posed his models separately and brought them together as pairings and groups, working freely on the actual canvases.

Cursory preparatory drawing in pencil or charcoal is visible beneath the paint layers of the finished *Card Players* paintings when they are viewed under infrared light (fig. 1).

This reveals that the artist did not rely solely on pencil strokes to outline his compositions; more often he painted lines with a brush to map out the initial contours. Frequently blue ultramarine paint served for this purpose. Cézanne then filled in the spaces with thicker patches of colour. Traces of this painted drawing are sometimes visible in gaps between forms (fig. 2).

Occasionally – even in the final stages of the painting process – Cézanne reinforced a line to emphasise or exaggerate a contour. This was a highly unconventional way of working in the 19th-century when, more typically, artists disguised all traces of drawn lines in their finished paintings.

Cézanne also made revisions on the canvas, as is seen by comparing the pencil underdrawing for the left-hand figure in the Metropolitan Museum's *Card Players* (fig. 3) with the preparatory watercolour study of this figure (fig. 4).

Initially, Cézanne drew the bottom of the sitter's jacket lower down the thigh, with the edge of the jacket curving up towards the torso. This outline matches the curve of the jacket in the watercolour study (fig. 4), but he decided to change its length and shape at a later stage.

However, at other times, the artist seems to have been less confident. The pencil lines marking out this sitter's fingers and knuckle are vague; this could be from the lack of detail on the equivalent hand in a study which may have served as a guide. Sometimes, when an area

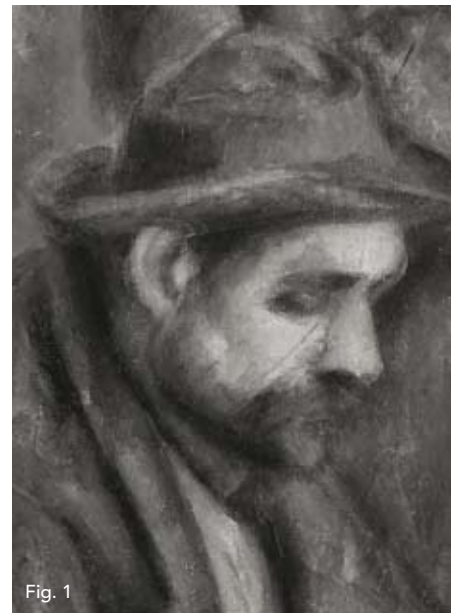


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1+3:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Players (IR detail) c.1890–92
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

THIS EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY PICTURE MIGHT NOT BE THE FINAL WORK OF THIS GROUP OF CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS, AS WAS THOUGHT PREVIOUSLY, BUT RATHER THE FIRST.



proved particularly challenging, Cézanne may have made an additional study before embarking on a new *Card Players* composition.

RE-THINKING THE SEQUENCE

The artist's under-drawing and his use of the individual figure drawings and watercolours challenges conventional ideas about the order in which the *Card Players* canvases were made. The hands and cards of the figure in a blue smock in the Metropolitan Museum's *Card Players*, a work usually thought to post-date the Barnes canvas, for example, are entirely incomplete: a problem that may have prompted him to produce a watercolour (fig. 5) in an attempt to resolve the issue.

Interestingly, in the Barnes canvas, the detail did not seem to cause Cézanne a problem, which may suggest that he produced the Metropolitan painting at the very outset of the series, before progressing to a larger composition.

Moving on to the two-figure paintings, infrared images of pencil underdrawing beneath the paint layers of the Musée d'Orsay picture indicate that Cézanne worked out its composition in pencil to a much greater extent than in The Courtauld Gallery version. The latter work shows only loose painted lines beneath the concluding paint layers, perhaps because he had already practiced this arrangement of figures on previous occasions. This evidence suggests that the Musée d'Orsay picture might not be the final work of this group of Cézanne's *Card Players*, as was thought previously, but rather the first.

Fig 2:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Players (detail)
c.1892–96 © The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Fig. 4:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Player c.1890–92 Private Collection
(on loan to Art Institute Chicago).

Fig. 5
Paul Cézanne
Card Player in a Blue Smock c.1890–92
© Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of
Design, Providence.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

3: CÉZANNE IN SERIES

ON CONCERNS OF CURATING

The idea of a 'series' in its most intuitive form suggests having a certain group of things in a particular order. Applied to groups of paintings, a series may be determined by chronology, by theme, by subject matter, by technique, cultural or monetary value, by the context in which the painter or painters existed and always by a certain kind of looking with hindsight on the part of curators of collections and exhibition makers. The decision about the place of the start and finish of a series of paintings is to a greater or lesser extent informed by looking backwards; we can turn backwards and look at an artist's career, at a cultural moment or an historical era and determine the reasons why Cézanne's compositions of peasant card players constitute a significant and discrete series. Similarly, looking at works of art in series with modern eyes – those accustomed to busy museums, monographic exhibitions and abundant photographs of cultural treasures – raises other questions about the cultural worth of each version individually, as indicative of a wider trend or indeed in comparison to other versions, and about the notions of an 'original', 'copy', 'best' or 'most valuable'.

The Courtauld's Cézanne's *Card Players* exhibition is the first and most comprehensive instance where Paul Cézanne's famous paintings of peasant card players and pipe smokers, long dispersed but considered to be among his most iconic and powerful works, are brought together. Informed by The Courtauld's own *Card Player* painting, the exhibition showcases a second, wider series that includes closely related portraits of French peasants, watercolours and drawings; evidence that Cézanne showed an interest in documenting country life that was broader than just gamblers and gamers.

Specifically, what makes the *Card Player* paintings a distinct series for us today is the temporal proximity and comparable style of their painting. But there is more than one way to consider the reasons why the artist created this series: as documentation of the rural reality of Provençal life; as an appropriate format for the exercise of a distinct style of painterly mark-making developed over a relatively short period of time; and as a response or contribution



Image:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Players
Oil on Canvas

Top:
47cm x 56cm
c.1892–96
© Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Middle:
60cm x 73cm
c.1892–96
© The Courtauld Gallery

Bottom:
97cm x 130cm
c. 1892–96
Private Collection.
(NOT EXHIBITED)

CÉZANNE PUSHED HIS PAINTING IN NEW DIRECTIONS - SOMETHING THAT WOULD HAVE APPEARED SO COARSE TO THE 19TH CENTURY VIEWER BUT IS VERY DIFFERENTLY RECEIVED TODAY



to the canon of artists, both to his predecessors and to his contemporaries, who produced genre scenes of this subject matter.

CAPTURING THE REALITY OF RURAL LIFE

Cézanne painted at least five versions of the *Card Players* in Aix en Provence, France, between 1890 and 1896. The artist enlisted local farmhands to serve as models; a number of such men visited the artist's studio during these years, often smoking their clay pipes. Cézanne made lots of individual studies for which he would offer a small fee, often repeating and reworking his compositions, treating seriously in paint the reasons he finds the people so compelling, centred and stoical. The idea for a specific series of card players within this, however, was probably in part planted on sight of a seventeenth century painting of the same theme from the studio of the Le Nain brothers that was in an art museum in Aix. The strange and contemporary Romantic taste for the carnival of clowns and harlequins probably also left a mark on Cézanne in his pursuit of painting rural French life.

It was an ambitious project, drawing together the studies he had already made in Aix, and was to occupy him for several years. Cézanne refrained from studying the peasants in groups, carefully stabilizing, detaching and variously composing them only on the final canvas, possibly to preserve the air of quiet steadfastness he found so interesting in their real-life characters. Some are cooler, some more intensely studying the hands they have been dealt.

The *Card Player* paintings vary in scale and complexity but all are formally based around men playing cards while seated at a simple, unadorned table. The series can be seen to be motivated by a single and (at least for several years) continual preoccupation with a paring away of the extraneous details of the theme to get to the core of the subject, achieved bit by bit in each successive rendition. This idea of the artist as genius, fixating on a subject and painting version after version until satisfied rings true with the way that the Impressionists are viewed today, as experimental individuals whose lives and art became two strands of the same existence. But Cézanne's relationship with the breakaway group was a complex one - earlier in his career (1864 - 1869) he had continued to submit his work to the official Salon and saw it consistently rejected.

TECHNIQUE

It is clear that the human element was at the forefront of Cézanne's preoccupation with painting the pipe-smoking peasants at Aix, but the technical aspect of his work forms part of our consideration of the *Card Player* compositions as a distinct series. He was certainly very concerned with compositional symmetry, planes and gradations of colour in his aim for a solidity of form for the peasants he studied in Aix. Thus the works can be read as architecture of verticals and horizontals, as an exploration of volume and colour - sharply delineated triangles contrast with softer

surfaces. In the Musée d'Orsay version of the theme, a pair of figures composition, a distinctly visible bottle marks the centre of a symmetrically balanced canvas. Indeed, the artist imagined the figures as naturally symmetrical with identical roles - each is the other's partner in an agreed opposition - but expressed also their separateness. The fact remains that these are not abstractions but peasant card players in his native Provence - the sheer veracity of his study of facial planes was probably due to the kinship he felt with those solid countrymen he portrayed. In the flux of shapes, Cézanne avoided a piecemeal rigidity that could have characterised two or more figures looking at their cards, instead making them legibly human. It is this inventiveness of colour and form that adds to the sense of contemplativeness that pervades this specific series.

FOLLOWING A PRECEDENT

This contemplative nobility is rare in the more light-hearted or moralising seventeenth century paintings of the same theme that seem to be more or less informed by the zeitgeist of the time in which they were made. In seventeenth century Italy, France and the Netherlands, paintings of peasant scenes began to take on a new character, with an emphasis on carousing, drinking and smoking. They were made popular by Caravaggio's appealing cardshacks. Peasants were presented engaged in crude, dishonest and vulgar activities; in a disreputable game of cards, an enticing woman or young artful-Dodger type cheats the hand of an unwitting man in order to steal his money or possessions.

However, one reason for Cézanne's more noble approach may have been that he was keen to join this tradition of picture making that he had become familiar with in museum collections - the Le Nain brothers picture to name one. Certainly, the significance of the preparatory and accompanying studies made during Cézanne's time in Aix and on show in The Courtauld exhibition is testament to Cézanne's commitment to the project. The ambitious undertaking of a series in particular means that his contribution can be seen in a continuum with these well-regarded works from history. Appropriately, one of the first works by Cézanne to enter a museum collection was *The Card Players* (now in the Musée d'Orsay) which was accepted by the Louvre in 1911, five years after the death of the artist. Not only then, is the concept of Cézanne's series informed by the hindsight of exhibition makers and museum visitors today, but was in part determined by Cézanne's desire to shape his own legacy. Similarly, Cézanne's card player series would become a touchstone for twentieth century artists.

IN SERIES

The series continues to be revisited and reevaluated by art historians and museum professionals. Recent technical research has shed light on the order in which Cézanne painted his card player compositions, taking into consideration the extent of underdrawing on the canvasses and the way in which Cézanne progressively pushed

CÉZANNE IN SERIES

Written by Rebecca Newell, a recent graduate of the MA: Curating the Art Museum at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+
Art and Design, History, Media, Art History and other humanities.

his painting in new directions - something that would have appeared so coarse to the nineteenth century viewer but is very differently received today. Moreover, on a more museological point, the bringing together of works perhaps or perhaps not intended by the artist to be systematically shown side by side informs the kinds of judgments made by viewers of the exhibition.

It is important to acknowledge the limits of describing Cézanne's works as a distinct series in an exhibition format. It could limit the viewer's capacity for wider association and it is inevitable that there is room for creation, subjectivity and even misjudgment in telling the story that can reinvigorate, renew but also change the story of art history; it may be further rewritten in time. It is also difficult in the exhibition context to disregard modern considerations of value and comparative quality that entered the equation very differently in the late nineteenth century. The very fact that Cézanne may have been attempting to actively contribute to an established artistic motif is quite foreign to our contemporary notion of originality in art and this is why there is necessarily an amount of looking backwards that needs to be done by viewers as well as exhibition makers and the artist himself - Cézanne was breaking new ground with his series. Yet the idea of a series continues to interest art historians, academics, museum professionals and -goers alike.

The exhibition of Cézanne's card players constructs a picture of the artist's work and working practice in Aix, and reveals something about the position of such subjects in his and our own society. It also reflects longer passions of collecting in the story of The Courtauld collection and in time will be the record for new ground forged, research undertaken, an artist better understood and exhibition taste in 2010. We in turn appropriate the past as the artist reused and reworked past tradition, thus forming one long cultural chain. Understanding this means that the body of discourse about the series and explorative exhibitions like that at The Courtauld Gallery will continue to make the card player series relevant to our own cultural framework.



Image:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Players
Oil on Canvas

Top:
65.4cm x 81.9cm
c.1890-92
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Bottom:
134cm x 181.5cm
c.1890-92
© The Barnes Foundation, Pennsylvania
(NOT EXHIBITED)

IT IS IMPORTANT
TO ACKNOWLEDGE
THE LIMITS OF
DESCRIBING
CÉZANNE'S WORKS
AS A DISTINCT SERIES
IN AN EXHIBITION
FORMAT.



4: CÉZANNE FOR ENGLAND

ROGER FRY AND THE INTRODUCTION OF MODERN ART TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

'Modern art' is a phrase that gets a lot of use in conversation, but when it comes to art history, 'modern' is a tricky word: when does 'modern' start? What defines 'modern' art? These questions are often subjects for debate, and there are many answers to them, but one name that comes up frequently when people talk about modern art is Paul Cézanne.

Specifically, Cézanne is often mentioned as a key figure in the transition from a traditional-minded, backward-looking style of art practice into an era where artists actively experimented with different techniques and drew inspiration from the visual influences they saw around them. Vincent van Gogh collected Japanese wood block prints, one of which you can see in his *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* in the Courtauld Gallery. Henri Rousseau—whose *Toll Gate* is also in the Courtauld collection—painted without any formal art training.

These artists, and many others at the end of the nineteenth century, were trying to make art that very intentionally avoided the longstanding tradition of using painstakingly-practiced methods to create illusionistic paintings that looked as true to life as possible. Instead, they wanted the colours and shapes in their work to convey emotion in their own right, without needing to combine into, for example, a human face showing a pre-determined expression.

Cézanne was the king of this movement in art. He hated the idea of painting the same way people had painted before him, and worked hard to make his art different. 'I have to work all the time,' he wrote in a letter, 'not to reach that final perfection which earns the admiration of imbeciles... And this thing which is commonly appreciated so much is merely craftsmanship and renders all work resulting from it inartistic and common.'

The 'thing' he is referring to is the sort of painting being done by artists like William-Adolphe Bouguereau, who painted *Amor and Psyche, Children* in 1890 (see right), working in the artistic style that had been encouraged by the great art Academies around Europe for several hundred years.

Cézanne, even early in his career before

his 1890s series of *Card Players*, stayed as far away from traditional representation as he could. But that certainly did not mean that he was celebrated as a visionary right from the start. During his lifetime, his shows were often met with mocking commentary and even public laughter. He was still stirring up controversy several decades after his death when the National Gallery was deciding what sort of art it wanted to collect and show to the British public. In 1914, when one National Gallery trustee heard about the intention to acquire some modern French paintings by artists including Cézanne for the nation, his reaction was that he 'should as soon expect to hear of a Mormon service being conducted in St. Paul's Cathedral as to see an exhibition of the works of the modern French Art-rebels in the sacred precincts of Trafalgar Square'. Clearly, Cézanne's work did not please everyone.

There was one man in particular, however, who always believed in and loved Cézanne's art, even when his was practically the lone supporting voice in a sea of naysayers. This was the man who championed Cézanne's work and was largely responsible for the fact that by the 1930s, Britain had come to appreciate the important role Cézanne played in the transition from the art of the nineteenth century to the art of the twentieth. The man who kept on stubbornly insisting on his devotion to this one artist's work was Roger Fry.



Fry himself was something of a maverick. He was an art critic, a curator, an art



Above
William-Adolphe Bouguereau
Amor and Psyche, Children
1890
Private Collection

Left:
Roger Fry
Self Portrait
1928
Oil on canvas

historian, and an artist himself, and he worked as part of the Bloomsbury Group, where truth to one's own ideas and feelings was the most important principle of all, even if those ideas and feelings were highly unpleasant to other people. This group of intellectuals included writers like Virginia Woolf, artists like Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell (Virginia Woolf's sister), and art critics like Clive Bell (Vanessa's husband) and Roger Fry, and all of these people listened to and assisted each other in their work wherever possible. When Fry decided that young artists needed the chance to earn a living wage, both Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant worked with him to found the Omega Workshops, where artists could produce and sell all sorts of objects. When he was included, along with Clive Bell, in the selection committee for the Contemporary Art Society in 1910, he was determined to bring to Britain work by all the exciting new Continental artists whose styles he found so influential on the modern art movement.

In just the same way Cézanne had wanted to shake France out of its traditionalist artistic mindset, Fry wanted to do the same in Britain, but instead of making his own art as a communication tool, he wanted to use Cézanne's. He had first seen Cézanne's painting in 1906, and it made such a strong impression that, even though Cézanne was merely one artist in a group of Post-Impressionist painters (a rather non-specific term coined by Fry that literally refers to art that was made after Impressionism) whose work Fry wanted shown in Britain, Fry's particular focus on Cézanne became a hallmark of his career.

It was Roger Fry who organised the first major British exhibition of modern European art, 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', which included a good number of Cézanne paintings, and which prompted Virginia Woolf to write, 'On or about December 1910, human character changed'. Public and critical opinion both gave this show a severe drubbing and dragged Fry's own reputation down into

the gutter. Perhaps the added personal insult strengthened Fry's resolve to promote these artists even further, as we will see he most assuredly did.

In the 19teens and 1920s, the museum that would become the Tate Britain (then called the National Gallery of British Art, not to be confused with the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square) was looking to start up a collection of modern European painting. The controversy over what should be included was ongoing. 'When a few years ago pictures by Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh were first shown in London they were taken for bad jokes,' said one art writer for The Times in 1918. By 1921, Gauguin and Van Gogh, while not universally admired, were included in art purchases and chosen to hang on gallery walls for the public to see. Cézanne, however, was not.

A letter writing war was waged in the papers for a few months in 1921, between the pro- and anti-Cézanne movers and shakers of the art world. Much of the criticism toward the artist in these letters mirrors the main charge that was often thrown at him: that he was a technically unskilled painter whose images looked the way they did, not by stylistic choice, but because he could do no better. *The Card Players* paintings, for example, are full of odd, unnatural proportions and roughly added areas of paint.

Those who saw value in Cézanne's revolutionary techniques (most especially including Roger Fry), took the artist's statements at face value when he talked about using colour and form to express his inner vision instead of merely mimicking the scenes in front of him. Fry praised Cézanne effusively, saying of *The Card Players*, that "it is hard to think of any design since those of the great Italian Primitives [the movement leading up to and encompassing the early years of the Italian Renaissance] ... which gives us so extraordinary a sense of ... something that has found its centre and can never be moved, as this does ... This



Top:
Roger Fry
Poster for 'Manet and the
Post-Impressionists' exhibition.
1910
Ink on paper

Left:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Players
c.1892-96
Oil on canvas
© The Courtauld Gallery

TODAY THE BATTLE IS WON — TRIUMPHANTLY WON! CÉZANNE HAD TO LIVE DOWN THE MOST DETERMINED OPPOSITION AND IS NOW REGARDED AS CLASSIC



little café becomes for us, in Cézanne's transmutation, an epic scene in which gestures and events take on a Homeric ease and amplitude."

Cézanne's style was new and different, even compared to the Impressionist friends and colleagues from the early phases of his career. While they still aimed to paint the appearance of the world around them augmented by its atmosphere and associated feelings, Cézanne relied much less on the actual way things look. If he wanted to emphasise the monumental qualities and solid respectability in his *Card Players* paintings, then he was perfectly willing to sacrifice accurate proportions between the figures' heads, bodies, and limbs to do it.

Thinking about Fry and the Bloomsbury Group and the importance they placed on openness and truth in expression, is it any wonder that Cézanne, a French artist whose visual style mirrored the British friends' intellectual ideals, was so strongly embraced by Fry and his companions?

The great moment of vindication for Cézanne and his fans came with a 1922 exhibition put on by the Burlington Fine Arts Club (and partly organised by Roger Fry) about the previous 100 years of French painting. Relatively little of the traditional work by artists like Bouguereau was displayed, and, despite the Burlington's reputation for being quite elite and traditional itself, they included more paintings by Cézanne than by any other artist. The critical reception of these pieces was overall positive, and Fry, reviewing the show for the *New Statesman*, went on so rapturously about Cézanne (and so righteously, too, about how everyone who had put down Cézanne's work in the past were now sure to see the error of their ways, and also sure to see, of course, how right Fry had been all along) that he ran out of room to cover other aspects of the show, and had to sum up Degas' work with not much more than, *'This is Degas almost at his best.'*

It was this landmark 1922 show that proved to the art world that Fry, no matter how argumentative he may have been in his writings and letter campaigns

(argumentative being a kind word compared to some of the scathing insults offered by those whose opinions differed from Fry's own), had also been directly on target about the seminal importance of Cézanne's work in the development of that tricky category we call 'modern art'. Samuel Courtauld had his eyes opened to Cézanne's appeal at that Burlington show, writing that, *'At that moment I felt the magic, and I have felt it in Cézanne's work ever since'*, and going on the very next year to start building what would become an impressive and varied collection of Cézanne pieces, many of which are now on display in the Courtauld Gallery.

Courtauld also gifted the Tate with £50,000 to purchase modern works of art for the British public, stipulating that he himself would have approval over the choices, and adding Cézanne's name to the list of artists whose paintings should be especially sought out. Fry and Courtauld both contributed concretely to the status that Cézanne held in the eye of the British public, and when, only ten years after the Burlington show, another French art retrospective was held at the Royal Academy, this one covering the time span from 1200–1900, it included a great deal of the modernists (including one of *The Card Players*) and none of the Bouguereau-esque traditional academic painters.

Writing about that 1932 show, one reviewer summed up the British battle over Cézanne by saying: *This was but little more than twenty years ago [that the 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' show was put on at Grafton Gallery], and yet I think it is almost completely forgotten with what volleys of hostile criticism that exhibition was received ... Today the battle is won—triumphantly won ... Cézanne ... had to live down the most determined opposition and ... [is] now regarded as classic.*

What a change in Cézanne's reputation in such a relatively short time period. As seems to be the case fairly often, the artist himself, dead in 1906, was never around to see his great fame and success. However, the list of modern artists who have credited Cézanne as an inspiration is extensive and includes some famous names: Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Piet Mondrian, and, probably the single most famous modern artist, Pablo Picasso.

By breaking away from the traditional use of form and colour, Cézanne paved the way for just the sort of abstract, expressive works that come to many people's minds when someone says 'modern art'. By sticking to his beliefs and being constantly willing to take criticism for his honesty, Roger Fry went a long way to bringing Cézanne's vision into general acceptance. And by comparing two Cézanne painting sales, one for the equivalent of £16 in 1890 and one for over £23,000,000 in 2006, we can see how that general acceptance has without a doubt lifted Cézanne up to rank with today's most coveted artists.



right:
Roger Fry
Copy after a self-portrait by Cézanne
1925
Oil on cardboard

CÉZANNE FOR ENGLAND

Written by Rachel Ropeik, recent graduate from The Courtauld Institute of Art and current gallery educator.

CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+
Art and Design, History, Art History and other Humanities.

5: THE FLICKER OF MODERN LIGHT

CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS AND EARLY CINEMA

On the evening of the 28th of December 1895, the basement of the Grand Café in Paris temporarily transformed into the world's first cinema. The aptly named Lumière brothers, whose scenes seemed to 'unfold before the camera rather like a microbotic organism under a biologist's microscope', presented *Sortie d'usine*, a short film showing men and women leaving a factory, streaming out of their workplace into the daylight. A moment of modern life, framed and recorded for an audience's pleasure, applied Charles Beaudelaire's enthusiasm for the Impressionist ability to capture the flicker of modernity in a revolutionary new way. In his 1863 *The Painter of Modern Life*, Beaudelaire praised a painter's ability to quickly and wittily observe his urban surroundings, taking a group of men talking animatedly, a man's glance at a woman at a concert or the thick application of cosmetics and fashion accessories as ideal subjects for new works of art. In the early 1890s when film technology was developing to the extent that it became possible to record and subsequently project a moving image, it was ordinary life that, like so much of the Impressionist painters of the 1870s and 80s, attracted the camera's gaze: trains pulling into stations, a family feeding a baby, or a small group gathered around a table to smoke and play cards were all acted out for the first cinema audiences to consume.

Between 1890 and 1896, just as the earliest films were being produced and shown, Paul Cézanne was in Provence painting a series of works exploring the theme of card-playing and peasant everyday life. In these works, perceived since their production as among his best, Cézanne challenged perceptions of how rural working individuals should be presented to an audience. Like the Lumières and their contemporaries such as Georges Méliès, he defied convention and broke with tradition by engaging directly with it. It can be said of both Cézanne's painting and the earliest cinema that their history is 'the history of a new art'. Richard Shiff has recently suggested that Cézanne's use of light is evocative of the flicker of film, but as yet there has been no sustained investigation of the connections between the first years of film and Cézanne's 1890s work.

The Courtauld Gallery's exhibition of

Cézanne's *Card Players* series offers an opportunity to consider their context and focus on their material qualities. Playing cards was a common theme in French painting prior to the 1890s, and both Cézanne and film-makers such as Georges Méliès took a new and fascinating approach to the subject. Instead of focusing on card games as a respectable bourgeois pursuit or a setting for rowdy tavern drunkenness, the painter and the film-maker used the game as a metaphor for timelessness and illusion. Card games and the materiality of cards themselves became a vehicle for exploring flatness and surface, the narrative aspects of game-playing (a round of cards, like a film-reel and a painter's process, has a beginning, middle, and end), and the nature of display and public leisure.

Through this double lens of card-playing in the earliest French films and Cézanne's Provence pictures, we can consider the connections between the *Card Players* series and the first films as avant-garde creative experimentation that challenged and blurred the boundaries of public and private experience. They are fleeting, flickering attractions, displaying the public and its habits back to itself in order to transform perception. The result, in the case of both Cézanne's 1890s peasant pictures and Georges Méliès' films, can be categorized as a '*collective solitaire*', occupying a middle ground between public spectacle and private experience.

Cézanne's oversized and distinct brushstrokes, evident in works such as *The Card Players* from 1890-92, raise the viewer's awareness about the image's construction and process. Shiff suggests that this is mark-making as a response to a '*succession of momentary sensations*'. The labour of painting is as visible in this series as the labourer status of its sitters. Albeit a metropolitan one, Eric Rhodes identified cinema in the 1890s as a working-class attraction, '*more likely to lose your fortune than to make it. It hovered between life and death in the nether-world of the fair-ground, the second-class music hall, the beer garden, the penny arcades...*' In these rural and urban worlds where spectacle and the ordinary met, early cinema at the advent of post-Impressionist art negotiated between display and narrative.



Above:
Paul Cézanne
Man in a Blue Smock
c. 1892-97
Oil on canvas
© Kimbell Art Museum, Texas

MÉLIÈS' EARLY WORK RECEIVES LITTLE SCHOLARLY ATTENTION, BUT THE FILM MAKER'S BEGINNINGS ARE CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTANDING THE PRIORITIES OF EARLY CINEMA



The cinematic and painterly gesture was one of constructing and displaying a moment of public life back to the public which creates and maintains its structures of labour and pleasure. Early cinema, as Tom Gunning has noted, attracted viewers' attention by arousing 'a curiosity that is satisfied by surprise rather than narrative suspense.' Méliès' 'rapidly juxtaposed jolts of activity' are 'a collage of immediate experiences' wherein an assemblage of imagery and series of gestures takes precedence over the unfolding of a story.

Either as an accident of primitive optical technology, or as a deliberate compositional ploy, one of the ways to procure surprise in the earliest film was through disorientation. Distortion and a refusal to conform spaces to a physical logic characterizes much of Cézanne's work in the 1890s, including the *Card Players* and associated studies. This distortion is a deliberate mechanism, problematising spatial relationships in order to create new methods of conveying visual experience.

Cézanne's *Card Players* surfaces appear disorientated, rough and awkward; their synthesis of statuesque modeling and skewed perspective give them a quality of flatness. His work is all surface and texture, focusing on the alternation of light and dark tones to create the elusive, flickering visual quality common to each of the images in the Courtauld exhibition. This atmospheric flatness and persistent oscillation has cinematic parallels, and it is particularly in Méliès' use of card-games that the negotiation between surface and perspective playfully comes to the fore. Georges Méliès began making films in 1896. He made over 80 in that year alone, and would go on to produce 500 more. Paul Hammond argues that Méliès was exceptionally aware of 'the validity of the heightened, autonomous image,' developing this into a general belief that, 'the independence of the isolated image and its ability to shock and astound has implications for any critical

conception of the cinema.' Méliès' early work receives little scholarly attention, but the film-maker's beginnings are crucial to understanding the priorities of early cinema and the ties that pull it into a productive comparison with contemporary painting practices and subjects. As Méliès trained first as a magician and entertained at the Robert-Houdin Theatre in Paris, Méliès was especially drawn to spectacle and trickery in his film conception and direction. This is clearest in his most famous works, *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1901) and *Voyage to the Moon* (1902). Méliès' film debut was, however, a Lumière-like reel of three men playing cards. *Playing Cards* (1896) features a table open to the viewer around which three men are seated outdoors, drinking and smoking as they play their hand.



Interrupted by the delivery of a newspaper, they laugh together and carry on their game. As in the Met's version of Cézanne's *Card Players*, the three men are a unit, tied together by the game, but they are not hermetically sealed in their play against the outside world. Rather, they are observed by a fourth figure who stands behind, his belonging and quasi-exclusion enforced by the rack of four pipes on the wall by the curtain to the right. The curtain, suggestive of theatre and Old Master painting traditions, is tied together as though it has just been drawn back, revealing the game-playing scene. So too does the bond of the card round open itself to our gaze and the welcome interruption of the newspaper in Méliès' first work.

Above right:
George Méliès
Playing Cards
1896
Film still

Right:
Paul Cézanne
The Card Players
c.1890-92
Oil on canvas
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

THE FLICKER OF MODERN LIGHT

Written by Ayla Lepine, visiting lecturer at The Courtauld Institute of Art

A full set of footnotes and academic references for this essay are available on request.

CURRICULUM LINKS: KS5+ English Literature, Art and Design, History, Art History, Film History and Media Studies.



As his cinematic style became increasingly illusionistic and magical, Méliès' preoccupation with card games and the cards themselves returned as a regular motif throughout his substantial oeuvre. *The Living Playing Cards* (1904) features Méliès as a magician on a small music hall-style stage. His first task is to increase the size of a playing card, stretching it to life-size and then setting it up as a central portal on the stage. He then invites the Queen of Hearts to emerge, conjuring her out of her paper frame.



Miraculously, a woman dressed as a playing card queen regally proceeds from the flat confines of the card-portal. In the final scene, Méliès walks through the card, demonstrating its double status as mere paper and the site of magical creativity and delight. The flatness of both card and screen are juxtaposed with the animated movement of figures across the camera's mechanical eye, and the everyday simplicity of a pack of cards and its stock characters takes on new dimensions with surprising and entertaining results.

In Méliès' drawing of a scene from *The Lilliputian Minuet* (1905), the artist's magician persona holds up a series of oversized playing cards on a card table in another theatre space. One curtain in the background is tied back, but the further curtain is still drawn, suggesting that we are privileged viewers of a spectacular behind the scenes event to which the theatre's audience is not invited. Here, the solitary magician aloofly releases the animated royal figures from their cards, as king of diamonds joins hands with the queen of spades.



This is a game of solitaire, which the film audience observes much in the same way that the fourth standing figure in the Met *Card Players* looks on at the game unfolding in front of him, mirroring the viewer's own experience of the picture.

In each of Cézanne's *Card Players* images, the viewer is drawn in to the action of the game and led to consider the meaning of the cards themselves. We find parallels between the small paper cards passed from

hand to hand in the succession of rounds, the network of peasants in small rural communities and Cézanne's involvement in that social network, and the materiality of mere paint, canvas and cards, flat surfaces which, when animated by purpose and social interaction, gain and proclaim meaning.

One of the most important meanings conveyed in these films and images connected by game-playing is the nature of social relationships and the place of interactivity in attractions. Gunning observed that '*film lies between drama and narrative: going to the movies is something more private than the theatre and more public than reading a novel. A film is shown in public, a performance for the public, but the performers are not [present] before the public, we are not exactly in their company. Nor are we exactly alone.*'

Occupying a darkened cinema together is a communal act. The participants are together alone, each individually entertained and engaged and through the corporate act of looking, they are bound together in mutual experience. So too is the experience of visitors to a gallery to view an exhibition. Moreover, it is possible to go beyond the boundary of the frame and the screen, considering social relations displayed to the public in Méliès' *Playing Cards* (1896) and Cézanne's *Card Players* (1890-92). Meyer Schapiro believed that Cézanne's card players are markedly different from other French pictures of the same topic because they are devoid of the '*drama of rival expectations*' and are not '*convivial and loud*'. Méliès' players, while boisterous, also do not appear to be invested in the competitive aspects of their game, and seem to have an awareness of playing for the camera's pleasure and the viewer's desire to experience the rapid dimming and brightening of film rather than the mere observation of a familiar card game scene. Card playing is a social activity which, in the artistic invocations described above in film and painting, allows its participants to remain solitary.

As in all of the works involving playing cards in Méliès and Cézanne's output, the game with its suggestion of timeless tradition and endless hands or rounds to play is a metaphor for the routine encounters of French social networks and interactivity both in labour and leisure. Most importantly however, the cards hint at the independent agency of the artist and film-maker magician, serving as a way of proclaiming what Schapiro calls '*a kind of collective solitaire*'.

KEY IDEAS

Surface and painting techniques
Film technology and cinematography
Narrative and visual story-telling
Leisure, labour and the everyday
Social relations and public audiences
Magic and illusion
Display in art and exhibitions

FURTHER READING:

Richard Abel (ed.), *Silent Film* (London: Athlone, 1999).
Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1995).
Michael Doran (ed.), *Conversations with Cézanne* (London: University of California Press, 2001).
John Fraser, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979).
Paul Hammond, *Marvellous Méliès* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1974).
Terence Maloon (ed.), *Classic Cézanne* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1998).
Gerald Mast, *A Short History of the Movies* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1981).
Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* (New York: Abrams, 1988).

Screenings of some of the short films mentioned in this essay will take place in the gallery during the late events on Oct 28, Nov 25 2010 and Jan 13 2011. Most films are also viewable on youtube.

Top:
George Méliès
The Living Playing Cards
1904
Film still

Bottom:
George Méliès
The Lilliputian Minuet
1905
Graphite on paper
[In Paul Hammond *Marvellous Méliès*, 1974]

6: A HARMONY PARALLEL WITH NATURE

MUSIC HISTORY AND CÉZANNE'S PAINTING

In the far right of Gustave Courbet's celebrated *After Dinner at Ornans*, 1849, his friend the violinist Alphonse Promayat sits, with instrument tucked under his chin. Courbet's canvas of himself, his father, and friends relaxing in an ordinary village house in the French countryside compares with Cézanne's series of five paintings of card players and the associated figure studies. Rustic furniture, distempered walls, country overcoats and weatherproof hats, clay pipes – the works by both artists recall a history of genre painting, to *Le Nain* for Cézanne, and Murillo and seventeenth century Spain for Courbet. Yet I would argue that it is Courbet and Cézanne that have more in common: in neither *After Dinner at Ornans* nor Cézanne's studies of farm workers in Aix can we be sure of the relationship between the figures. The opaque features in Cézanne, the introspective expression of Promayat, dreamy gaze of Courbet, and his father's soporific slump: each figure occupies his own space, itself shadowy and ambiguous. Engrossed in their own worlds these characters are resistant to our attempts to unlock them. Both artists refused convention and tradition, yet in these rural subjects both propagate timeless traditions which appear apart from the ever-impinging spread of modernity.

For Courbet, we know that rural life involved music, that Promayat would accompany the artist and his sisters in 'country songs, poor in rhythm, yet with exquisite sentiment.' Anecdotaly, Vollard remembered Cézanne's 'enthusiasm' for Courbet, a copy of whose other great regional canvas, *Burial at Ornans*, 1849, hung in his studio during the 1890s – the time of the card player works. But where does this leave Cézanne's attitude to music?

Vollard says little on music beyond explaining that Cézanne favoured the hurdy-gurdy or the boulevards music of Aix – music of rural folk traditions expressive of place. Whilst not misleading, other contemporaries record a more expansive, if inconclusive appreciation. Lawrence Gowing referenced Cézanne's admiration of Weber, and Emile Bernard remembered having Cézanne for dinner, where a domestic piano recital returned him to his youth. Bernard continued 'music meant

nothing to Cézanne', whose early interest in Wagner was not aesthetic. But Cézanne clearly was affected by music. In a letter he complained that the organ playing of the new Abbé made him 'hurt' so badly he could not endure Mass. Moreover, alongside an approach to Cézanne's music which seeks comparison in a revival of interest in regional culture, it is illuminating to consider the frequent recourse of contemporary critics to musical analogy to account for Cézanne's method. Bernard himself falls into this metaphor, discussing the '*instinctive and sentimental perception of relationships and harmonies [... which] touch on music.*' Roger Fry followed suit:

the transposition of all the data of nature into values of plastic colour is here complete. The result is as far from the scene it describes as music.... We remain too completely held in the enchantment of this deep harmony. Though all comes by the interpretation of actual visual sensations.

It was Maurice Denis who first cast Cézanne as 'a naïve artisan, a primitive who returns to the sources of his art, who respects its primordial givens.' Whilst Denis alludes to the question of painting as painting, inviting comparison to the discrete essential qualities in music as an art concerned with itself, the image of an artisanal Cézanne has had a significant impact upon the mythology of the artist. Writers often place Cézanne amongst his Provençal subjects as one of them. There is extensive scholarship devoted to where he painted his subjects which favours the attics of his house or adjoining farmhouse, thereby tracing a direct and empathetic relation between painter and subject. This is pure speculation, and this exhibition catalogue emphasises accounts of difference. Whether or not Cézanne adhered to these regionalist arguments, they find their parallel in the folk-song collecting activities of Maurice Ravel, Manuel de Falla and Joseph Canteloube. Qualities of 'authenticity', hard work, and 'regionalism' are a provocative mix for those who might wish to seek nationalist agendas. It should be clear however that in this comparison, I do not wish to associate Cézanne with any outwardly political agenda, even though the art historian Max Raphael was stimulated to a socially

WE REMAIN TOO COMPLETELY HELD IN THE ENCHANTMENT OF THIS DEEP HARMONY. THOUGH ALL COMES BY THE INTERPRETATION OF ACTUAL VISUAL SENSATIONS. ...



A HARMONY PARALLEL WITH NATURE
Written by Dr Charlotte de Mille, visiting lecturer at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

A full set of footnotes and references for this essay are available on request.

CURRICULUM LINKS: [HE+](#) Music, Art and Design, History, and Art History.

motivated reading of the card player paintings in the 1920s.

Simultaneous to the mythology of Cézanne's Provençal roots, the card player series also invites an idealised interpretation of their subjects. The French countryside of the 1890s-1900s was under stress. Farm labourers migrated to towns in search of better standards of living and industrial encroachments ate into pristine landscapes, exemplified by the quarries and railway viaduct in the Courtauld's *Mt Sainte Victoire*, 1887. It is surely no accident that it was in this period that Cézanne's close childhood friend Emile Zola published his novel *La Terre*, 1887. Despite the variance in temperament between Zola's violence and Cézanne's enigmatic rural labourers, André Theuriot's introduction to Zola's novel resonates with the romanticised view of regional life: 'Today in France, it is in the lowly classes of the peasantry that the best-tempered characters ... the liveliest and most robust intelligences can be found.' It was similar sentiment that stimulated Canteloube's impassioned arrangements of folk songs collected as *Chants d'Auvergne*, 1924-55. In four volumes, many of Canteloube's songs concern an Arcadian idyll of innocence, shepherds, and meadows. Like Canteloube's first opera, the language is Occitan, the local dialect of a comparatively large area spanning Spanish Catalonia, Southern France and Monaco to the Occitan valleys of Italy. Relatively common at the end of the nineteenth century, it accounted for 36% of French speakers even in 1920. Despite the appropriation of Canteloube's most popular songs during Vichy France, in whose government he served, they were prized for their integrity to indigenous language and folklore, as examples of the culture of traditional Provence.

Comparable to Canteloube's interests in the Auvergne, Manuel de Falla's *Seven Spanish Folksongs*, 1922, evoke the rhythms and Phrygian mode of flamenco. Whilst the first might be more arrestingly evocative, the second makes the connection explicit by name: '*Seguidilla murciana*'. de Falla had spent seven years in Paris before World War One, a friend of Paul Dukas, Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy. His harmonisations in these songs synthesise French influences with the purely indigenous: where the fourth ('*Jota*') and sixth ('*Canción*') anticipate Canteloube's work, '*Nana*' (the fifth) is a Moorish lullaby. Canteloube and de Falla's songs are directly related to their nationality, however Ravel also experimented with settings of popular songs in *Cinq Mélodies Populaires Grecques*, 1904-6. Written at the start of this interest in France, less than ten years after Cézanne's *Card Players* these too have been praised for their authenticity. Pierre Bernac notes the songs invite spontaneous performance since the medium allows for greater freedom than most. Composers used the richness of folk traditions to reinvigorate their writing. In these arrangements, tradition is transposed into music that recognises its roots, but is itself progressive. The same may be said for the combination of Cézanne's innovative

technique yet conservative subject matter. His peasant sitters are his farm workers, the multi-figure works nonetheless 'staged rather than observed from local life.'

Synthesis of novel form and traditional theme also occupied Canteloube's compatriot from Auvergne and Cézanne's Parisian friend, the composer Emmanuel Chabrier. Although at the heart of Parisian cultural life (an attendee of Manet's famous gatherings), Chabrier wrote several sophisticated renditions of folk themes in '*Paysage*' and '*Danse Villageoise*' from *Pièce Pittoresque* (1880), from which he orchestrated another rurally inspired movement, '*Idylle*'. These light cameos capture a Southern warmth reflected in the canvas by Cézanne which the composer owned – *The Harvesters*, 1877. Depicting a group of farm hands resting from their labours, the canvas shares its genre subject with the artist's later peasant works. Although the figures in *The Harvesters* lack definition or individual character – the profile of only one of the five men is visible – the seated, be-hatted figure in particular anticipates the monumentality and gravity so often commented upon in Cézanne's *Card Players*. Set in a landscape rather than interior, these figures exude permanence comparable to the mountain range behind them. To this extent, Cézanne's figures invite comparison to the solidity of the mythic characters in the operas of Richard Wagner, indeed, Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer suggests that Cézanne 'implicitly positioned himself, in painting, as a parallel to Wagner.' *Jeune fille au piano*, or *L'ouverture du Tannhäuser*, 1869, of his sister and mother, supports this, and Athanassoglou-Kallmyer records Cézanne's visits to Wagner concerts in Paris and Marseille. Yet, describing the scene as one of '*domestic duties*', she notes how emotionally disengaged both figures are from Wagner's score, and certainly the relationship is ambiguous. Neither blank impassive features nor the wooden body of his sister exude pleasure. Disconnected from one another, each is engaged in a private occupation, their emotional distance far greater than the cramped drawing room in which piano stool rubs against sofa. I would argue that this befits Wagner's score: the everyday world is small in comparison. Compositionally Cézanne's canvas renders the magnitude of the overture, placing figures as steady theme against the whirling orchestration of clashing patterns. The opening sequence is grave, Cézanne's hues dark and the contrasting red and green complement the conflict of horns and strings in the final minutes of the overture. Tannhäuser tells of the tragic consequences for its protagonist, a minnesinger who is lured into the mountain of Venusberg. Is it too far fetched to consider Cézanne's obsession with the mountain of Sainte Victoire, renewed in each painting, as analogous in force?

If Cézanne is implicitly the French Wagner of painting, then Debussy in *Péleas et Mélisande* (1893-1902), consciously produced an antidote to the 'Wagnerisme' of his day. His reaction is complex, playing Wagner at his own game. French myth matches German – *Mélisande* evoking the

siren Mélisune; where Wagner aims for maximum effect, Debussy's scoring is so melodically sparse that the composer wrote of 'trying to capture that "nothing" that *Mélisande* is made of.' *Mélisande* becomes a symbolic identity on to whom the male protagonists graft their aspirations. For the audience this achieves multi-point perspective: she assumes different roles seen through many eyes, but never from within. Her elusive nature complements Maeterlinck's suggestive writing, and it was this interpretative scope in the playwright's script which first led Debussy to him. Yet Debussy set himself a paradox in adopting this libretto, for his composition was driven by text: '*nothing should impede the progress of the drama: all musical development not called for in the words is a mistake.*' Essentially his desire was reductive, to portray fullness of character economically – even when the prevailing identity was one of concealment. Painting a character resistant to interpretation is far harder in cameo than one eager to communicate. Where critics disliked the 'monotonous' style of vocal lines, Debussy explained that '*the feelings of a character cannot always be expressed melodically.*' His opera aspired to a synthesis of text and music that gave psychological force over linear narrative. As music critic Rollo Myers wrote, '*the characters speak in ... psalmodic declaration expressed in melodic curves, and thus their personalities and actions stand out more poignantly against the shimmering, pulsing harmonic background.*' Myers is clear that Debussy's melodic line is constructed inversely – that is, '*the melodic impulse expresses itself in harmonic colouring and combinations.*' It grows from within the overall texture. For Debussy, dissonant colour relations were achieved by full use of the whole tone scale. Negating Western tonal harmony, Debussy created melody from a harmony that has itself been distorted beyond what was recognizable to his culture. Distributing the notes of a chord to '*secure the greatest sonority,*' Debussy employs non-relational colours in a manner that in painting, would be regarded as abstract.

Non-linear melodic construction and fragmentary counterpoint resonate with innovations in Cézanne's technique. In 1906 Théodore Duret remarked how Cézanne built his canvases, placing '*strokes next to one another, then on top ... repetitive strokes juxtaposed.*' Richard Schiff has developed this analysis, describing how Cézanne would 'warp' his two-dimensional canvas surface without furthering the representation of his subject. Details of the wall and table of the Metropolitan Museum's *Card Players* for instance work to '*violate the integrity of the depicted subject.*' Schiff continues, '*all becomes equally animated and similarly volumetric, whether rounded or flat in reality.*' Comparing this to the unusual sequences and remote keys of Debussy is instructive. Overall Debussy is a master of atmosphere and Cézanne's painting coherent. Surface planes melt from one to the next, we are ever aware of how they enmesh yet this goes little way toward describing their effect. Perhaps this is why Duret contended that this style of

painting was 'inaccessible'. Moreover, in an aphorism to Bernard Cézanne claimed 'one should not say modeling, one should say modulation', himself evoking a musical reading of his technique. Modulation defines progressions from one key to the next. For Cézanne, it accounts for sudden turns, parallel bars of colour sculpt form, yet their continual change – modulation – renders everything off centre – the effect of a Debussy score where home keys can be hard to discern.

Beyond form, what analogies can be drawn between Cézanne and Debussy's ambiguous characterisation? In technique, the parallel is surely in the composer's attempt to capture the emptiness of Mélisande and the physically bare patches Cézanne leaves. Hans Sedlmayer quipped that these paintings depicted 'stillness without life'. Whilst this might account for the monumentality of the figures, Schiff is correct to follow Meyer Schapiro in paying close attention to the affects of animation in the brushwork, warm tones, and light across the surface of these works. They breathe organically, exuding life just as much as that life is suspended action. United despite broken technique, their ambiguity is born of a richness indicative of more than can be easily assimilated at once. These archetypes of spatial painting in fact have temporal resonance, arresting and distilling attention for longer than is expected. In confounding expectation, they insistently, quietly demonstrate their avant-garde credentials. They are not so much at the forefront of their time, but out of time. Correspondingly, one can argue for the spatial qualities in Debussy's music, of which Pélleas is an excellent example. Those 'psalmodic declarations' and suspended harmonies seem at times not to move at all, instead expressive of psychological depth far from the temporal action of consciousness in everyday life.

Both Cézanne and Debussy portray characters who defy categorisation, who are beyond human experience but who inform us of some essential humanity only appreciable from this position of distance. Cézanne's early canvases *The Harvesters* and *Jeune fille au piano* suggest this skill. In Debussy's oeuvre, his Prix de Rome winning cantata *L'Enfant Prodigue*, 1884, is telling. Responding to the set text for that year, Debussy married the tradition

of Massenet expected by the Prix jury to disorienting exotic passages expressive of the text's setting – the Sea of Galilee. On this pretext, the cantata opens with Phrygian motif, before the 'Air de Lia' settles traditionally. The Académie praised Debussy's 'poetic sense,' although it was the critic of *Le Figaro* who noted the qualities to become so identifiable with the composer, 'indefinite' tonality, vocal parts lacking 'attention to... timbre', and 'over-emphasized declamation', effects which withhold as much as they reveal. Debussy dismissed this early work for its 'smell of "exams", "the conservatoire", and tedium,' reasons that were later to inspire him to compose more interesting works for instrumental exams as a professor at the institution. Nevertheless the cantata as Debussy conceived it concerns fundamental human relationships, the negation of metropolitan excess and a return to simple values. How like then the unadorned existence of Cézanne's peasants?

This brief survey of comparable motifs and concerns between Cézanne's painting and music c.1900 has demonstrated cultural synonymy expressed in different media. When Joachim Gasquet found 'interior music' in Cézanne's painting we should remember the modernist vocabulary he employs is as evocative of his cultural moment as the works he discusses are themselves. Today we may regard such comments as fanciful descriptions of little significance, but I would caution against dismissal of this kind. There is a tangible and rich attachment between the arts. Moreover, how often do we continue to operate from within this inheritance? In this vein I conclude with Meyer Schapiro's estimation that Cézanne's work 'demands of us a long concentrated vision, it is like music as a mode of experience.'

SUGGESTED REPERTOIRE:

Joseph Canteloube

Chants d'Auvergne, (1924-55)
Lou coucut
Lo Fiolairé
Baïlero

Emmanuel Chabrier

Ronde gauloise (song)
Caprice (piano solo, posthumously published)
Pièce Pittoresque (1880)
Paysage
Danse villageoise

Maurice Ravel

5 Mélodies populaires grecques (trans. Calvocoressi), (1904-1906)
Le Réveil de la mariée
Là-bas, vers l'église
Quel gallant m'est comparable
Chanson de cueilleuses de lentisques
Tout gai!

Claude Debussy

Première rapsodie (clarinet and piano), (1910)
Violin sonata in G minor 'Beau Soir' (1917)
L'Enfant Prodigue, libretto Edouard Guinand (1884)
Pélleas et Mélisande, libretto Maurice Maeterlinck (1902)

Manuel de Falla

Siete Canciones populares Españolas (1922)



left:
Paul Cézanne
The Harvest
c.1877
Oil on canvas
© Galerie Tamenaga, France

This essay is accompanied by three live performances in The Courtauld Gallery:

THURSDAY 28 OCT 2010
THURSDAY 25 NOV 2010
THURSDAY 13 JAN 2011
7-8PM

To find out more please visit:
www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/exhibitions/2010/cezanne/Cezanne-Lates.shtml

7: REGARDER!

JOUER AUX CARTES À L'ÉPOQUE DE CÉZANNE

Dans les différents tableaux de Cézanne, Les joueurs de cartes, on observe toujours la même scène : un groupe d'hommes jouant aux cartes – probablement à la belote ou au tarot - autour d'une table. L'atmosphère du jeu semble calme et détendue bien qu'attentive. La table, recouverte d'une nappe sommaire ou sur laquelle reposent des objets du quotidien (pipes, cartes, bouteille de vin) concentre l'action du jeu. Ces hommes, dépeints portant des vêtements simples et dans un décor rustique semblent absorbés par leur jeu. En utilisant le sujet des joueurs de carte, Cézanne illustre un passe-temps répandu en France à son époque. Jouer aux cartes au dix-neuvième siècle est une occupation répandue, que ce soit au sein du cercle familial et privé ou au coeur d'une maison de jeu. Dans les grandes villes, le jeu de carte organisé est considéré comme un vice. Les maisons de jeu et de pari – bien qu'illégales jusqu'en 1907 – forment un secteur d'activité important qui attire personnages douteux et corruption. La frontière entre simple divertissement ou véritable machine financière est souvent difficile à délimiter. L'exemple de Joseph Oller et Charles de Maury qui en 1891 établissent un système national de pari sur les courses de chevaux (le pari mutuel ou PMU qui de nos jours est encore très en vogue) le montre bien. Réguler, mais aussi faire de l'argent sur les jeux de hasard, fonctionne.

Cependant, jouer aux cartes en privé, en famille ou entre amis, est une activité ludique, courante et souvent dénuée d'intérêt financier. Dans les bonnes maisons, on joue au whist (ancêtre du bridge) ou à la bouillote (qui deviendra le poker). Dans les milieux plus populaires, on joue au piquet ou à l'écarte ou encore au tarot.

Le jeu de cartes se démocratise au dix-neuvième siècle. D'une part, les cartes permettent à une population encore en grande partie analphabète de se repérer uniquement avec les images et de jouer ensemble. D'autre part, la production des cartes s'industrialise et se multiplie. Bien qu'introduites en Europe au quatorzième siècle, les cartes à jouer, bien souvent peintes à la main et rehaussées d'or fin par des artistes reconnus, restent réservées à une élite fortunée. Il faut attendre le

dix-neuvième siècle, pour que les artisans fabricants de cartes soient remplacés par des industriels, tels que Baptiste-Paul Grimaud qui crée la première fabrique de cartes en France en 1848. Les jeux de cartes deviennent alors plus maléables, plus perfectionnés, plus durables, moins chers et donc plus accessibles. Jouer aux cartes devient si populaire à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, que l'État ne manque pas d'en faire un objet politique (et financier !). C'est en 1907 que la Loi fondamentale pour les jeux en France, autorise pour la première fois les cercles de jeux et les casinos dans les sites thermaux. Plus anecdotiquement, en 1900, l'administration française demande à BP Grimaud de créer un «tarot nouveau» pour lutter contre le succès des cartes allemandes, prédominantes en France. Ce tarot nouveau est, à peu de chose près, celui qui est encore utilisé de nos jours.



Above:
Paul Cézanne
Study for The Card Players
c.1890-92
Oil on canvas
Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

Left and bottom:
The Card Players (detail)
c.1892-96
Oil on canvas
© The Courtauld Gallery

CEPENDANT, JOUER AUX CARTES EN PRIVÉ,
EN FAMILLE OU ENTRE AMIS, EST UNE ACTIVITÉ
LUDIQUE, COURANTE ET SOUVENT DÉNUÉE
D'INTÉRÊT FINANCIER.

//



Above:
Nathaniel Dance-Holland
Men Playing Cards
18th Century
Pen and ink, watercolour and graphite on paper
© The Courtauld Gallery

REGARDE!: JOUER AUX CARTES À L'ÉPOQUE DE CÉZANNE

Written by Alice Odin.
(for a full English translation see overleaf)

CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+
MFL French.

ACTIVITÉ : JOUEZ À LA BATAILLE

La bataille reste un des jeux de cartes favoris des Français. Les règles du jeu sont simples. La bataille se joue souvent en famille, avec des enfants.

Munissez vous d'un jeu de 52 cartes, lisez les règles du jeu ci-dessous et... à vous de jouer !

RÈGLES DU JEU:

Distribuez toutes les cartes entre les joueurs (deux joueurs ou plus).

Chaque joueur ramasse son paquet de cartes sans en regarder le contenu et le tient dans sa main, face cachée.

Chaque joueur pose sur la table la carte qui se situe sur le dessus de son paquet. Le joueur qui a posé la carte la plus forte ramasse les deux cartes. On recommence le jeu. Ceci jusqu'à ce qu'un joueur n'ait plus de cartes du tout.

Si les cartes jouées sont de même valeur, il y a bataille. Dans ce cas, chaque carte jouée est laissée sur la table, face visible. Chaque joueur pose sur sa carte la carte suivante de son paquet, face cachée, puis encore la carte suivante, face visible. Celui des deux joueurs dont la carte visible est alors la plus forte remporte les six cartes en jeu (et il se peut qu'il remporte un as de son adversaire). Si à nouveau les cartes sont de valeur égale, il y a double bataille et on recommence la même procédure.

Si l'on joue à trois (ou plus) et qu'il y a égalité entre les deux joueurs qui ont posé les cartes les plus fortes, la bataille se déroule entre eux, bien entendu.

NB: L'ordre de valeur des cartes est: Jokers, As, Roi, Dame, Valet, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2.

Charles de Maury était un pionnier de l'industrie du divertissement, puisqu'il était le co-fondateur du Moulin Rouge et promoteur du Nouveau Cirque d'Hiver et de l'Olympia à Paris.

REGARDE! CARD PLAYING IN CEZANNES TIME

In his series of card players paintings, Cézanne depicts a similar scene: a group of men seen playing cards around a table. The atmosphere of the game is calm and relaxed yet resolute. A simple table cloth or a few objects (a pipe, cards, a wine bottle) lay on the table around which the game is taking place. These men, portrayed wearing rural clothes and in a simple setting, look fully absorbed by the game. In using the subject of card players, Cézanne stages a popular leisure activity of late nineteenth century France.

Card playing in 19th century France was a well established past-time. Cards were played at home, amongst friends and with relatives but also in more formal settings. In cities underground betting houses, which were very successful yet plagued with corruption and criminality, could accommodate organised card playing. This is why card playing was still seen as a dubious activity in the nineteenth century. It is not until 1907 that betting houses were made legal in France.

The boundary between card playing as a simple, innocent past-time and card games or betting as a less than reputable money-making scheme is often hard to delineate. In 1891, for example, Joseph Oller and Charles de Maury establish a national system for horse racing bets, called Pari Mutuel Urbain or PMU (which is still widely popular in France nowadays). While this system was created to regulate betting on a national scale, its money-making impact hugely benefitted Oller and de Maury. Card playing is however widely practiced in private circles amongst family and friends; in need of easy, fun and free entertainment. In bourgeois and upper-class households, whist (similar to bridge) and 'bouillote' (an ancestor of poker) are played. Games such as piquet, 'l'écarte' or tarot are played in more working-class circles.

Card playing becomes more and more accessible in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, cards enable the majority of the population, which is still illiterate, to play using the cards' pictures and symbols. On the other hand, the production of cards increases dramatically thanks to new industrial techniques. While cards were introduced in Europe in the fourteenth

century, they had been produced and hand-painted by artists until the industrial age and were therefore reserved to the elite. Card makers are replaced in the nineteenth century by manufacturers, including Baptiste-Paul Grimaud who creates the first card manufacturing plant in France in 1848. Cards, after the 1850s, became more malleable, refined, durable and cheap and therefore more widely accessible.

By the end of the nineteenth century, card playing has become so popular that the French state sees in this activity a political and financial opportunity. In 1907, a law allowing betting houses and casinos in spa resorts is passed, allowing people to gamble freely and incidentally permitting the state to heavily tax profits. In 1900, the French administration had already asked BP Grimaud to produce a 'new tarot' game, to counteract the success of German tarot cards in France. This tarot game is still more or less used nowadays.

Activity:

Play a French card game, 'la bataille', following the instructions below:

La bataille is one of the most common and simple games still played in France. The game is very easy to explain and is often played with children and can be played with any number of players.

Grab a pack of cards, read the instructions below and enjoy!

Instructions:

Distribute all cards between all players. Each player picks up his/her cards, without looking at them and holds them in his/her hands, cards facing down.

Each player reveals the first card on the top of his/her pack. The player with the strongest card collects the other players' cards. The game goes on until one of the players has no cards left. The winner is the player who has won all the cards.

If two cards with the same value (see footnote for value explanation) are revealed at the same time, there is 'bataille' (= a battle). In this case, the cards with the same value are left face up on the table. Each *battling* player then takes out one more card from his/her pack, face down,

then another card, this time face up. The player with the highest 'value' card shown the second time around collects all cards from this round of bataille.

If after the first round of 'bataille', the second round of cards still have the same value, then there is a double 'bataille' and the same process as with a simple bataille is followed.

Please note:

Strongest: each card has a value, which are from highest to lowest : Jokers, Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2.

Charles de Maury was a pioneer of the leisure industry, as he was the co-founder of the Moulin Rouge and the property developer of the Nouveau Cirque d'Hiver and the Olympia concert hall in Paris.

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8: TEACHING RESOURCE CD

Included in this Teachers Resource CD are images from the Cézanne *Card Players* exhibition as well as works relating to the exhibition. This disc has been specially formatted to be easy to use. Images can be copied and downloaded as long as they are used for educational purposes only. They have all been formatted to a non-publishable standard. A copyright statement is printed at the end of this section which outlines authorised and restricted usage. This should be read by every user before using this resource.

1: PORTRAITS OR STILL LIFE?

The tranquility, serene or some might say still atmosphere in which the card players are depicted have led many to look closely at Cézanne's portraits and still lifes. Here are below a selection of portraits and still lifes (most of them created in the 1890s), produced by Cézanne.

2: PLAYING IN ART

Card playing is a well-known motif in Art History, with artists such as George de La Tour, the Le Nain brothers and Pieter Brueghel producing famous paintings around this theme. However, the act of playing is also represented in art through child play. In the Courtauld collection, artistic representations of play and especially child play are very different.

3: THE COURTAULD CÉZANNE'S

The Courtauld Gallery houses one of the finest collections of Paul Cézanne's paintings in the world. This section includes a selection of these works.

All images © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

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- The Courtauld Gallery: www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery, where you can learn more about our collection, exhibitions and related events.

HOW TO USE THIS CD

This CD has been formatted to work with as many browsers as possible including Linux, Macintosh OS and Microsoft Windows.

This is why it will not launch immediately when inserted in your computer.

Please follow the instructions below to launch this interactive CD.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Open the *Data* folder
- Inside are 3 folders: *Cézanne Card Players*, *graphics* and *style*
- Open the *Cézanne Card Players* folder
- Inside is 1 sub-folder: *images* and 4 html files: *Cézanne's other works*, *index*, *Playing in Art* and *Portrait or Still Life*.
- Double click on *index*, one of the html documents.

This will then launch the *Cézanne Card Players* teaching resources in your web browser.

This can be used like surfing the internet by clicking on images or highlighted words to navigate throughout images and pages.

Click on menu or click on an image to enlarge.



If your web browser is unable to open the folder you can open the data folder, inside which you will find all of the images saved as j-pep files.

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CURRICULUM LINKS: KS2+ Art and Design, History, Art History, and other humanities.

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WITH THANKS

WELCOME

Henritta Hine

1: CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS

With thanks to the exhibition curators Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright

2: IN THE MAKING: A TECHNICAL STUDY

Gabriella Macaro with thanks to Barnaby Wright and Nancy Ireson

3: CÉZANNE IN SERIES

Rebecca Newell

4: CÉZANNE FOR ENGLAND

Rachel Ropeik

5: THE FLICKER OF MODERN LIGHT

Ayla Lepine

6: A HARMONY PARALLEL WITH NATURE

Charlotte de Mille

7: REGARDER!

Alice Odin

TEACHING RESOURCE CD

Courtauld Gallery Public Programmes

TEACHERS' RESOURCE

CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS

Second Edition

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