Paul Cezanne And His Influence On Art Of Modernism

One of the most influential artists of modern painting, French painter Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) has been a significant figure in the revolution of representation during his life. His work began a new way of looking and thinking abut our responses of how we experience the world. Known as a painter of still life's and landscapes, he also mastered portraiture. He challenged the conventional academic boundaries of 19th Century art with his new method of building form with colour and his new approach to space. He set out to express that a work of art is not just a copy of reality but an independent reality of its own. That the created objects relationship to the outside world is fluid, or perhaps even with bract art, non-existent. This is shown especially in his late masterpieces such as Still Life with Plaster Cupid (1895); The Large Bathers (1906) and Mont Sainte-Victorie from Les Lauves (1904-1906). This notion of autonomy in art is central to modern art movements from Cubism to Abstract-Expressionism and Pop Art.

Respected as the pioneer of this radical break with the past, the master Henri Matisse stated that Cezanne was 'the father of us all'. Bring a country boy at heart he was born in Aix-en-Provence just outside of Paris, France and he always sees himself as a brute compared to the bougious Parisian class. He had painter friends in Paris like Renoir and Pissarro and spent time between Paris and his family home. A lot of his early work however was met with mockery and derision at the time by the critics. This derision could have potentially helped Cezanne cut his own path by deciding to make works that response to only how he experienced the world and how he felt about something. Cezanne wasn't interested in accurate representation and perfect perspective, he was more interested in feeling and the expressive way paint could display emotion. He was very experimental with his still life painting. There are hundreds of paintings of apples, and jugs and flowers and he became known as the painter of apples. Perhaps this repetition gave him the fortitude to try new things. Still Life with Plaster Cupid (fig.1) 1895 is a simple image of a table with a plaster cast on it, but when we look closer we see all these strange things happening. Things that wouldn't have happened in reality like the table top being square but the floor behind the flows up at a strange vertical angle. The apple in background on the floor is the same said as the apples on the table in the foreground. The onion at the front blends into the table leg in the still life painting. Paintings are within the painting, canvases are stacked up in the background and the fabric in one of them is the same as the blue fabric on the table. Everything is strange and out of the ordinary in terms of factual, realistic space, gravity and perspective. Cezanne was expressing that this wasn't an accurate painting of a realistic scene, but a perception of that scene. A sense that reality is fractured. That we see things differently when we look from slightly different angles.

Later in his life Cezanne worked on three large paintings of female bathers. He set out create a link between the figure and the landscape. And this was achieved by focusing on the forms rather than the individuality of the figures. Because they are not the dominant element they become part of the overall composition and merge into the environment. In The Large Bathers 1906 , the figures are split into two groups with both of them restricted inside a triangular composition. This shape is reflected by the tree trunks arching over to meet at the top which frame the view in the background. The composition is literally reflected from the centre of the cloud in the middle of the painting, onto the highlight of their bodies. The colours of both figures and environment are co-ordinated to merge them together. The ochre-beige colour of the river

bank is only slightly darker than the skin colour of the figures. The brown tree trunks also repeat the colour of their hair. These light and colour links allow the bathers to merge into forms of nature.

Cezanne painted the same things over and over, like the Mont Sainte-Victoire, the big mountain that looks over Aix-en-Provence where he’s from. By coming back to the same subjects he could challenge the boundaries of what came before him in painting and build a new language. He wrote a letter saying“Treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone. Nature is more depth than surface” which inspired 7 many artists after him. In Mont Sainte-Victorie from Les Lauves 1904-1906 we see a lack of contour lines and obscured perspective that draws the viewers attention more to the very act of perception. This is shown by broad interlinking patches of colour that are not intended to reproduce individual colours of houses and trees but to be part of the overall pattern of colours. The individual strokes of colour are large and individually visible but we can still see the forms shown by the colour contrast. On the left side, the background, middle and foreground blend into each other to obscure perspective but we can still see the houses in the middle. The sun drenched areas are shown by ochre and the shadows by dark violet tones. The cool blue of the mountains makes it recede into the distance with patches of blue moving into the foreground to bring the viewers eyes backwards. This painting was a triumphant marker of his journey to create a new language in landscape. All these elements the multiple complex viewpoints, building form with colour and different approaches to space was what went on to influence the Cubists and Fuavists.

He had a profound influence on Picasso which we can see in his painting ‘les demoiselles d’avignon’ (fig4) 1907 . The upturned table thats pushed towards the viewer; the cool and warm tones that tell the viewer about depth; the curtain upturned is the only recession in space communicated by the colour blue; the compression of the bodies in a small space to maximise impact because our eyes cant look at the background. The Cubists also broke things up on the picture surface with bizarre, unexpected angles. Beyond the Cubists, Cezanne has influenced many artist and still does to this day.