The Influence Of Paul Cezanne On The Revolution Of Representation 1890-1910

Paul Cezanne's innovative body of work ushered in a decisive break with the standards of representation between 1890 and 1910. Cezanne's work laid the foundations for the revolution of representation through its subjective approach to painting. In many respects, Cezanne was the first Western artist to explore the reduction of painting and in doing so led to new way of painting that was in response to the natural world around him. Cezanne's critical newly deconstructed form of painting was key to the revolution of representation between 1890 and 1910. Called "The Father of us all," by none other than Pablo Picasso Cezanne's work demonstrated the world could be treated through a more formal, abstract system of three forms: the cylinder, the sphere and the cone. Though never exploring work simplified to this extreme himself, Cezanne's followers would after his death in different ways.

Cezanne's reductive and subjective ideas can be seen through his series of works focusing on Mont. St Victoire, a mountain in Provence, where he was born. Cezanne developed his new form of painting from his relationship with nature as he wrote, "But I must always come back to this: the painter must devote himself entirely to the study of nature and try to produce pictures which are an instruction. Talks on art are almost useless." In these works Cezanne places great emphasis on flatness. The landscape has been created using squares, rectangles and flat planes. The ground is either a flat tan plane or a diagonal green mound. Cezanne has removed any particular details from the buildings depicted and reduced them into flattened boxes so that houses seem like small cubes. Certain parts of these paintings can be compared with the work Houses at L'estaque by Georges Braque, 1908, one of the first works to be called cubist. Cezanne's influence on Braque can be seen where Braque has reduced the buildings to flat planes of squares and rectangles and in his simplification of the trees and natural environment. In depicting what is a very rocky mountain at Mont. St Victoire, Cezanne has smoothed out any irregularities. When squinting the eyes it looks like a uniformly flat rock face, which it is not in real life. With his use of brushstroke, Cezanne also reduces the landscape. He would only use a few brushstrokes to depict a group of trees or a building. Furthermore Cezanne seemed to be reinforcing the fact that the image was on a flat plane. If you look at Mont. St Victoire with Large Pine, 1887 the tree in the foreground is outlined in a lighter colour up the top, making it blend in with the background sky. If you also look at the lower section of leaves, the division between them and the mountain is blurred, and this area of the painting seems to be vibrating. Cezanne could have easily made a clear division here and presented the tree in front of the mountain, however he chose not to. In doing so he is disputing the traditional assumptions of what painting should do, and seeking to express something that was not just dependent on realism but sought something different through the reduction of forms and the fusion of elements within a scene.

Cezanne's incorporation of different points of view of objects was also significant to the revolution of representation between 1890 and 1910. This was an attempt to make a painting on a flat surface more true to the experience of vision. As he said himself "I pursue the realization of that part of nature, which, coming into our line of vision, gives the picture. Now the theme to develop is that—whatever our temperament or power in the presence of nature may be—we must render the image of what we see." Cezanne depicted that vision was a series of successive images and through this intended to show that life and experience were about constantly

shifting perspective. In Still Life with Basket of Apples, 1890-94, Cezanne creates a compilation of different views of objects in one work. The tabletop on which everything rests is seen from two different angles, so the edge on the left hand side does not meet up with the right side edge after the table cloth. Each apple seems to be painted individually, in some odd shapes and angles, to the extent that it is difficult to integrate them into one point of view. The basket also seems to have been painted from two different points of view, and the wine jug in the background seems as if it is tipping over. Cezanne was more interested in relating the objects within his work to one another, rather than making sure the work made perspectival sense.

The influence of Cezanne on the revolution of representation from 1890 and 1910 derives from the complexity of his technique. He combines linear and planar elements with passages of solid modelling which creates a picture space full of shapes and ellipses, especially noticeable in depictions of the human figure. Cezanne built his forms with accumulations of small, planar strokes as a way of not fully defining objects whilst also depicting them. What results within his work is a tension between the painted surface and what is represented on it. Mondrian wrote that Cezanne showed how beauty was created not by the objects he represented but by “the relationships of form and colour.” Kandinsky placed emphasis on the content of Cezanne’s paintings, his “gift of seeing the inner life in everything.” Cezanne’s influence and the tensions that underlay it are exemplified in The Large Bathers, 1906. The Large Bathers sums up Cezanne’s explorations during the last two decades of his life, in terms of size, inventiveness, force and majesty. The size of the images relates to grand depictions of historical and religious subjects, demonstrating Cezanne had grand ambitions for it. Cezanne’s subject reaffirmed the tradition of pastoral painting, but in style it deconstructed the worn out conventions of that tradition. The painting has no slick finish, and in contrast to the other large scale depictions of Bathers, Cezanne’s The Large Bathers is rife with contradictions. The first of these contradictions is the sensuality of the subject in comparison to the austere way the figures are treated within the landscape. Since the renaissance, nudes in a landscape had generally always been painted with a sensual eroticism. In The Large Bathers the women who assume the poses of sensual nudes, are clearly de-eroticised. Their faces are blank, and their bodies forbiddingly angular and disjointed. They disturb rather than delight us. Similarities can be seen between Cezanne’s work and Henri Matisse’s 1905 The Joy of Life. Like Cezanne, Matisse constructs the landscape so that it functions as a stage. In both of these works trees are placed on the sides and in the far distance, with their upper bows spread like curtains to highlight the figures lounging beneath. The most significant comparison is the artists unifications of their figures with the landscape. Cezanne achieves this by stiffening his trunk-like figures, whilst Matisse heavily emphasises the serpentine contours of the women, which is reiterated in the curved lines of the trees.

Cezanne laid the foundations for the revolution of representation between 1890 and 1910. He explored a reduction in his paintings, and in doing so created a new form of representation.