

Cezannes maison maria with a view of chateau noir essay sample

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Maison Maria with a View of Chateau Noir, an 1895 painting by revered post-impressionist Paul Cezanne, is an oil on canvas painting that is 25 5/8" x 31 7/8" in size, and currently rests in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. The painting depicts a scenscape of a group of ordinary-looking, yellow buildings resting around the corner of a hill, with a road leading to it bordered by dead trees. Instead of using typical artistic devices and notions of vanishing points and the like, Cezanne chose a more innovative approach for Maison Maria. The use of space in this particular painting is evidence of Cezanne's constant search for innovation in art, as the skewed perspectives leave the viewer with a sense of unease that enhances the viewing experience and challenges preconceived notions of what can be depicted in painting.

The subject of the painting is the Chateau Noir, ostensibly, as that is the one artificial structure seen in the painting. However, given that it is obscured by the mountainous growth in front of it, the viewer's perspective constantly changes - the subject of the painting may well also be the aforementioned Mont St. Victoire. The juxtaposition of these two elements creates a hypnotic and alienating effect in the viewer; we never know quite what to focus on, as the obvious subject in the landscape is obscured by natural elements.

The real magic of this painting, despite the initial confusion that the viewer may experience upon seeing it, is the way that Cezanne plays with perspective and form, as well as scale. In this painting, Cezanne wanted to further his ideas of challenging issues of space within painting. In traditional art, perspective is determined through the establishment of a vanishing

point - a single point in the distance that helps to determine scale and distance of objects from each other (Lunday, 2011). It is, more or less, a North Star for the viewer to navigate in order to understand the painting. Cezanne, however, ignores all of this in favor of trying new things and being innovative, which is where Cezanne's use of perspective comes in.

The vanishing point of the painting is somewhat alluded to when you get to the horizon with the road; it is clear that the dirt road is getting thinner as it approaches the house, making it look like the house is in the distance. However, Cezanne being as contrarian as he is, simply chose to curve the road up instead of making it disappear into the distance - our subconscious desire for a vanishing point is subverted. Because the vanishing point is gone, our sense of size and scale is skewed; we have no idea how large the mountain is, though it is obviously smaller than the buildings since they can still be seen. The building towers over the mountain, even though it looks like it is just a two-story building.

The way the artist organizes the composition.

The organization of the composition is the true novelty and thesis of the work; Cezanne's experimentation with placement and perspective are at the center of what he is trying to subvert in this work - Romantic and Impressionist notions of symmetry and realism. The ultimate purpose of this experiment was to embody all of the different perspectives that can be caught by the human eye in real life; depending on how we look at an image or what is in front of us, some things can have different spatial relations to each other (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). To that end, the house itself leans very

dramatically to the left, creating an unsettling tension in the viewer regarding where the horizon is in relation to the road and anything else. The lack of decoration or embellishment on the house makes it seem much simpler, less complete, than the rest of the landscape, its skewed angle contributing to that feeling. The building seems to lean away from the mountain and the other buildings in the painting, making it difficult to discern exactly how far these other elements are from each other. This lends the landscape an immediacy, making it seem more vibrant and alive because of its unpredictability. The contrast of the very Cubist and geometrical shape of the house in relation to the curves and waves of nature further emphasizes the tension between these individual elements, creating a painting that is very much alive and keeps the viewer guessing.

Cezanne's techniques, both in this painting and his career as a whole, are very much reactions to established notions of painting as expressed by Impressionism and Romanticism, as well as Neoclassicism and others. Cezanne was a consummate contrarian, always searching for ways to subvert or turn on their head notions of space, color and perspective, among other things. To that end, Cezanne's techniques are very post-Impressionistic; *Maison Maria* uses muted tones to create a stark image, much as you would see in Impressionist works. However, he contrasts that with the imbalanced perspective and the skewed levels of the house and the horizon, deliberately making things look "off" and unsettling. The painting depicts deep space in a very interesting way as well, with Mont St. Victoire on the horizon on the right, at some indeterminate distance. This uncertainty

of place and space is a hallmark of Post-Impressionism, as Cezanne always sought to respond to direct form and easy understanding of works that were created through Impressionist and Romantic styles.

Cezanne also challenges the notions of light and shade in his post-Impressionist work; few parts of the painting include a shadow, with the exception of the left side of the building and the shadow cast by the dead tree that borders the right side of the painting. However, there is no true sense of a light source, with color being presented as luminous over the whole surface of the painting. To that end, the colors are what is truly emanating the light, as opposed to some off-image sun that is implied in order to add verisimilitude. This places the painting above color and above realism; combined with the skewed visuals and perspectives, Cezanne truly creates an alien world with this image.

Cezanne's use of oil on canvas helps to support the alien and disorienting nature of the piece. On one side of the coin, the use of oil is very familiar; it reminds us of classic paintings by Van Gogh and the like, particularly in his use of bright earth tones and natural colors. However, the slickness and unnatural look of the oil helps to obscure clear lines and makes everything look somewhat ethereal and dreamlike - this helps to further disorient the viewer. With the use of oil, Cezanne is able to create clear separation of line through basic color schemes; the bright blue of the sky contrasts with the green of the grasses and the yellow of both the dirt road and the chateau itself. Each brush stroke is cleanly visible with oil, showing its own particular

shade of color, noting, in a way, Cezanne's own thought processes and the hand of the author in the creation of this work.

Cezanne's *Maison Maria with a View of Chateau Noir* is a fundamentally strong example of the artist's disposition towards unpredictability, challenging expectations, and subverting tropes and traditions of traditional art forms. With his post-Impressionist techniques, he depicts a landscape that has no clear, consistent sense of scale or realism, with light filling the area and proportions extremely disconcerting to even the casual viewer. By obscuring the vanishing point and confusing the viewer as to their relation to the objects in the painting, he forces the viewer to constantly search for new perspectives and new ways of looking at the piece. Reacting to Impressionist and Romantic notions of realism and symmetry in his works, Cezanne skews the home and places a hill in front of it, throwing objects at you at various angles so that you do not know what precisely to make of it. While this may seem like random chaos slapped onto a canvas, this is Cezanne's purpose, in its simplest form. This challenging of what is traditional and normal challenges the viewer as well, and forces them to actively engage with the work in a way that Realism and Impressionism may not.

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