

Cezanne : Watercolor & Form

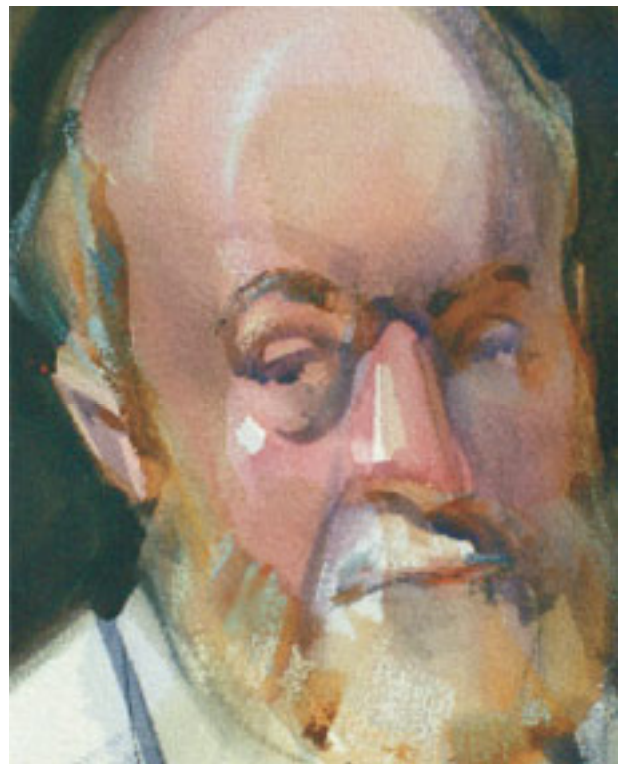
By Christopher Schink

"Whats the big deal about Cezanne?"

You may have wondered. His watercolors look a little thin; his figure drawing seems a bit shaky; and the perspective in his paintings often seems slightly off. In fact, there may be a couple of people in your art club who you think are better artists. So, why is he called the Father of Modern Art? And do you have to go to art school to get it? Not if you subscribe to Watermedia Focus.

Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) through constant experimentation and with great determination changed the graphic language of painting—how we depict form and space. His ideas inspired Picasso's and Braque's experiments in Cubism, Matisse's treatment of space and the style of practically every modern painter since.

By subtle distortions of form and perspective, Cezanne flattened the pictorial space of his paintings. He adapted the Impressionists' color approach to create more two-dimensional designs rather than to capture the play of light and shadow.



Light and shadow

To convey a sense of three-dimensionality, I have illuminated the head from the side creating a strong contrast in light and dark. Color and Intensity

I have employed a full range of color modifications —clean tints in the lights, muted tints in the shaded area and deep shades in the background. To create a sense of space, I've made the figure warm and the background cool.

Value Range

To make the head appear round and “real”, I've used a full range of values— white to almost black. The greater the value range on a painted object the more three-dimensional it will appear.

What Cezanne didn't do...

I have taken a traditional, realistic approach in this portrait I painted of Cezanne (although I never actually met the man). I have employed a full range of values, color, and intensity to model the form. I have made the background darker, cooler, and less intense to create the illusion of space. This is exactly what Cezanne didn't do. Although Cezanne flattened the forms and space in his paintings, he was always concerned with maintaining some sense of volume and solidity. He was not interested in simply achieving a two-dimensional design. His struggle to combine solidity with emptiness, to make his objects both round and flat gives his paintings an almost palpable tension. It is his unique treatment of form and his approach to watercolor that I would like to discuss here.

Cezanne's approach to watercolor was very different from the techniques and concepts used by 19th century English watercolorists. He ignored the effects of aerial perspective and modelling of form with value contrast. Instead, he retained large areas of unpainted white paper throughout his design to create a single, flat picture plane on which to develop his subject. He concentrated on the warm-cool relationships on the edges of his forms with only slight references to their local color. By working in small dashes of color that he repeated throughout the painting, he slowly developed the overall design and harmony of his work.

What Cezanne did do...

In this Cezanne-like treatment, I have left a majority of the paper unpainted and have made only slight reference to the local color of my subject. I worked entirely in tints of red, yellow, and blue and attempted to distribute them evenly throughout the design—both in the negative space and on the head.

Compare this Cezannesque portrait with the traditional one on the preceding page.

Light and shadow

I've ignored or barely suggested the actual shadows on the head. By making both the illuminated and shaded side equally light, I've flattened its form. My interest is in the color-temperature relationships at the edge of the form, not in creating volume with darks and lights.

Color and intensity

I've avoided the traditional approach of warm, intense, positive objects surrounded by cooler, less intense negative space. Here, I've repeated both warm and cool tints throughout the design. By alternating their relationships—a warm edge against a cool background, cool edge against a warm background—I've reduced the illusion of form and deep space.

Value range

I've worked in a limited value range and have left the white of the paper throughout. By alternately darkening and leaving light the edges of the form, I create a flatter “ bas-relief effect.”