

## 4.28.20 Post Impressionism 1

Responses due 4.29.20 at 9:30 AM by email ([anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu))

### Slide 1: Summary

Summary

RESPONSE QUESTION 1/3 (slide 3): Describe this painting in one paragraph.

RESPONSE QUESTION 2/3 (slide 11): Compare and contrast these paintings in a paragraph.

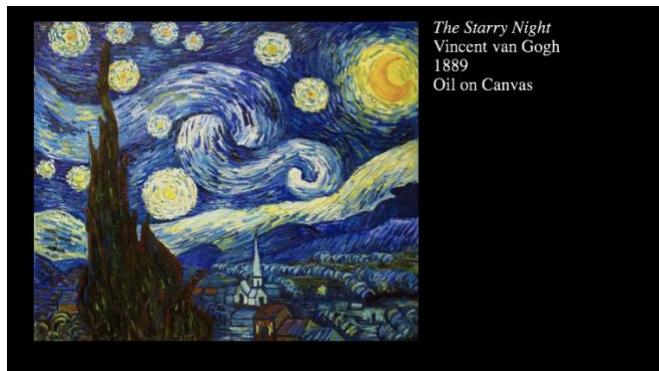
RESPONSE QUESTION 3/3 (slide 11): Please submit any questions you have.

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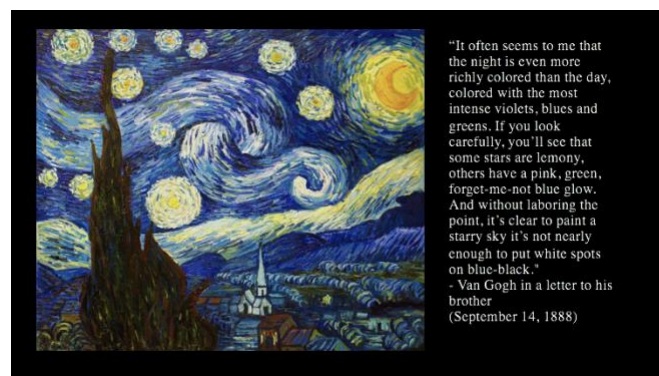
### Slide 2



After Impressionism came Post Impressionism, which is a very general term. Not all Post Impressionist art looks the same. One very famous Post Impressionist painting is *The Starry Night* by Vincent van Gogh.

What's different about this painting than other landscapes we've seen? It's at night! This may seem like a small detail, but it's actually a big deal.

### Slide 3



## 4.28.20 Post Impressionism 1

Van Gogh wanted to paint this work en plein air (outside) but struggled to because it's hard to paint in the dark. He wrote about how difficult it was to complete this painting because he had to paint from his own imagination, when he didn't typically do so. He writes: "It often seems to me that the night is even more richly colored than the day, colored with the most intense violets, blues and greens. If you look carefully, you'll see that some stars are lemony, others have a pink, green, forget-me-not blue glow. And without laboring the point, it's clear to paint a starry sky t's not nearly enough to put white spots on blue-black." (September 14, 1888)

This painting was done when Van Gogh had been institutionalized after a mental breakdown in 1888. As part of his treatment he was encouraged to paint, so this painting was done while the artist was in recovery.

This painting is often described as very emotional because of the swirling lines of the sky and the waving trees. It's not naturalistic, but an abstracted sky.

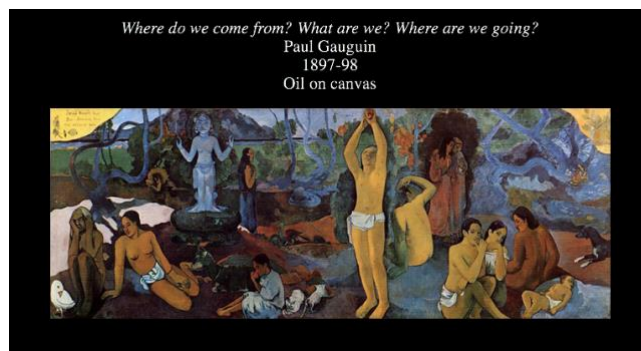
**RESPONSE QUESTION 1/3: Describe this painting in one paragraph.**

### Slide 4



Van Gogh uses a lot of paint. He uses loose brush strokes to build up layers of paint. This technique is called **impasto- thick layering of paint so that is built up off of the surface.**

### Slide 5



This painting is by Paul Gauguin who was friends with Van Gogh. The two artists briefly lived together and worked together. This painting is a scene of Tahiti, where the artist briefly lived from 1891-1893 after abandoning his career as a stock broker to pursue painting full time. This painting is filled with symbolism that answers the questions in the paintings title.

## 4.28.20 Post Impressionism 1

### Slide 6

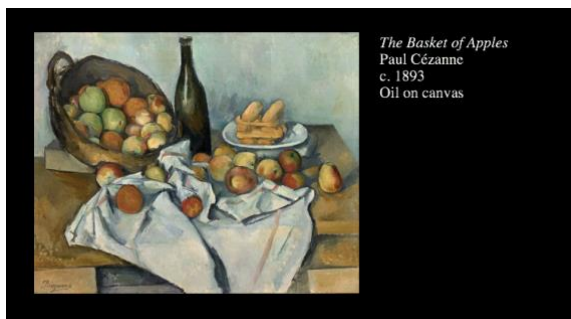


Moving from the baby at the right to the baby at the left, Gauguin paints the stages of life- where we come from, what we are, and where we go. This is what Gauguin says about the painting:

“It is a canvas four meters fifty in width, by one meter seventy in height. The two upper corners are chrome yellow, with an inscription on the left and my name on the right, like a fresco whose corners are spoiled with age, and which is appliquéd upon a golden wall. To the right at the lower end, a sleeping child and three crouching women. Two figures dressed in purple confide their thoughts to one another. An enormous crouching figure, out of all proportion and intentionally so, raises its arms and stares in astonishment upon these two, who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the center is picking fruit. Two cats near a child. A white goat. An idol, its arms mysteriously raised in a sort of rhythm, seems to indicate the Beyond. Then lastly, an old woman nearing death appears to accept everything, to resign herself to her thoughts. She completes the story! At her feet a strange white bird, holding a lizard in its claws, represents the futility of words....So I have finished a philosophical work on a theme comparable to that of the Gospel.”

This painting is done in a style called Primitivism, that uses less modelling and perspective than other styles from the same period. Artists wanted to look to the past and looked at what they thought was “less developed” art from Africa and the prehistoric period. The term Primitivism has been met with a lot of criticism because it disparages non-western art, even as artists based works off of non-western pieces. The artists are painting after non-western works, but positioning the art from the cultures that inspire them as less than European art. In some ways, it is similar to Orientalism because it seems to embrace other aesthetics but is actually very Eurocentric. Like Orientalism, it’s also been seen as a way to exoticize and other non-European people.

### Slide 7



## 4.28.20 Post Impressionism 1

Another painter of this time period was Cézanne, who is often referred to as the “father of cubism.” He is not a Cubist painter, but is a proto-Cubist.

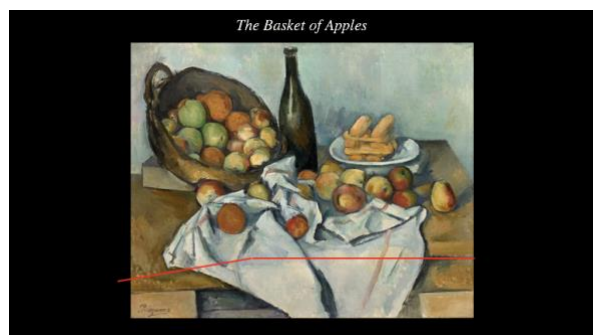
### Slide 8



Here we have one of his still life paintings. A **still life** features an arrangement of objects, typically food and flowers. It is a very old type of painting that had fallen out of favor with in the Neoclassical period with the rising popularity of history painting. Cézanne painted a number of still life works, bringing the genre back into prominence. Previously, still life paintings were very naturalistic, like Luis Meléndez' *The Afternoon*, but Cézanne wasn't interested in making this kind of work.

What's different about these two paintings? Both are representational, but Cézanne's is much less naturalistic. There is perspective in *The Afternoon*, but less emphasis on this in *The Basket of Apples*. We can see the background in the earlier work, with clouds and trees disappearing into the distance. There is less interest in the background in *The Basket of Apples*. There is some perspective; the edge of the table in the right side of the canvas recedes into space. But something weird happens at the front edge of the table.

### Slide 9

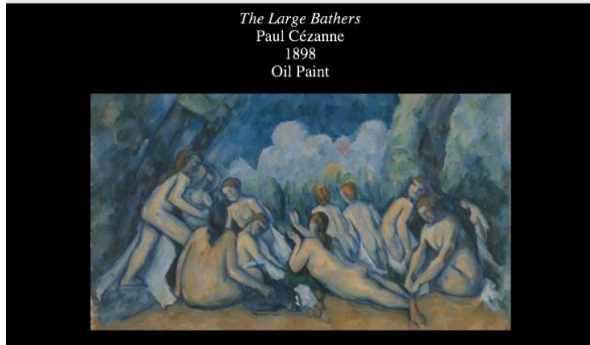


The edge of the table collapses on the left side of the painting, as shown by the red line. Why is this happening? Cézanne was destabilizing perspective, which relies on capturing an object from one angle. Typically, if you were to paint a still-life you would begin by setting up the arrangement, in this case the apples on the table. Then you would set up your canvas and pick a point of view to work from and you would paint the entire still life from that ONE point of view. In Cubism, artists try to imagine multiple points of view. We'll talk about Cubism next class. As a proto-cubist, Cézanne is taking the first step in imagining what would happen if you show an object from multiple points of view at once. You couldn't do that with standard perspective

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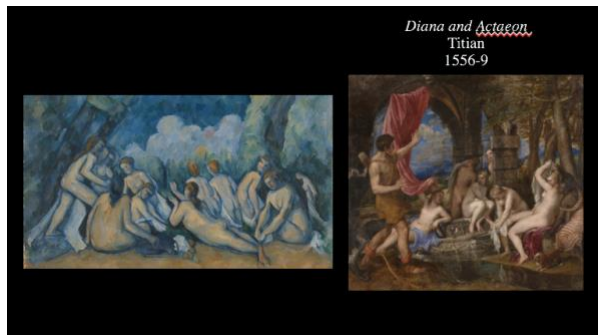
techniques, so they begin to disappear, like the disappearing edge of the table. Cézanne doesn't want to show his viewer what the world looks like, but how we experience it from multiple perspectives.

### Slide 10



A similar thing happens in Cézanne's *Bathers*. This is a very abstracted painting. There are a couple standard components to an **abstract** painting. (This is a more precise term than abstracted as we've been using it throughout the semester, to mean not naturalistic, so be careful with how you use this term.) Abstraction involves the flattening of the picture plane, meaning there is less perspective, and it deprioritizes anatomy and the human figure.

### Slide 11



Let's look at what this means by comparing *Bathers* to Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*, a Renaissance painting. Prior to this period when Cézanne was working, figures were very modeled, with the emphasis on the figures rather than the background. In *Bathers* everything is treated equally. Look at the woman on the left; her leg is connected to the tree, showing that Cézanne treated figures and background as equally important. In *Bathers* there is no foreground, middle ground, or background. This flattens the picture and makes it seem like the clouds and figures are in the same space. Cézanne uses short brushstrokes.

**RESPONSE QUESTION 2/3: Compare and contrast these paintings in a paragraph.**

**RESPONSE QUESTION 3/3: Please submit any questions you have.**