

In three weeks, the Montclair Art Museum – or shall we say Musée d'art de Montclair – will unveil a show featuring 18 works by Paul Cézanne and the art of 34 Americans influenced by the French master.

Exhibiting Greatness

Here's a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the museum's largest and most ambitious exhibit to date.



MINIATURE MASTERPIECE Adrian Shelby, chairman of the board of the Montclair Art Museum, left, inspects a model of the upcoming exhibition "Cézanne and American Modernism" with MAM chief curator Gail Stavitsky.

BY CINDY SCHWEICH HANDLER

"He is the father of us all," Pablo Picasso said of Paul Cézanne, the French artist whose innovative work bridged the late Impressionist and early Cubist movements, and influenced many American masters.

By way of illustration, the Montclair Art Museum will open "Cézanne and American Modernism," its largest and most ambitious exhibit to date, on Sunday, Sept. 13. The show will run for three months, and feature 131 artworks from 50 private and institutional lenders, including 18 works by Cézanne; 34 American artists are to be represented. To

accommodate the unprecedented scale of the project, the museum's permanent collection is being condensed to free up two galleries, and an accompanying catalogue produced by Marquand Press and published in association with Yale University Press runs 376 pages long. Due to the unprecedented interest the project is expected to generate, museum officials have decided to extend hours, and will not impose an extra fee upon visitors.

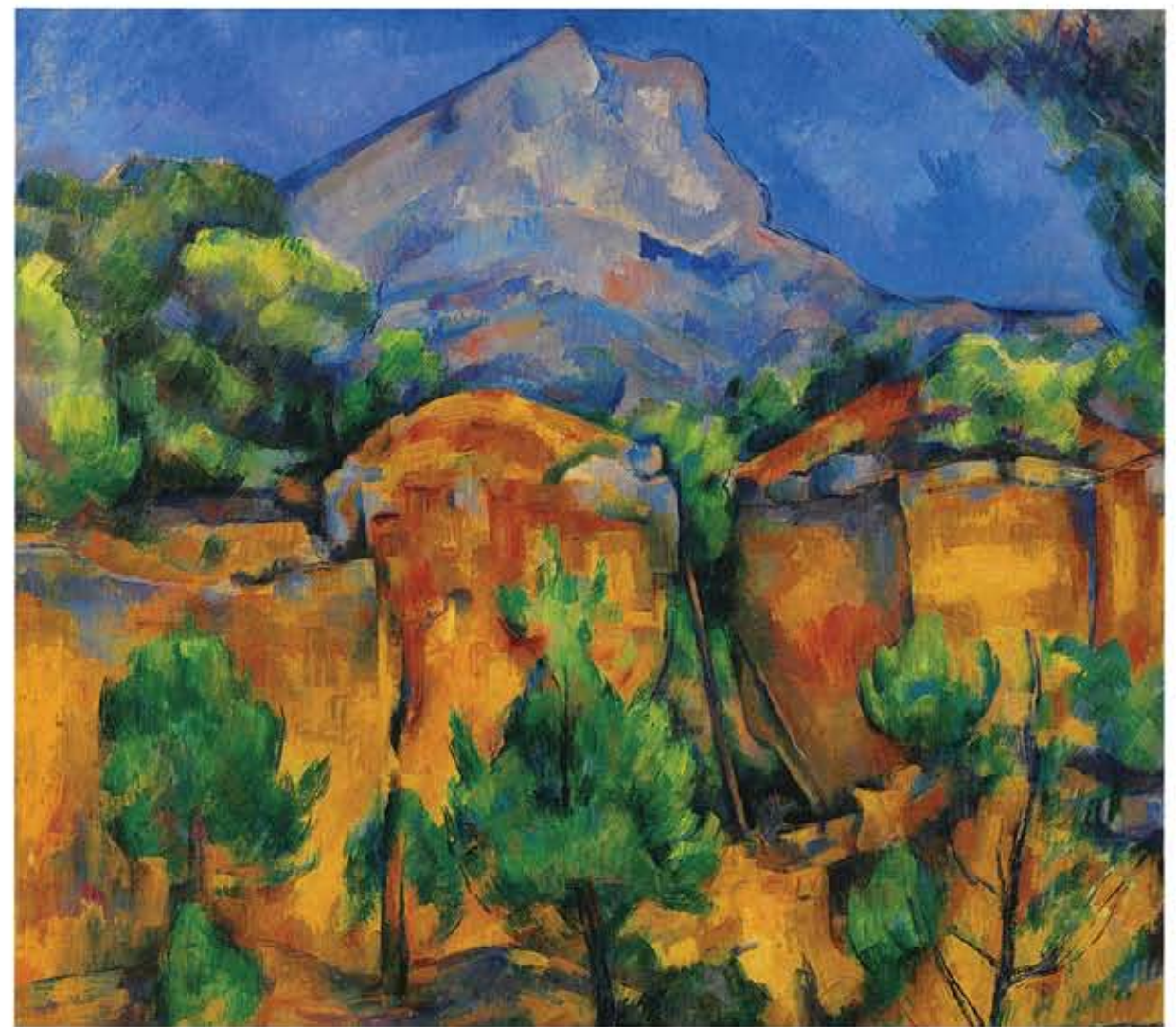
Displayed together, the works demonstrate how Cézanne led an artistic movement away from the strict imitation of nature toward a more interpretive style, featuring intense color, and broken outlines

that blend objects with the space around them; he also had a great impact on avant-garde photographers, such as Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz. These techniques have long been on view at MAM in the works of devotees such as Marsden Hartley, Max Weber and Morgan Russell, of whom the museum owns the largest archives of original papers and drawings. Now "Cézanne and American Modernism" connects the dots – or rather, the lines – between originator and followers.

"American artists traveled to Europe in the teens and '20s of the last century because the environment was less puritanical," says Adrian Shelby, a longtime MAM member and current chairman of the museum's board. "They wanted to study art with nude models, which you could do there, and women could have a greater sense of freedom." A consequence of this exodus is that the visiting Americans brought attention and acclaim to Cézanne, whose work was often criticized in the years before his death in 1906.

"Cézanne and American Modernism" is made possible through a unique partnership with the Baltimore Museum of Art, which is contributing works donated by friends of Gertrude and Leo Stein, the famed ex-pats who encouraged the artist in their Parisian salon. It is underwritten with unprecedented financial assistance from the Leir Charitable Foundations, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Terra Foundation for American Art, Bank of America and other supporters.

But its organizers agree that the exhibit would never have come >



SEEING CÉZANNE

"Cézanne and American Modernism" premieres at the Montclair Art Museum, 3 South Mountain Ave., in Montclair, on Sunday, Sept. 13 and runs through Sunday, Jan. 3, 2010. Here's everything you need to know to go:

WHAT Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) deeply influenced Cubism and the direction of 20th-century art. This exhibit is the first to examine the artist's profound influence upon the development of American modernism.

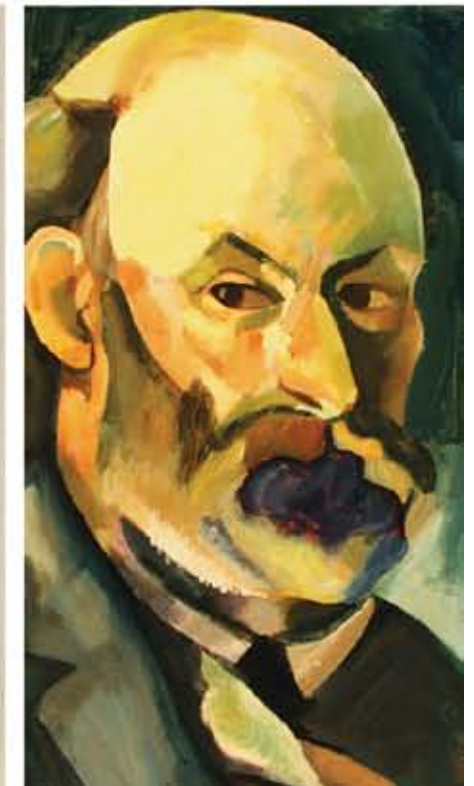
EXPANDED HOURS Tuesdays and Wednesdays, noon to 5 p.m.; Thursdays, noon to 9 p.m.; Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5 p.m., and closed on Mondays and major holidays.

ADMISSION \$12 for nonmember adults, \$10 for seniors and students with I.D. Free admission to members and children under 12.

TOURS Docent-led tours are free with museum admission and are held on Saturdays, at 1 p.m.

MORE Special lectures and events are in the works. Call 973-746-5555 or visit www.montclairartmuseum.org for details.

MONUMENTAL WORK Paul Cézanne's "Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from the Bibemus Quarry" (c. 1897) is one of 18 works by the French master on view at the Montclair Art Museum starting Sunday, Sept. 13.



THE FRUIT OF HIS LABOR

"Strewn Apples," by Max Weber (1923). Weber visited Paris as a young man and became profoundly influenced by the work of Cézanne and Cubism. Weber, who lived from 1881 to 1961 and often revisited the genre of still-life, is credited with remaking Cubism into a uniquely American genre.



APPLES TO APPLES Cézanne's "Five Apples," left, inspired the Morgan Russell still-life "Three Apples," right.

HOW "FIVE APPLES" IMPACTED THE WORLD OF ART

Probably no clearer example of the exhibit's theme exists than its first-time pairing of Paul Cézanne's "Five Apples" (1877-1878) with "Three Apples" (1910), the Morgan Russell still-life that it inspired. (A third artist, Andrew Dasburg, also based a work on "Five Apples," but it has been lost.) Cézanne's painting was a favorite of writer Gertrude Stein and her brother, Leo, who gained sole ownership of it before World War I, to his sister's regret, when the two split up their modern art collection. To Morgan Russell, Leo wrote that "... nowhere is [the Sistine Chapel] as complete as in those apples of Cézanne's." Gertrude and partner Alice Toklas were so fond of the artwork that Picasso painted a watercolor of a single apple for them to

hang in its place to the right of their fireplace. But the Picasso, Toklas later conceded, was no substitute.

"Five Apples" had several owners – according to the Rewald Catalogue Raisonné, it made its way from Leo Stein to several collections in New York (and one in Des Moines) before landing in New York with Eugene V. Thaw, who donated it to the MAM exhibit. "People say that the apples look almost as if they're sculpted, because you see their fronts and sides, but the back is kind of flat," says Gail Stavitsky, the museum's chief curator. "The background space, which we usually think of as empty, has just as much meaning in his paintings as the solid parts. These same devices led to Cubism."

together without Shelby's inspiration.

An avid Francophile who studied in Aix-en-Provence and Paris, Shelby met several Cézanne aficionados a decade ago at a French Consulate fundraiser who encouraged her to celebrate her wedding anniversary in Aix. The director of a museum there then connected her with the woman who was living in Cézanne's house at the time, who persuaded her to hold the party in her home, and to linger afterwards.

When she returned to America, Shelby discussed her interest in arranging a Cézanne-related exhibit with MAM chief curator Gail Stavitsky. The project moved forward five years ago when the Luce grant enabled Stavitsky to assemble a research team. "It's a challenge to find the artworks' owners," she says, laughing at the memory of how the auction house Christie's "forwarded our letter to an owner of a Marsden Hartley painting of Mont Sainte-Victoire who, ironically, lived in New

Jersey." Two years ago, she secured the Phoenix Art Museum as the third and final setting for the exhibit, which will travel there after its three-month show in Baltimore. Last September, museum registrar Renee Powley applied for and received highly sought-after indemnity coverage from the National Endowment for the Arts, an honor signifying the government's recognition of the show's scope and prestige.

Then the real nuts and bolts preparation began: building models of the galleries ("playing dollhouse," Powley jokes); hiring Montclair graphic designers Lehner & Whyte to prepare accompanying text panels; addressing increased security concerns, such as hiring more guards; and arranging for the precious objects' shipping. Crates must be custom-built and meet each lender's specific pick-up, packaging and security requirements before they can be shipped under the watchful eyes of couriers. Among other locales, works to be included in the

exhibit hail from New England, Florida and the Santa Fe area; an Arshile Gorky painting originates in Switzerland.

The mounting process is always delicate, and exhausting when multiplied several times over. Because the works are sensitive to climate fluctuations, they require 24 hours to adjust to their new surroundings before they can be uncrated. Then the lenders' specs about light levels, temperature and humidity must be observed; books must be encapsulated and covered with plexiglass bonnets.

When the show closes on Jan. 3 of next year, MAM staffers will repack the artworks and archival materials with care, and ensure their safe passage to Baltimore.

And Adrian Shelby will have achieved her 10-year plan. "I always thought that if we could do a Cézanne exhibition, the Montclair Art Museum could attract people from far and wide," she says. "We're worth the trip." ■



Montclair Art Museum

3 South Mountain Ave., Montclair, NJ 07042: montclairartmuseum.org