

Paul Cézanne



1839
TO
1906



France
EUROPE



Post-Impressionism

“ I want to astonish Paris with an apple! ”

Paul Cézanne

Paul Cézanne loved painting apples. And in the 19th century, he was the only one. Most painters at that time created amazingly realistic portraits of rich people. They painted epic mythical or Biblical scenes or famous battles. The landscape artists were considered slackers by many critics, because it was ‘way too easy.’ And in that time, Paul decided he would paint only apples (and maybe a pear from time to time).

Why? He **believed that still life** (which was considered the lowliest genre of them all) **could be a great tool for faithfully representing the appearance of light and space.** And since the still life was considered so low, he decided to paint it with the **most common fruit of them all: an apple.** Just to prove his point. Plus, he loved apples.

His task—to **astonish Paris with an apple**—was not easy. It may sound crazy or silly to you but it sounded a hundred times sillier to the critics in the 19th century. But Paul did it. He astonished the art critics in the largest city in France with nothing but his apples. How? They never saw brushstrokes like his. Most painters at that time hid their brushstrokes. They tried to make their works as realistic as possible. Paul did not. His brush strokes were short, parallel and not hiding at all. They were thick and you could see, very clearly, every single one of them. You could watch as the color changed a little bit with every single stroke of his brush. It would get darker, lighter, bolder or more vivid. And it would work amazingly well.

He created over 200 still life paintings. He always set them up with great care. He studied them. He looked at them from many different angles. He played around with the light and the composition (the way they were placed on the table). He stuck fat coins and small wedges underneath the apples to position them the way he wanted. He placed them on a wrinkled tablecloth and moved the vases so that they were not straight.

Paul met Édouard Manet (his fellow painter) on the street and said, 'Sorry, I don't want to shake your hand—I haven't bathed in three days.'

He did not like touching anyone, at any time.



When Paul finally got around to paint his still life, he took his time. **He was a slow painter.** He often started painting the still life but did not finish until the flowers faded and the food had gone bad.

He also painted the still life differently than he put it together. He always confused the eye a little bit – in a good and playful way. In one of his paintings, he covers part of the table with a messy tablecloth and if you trace the table, you see that it is so crooked it could not have laid on the table like that. These little things are what made his paintings interesting and fun to look at.

[Click here to see Paul's paintings.](#)

Do you see the distorted angles and rough shapes in his paintings? These may be seen as (almost) the **beginning of Cubism** even though Paul painted his still lifes long before Pablo Picasso. In fact, Pablo considered him his inspiration and a ‘father to us all.’ He admired his work, as did a lot of other painters we have talked about, like Henri Matisse.

Paul became very famous but it took a long time. The world was not ready for his new way of painting for a very long time. **It was not until he was 66 years old that people finally appreciated all that he had done** for the art world of the 19th century. A once unknown artist who painted apples became a **‘father of the modern art.’**

Watch a time-lapse video of an apple being drawn.

His apple-filled still lifes were filled with strong, thick brushstrokes and a playful composition.



COMPOSITION *of an apple*



In the visual arts, composition is the placement of objects in a painting. It means: putting together. There are many ways you can play around with composition and many rules you can follow or break. But let's look at the basics right now.

In most paintings, some things appear to be in front of the others. You can see a person in front of their house, a tree that is closer to you than the mountains behind it, or in this case, the apple is closer than the basket of the apples by the wall.

- Things that are closest to us are in the foreground.
- The ones that are far away are in the background.
- The ones in the middle are in the middle ground.

How do you paint it?

That's what we will explore. Here are some examples to get you started:

Green in the foreground.
Red in the background.



Red in the foreground.
Green in the background.



Red in the foreground.
Green in the foreground..



Green in the foreground.
Red in the background.



Green in the foreground.
Red in the foreground.



back fore **GROUND**

what do you need?

- squashes, apples and pumpkins
- black paper
- soft (chalk) pastels
- hair spray

1 Find apples, pumpkins or squashes you want to paint. You can add as many as you want. Paul Cézanne painted anything from one to thirty apples. But 2-5 is probably the best number for you.

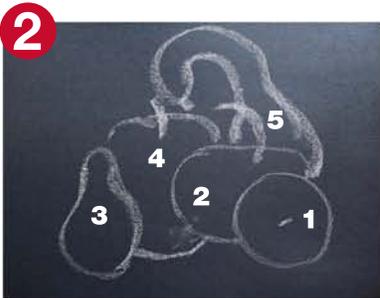
Once you find them, **arrange them on the table**. Which ones are you going to put in the foreground (close to you) and which ones will look good in the background? Play around with it.



where
is it?

Tip

You can put them on the side, lie them down or tip them a little bit. If they keep falling, just add some poster putty or playdough to keep them in place.



2 Sketch the still life that you see in front of you. Start with the object that is closest to you and go from there. Which one is the first, second, third...? If you want to draw the whole overlapping food, that is fine. Do it. We will color over it later.



3 Add a horizon line (where your table ends and your backdrop begins).

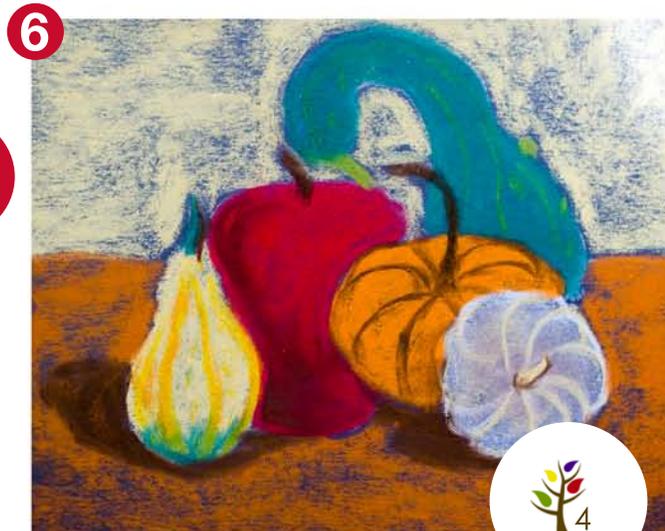
Then choose the most dominant color for each and color it. The left gourd is white and yellow and green—but in this step, we will use only one color: light yellow.



4 Add some details: more colors, patterns, shapes. You should not see any white lines (aside from the horizon).



5 Color the background. Choose two colors and use one for the table and one for the wall. You can place your pastel on its side and use it to shade. If you do, make sure you do not smudge your picture too much, be careful.



6

You can be bold and create a dramatic look using baskets, crates, sacks and more.

6 Add last details and shadows. If you smeared some pastel over your painting, fix it. Then **spray the hairspray over it so that it does not smear anymore.**

Your still life is done.



shine some **LIGHT** on



One of the reasons Paul painted apples again and again was that they let him focus on things he really cared about: **shapes, colors and light.**

[Click here to see how Paul used light and shadows in his art.](#)

Did you know?

What light you use is almost as important as what things you put in your still life. Light can change the mood of your art a great deal. It is not only about day and night.

The right lighting can make your picture look cheerful and happy or spooky and mysterious.

Grab a flashlight and try it out!

How can you light your apple so that it looks different?



Point your flashlight from:



the right side



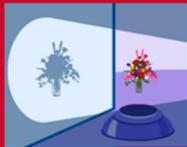
up front



the left side



above



Do you want to experiment with light and shadow right on your computer screen?

[Click here](#) to play a light and shadow game.

Can you make the shadows bigger and more interesting? How do they look inside and outside?

Explore, learn and have fun!



close up



further away