SOME ASPECTS OF COMPOSITION

BY

RICHARD A. EVELETH, B. F. A.

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SOME ASPECTS OF COMPOSITION

BY

RICHARD A. EVELETH, B. F. A.

Approved by Committee:

Leonard Boo
Chairman

Karl Matten

Dean of Graduate Division

141833
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INTRODUCTION

The painter of oil paintings has at his disposal a medium as flexible and effective as any that could be desired. Because oil pigment dries slowly and is opaque in nature, it can be contemplated longer and changed more easily to conform to the artist's wishes than can most other mediums. Oil paint also makes it possible to paint the lighter colors right over darker ones, whereas in transparent water color painting one must always paint dark colors over light ones. The experienced painter can combine and shade pigments on the canvas to an almost infinite variety of hues, values, intensities and textures.

The picture he paints will be presented on some flat surface, such as canvas stretched on a wooden frame or glued to some rigid board. There is no set rule as to how he will paint or what he will use as a tool. Brushes, palette knives and even the tube of paint itself have been used by some artists to apply the pigment to the canvas.

The methods by which a subject is composed by the artist is the immediate concern of this author. A study of some of the aspects of composition used by Johannes Vermeer of Delft and Paul Cézanne of Aix-en-Provence will enable the author to expand his knowledge of the handling of pictorial space.

It is not with the intention of imitating the painting of
the aforementioned artists, but rather the adapting of some of their theories and concepts to his own studies of the "Crucifixion" and the "Grain Elevator," that this study has been made. These subjects were chosen because of their basic structural differences. The "Crucifixion" concerns the placing and handling of figures in an allegorical situation, while the "Grain Elevator" concerns the depiction of inanimate objects in deep perspective on the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. The latter painting also contains a quality of emotional reminiscence.
CHAPTER I

COMPOSITION

The dictionary says that composition is, "the act of combining parts or elements to form a whole, or the manner in which such parts are combined; the resulting state or product; make-up or constitution; a compound or composite substance; the act or the manner of composing prose or verse or a musical or artistic work; the resulting production or work." ¹

Probably the first meaning given will be the one that will aid most in this study. "The act of combining parts or elements to form a whole, or the manner in which such parts are combined...." These parts that are to be combined are the elements which the painter must understand before successfully completing a picture. He must realize that a successful composition does not result merely from putting together objects or subject matter. Good composition is the result of carefully abstracting from the subject the plastic elements of composition which are form, line, space, texture, and color.

Form

The word form has many meanings. One aspect of form is the

basic structure or shape of an object and is its most constant quality. These basic forms are cubes and other rectangular solids, spheres or parts of them, cones and parts of cones, and cylinders and parts of cylinders. These may be combined to form other shapes. The color, outline, texture, and position in space may change but the form may remain the same. For this reason it is the most important of the plastic elements.  

Form as used in discussing the plastic elements must of necessity be a narrower meaning than usual. Here it is meant to be mass or shape, whereas in broader usage it means the total answer to a human need. This would include all the plastic elements and the principles governing their use along with the materials and processes combined to complete a work of art. In a building this would mean the total shape and details of a building in respect to its basic use in satisfying the needs of the occupants. The painter must use this broader meaning of form in the depiction of his subject. If he wishes to convey an emotional message, everything he does on the canvas with his paints, brushes, and talent must be relegated to the conveyance of that message. Every color, shape, texture and line must help to convey this feeling.

Line

The artist who paints or draws cannot mold his materials into three-dimensional solids and therefore must use symbols or conventions

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that indicate form. The simplest of these is line. Lines can be either expressive or representational. The artist uses it usually as an expression of emotion or action, while the engineer or architect uses it as a means of reporting how an object must be built. C. Law Watkins in his Language of Design gives an alphabet of linear expression as follows:

![Diagram showing symbols for various emotions]

**Calm**  
**Stability**  
**Movement**  
**Grace**

**Buoyancy**  
**Excitement**

Fig. 1.—Alphabet of Linear Expression

These lines are not the surface lines or single lines of a drawing. They are the total directional influences of the group of lines making up a figure or object in a picture. They are said by Watkins to be effective because of a combination of memory and association by the viewer. It can be seen in this alphabet of lines that the direction and character of the line are very important to its effect. The line can be curved or straight, horizontal or vertical, with countless variations in between these extremes.

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A line that is curved can continue until it is a circle and thereby forms a shape on the canvas. Lines of various shapes and sizes can be grouped to form other rectangular shapes. A line has proportion in that it can be considered as a certain size, area, or quantity. All lines have a texture depending on the medium used and the surface as well as the will of the artist. They also have values ranging from black to white as well as colors of any hue. This last factor of color in a line is what sometimes causes the casual viewer of a painting to feel that there are very few lines and that color is the basic element of the design.

A use of interrupted line in a picture suggests the pauses between notes in a musical score. This gap makes an interval through which the artist directs the eye by the use of accompanying lines to continue across an area that the line does not span. This is known as a subjective line or one to be filled in by the viewer of the picture.

Space

Lines are used in paintings to build forms and the forms must fit together to create a feeling or idea of space between and around the forms. Therefore space must also conform to the two-dimensional aspects of the canvas. This is symbolic space rather than actual space as the sculptor and architect know it.

There are two ways to consider space that will help in the study of painting on canvas. One is to treat it as a problem in spatial organization which means that the artist will design forms, textures, and colors in three dimensions symbolically. The other is
to treat it as a problem of space division which implies a decorating or dividing of the surface of the canvas. This study is concerned more with the problems of spatial organization.

The two-dimensional space of the canvas leaves the artist with a definite and limited area. The particular shape of this area is referred to as the format of the picture. This is the total area on which the objects may be described in their relationships with other objects. In general the format is chosen to fit the subject. Very seldom does a subject naturally fit a format. The flowers in Figure 2 require some aid in filling the format. Figure 3 shows a better filling of the format by the same subject. It is of course possible to fill in the rest of the space in Figure 2 and make a

![Fig. 2.—Format Poorly Filled by Subject](image1)

![Fig. 3.—Format Fitted to the Subject](image2)

more complete picture, but, for the sake of illustrating the theory, this will do as it stands.

In order to suggest deep space on a flat surface the artist must set up various planes which will convey to others the feeling of space in the third dimension, depth. These receding planes will never be parallel to the picture planes. Sometimes this is obviously emphasized to convey recessions and to draw attention to the illusion of depth.
These planes may be either static or dynamic. A static plane is one which is parallel to the picture plane. It creates little if any sensation of movement. A dynamic plane is one which runs at an angle to the picture plane and gives an illusion of receding or projecting from the picture plane. If they are parallel with the picture plane, they may be shaped so as to give the impression of a wall, flat on a canvas, as in Figure 4. If the artist adds planes B, C, D, and E to plane A by using diagonal lines as in Figure 5, they give one an illusion of receding into the distance. By combining these planes one gives an impression of objects having volume or three dimensions.

Since pictorial space must be achieved by the use of lines and forms, it must be done in a manner that will not draw too much attention to the method, but will leave the observer with the feeling of space resolved.

The simplest way of portraying an object or experience is to show a single object drawn on a page. This is called a catalog approach. The lines and their relationship to the spaces between them tell the story. Whenever a second and third object enters the picture the sizes of the objects can be used to tell where they are
in relation to one another. Closer objects seem large and the farther objects appear smaller. Another practice is to put the interests nearest the artist close to the bottom of the format and then force everything to go "up hill" from there. This is called vertical location. Generally these methods are not used alone but in conjunction with one another and with variations of other ideas.

One of the common methods of space depiction is that of overlapping forms or planes. It is obvious from the most casual observation that close objects are always in front of further removed objects and therefore often hide part of the farther ones from the sight of the observer.

Linear and aerial perspective are probably the most widely used means of representing space today. Linear perspective involves the use of a central viewing point with straight and parallel lines converging and vanishing at a common point on the horizon much the same as the illusions of depth in a photographic negative. Mechanically, the objects diminish in size as the various objects become farther from the artist's physical point of view.

An aerial perspective depends upon the blurring or softening of edges and weakening of the hues and values and contrasts of the objects as they recede from the foreground. There are many variations of linear and aerial perspective, but most of them depend on the single viewpoint and the converging of lines. However, the artists of all periods have managed to create great works without adhering to any definite laws of perspective. They may use several viewpoints or several horizon lines in the same painting. Before
the formulation of rules in Italian perspective by Paolo Uccello, about 1460, artists often reversed the converging lines and made them diverge to widen the scope of the picture.

These are the logical and natural methods of achieving the concept of space on canvas, but there are still other ways of conveying a feeling of space in pictures. One of the more common is that of contradictory spaces used by many contemporary painters. This occurs when one line forms a common part of two similarly shaped objects. A study of Figure 6 will show this to good advantage.

First the vase, and then the large bowl, will seem closer to the viewer if he stares at it a while, partly because the tangential line unites the two objects into one, and this acts to enlarge each of them.

Interpenetration and transparency are other methods used to create other concepts of space. An interweaving of colors, textures, and lines that let us see through, over and under objects in an abnormal way is used by many artists. The most apt and experienced artists are likely to use many variations of all of these methods. There is no single set of rules, for that would hinder the expressive qualities of all artists.
Texture

The fourth plastic element of any work of art is that of texture. Each single natural material has a texture of its own. This causes a certain visual response because it indicates how the material will feel to the sense of touch. The pictorial texture should be appropriate to the material and its function. Thus the materials used to build a house may purposefully be made very rough to indicate the strength of the brick and cement used. The material gives a look of strength through its roughness. On the other hand, the builder of a small boat must use smoothly sanded wood or slick metals to give the buyer the sensation of a fast boat skimming through or over the dragging surface of the water.

In painting one must again recall that oil paint and canvas are used to convey the sensation of natural textures rather than to copy actual textures. A group of lines may be arranged to give an object the appearance of being rough or smooth. This would be simulated texture, whereas the surface of the finished painting itself may have a differing roughness or smoothness of its own. It may copy the natural surfaces, but today it is usually the result of the type of brush strokes used to apply the paint rather than any conscious effort to simulate natural surfaces. The painted textures are of the most importance to the artist as they are used to convey ideas or emotions.

Color

The last of the plastic elements is that of color which should be subdivided into two types. Physiological color is that of the
sunlight or white light. The sunlight is made up of a mixture of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. Color depends on the eye of humans and animals for its existence. Objects are seen in different colors because the objects that are red, for instance, will absorb all other rays of the spectrum and reflect only the red ones.

The other type of color is that concerning the painter for it is mixed from pigments or dyes. A pigment absorbs all of the colors of the spectrum except the one closest to its own color which it reflects to the eye. When various colors of the light spectrum are added together they produce color, whereas any pigment must subtract all the other colors from the spectrum in order to reflect its own color to the eye of the viewer.

The painter is concerned basically with pigment colors, as they are what he must use. Colors have three characteristics or attributes which enable the user to discuss them in a more accurate way than as to color family alone. These are hue, value, and intensity or chroma.

Hue.—Hue is the name of the color, such as the primary hues, red, blue and yellow. They are called primary because they cannot be obtained by mixing of any other known pigments. By mixing two primary hues in equal amounts a secondary hue such as purple, green, or orange is theoretically obtained. From these colors the artist mixes an infinite number of hues by combining them in various amounts with their neighboring hues.

The hues have effects of warmth and coolness. In fact, the colors of the spectrum when tested with a delicate thermometer show
that certain hues, (red, yellow and orange) give off slightly more heat than do the blue-green, blue and purple hues at the other end of the spectrum. 4

Hues may have a harmonious or contrasting effect on each other depending on whether they contain mixtures of neighboring colors or colors opposite each other on the color wheels. Hues adjacent to each other in the rainbow or on a color wheel are called analogous and those opposite each other are called complementary. The latter are what create contrasts. Complementary hues mixed together in equal amounts theoretically will produce a neutral gray. Complementary hues when used next to each other will intensify each other's color qualities. This last color effect was used by both Vermeer and Cézanne to produce radiant coloring effects in their pictures.

Value.—Value is basically the lightness or darkness of a color. Yellow is naturally light in value while blue would be dark in value. This is value in relation to the total group of hues on the color wheel. Each hue can be altered to make different values by adding white or black to the hue. Then there will be many hues ranging from a very high light one to medium and then to a very low dark and almost black one. In between these can be any number of values of one hue. These will of course create new hues and change the intensity of the original hue somewhat.

The paler the value of the color used, the larger the object may appear to the viewer. A square inch of a pale yellow would appear larger than a square inch of a darker color such as blue. This is one of the ways value is used in painting. The paler the values of the object compared to the values of its surroundings, the larger and more conspicuous the object will become.

If an artist lightens the values of the colors meant to be in the distance in a picture it will aid in the depicting of space. The use of the same hues but in higher values will also aid in the harmonious cohesion of the composition of the painting. Value contrasts are used to emphasize objects. Vermeer was a master of the control of space by values.

These contrasts of value are sometimes manipulated in such a way as to create space through a system of interchanging the values. This interchange occurs when the artist makes the lower portion of a tree light in value to show up against the ground colors but then darkens the upper parts of the same tree form to make it show up against a light sky.

Values cannot be constant because they always seem altered by their relationship to the values about them. A medium value will appear darker on a light value than it will if placed against a dark value. As are all other things in art, a value is subject to the changes made in its surrounding values.

Intensity.—The third characteristic of color is that of intensity. This refers to the purity of any hue. Intensity may be lowered by mixing the hue with its complement from the color wheel.
Thus red mixed with green will eventually turn to a neutral gray. Whereas value is the lightness or darkness of any hue, intensity tells how bright or pure the color is. The full strength of any color will be its greatest intensity and if the value is either raised or lowered, the intensity is automatically lowered. Intensity is also dependent on the effects of its surrounding colors.

There are many ways to use color in relation to painting pictures. There are many more or less basically mechanical color schemes used by designers and painters alike. They are mechanical in the sense that they can be chosen from a color wheel as a starting place for a picture. They run from a simple monochromatic, meaning all of one hue, such as blue, on through the triad of any three hues located equidistant from each other on the color wheel.

The monochromatic scheme involves the variation of values and intensities and must be handled carefully to prevent its becoming dull or monotonous. It is entirely dependent on the behavior of pigments when they are mixed with other pigments and therefore the result is sometimes unpredictable.

Another scheme is analogous, which uses a hue and a variation of a hue on each side of itself. Blue-green, blue and blue-violet would illustrate this choice.

Complementary colors are also used as a basic scheme in color usage. A modification of this would be the split-complementary scheme which is comprised of any hue with the two hues on either side of its complement.

It is also possible to use two adjacent hues and their two
complements as a double complementary scheme.

These schemes depend either upon harmony or contrast to create unity and interest in a painting. All of them can give effects of harmony or contrast if their values are used harmoniously or contrastingly.

There is a use of color that coincides with the surprise that a well placed discord provides in music. That is a color discord caused by reversing the natural order of color and tone on the color wheel. Pink is a very light red and will create a discord when placed against a background of orange. In small areas this can be exciting and contribute to movement in a picture.

There are variations in the way color is used in depicting space on a canvas that should broaden the use of it. There is the closed system in which each object has a single hue and is set off from its surroundings by its difference in color. Then there is the open system in which objects are built up from minute variations of hue, value, and intensity. In the open system various hues are used on many different objects. A tree may contain many hues of green that are identical with those of the grass, hillsides and even the dresses of girls in the picture. Shadows of a yellow building may reflect some of its color to the ground and change the color of the grass to a yellow-green. Cézanne is the master of the latter method.

With the help of this study of the plastic elements of composition, a study of the painting of Jan Vermeer and Paul Cézanne may be made.
Since Vermeer's paintings have been recognized there have been numerous falsifications, retouchings of other paintings to resemble his work, and other paintings misattributed as his, but not accepted by authorities as such. Vermeer is known to have spent the lifetime of forty-three years in Delft without ever leaving. He had a family of eleven children when he supposedly died in comparative poverty. His wife gave two of his paintings a value of 1,176 florins he owed his Jan Vermeer, who is also called Johannes Van der Meer of Delft or Jan Vermeer Van Delft, was christened Joannes Vermeer, in Delft, October 31, 1632. Nothing definite about him is known until he married on April 5, 1653, and later that same year was admitted to the Guild of Saint Luke in Delft as a master painter. His first signed and dated work is of the year 1656, which means that nothing positive is known about his work until he was 20 years old. It is not known for sure whether he studied anywhere but in Delft. Vermeer must have been recognized by his fellow painters, for he was chairman of the Guild of Saint Luke for two years, and was paid more for his pictures than others of his day were used to receiving. He worked slowly and therefore his production was very low. This low productivity may be what caused Vermeer to lose prominence. After his death he was virtually forgotten until in 1866 when Etienne Thore, who wrote under the name of W. Burger, described some forty-seven works as being by Jan Vermeer. This has more recently been cut to forty by the scholars as listed by noted authority A. B. De Vries.5

Since Vermeer's greatness became recognized there have been numerous falsifications, retouchings of other paintings to resemble his work, and other paintings submitted as his, but not accepted by authorities as such. Vermeer is thought to have spent his lifetime of forth-three years in Delft without ever leaving. He had a family of eleven children when he may have died in comparative poverty. His wife gave two of his paintings to satisfy a debt of 3,176 florins he owed his baker.

Vermeer's artistic education is not known. It must be assumed that the artist was a product of the influences upon him from three directions: the first was his time of living. He lived at a time of great artistic fertility in Holland and his generation was allowed freedom from pressures of either church or state. The rest of Europe was involved in the courtly and ecclesiastical style known as the Baroque while the Dutch people were adopting a rather closed middle-class culture. There were few rules or regulations to hinder the artist in the search for his own way of expression while using the knowledge of those before him.

The second influence was probably the influence of the artists about him in Holland, and the general subjects painted by them. Painting was an individual proposition in Holland and the painter expressed his own personal relationship to nature and the life about him. The tendency was away from the ideological themes of the international Baroque toward a more natural search for color, form,

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6 Ibid. p. 63.
and line usage in genre paintings.

Vermeer came between the extremes but tended toward the Dutch painters of Utrecht who followed the lead of the Italian, Caravaggio. This meant a more realistic approach to painting than the idealistic approach of the High Renaissance period in Italy. The factor of realism here is debatable as the cellar lighting and stark contrasts almost reduce a picture to two planes—one of light and one of dark shadow. However, the emphasis was on form, unity, and attention to still life qualities so it fitted in well with the problems of the genre painters of Utrecht.

There was in the Utrecht group of painters a man called Hendrick ter Brugghen. This man was a very subtle colourist with a fine sense of the plastic elements in painting. The colour scheme of his picture "Jacob and Laban" in brick-red, ruddy brown, pastel blue and slate gray is one used in Vermeer's painting, "Christ in the House of Mary and Martha." 7 In other paintings considered to be among Vermeer's earlier works there are characteristics much like those typical of the school of Utrecht. The preference for blues and yellows as color harmonies, certain compositional patterns and the lyrical interpretations with close-up views of the figures all make it possible to believe that Vermeer may have studied at Utrecht before being admitted to the Guild in Delft in 1653.

The third influence on Vermeer was probably that of the painters who preceded him in Delft and were there during his early formative years of painting. One of these was Paul Potter who so

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7Tbid. p. 29.
masterfully expressed the atmosphere of a sunny summer day and became a popular painter of animals. Vermeer may have learned the art of placing his figures against bright backgrounds from the manner in which Potter placed his animal subjects against light skies or hills. Potter and Vermeer were akin because both approached their problem strictly as painters with no ideological ideas present.

Another of these Delft painters was one who studied under Rembrandt in Amsterdam but arrived in Delft in 1652 to join the Guild. Carel Fabrianius dropped the strong contrasts of his teacher and painted in the manner of the rest of the Delft painters.

No concrete proof of any of these influences is available but in the case of a man with so little known about his private life it is probable that these influences were real. Similar influences have left their imprints on all artists of all the ages.

**Vermeer's Composition**

In the study of the work of Vermeer the author wishes to focus his attentions more on the paintings which are considered to be indicative of the changing points or high points in his development. One of his first works was that of "Christ in the House of Mary and Martha" which illustrates the point that the artist tried to capture the effect of the actions at their conclusion rather than in the middle of an action. The figures are usually totally unaware of any observer. The viewer is never a guest, but is usually an intruder, in one of Vermeer's pictures. Vermeer approached his subject as a painter with little or no ideological or literary intentions at all. Typical of Vermeer are two features of a general
character: the monumentality of his figures and the depth of his perspective. He saw and thought in terms of color and in that sense attained the highest perfection a painter can reach.

Vermeer's development was gradual and so a study of periodic changes in his approach will help to understand his genius. "The Procuress" indicates a change from the lyrical fashion of the "Christ in the House of Mary and Martha" painting in that "The Procuress" treats a subject much painted in Holland. The subject of mercenary love called for a more sensual and robust approach. In this painting the degree of finish is not up to his later standards. The paint was applied to the flame-red jacket of the man and the lemon-yellow jacket of the girl very thickly and possibly with a palette knife, whereas the pitcher and wine glass to their left was treated delicately and lightly with thin pigment.

The folds and the red and yellow color of the carpet continue with the shapes and colors of the paramount figures. The color scheme is one of warm hues of yellow and red with values ranging from dark to almost white. The range of intensity of colors is from a hue near the probable maximum of red down the scale to gray. There is a definite use of subjective lines or areas of color directing the eye in the paths of color and line. The pitcher directs the eye upward where it is caught by the white bonnet of the young woman and sent down her arm to the focal point of her interest which is the hand and the coin it is to receive.

The dark garment in the left foreground is a continuation of

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8Ibid. p. 23. 9Ibid. p. 62.

10Ibid. p. 33.
the line with a row of white-appearing pearl buttons to draw the eye up and thence to the highlights of gray on the jacket of the minstrel. There the white of his collar and the darker mass of his hand holding the glass points out the procurress watching the transaction. The slant of the form of the face of the procurress seems, by contrast of axis, to balance and lead into the arm of the purchaser. The cocked angle of the hats of both men help to contrast and balance the right to left diagonal of brilliant color in this picture.

yellow. The monumentality of figures and their arrangement along with the almost tangible feeling of real space which Vermeer was capable of suggesting is missing in this painting. Therefore it could be an early study similar to another painting of the same subject by Theodor van Baburen of the Utrecht school which was in Vermeer's possession as seen by its use in backgrounds of several of his paintings.11

girl. The next picture Vermeer painted that shows a definite growth into his own expressive temperament was that of the "Sleeping Girl." Here that quality of repose and timelessness is abundant. The picture is the first to reveal the search for the control of space in which the painter was to become so proficient. The method of spacing is still somewhat obvious with the many horizontal and vertical lines, but for the first time he places the figure of his girl against a light background and keeps the general values of the picture low. There was no precedent for this subject except for the obvious contrasts of value that remind one of Carel Fabritius. This may mean

11 Ibid. p. 28.
that this was the first totally independent work of the painter Vermeer.

The next work to consider is that of "Lady Reading a Letter." In this Vermeer has hit a high point in his work. There are few obvious verticals or horizontals. It is simple in subject and involves little in the way of accessories. Line and color are held together by the common source of light from the window. This occurs due to the color range which runs from a medium green to a high yellow. The open window on the left is lighter in value than anything else in the picture but this is balanced by subtle changes of the same hue in the figure, the wall, and a large drapery in the foreground. The Oriental carpet on the table with the fruit as a still life is handled finely and creates the sense of distance between the table and the girl. The suggestion of a reflection in the open window pane is effective in establishing it as being behind the girl. The warmth of the reds in the carpet in the foreground and the window drapery carry the eye easily from the bottom to the top of the picture.

There is an omission in the mechanical perspective in this picture which helps to verify the fact that the subject was second to the total picture even though the great attention paid to detail tends to belie this. There is a chair in the corner of the room below and beyond the window. It is placed across the corner of the room. If one carries a line up from any appropriate cornerpoint behind the chair he will find that nowhere on the upper part of the same wall do the two walls intersect. A study of the reproduction,
Plate 7, in *The Paintings of Jan Vermeer*, Phaidon Edition, Oxford University Press, will show no break in the composition at that point mentioned. It is hard to believe that this omission could be accidental by one as thorough as Vermeer. It might possibly have been lost in the deep shadows of the corner, but the picture is more a unit without it.

The next picture mentioned here is probably one of the best known and monumental works of the artist. This is the "View of Delft," which hangs in the Mauritshuis Museum in the Hague. Vermeer treated this study of his city as from afar. It is characteristic of a Dutch town, having the sandy bank of a canal in the foreground, the canal and the ships tied to the banks on the farther side of the canal. This is a bright and sunny day with large billowing clouds and very blue sky. Bright sunlight is evident on parts of the city in the right-hand part of it. The buildings are composed of horizontals and verticals. The blue rooftops are a deep color drawing attention to themselves while at the same time harmonizing well with the sky and water. The general tone of sky and land is light with the buildings and the reflections offering solid contrasts. De Vries says:

The picture has an incomparable glow: brick-red against flame-red; blue against lemon-yellow and orange; deep blue against lead gray. The shadings are innumerable. The granular brick of the walls, the green creeper (that time has turned almost blue), here and there even the ships' hulls, are dabbed and dabbed again. These curious pointilles are distributed over the whole picture. Conjured up as by magic from so rich a palette, the "View of Delft" is wholly subject to the overwhelming power of light.¹²

¹²Ibid. p. 36.
The last picture studied is called the "Lady in Blue" and in it Vermeer is supposed to have summarized all his artistic experience and genius. He conveys a feeling of space without overemphasis and used his best color with the use of light. It is an analogous harmony split between many hues of blue to green and ultimately yellow. A yellow-brown in a map on the wall and a scarf on the table balance each other to create a link between the wall behind the girl and the table in the foreground of the picture. Here in the pale gray hue of the girl's face can be found proof that the artist was aware of the fact that the color of any object which casts a shadow is reflected into the shadow where it influences the local color in the shadow.

Two hundred years later the Impressionists utilized this theory and expanded the pointillist technique of allowing many different colors to blend into one unified effect on the canvas rather than by mixing these together previously on the palette.
CHAPTER III

THE ARTIST CEZANNE

Cézanne's Life

The Impressionists approached the idea of painting with an objective viewpoint somewhat similar to that of Vermeer. The subject was of little importance except as a starting place for the experiencing of the beauty of color and light that exists in objects and nature. Impressionists were concerned with the effects of light on nature and therefore often took their easels outdoors to paint. Most earlier artists had sketched out-of-doors but had painted in their studios, but the Impressionists were the first to complete their work out-of-doors with the subject in view. They were aware of the actual brightness of color and conditions of light and atmosphere more than any previous group of painters. Their technique had to be quick to catch effects of light before they changed, and the colors had to be brightened if possible beyond the existing intensities of the pigments they had. This led to the roughness of the brush strokes, almost a shorthand, and to the broken color schemes that are characteristic of many of these painters.

The Impressionists treated the subjects from the viewpoint of a camera lens but did not focus on one point more sharply than others. They were not lost in details, but represented what they
saw quickly and effectively in color as though the objects were seen at a glance rather than studied in detail. They treated the canvas as a whole rather than focusing in more detail on one area or another. The tendency was to keep the picture two-dimensional in nature without excessive modeling or chiaroscuro.

Paul Cézanne admitted the value of the feeling for color the Impressionists had, but rejected the transient nature of their conceptions. Cézanne deplored the weaknesses in structural feeling and composition of most of the Impressionists and strove to combine their color ideas with the pictorial structure of the masters he studied diligently in the Louvre.

Cézanne was born in Aix-en Provence, France, on January 19, 1839. He was born of a gentle and understanding mother and a hard-headed businessman and banker, whose main measure of success was the accumulation of monetary goods. Cézanne was forced to become first a lawyer and then a banker, but neither vocation could prevent his wanting to be a painter. His father reluctantly permitted him to study art in Paris. There he joined his boyhood friend, Emile Zola, and became acquainted with the men who would become the stalwarts of the Impressionist movement: Manet, Degas, Renoir, and Monet.

While in Paris Cézanne spent hours sketching and studying the works of Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Rubens, and Delacroix in the Louvre. He took his profession seriously and was inclined to isolate himself from society. Each year he submitted a painting to the Salon in Paris and had it refused. Cézanne depended entirely on his father's support for a livelihood. His fame and fortune
did not begin until a few years before he died, practically a recluse, in 1906 in Aix.

Cézanne was quick to suggest that he was searching for a new expression and that he was not always successful. His early works concerned literary subjects and were crude and severe in form. His mature works, for which he has become famous, are carefully planned and methodically constructed. They differ from that of Vermeer by being a single statement of fact discerned at a glance. Despite the simplicity of the statement, there is nothing obvious about them. They will stand and reward careful scrutiny with greater beauty than was seen at first glance.

Cézanne exhibited publicly for the first time in 1847 with the Societe Anonyme des Artistes-Peintres, Sculpteurs et Graveurs. "Many of the great Impressionists who participated in that exhibition were damned by the critics; but Cézanne was savagely attacked."13

In 1866 To understand better Cézanne's critics it should perhaps be mentioned here that the man began to paint at a time when the general rule was that of the Beaux Arts academicians which was merely a revival of the darkened and dull passages of color in the paintings of the Romantics. The Romantics were more interested in the emotional aspects of subject matter and in striking color effects than in the classic esthetic values. The academicians considered drawing as something separate from color and used black for many of the shadows in their paintings. It was said that, on the few occasions when

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one of the Impressionist pictures was hung in the Salon, it was like an open window with the brightness of the sunlight streaming in.\(^{14}\)

From 1866 until 1882 Cézanne submitted regularly to the Salon des Beaux Arts and was rejected until the latter year when Antoine Guillemeret, who was a friend of Cézanne’s serving on the jury, included a painting for him. Each juror was permitted to choose one work of art for display, without its being approved by the other members of the jury. The painting drew no attention from the public, and Cézanne did not exhibit there again.

Cézanne led an unhappy life in which he was always at odds with his father over something. He met and lived with one of his models who bore him a child in 1872. His father knew nothing of this union and when he found out about it later, cut Cézanne’s allowance in two. He was persuaded by Cézanne’s mother to resume the full allowance later, but the struggle between father and son continued. In 1886, probably more for his son’s sake than for love of the woman, Cézanne was married to Hortense Fiquet with the artist’s parents as witnesses. Cézanne lived with his mother and sister most of the time in Aix-en-Provence where he felt that he could do his best work. Hortense remained in Paris. Her main contribution to his life seemed to be that of posing for him without moving or talking. She and Cézanne’s sister were among the few women that Cézanne ever painted.

The rejections that Cézanne suffered in his professional as well as private life took a terrific toll on his mental state. Even

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after his contemporaries and the general artistic public began to appreciate his work, he withdrew from all of them and was even known to fly into a rage at being touched by any person.

Paul Cézanne stayed out in a rainstorm to paint on October 15, 1906 and was overcome while trying to reach his home. He was carried home, but got up the next day to paint a portrait in his studio. He returned to his living quarters in a state of collapse, and on October 22 he died before his wife and son could get to his bedside.

Cézanne's Composition

Cézanne often began a painting by sketching on bare canvas with a pencil or stick of charcoal. Even though the sketches may have been brief, they established the planes that were necessary to fill the space involved in the painting.

His next step was to retrace these lines and verify them with a thin blue-gray color in the medium he was to use. He drew only after long contemplation of the subject. Once he started, he drew with the brush rapidly and with great intentness. Then he began with cool, neutral colors to paint in the various volumes, starting at their outer edges, working toward their centers. This is not to be confused with the finishing of each area to a great degree, then moving to the next. It was a process of working the colors about the canvas without finishing any one object, but advancing the picture all at the same rate.

Once the colored outline of space relationships was finished, he began to distribute the smaller planes of color with which he, in effect, formed the objects and kept them in harmony with the
spaces about them. It is said by Fritz Novotny that these color areas are not meant to isolate the objects but are meant to create a link between two adjacent or near areas of color.\textsuperscript{15}

Cézanne and the Impressionists used the idea that color was to be mixed by the eye if small areas of one color were intermingled through other colors. At a distance, this gave much the same effect as when the color was mixed by the painter on the palette, but it had more vibrancy.

Cézanne modulated volumes from their cool, darker sides to their warm lighter parts in a series of small color changes from low to high intensity. In fact, never before had modulations exploited the various ranges of intensity in scales as did those of Cézanne. Volumes were given shape or were modeled more solidly with this form of color modulation than could be accomplished by changing values of one hue, as the academicians had done. Cézanne laid his color changes on side by side, with no blending of the paint on the canvas. All of these minute color planes remained flat on the surface of the canvas, repeating the picture plane and maintaining the two-dimensional character of the colors themselves. These color planes were subservient to the larger structural planes of the picture.

As Cézanne advanced the color and space on the canvas he constantly reestablished the contours with lines so that the structural planes of the composition remained firm. Whenever a line

became lost or diffused due to the similarities of neighboring colors, he superimposed a firm line there to renew the contours necessary to his composition. These lines were seldom drawn about an entire object but, just as the color aided an observer's eye to connect objects in two-dimensional space, the lines faded so that the eye might leave and connect the object with other areas. These lines were of different colors suited to the objects or areas being emphasized. They served to supplement the color areas where necessary due to lost and found edges. Cézanne's lines might have been formed by color in places, but elsewhere they were left obvious, firm and positive. They thus established the structure of his paintings.

As stated previously, Cézanne's color modulations came from the theory of the Impressionists that light is composed of the prismatic colors rather than being dependent on the pigment colors. This raised the general key of the colors and tended to brighten the canvases. The Impressionists followed the general practice of trying to portray the results of the various atmospheric conditions rather than the composing of a picture through the medium of a standard supply of colors.

Cézanne's color was not hampered by the adherence to principles of light and shade, but transcended them to become a source of light itself. It usually remained conscious of the two-dimensional nature of the painted surface and did not cause one thing to protrude and others to be "holes" in the canvas. In many cases, in order to keep a distant mountain from destroying the two-dimensional
qualities of the composition, he would take some of the bright colors from the foreground and use them on the mountain, thereby connecting the two areas and flattening the perspective.

Being probably the first of the modern painters to use the knowledge that warm colors advance and cool colors recede, Cézanne used this understanding to make sure that his pictures did not become the extreme imitations of great distances or depths in many of the Impressionists' compositions. Over and over, he repeated foreground colors in the extreme distance to keep background shapes from receding too far away where they might destroy the compositional unity.

The final color balance of the entire picture was the goal, rather than the shaping of each individual form or volume. This is proved by the fact that the relationships of the large color areas and the balance of these colors in relation to the form and the space involved were enough to make Cézanne one of the great colorists in painting.

Cézanne's concern with the cohesion of all of the elements of his composition would refute his statement that a student who learned to render volumes would be able to paint. Only by rendering the volumes in relation to their surrounding space did he realize his own desires in painting.

Cézanne did not ignore the source of light completely, but many times used shadows or their general shapes to good advantage in the composition of many pictures. He painted outdoors, and even went so far as to paint certain landscapes at the same hour on successive days so that the light conditions would be nearly the
same. He is reported to have told Charles Camoin, a painter, to study the masters, Veronese and Rubens, but above all to study from nature. 16

Cézanne caused one to sense the various conditions of light by using color which would reflect enough light from the canvas to give the feeling of sunshine or cloudiness. He did not depend on deep shadows or fuzzy divisions or area to depict bright or misty days. His color always was somewhat two-dimensional in feeling and moved freely about the canvas to hold it together as a unit.

It should be mentioned here that the colors used in Cézanne's landscapes were not abstract. According to Erle Loran, who has made a prolonged study of Cézanne's methods and who has photographed the very motifs, the colors were native to and natural in that area of France. 17

The colors and their areas were responsible for the type of brush strokes and treatment of the surface that Cézanne used. This of course made a broken sort of paint texture. It was not a conscious effort to form imitations of other textures in nature, but was the result of the canvas being filled with small areas of color to build objects.

Cézanne's application of color in small patches made of necessity a texture akin to the number of changes in hue, and in this way added to the feeling of space or direction. Erle Loran

16 Rewald, op. cit., p. 201.

17 Loran, op. cit., p. 65.
says that, due to the character of the forms, the texture changes because:

A flat surface will remain quite smooth, while leaves and trees and bushes will take on a variegated, broken kind of texture. These differing textural weights were balanced. It was not merely a matter of rendering the varying character of forms as they appeared in the motif. If a flat surface needed more weight in relation to other parts of the picture for example, he would not hesitate to introduce heavy modulations.18

In the textbook called Art Today a reference is made to the use of brush strokes as texture in order to counter-balance the direction of a volume.19 The tree on the left of the picture has a definite movement of the trunk from right to left. The foliage on the tree, though shaped roundly, is painted with brush strokes which slant and run from left to right in opposition to the tree trunk's direction.

In his search for structural unity attained by careful use of structural lines and color modulations, Cézanne sought many answers to the handling of space in his pictures. He was not content with the aerial perspective used by the Impressionists nor did he approve of the flat approach of the Primitives which was poster-like and decorative in nature.

There have been some writers who thought that Cézanne did not use outlines in his composition. They felt that he created a feeling of space by the strict modulations of colors and that the only use of lines was of a decorative nature. This is denied by Loran who goes on to say that the modulating of colors does aid in the depiction of space but that it is obvious that the lines and

18 Ibid., p. 31.
19 Faulkner, Ziegfeld & Hill, op. cit., p. 386.
structural planes themselves are enough to depict the basic relationships Cézanne desired. Loran said, "Fundamental spatial relationships remain clear even when all modeling is eliminated and when the basic planes are established only with outlines."20

It has been stated earlier that when Cézanne began a painting he made a preliminary sketch with pencil or charcoal-stick in which he outlined the various planes of the space involved in the picture and then began to build up his color areas after much contemplation of the subject. Here drawing or line was developed simultaneously with the color because the contours developed as the colors built up and defined the areas more brilliantly. If a color ran past a border line, a new line was superimposed. This helps to explain Cézanne's statement that he advanced his canvas all at the same time.21 In this method of painting, Cézanne was using a new approach to the use of both line and color. This strengthened the idea that the structure of the painting was inherent in his drawing.

Lines for Cézanne were not merely two-dimensional in feeling but were used many times as a three-dimensional device to lead the eye back across a canvas or otherwise to contribute to a definite linear rhythm. In many places his lines were heavy to reinforce definite portions of objects that might tend to fade too deeply into space or that might merge with their surroundings too invisibly. In most of his paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire the hill was drawn with a series of heavy and light lines that held it to the canvas

20Loran, op. cit., p. 10.
21Ibid., p. 130.
and also appeared to direct attention down the hill to the sides of the pictures. The many repetitions of lines around objects are said to be accidental and illustrate his search for perfection. With the open quality of his color modulations Cézanne had to depend more on the lines than on the color.

Next the aspect of the motif should be considered in Cézanne's paintings. Through the comparisons between paintings and photographs of the motifs as presented by Erle Loran it is possible to state that Cézanne painted from nature to a degree unbelieved by the usual viewer of his works. The abstract quality of many of his paintings of the forests and quarries of the Chateau Noir would lead one to think Cézanne had improvised greatly in the composition of his pictures. This is plainly not true as Cézanne may have left out things, but did not introduce many new objects to his pictures.

Keeping in mind the fact that Cézanne did almost all of his painting directly from a particular motif or still life, it would be opportune to consider the basic and most interesting aspect of his composition as that of his handling of spatial relationships. In the painting of most of his nudes or bathers, Cézanne worked more from photographs and sketches he had made earlier, and so these paintings should be excepted from his rule of direct painting of a certain motif. If there is a basic concept behind Cézanne's composition it well could be as Erle Loran suggests that André Lhote said, "It is necessary to repeat it: the picture, regardless of the subject represented, must remain faithful to its own structure, to

22 Ibid.
its fundamental two dimensions. The third dimension can only be suggested; it is from this double necessity that most of the inventions in the art of painting are born. ²³

It is then this two-dimensional quality of the canvas that Cézanne grappled with when he wanted to convey the feelings of space that his countryside revealed. He did not use the aerial and scientific perspectives that his contemporaries used but aimed to convey that definite feeling of volumes being placed in space in relation to one another.

The ideas of scientific perspective were well understood by Cézanne but rather than use them alone he went a step farther and modified them to give his work the two-dimensional quality necessary to a painting.

In the case of receding roads or paths he was apt to bend them out of sight by moving a building, squaring a curve, or by expanding rather than contracting them as they went away. This leads to the manipulation of the sizes of objects. It has been said previously that he painted diligently from nature and therefore he must have realized that he was changing the sizes of many buildings or other objects. He not only changed the size of objects but also distorted many of the parts of objects to emphasize changes in shape or relationship of the objects to one another. He gave the objects the size and shape necessary to represent themselves properly in regard to their surroundings.

Another change in the use of scientific perspective was

²³Ibid., p. 131, quoting Traité du paysage, pp. 30-33.
that of the changing of eye levels and the shifting of viewpoints from which the viewer appears to be seeing the subject of the painting. This is evident in many of Cézanne's still lifes as well as his landscapes.

One of the results of the shifting of viewpoints is that it created changes in the axial planes or surfaces of objects so that a circle of planes and tensions revolve about a central axis. Loran has diagrammed many of Cézanne's paintings to verify this as well as the tipping of some of the vertical axes in the objects in the motifs. 24

The feeling of space in Cézanne's pictures depended on the overlapping of planes and the varying of the intervals of space between the planes to create tensions that worked against each other to conduct the eye about a two-dimensional surface. This does not imply that this is a mural-like effect of space but instead is one in which volumes appear to have mass and weight. Cézanne gives one the idea that objects far away can be seen clearly but that they still seem distant because of their relationship to objects close to the viewer. This quality is accurately shown in Erle Loran's book, Cézanne's Composition. 25 Thus Cézanne rejected entirely the theory of aerial perspective as relied upon by the earlier Impressionists.

Possibly the fact that Cézanne did not work carelessly but with great intentness on the motif should be restated in closing.

24 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
25 Ibid., p. 60.
Because of this it may be pertinent that with Cézanne the picture and the space involved within its scope are subject to any and all variations that may enhance its structural and pictorial strength.

As has been said earlier in this thesis, there is no single set of rules, as such. Paul Cézanne was one who had studied the masters and was setting out to add his own link to the chain of knowledge that they imparted to the world. He was said to have remarked to Emile Bernard, "I am the primitive of a new art. I feel that I shall have followers." This implies that he was setting up his own set of rules based on the rules of the masters and utilizing the feeling for color of the Impressionist group. Each artist must pick the set of rules that fulfill his desires and will enable him to enjoy the greatest degree of creative success.

There are some basic conditions that may be stated as a result of this study. There is no one set of rules to handle all the situations the painter will encounter as an artist. The rules must be flexible and must fit together to aid in the creative work of the artist and his medium. The more rules or theories that the artist understands, the better able he will be to make his own points of departure from them if necessary. These conclusions are also to

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Since the study of Vermeer and Cézanne has been made there is a feeling of freedom in creative effort for the artist-author. In the study of the first artist he discovered an adherence to scientific perspective and harmonious color schemes that prevailed over all others he has seen. In Cézanne he found a treatment of space that appeared to transcend that of Vermeer, but is actually so very dependent on a basic knowledge of scientific perspective that one could not reach Cézanne's heights of realization of space without it. As people learn to walk before they learn to run, they should learn the rules of art before they attempt to use contradictions of them.

There are some basic conclusions that may be stated as a result of this study. There is no one set of rules to handle all the situations the painter will encounter as an artist. The rules must be flexible and must fit together to aid in the creative work of the artist and his medium. The more rules or theories that the artist understands, the better able he will be to plan his own points of departure from them if necessary. These conclusions are aids to the further understanding of the rules.

The picture one paints on a canvas is two-dimensional. The
feeling of space therefore is merely an illusion in the eye of the viewer. The picture is primarily to be looked upon as a unit in itself. The painting of objects is only important as a means of building the picture as a whole and not as a report, or in a realistic manner.

Color can not be separated from the composition of a picture but should be an integral part of it. Colors must be related to their neighboring colors and should lead into each other. Color alone can seldom construct a satisfactory composition unless it is varied and fortified with strong lines which help to direct the eye about the canvas.

The various systems of pictorial perspective can be shifted or changed to make the composition stronger. The spatial relationships of the picture do not depend directly upon mechanical perspective but on an overlapping and careful placing of various planes.

In attempting to utilize the aspects of composition discovered in the research for this study, the author has painted two compositions to show his present stage of development. The two oil paintings done in conjunction with this study are in oil colors on canvases measuring twenty-four inches high by thirty inches wide.

The "Crucifixion"

The "Crucifixion" scene was painted from a desire to compose a group of figures in an outdoor atmosphere while illustrating an awesome moment in Biblical history. The author picked that moment, both sorrowful and triumphant, when Joseph has come to take Jesus from the cross. There have been earthquakes and tombs have opened
and saints have arisen to appear in the streets. There are many keeping watch over Jesus who said, "Truly this was a son of God." Joseph comes to take Him down from the cross and finds there Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph. Watching it all is the neutral and unconcerned Roman soldier. The crowds have left and the mood is one of silence.

The picture was started in the manner of Cézanne. With charcoal, the principle planes of the picture were laid out. Then the most prominent structures of the composition were drawn. The axes formed by the crosses and their burdens were seen at first to cut off the top of the picture plane and the horizon line was too nearly in the center of the canvas. See Figure 7.

Fig. 7.—First Sketch for the "Crucifixion"

The problem of linking the three closely grouped figures with

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27Matt. 27:45-60.
the soldier was difficult if the painting was to continue as it had been started. In Vermeer's works one of the basic ideas of space development was that of placing figures against a light background and keeping part of the subject-matter close to the viewer. Cézanne shifted the axes of many objects either to flatten them or to give them a feeling of tension with some other objects.

In accordance with both of these factors the axes of the crosses were changed. The viewer changed his position, which was also a concept of Cézanne. The cross on the right of Jesus was turned with its figure almost facing that of the cross on Jesus' left. The cross-arms on the crosses at either side of the center were bent from the usual 90° angle to cut the lateral thrusts of them on the picture plane and lead the eye in a third-dimensional direction. They then countered each other's axes as well as created a circle of movement in the third dimension. The plane of the hill

![Second Sketch for the "Crucifixion"](image-url)
in the right background was shortened so that it ended before it reached the central cross. See Figure 8.

After these changes were made and the idea of trying to balance the various planes and axes was firmly in his mind, the author began to explore the possibilities of color in the composition. Since there was no direct motif in color, the colors were chosen to create a feeling of silent tensions. Therefore there are strong contrasts in both hue and value in some places, and gentle harmonies in others. The author's palette consisted of few colors so that the range of hues would not be too great. The colors were:

- Cadmium Yellow—light
- Cadmium Yellow
- Yellow Ochre—light
- Yellow Ochre
- Burnt Sienna
- Zinc White
- Cadmium Barium—red light
- Alizaron Crimson
- Cobalt Blue
- French Ultramarine Blue
- Emeraude Green—Viridian
- Ivory Black

The color was started by using thin washes of the yellow ochre, dulled in intensity by adding cobalt blue to it. This color was applied to the plane on which the crosses rest and the plane immediately above it on the right. Then a burnt sienna wash was run on the triangular planes at left and the upper-right. At this point it was discovered that this last plane almost met with the foreground plane. The foreground plane was then changed to run farther to the right before changing direction to run parallel with the plane it meets on the right. This is seen in the final painting, Plate I.

The crosses were painted with a strong burnt sienna brown, a bit darker than the triangular planes just before them. The flat plane or sky at the back of the picture was painted with a wash of
ultramarine blue with a bit of black in it. These washes were not solid, but were laid on in wide strokes in the general direction of the axis of the plane. The foreground blended with the hillside it meets on the right and here the foreground was raised in value to contrast with it.

Figures on the crosses were then painted. The contours of the right-hand edge of the figure on the left-hand cross were dark against dark and needed a contrast to give the figure its solidity. Therefore, that area of sky encompassed by the direction lines of the cross was painted light blue-gray. The strong direction or movement caused by the left-hand cross was enhanced by applying the paint in slanting strokes running the same way as the cross-arm. There is a planned difference in the handling of the values of the figures in relation to their background. The colors were so handled as to make the left figure dark against light, the figure of Christ light and cold against a warm but darker value, and the last figure visible due to the interchanging of values as well as different hues. After the figures were placed against the cold blue background they were too stark, and projected forward from the background too far. The next step was to build up the foreground plane and see if that would help the figures remain in their proper place on the canvas.

As the areas of greater intensity were added to the foreground, wherever possible they were also used to modify the flatness of the hillsides in the background. The three figures on the ground were each modeled with patches of different values of the same basic hue. They counterbalance the dark to light treatment of the left figure.
and Christ. The line formed by the heads of the figures is in opposition to the curved line of the left-hand figure on the cross and is parallel with the cross-arms of the right-hand cross. The soldier is a pyramid formed by spear and body. This returns the eye from the figure on the last cross to the immediate foreground. Due to the changes in hue and value of the ground he is standing on, plus the line formed by feet and base of spear, the eye is directed back to the figure in blue, or the base of the left cross.

The last significant change made to this painting was one with which the study of Cezanne had much to do. The intense reds in the foreground along with the other reds on the footblocks of the crosses were too overpowering. The figures were too stark against the light, almost white, blue of the circle of light in the sky, and so the author mixed a pink with a little blue to tone it down and added it to the sky. The left and right-hand figures immediately toned down a bit, and yet Christ was still prominent. To take away some of the starkness of the Christ figure, the soldier was given a good deal of white, as was the figure of Joseph on the left of the central cross.

The "Grain Elevator"

The "Grain Elevator" had its origin in a sketch taken while on a trip from Lake City, Iowa to Des Moines. From their earliest recollections of trips through the midwest many people will mention the fact that they think of the highway stretching out before them and the often repeated symbol, the grain elevator, rising so dominantly into the vastness of the sky. There is a cut-off to Highway 30
just north of Perry, Iowa. On that blacktop road there was a grain elevator. Up the road from the elevator was a tool shed which added to the feeling of space brought about by the rolling fields. The boxcars, semi-trailer and truck were as pictured. There was no water tower, and yet the author can recall seeing so many of them in Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota that it seemed as though there should be one there.

The sketch was a rapid one in failing light, so the only things concentrated on were the aspects of each object and its position that seemed to give it its character or feeling. It was one-point perspective in its original state.

Back in the studio an attempt was made to determine any similarities in the objects. The sketch was started on the canvas with charcoal. The project seemed like a good one to try to make the objects revolve about a central axis in the method used by Cezanne.

The sharply converging highway with its telephone poles to accentuate the perspective caused a disastrous funnel effect because it did not allow the eye to return from the farthest depths. The boxcars on the left and the tool shed in the foreground added to the funnel effect of the highway.

In Vermeer's works, and many of Cézanne's, there were the same problems. Vermeer solved his with color and contrasts and possibly some of the props used, such as the maps on the walls, and the windows opening into a room. The distorting of volumes and masses to keep them related to the spaces involved in the painting was probably the basic method of changing nature to fit the
two-dimensionality of the canvas in Cézanne's works. Along with this was used the tipping of axes and planes of objects.

The first problem in the suiting of the subject to the canvas was to revise the sketch. Any explanation of how this occurs will be general by nature if one treats the canvas as Cézanne did. In creative work one must, of necessity, experiment. When Cézanne advanced his canvas all at one time he was probably putting in a line in one place, then considering the effect it had on the far side of the canvas. Then something on that far side would be changed to work more effectively with the first line he drew. This would continue until he had that balance and construction necessary to a complete composition, or realization, as he considered it.

In this manner, the author worked from the small sketch onto the larger canvas. The sketch stood as in Figure 9.

![Figure 9](image.png)

Fig. 9.—First Sketch for the "Grain Elevator"

It was studied by the author to pick out the important elements
to convey the general impression of the subject. It seemed that the feeling of the space of the plains country and the elevator's importance to that feeling would be enhanced by the shrinking of the shape of the elevator. The only strong verticals in the sketch were those of the poles on the right and the elevator itself. Due to the many horizontals, the sense of three-dimensional space would be difficult to convey without the funnel-like perspective in the sketch. The elevator was placed on the edge of the first plane of the picture format about one-third of the way from the bottom of the format and a bit less than a third of the way from the left edge of the format, as in Figure 10. The elevator was treated as though it were a flat plane, and was turned to lessen the feeling of perspective. This was to serve as a stopping point to return the eye from the hills and the sky as well as help to flatten the picture plane at that point.

Fig. 10.—Sketch on Canvas for the "Grain Elevator"

The road was started on the right edge of the format a sixth
of the way up from the bottom edge. The left side of the road started a third of the way from the left edge of the format and ended on the same edge that the elevator was on, about a third of the way from the right edge of the format. The top of the elevator stopped a third of the way from the top of the picture. It was felt by the author that the more prominent the sky could become, the greater the feeling of space would be.

The shed was shifted, and its slanting roof lowered in order to lay more on an angle across the corner of the format, with its longer axis in opposition to that of the string of boxcars. It also moved off the direction line of the roadway tending to counteract the leftward thrusting of the road. The hillside, which is the second ground-plane in the picture, was introduced just below the level of the trailer top. All the objects were accounted for but the poles. They were left as in sharp perspective, or rapidly diminishing in size, so as not to overpower the grain elevator and truck at their respective positions in the composition.

The next step was to break up the remaining areas of sky, road, and ground plane into more harmonious shapes. This was done by picking out a series of parallel lines that occurred in the various objects and repeating them in other parts of the canvas. The near edge of the shed roof was countered with a line opposing it and running toward the elevator. When this line reached the elevator, it was met by too many other lines and was stopped there. A center point of interest was created there due to the sharp angle caused by the train running into the sharp vertical of the grain elevator.
The water tower as it stands in the finished painting was added there to direct the eye upward and balance the rather odd shape of the elevator and truck.

The palette was the same as used in the "Crucifixion." The predominant hues are blue and green with yellow and red as contrasts. The values range from almost white on the elevator to almost black on the tool shed in the foreground. The first color applied was a neutral blue-green. It was washed on thinly to the right foreground, the large planes of the sky, except for the one ending at the tops of the telephone poles and the elevator, and the area in front of the shed and curving back to the boxcars. This made a rough circle of this color about the canvas.

The next color to be added was a light blue-gray. It covered parts of the outer plane of the sky. The road at the edge of the first plane was made the same color, but of greater intensity of blue. A new blue of low intensity but very high value was mixed from cobalt blue and zinc white for the pavement in the foreground. Some of the neutral blue-green was added to this last color on the palette and the light central plane of the sky was put in. This color was then heightened in intensity by adding cobalt blue and a bit of cadmium yellow and used on the grass and weeds and a line from in front of the tool shed along the railroad bed toward the water tower. Some of it was run along the right edge of the highway.

A green of medium intensity was mixed and applied to the weeds and grass just mentioned, as well as to the distant hillside and the small area to the right of the first pole. The yellow was
lowered in intensity, by adding a bit of white and orange to it, and applied to the areas between the shed and elevator and the area about the telephone poles. Two of the boxcars were painted with this same color as were some of the weeds in the left foreground.

The next move was toward modeling the objects, since all the important planes of the study had been suggested. The posts were given a reddish-brown color as were the ditch and weeds on the left of the road. Here and there the posts were brightened with some intense cadmium reds. These reds were carried then to the weeds in the foreground, the truck, and weeds on the right road edge. The same red in a darker, less intense hue was applied to the boxcar next to the elevator and the edge of the railroad bed. Darkened still further, it was applied also to the water tank and supporting posts. The sides of the shed were also made this color.

A study of the finished painting, Plate II, should make it obvious that the author was moving in a circle about the canvas with each color. These were not identical in hue or value but were all akin through similar bases of mixed pigment.

The last large areas to be filled or realized were those of the shed roof, parts of the road, and the large plane in the sky from the posts to the elevator. The sky was given a mottled effect by small patches of cobalt blue toned down with zinc white and a spot of yellow in small steps by mixing on the palette each new tint of blue and slowly working it across the canvas from right to left. About midway in this mixing of lighter blues, the blue was carried down into the highway and onto the roof of the shed,
as well as into a few openings in the largest plane of the upper sky. Then the rest of the blue tints were added to the sky, as originally stated. Small portions of the telephone poles and water tower were also painted with each new hue introduced in order to build a contrast by way of interchange with its surroundings.

The grain elevator was painted white. A reddish-gray was laid over the thick white paint and allowed to mix with it. The truck trailer was painted with a white which had a little cadmium yellow added to it. The high valued yellow created a harmony with the yellow, orange, and reds of the central area of the picture.

The water tank with its dark reds appeared to protrude from the white elevator and thus ruined the two-dimensional feeling of the picture. The color was changed to one more in harmony with the yellows and reds in the surrounding objects and the ground. It was made a yellow-brown with a neutral gray top to join it to the grays on the elevator.

The tool shed with its dark reds did not have enough blue on its roof area to balance the blues in the right-hand sky and highway. The values were kept about the same, but the hue was changed to blue. Ultramarine and cobalt blue were used. The next thing done was to apply some very intense spots of color wherever needed to strengthen a movement or heighten a contrast.

At this point the distant hillside was seen to fail as a means of stopping the funnel effect discussed in the beginning of this discussion on the "Grain Elevator." This plane was then added to, a strip at a time, until it created a definite passage to the
elevator itself. The green portion was then laid in with two greens—one yellow-green and one blue-green under it.

There is one concept that this author wished to emphasize. The painter should study from nature, as well as from the masters, if he wishes to succeed. The drawing is the basis for all art, and when it is combined with carefully handled color appropriate to the composition, as in Cézanne and Vermeer's works, it becomes something more than mere reality.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


