

Five Apples, 1877-78 Paul Cézanne (French, 1839-1906)

Paul Cézanne formed his apples with patches of color.



Oil on canvas; 4¾ x 10 inches
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene V. Thaw

Unlike the Impressionists who created shimmering sunlit surfaces with small strokes of pure color, Cézanne used patches of color like building blocks to construct images that appeared solid and weighty. While it may appear that he painted quickly, he was actually a slow worker, often taking a long time to consider how to place his next brushstroke. For this reason, a motionless still life arrangement of fruit was the ideal model. In fact, if Cézanne was painting a portrait of someone who had difficulty holding a pose for a long time, the irritated artist would gruffly instruct the sitter to “Sit like an apple.”

How do Cézanne’s apples look?

- All five apples are multicolored with varying amounts of gold, red, and green.
- No stems are visible, but the stem areas of all the apples look like black holes.
- The five apples look solid and heavy, as if we could pick them out of the painting and feel their weight in our hands.
- The arrangement is casual. At least two apples have been cropped by the top edge. There is no indication of a table or a wall behind.

How did Cézanne use his brush?

- Cézanne’s brushstrokes are clearly visible, running vertically and parallel to each other.
- Colors are superimposed over each other (as in yellow over green on the rightmost apple).
- Colors on each apple merge together. No color area is clearly defined.

How did Cézanne make the apples appear round and solid?

- Cézanne formed his apples with irregular patches of color rather than with shades of gray.
- *Warm colors* such as yellow and red appear to come forward while a *cool color* such as green hangs back.
- Cézanne makes it appear that the light is coming from the left by using more bright yellows on the left side of the apples and more dark greens on the right.

How did Cézanne arrange the apples?

- Each apple touches at least one other.
- The apples are set apart from each other by clear black outlines.
- The outlines vary in their thickness.
- Broken areas of outline allow one apple to connect with another apple or with the background.