

Sea Cliffs, late 1920s Max Weber (American, 1881-1961)

Weber adopted Cézanne's broad brushstroke technique to build a cliff.



Max Weber revered Cézanne and thought he was the hero of modern art. “This is the way to paint,” he said, while viewing Cézanne’s painting as a young man. “This is art and nature, reconstructed.”¹ Weber spent his early years exploring abstraction and many of the “isms” of modern art including the Fauvism of Matisse and the Cubism of Picasso and Braque. However, by mid-life he was living along the shore of Long Island, New York, painting more traditional scenes inspired by Cézanne. In this painting he selected colors that are very similar to Cézanne’s colors in *Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from the Bibémus Quarry*.

Oil on canvas; 15 x 18 inches . Estate of Max Weber, courtesy of Gerald Peters Gallery ©Estate of Max Weber, Courtesy of Gerald Peters Gallery, NY

How did Weber orient his patchy brushstrokes so that they describe the dune’s downward slope?

- The diagonal direction of the brushstrokes perfectly conveys the incline of the dune.
- At the top where the dune is steepest, the brushstrokes are short. The brushstrokes become longer as they make their way down the dune and stretch out even more as they level off near the ground.
- If the patches of color were oriented vertically or horizontally instead of diagonally, the effect would be more like a wall and less like a slope.

Are the borders of each brushstroke clearly defined?

- The patches of color have irregular boundaries which sometimes blend in with other color patches.
- Some patches are laid on top of other patches.

Where do you see a definite outline?

- The top edge of the cliff is made firm by a clear black outline.

How deep is the space in this landscape? Is the brown building with the smokestack next to the dune or some distance away? Does the yellow building sit on top of the brown soil or behind it? Is the fence right behind the dune or next to the house? Does the sky press down on the dune?

- Space is ambiguous in *Sea Cliffs*. While the dune is clearly in the foreground, the amount of space between the dune, buildings, fence, and sky cannot be determined with certainty.
- All parts of the landscape appear to be pressed close together.

¹ *The Reminiscences of Max Weber*, interviews by Carol S. Gruber, 1959, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 118.