Cezanne and the Mount Sainte-Victoire: A Neuroesthetic Approach

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44 paintings and 43 watercolors of the Mount Sainte Victoire. Why such an obsession? Cezanne paints this subject, simplifying his work to the edge of abstraction and unknowingly, “dialogues” with the observer’s brain. Using measurements of eye movements (Métrovision), we will explain the "color sensation" so dear to Cezanne, and through the specificity of brain cells to the orientation of lines we possibly approach the explanation of the painter’s pictorial transformation. Cézanne died in 1906 after making one last attempt at capturing the beauty of the Sainte-Victoire (SV). 4 works are studied: La tranchée, La Montagne SV au Grand pin, La Montagne SV, and La Montagne SV from the Launes. The SV has a geographical, emotional, educational, and symbolic value and becomes the cubism’s laboratory: «treat nature as if it were composed of basic shapes such as cylinders, spheres, and cones.» Visual strategy through these 4 works of art shows a glance seeking an anchor. Lost in the latest painting, only shapes and colors stimulate the eyes. Cezanne the father of modern art turns into an impressionist, and in 1879 becomes himself through 4 characteristics: Losing the visitor’s eyes, losing the drawing, mixing the colors and develops a taste for the unfinished. "His vision is more focused on his brain than his eyes.” Cézanne’s hatched lines, in opposition to pointillism, stimulate brain cells (Hubel, Wiesel). A true deconstruction is performed for the brain, sensitive to edges, angles, contrast or borders. The visitor’s brain then completes the painter’s work. Cezanne is interested in the first visual step, when the image is decomposed, before our brain creates reality. Similarly to the “neuronal recycling” (S. Dehaene) regarding letters, Cézanne’s paintings, are reduced to basic shapes, that our brain “loves”. Many modern painters will there after take some of Cezanne’s attributes, becoming true heirs of the painter.
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