

Books

122 In View

Cézanne in Provence
PHILIP CONISBEE AND
DENIS COUTAGNE
JON BRYANT

123 Art History

Bodybuilding:
Reforming the
Masculine in British
Art, 1750–1810
MARTIN MYRONE
MARTIN COOMER

125 Catalogues

James Ensor
MAX HOLLEIN, JAMES
ENSOR, INGRID PFEIFFER
ANDREAS LEVENTIS

124 Cultural Theory

Making Things
Public: Atmospheres
of Democracy
EDITED BY BRUNO
LATOUR AND
PETER WEIBEL
BRIAN DILLON

Cézanne used to meet up in the school playground with his two friends, Jean-Baptiste Baille and Emile Zola, and they would merrily recite a hundred verses in Latin before heading off for a smoke and a swim in the countryside

JON BRYANT

In View

Cézanne in Provence

Philip Conisbee and Denis Coutagne
Contributions from Françoise Cachin, Isabelle Cahn, Bruno Ely, Benedict Leca, Véronique Serrano and Paul Smith

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS £35.00 / \$60.00

Paul Cézanne's wife, Hortense, wasn't very keen on Provence. Unfortunately, Cézanne wasn't very keen on anything else. He hated his family, loathed physical contact, despised art critics and detested pavements (they disturbed the 'harmony of the past'). He wrote bitter letters to the Salons which refused his works and, as the poet Rainer Maria Rilke remarked, he worked, 'without pleasure, moreover, in a state of perpetual rage, at war with each of his works'.

Cézanne in Provence is the catalogue accompanying the exhibition currently showing at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, which will tour to Aix-en-Provence's Musée Granet in June, organized to celebrate the centenary of the artist's death. The essays in the book examine Cézanne's turbulent private life, his relationship with the Provençal countryside and how its colours, light and geology influenced his development as an artist.

Cézanne would have loathed this kind of close examination. With the mass of works already written about him, this one goes even deeper. Bruno Ely's biographical chapter on Cézanne's



youth pieces together meticulous particulars of his early life: school fees, days off, violin lessons; even the name of the man who appointed the drawing teacher at the school he occasionally attended. In the playground, though, things are more interesting. For here, Cézanne used to meet up with two friends, Jean-Baptiste Baille and Emile Zola, and they would merrily recite a hundred verses in Latin before heading off for a smoke and a swim in the countryside.

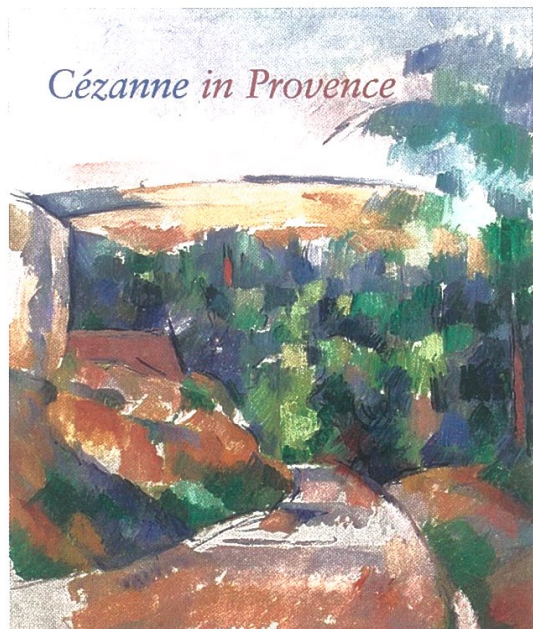
The three were known as the 'inseparables' and played in a band together, Cézanne on the cornet and Zola on the clarinet. Cézanne was talented at maths and religious education: Zola won the drawing prize. At the time there were no hard feelings, but 30 years later their relationship came to a sudden end when Zola published *L'Oeuvre* (1886), about

an artist who ends up hanging himself in front of a work he cannot finish. Cézanne believed it was a thickly coated portrayal of himself and never spoke to Zola again.

The same year Zola disappeared from his life, the artist's father died and he married Hortense, after a brief affair with another woman. He also started to complain of *troubles cérébraux*. It was the beginning of the 'violent inner turmoil' that haunted Cézanne and is a favourite refrain in the catalogue. His solution was isolation and seclusion, staying in ramshackle huts in the middle of dark forests and rocky valleys. He also began a painting frenzy that stopped only when he died.

In his essay, Benedict Leca sees Cézanne not simply as the father of a forward-looking, modernist art but as the 'grandson of a Provençal landscape tradition'. (In an interesting twist of fate, it was Zola's father, François, who designed the irrigation system around Aix and so inadvertently guaranteed a greener hue to Cézanne's landscapes.) Paul Smith's essay,

Cézanne in Provence



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er-Xavier Roussel
otograph of Cézanne
ainting at Les Lauves,
nuary 1906
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Meanwhile, examines the artist's obsession with death and offers a classical interpretation of his landscapes around Aix. However, it's the second half of the book that provides the most absorbing assessment of Cézanne's painting heritage.

All six essays in this volume advocate that it was the nature of the location that 'created' the artist and that the natural differences in the sites he painted forced him to alter his techniques. Serrano writes that the coastal town of L'Estaque granted Cézanne his 'altered gaze', where Cézanne became Cézanne. While in the next essay, Ely claims his months in Gardanne gave him his 'radiated light'. And it was the 'primeval mystery of the bosky hillsides' of the Bibemus quarry and Château Noir that offered him his sense of foreboding and claustrophobia, says Conisbee.

The culmination of this aesthetic evolution is Mont Sainte-Victoire. Conisbee looks at Cézanne's obsessive paintings of the mountain at a time when his diabetes was beginning to affect his eyesight. Was this changing vision the final touch to his more mysteriously abstract technique? Cézanne wrote that he was having difficulty seeing the edges of things, difficulty in determining where two forms meet. Yet, it was here that, as Conisbee puts it, he 'achieved his "harmony parallel nature" in his idiosyncratic yet formally coherent personal style'.

As a catalogue, the book is fabulous, with over 160 colour plates and translations of exceptional quality. Occasionally, it's a little tedious to read: there are too many fragments, too many quotes and, although the book has been well-edited, it suffers from a complaint common to multi-author, collected-essay volumes of this type in that it tends to duplicate references to incidents and landmarks in the artist's life. Nonetheless, where it touches on Cézanne's personality, where we learn that he finished a painting instead of attending his mother's burial, that he stopped attending services at the cathedral because he didn't like the way the organist played, or that his wife's nickname was 'la Boule' (the ball), this book holds all the gems. JB

Art History

Bodybuilding: Reforming the Masculine in British Art, 1750-1810

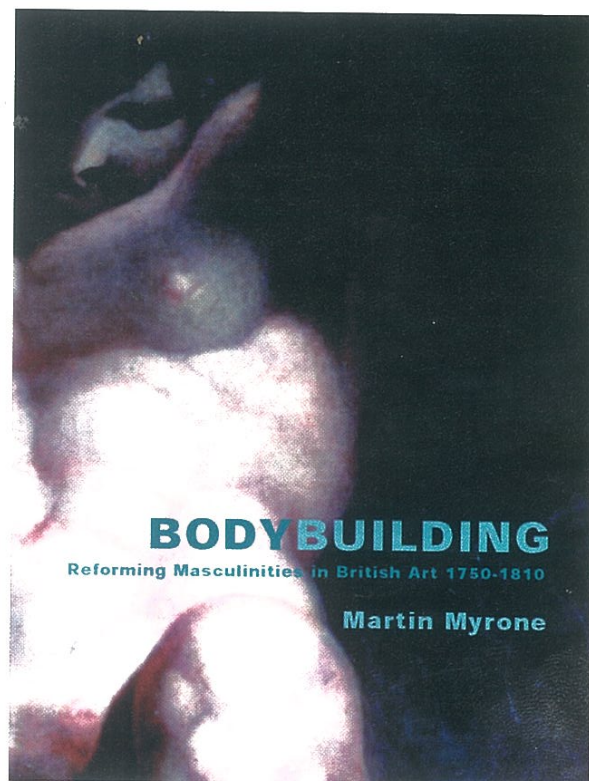
Martin Myrone

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS \$75.00 / £40.00

From the middle of the eighteenth century, something happened to British men. Actually, not men in general so much as those steely pillars of certainty for which the heroic male body in painting and sculpture had stood since antiquity. What occurred, argues Martin Myrone in *Bodybuilding*, was an ever-widening fissure, a 'fault line' between paradigms of masculinity and the experience of being a man in an increasingly bourgeois society. Constantly redefined by the relationships between virtue and commerce, state and subject, masculinity and its depiction were ridden with a hitherto unexpressed anxiety.

The rise of polite society played its part in unsettling the status quo, but it wasn't purely the fault of the fops, despite the protestations of John Brown who argued that their influence would lead to the nation's downfall: worse than being feminine, in spirit being a fop was deemed distinctly French. Add to the mix the changing artworld – the rise of public art exhibitions and the print market, the rather slippery status of genres as the century developed – and what you end up with by about 1780 is a skewed interpretation of the heroic: professional one-upmanship erupting on to canvas as hyper-masculinity; the cult of heroic outsider.

Myrone brings a distinctly late-twentieth-century ideology to events bracketed by the Seven Years War and the French Revolution and Revolutionary Wars (he in fact takes us back to the beginning of the eighteenth century and the rise of professional armies) but, thankfully, his tendency towards gender-studies-style hindsight is kept to a few jarring introductory passages. *Bodybuilding* then comes alive as it settles down to a series of explorations of how the heroic male body began to mutate as hero-worship itself was considered increasingly quixotic, and the ways in which artists such as Gavin Hamilton began, as a means of jostling for position, to emulate the grand manner just as a newly sophisticated viewing public decided it wasn't much



interested in that type of thing any more.

Out of this emerges a hero of sorts – Henry Fuseli. As with the *Gothic Nightmares* exhibition at Tate Britain, which was curated by Myrone, the book hinges, in one sense, on the unlikely rise of this self-taught Swiss through the ranks of the Academy. Myrone seems to enjoy the contradiction that 'the self-proclaimed artistic giant, walking among pygmies and driven by furious aspiration, was also Fuseli the five-foot-nothing would-be poet and would-be painter making a spectacle of himself.' And, as with the Tate Britain show, *Bodybuilding* spends a great deal of time in the company of this rather mercenary careerist, in this instance engendering fondness while dismantling reputation. 'The master of the grandest art of the age, the purveyor of an extravagantly heroic image of the male body... was revealed as a wizened old man with a propensity to swear.' MC