

A Critique of Paul Cezanne's *The Basket of Apples* ©

By *Connie J. Schlosberg*

Artist Paul Cezanne's *The Basket of Apples* (Sayre's *A World of Art*, figure 94, page 80) takes a modern twist on still life. This oil painting on canvas catches the eye with Cezanne's flair for geometric spatial organization on a two-dimensional surface. His collection of apples, wine bottle, and tea biscuits are ordinary objects placed in a typical situation. However, there is nothing ordinary about the tilt of the basket where some apples managed to escape rolling meticulously onto the napkins. Some independent and some huddled together. How is it that the basket leans over when it should be balanced on the wood piece settled upon the table? The apples contrast with the tea biscuits which are stacked neatly and orderly upon the pristine dish plate. The stoical wine bottle stands off-center between the two. *The Basket of Apples* manages to keep the mind busy with visual experience. Cezanne did not adhere to the traditional system of perspective. He portrays his objects from competing view points.

The table appears fragmented into different sections of the painting. It emerges on a higher-level on the right side than the left one. Some of the contours appear unfinished. The classical lines shape the objects sharply. The arrangement of these common items seem like they should be organized and orderly. The basket setting on the butcher block, the plate of biscuits resting on the plate, the bottle slanting towards the basket, and the folded almost crumpled napkins sit on top of the table. Yet Cezanne's painting contains geometric form but has no unified perspective. To Cezanne, the sum is greater than the parts. These objects are balanced variations of shared disproportionate diagonals in different planes. What balance the painting are the apples. The eye naturally falls from the tilted basket to the fallen apples then over towards the end of the table. The stiff almost starch-like napkins fold over the table unnaturally. The foreshortened lines in the biscuits sit to the left side of the plate. These three tilted forms correspond with the lines of the napkins coming together at the edge of the table.

Color seems just as important as line. This simple still life has a harmonious tone where space and depth create the perspective of the painting. The transition of tone and color is subtle. Cezanne's use of robust autumn-like colors reminds us of the harvest. The luminosity of the pearl white napkins and plates stand out from the painting. The smaller the objects the more intense the color becomes. We also notice the brush strokes more so with the smaller objects modeling a slight three-dimensional look. The sheen texture of the bottle gives the smoothness of glass. The texture of the apples and biscuits share the same pigment and brush strokes. The characteristics of this representational painting take on an almost abstract quality. Although his fruit lacks the sense of aroma and the realism of touch, Cezanne's inanimate objects take on a spunky life of their own mimicking the realistic still life pictures of the past. Cezanne gives *The Basket of Apples* a surreal look to indulgences of living.