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PAUL CÉZANNE

L'EXPOSITION DE PARIS DE 1907 VISITÉE, ADMIRÉE ET DÉCRITE PAR RAINER MARIA RILKE
EDITED AND COMMENTED BY BETTINA KAUFMANN, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF LOTHAR SCHIRMER

When the greatest painter of the nineteenth century and one of the most important poets of the twentieth century met at the dawn of modernism.

October 1907. An exhibition was held in honour of the French painter Paul Cézanne, who had died a year earlier, as part of the Salon d'Automne in Paris.

The Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke was then aged thirty-two and living in Paris, where he worked as the secretary of sculptor Auguste Rodin. He visited the exhibition several times and gave his impressions in a series of letters written to his wife, the sculptress Clara Rilke Westhoff, in which he revealed the profound emotional impact that Cézanne's art had on him. These letters are among the most important accounts of the reception given to Cézanne's works shortly after his death and contain astonishing remarks on their artistic qualities. From a stylistic viewpoint, however, Rilke's reflections go far beyond those of simple art criticism.

However odd it may seem, during the compilation of this book it became apparent that no photographic record of the 1907 retrospective seems to exist. In this book, the art historian Bettina Kaufmann has succeeded in recreating, for the first time, the list of all the paintings exhibited in the show. Published rather like a posthumous catalogue, the book presents all those works sufficiently representative to have been selected by the curators of the time. Unlike those found in the painter's home after his death, the paintings exhibited in Paris, which have been lent by private collectors, leave no doubt about their state of completion. It is also interesting to discover the thematic structure and distribution of the works over time, between the first and last. In addition, the selection reflects the perception of Cézanne's works by his contemporaries, which is very different to the perception of them we have today.

This is all the more interesting as the 1907 exhibition made an enormous impression on the generations of painters that followed, an impact that continues to be felt today. The event, which influenced artists such as Picasso, Matisse, Duchamp and others, laid the foundations for Cubism and, more generally, for modernism, and thus it marked an indisputable turning point in the history of art. **Bettina Kaufmann** is a Swiss art historian, writer, and curator. She is currently working on developing the online *catalogue raisonné* of the work of Paul Cézanne. When the greatest painter of the nineteenth century and one of the most important poets of the twentieth century met at the dawn of modernism.

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