

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 26, 2024

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The Phillips Collection Presents *Up Close with Paul Cezanne*

The exhibition unveils two newly conserved Cezanne paintings on view together for the first time in over 50 years alongside the museum's fully restored Cezanne holdings



WASHINGTON, DC—The Phillips Collection presents [*Up Close with Paul Cezanne*](#), unveiling two recently conserved paintings by French post-impressionist Paul Cezanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1886–87) and *Self-Portrait* (c. 1877), made possible by [Bank of America's Art Conservation Project Grant](#). A cornerstone in the permanent collection of the first museum of modern art in the country, the conserved works are on view for the first time in over 50 years alongside five works in the museum's world-renowned Cezanne collection, providing visitors new insights into the artist's process. ***Up Close with Paul Cezanne* is on view April 18–July 14, 2024.**

“While initially shocked upon seeing the work of Cezanne, museum founder Duncan Phillips came to appreciate the French artist as a ‘towering genius.’ In 1925, he acquired one of the artist’s iconic landscapes of Mont Sainte-Victoire, and by 1955, Cezanne assumed a central place in the collection with a representative group of six paintings,” says **Vradenburg Director and CEO Jonathan P. Binstock**. “The efforts of our talented team of conservators and scholars have deepened our understanding of these seminal works. Thanks to critical funding from Bank of America, our important collection of Cezannes will be seen from a new perspective.”

Over the past year, the paintings underwent extensive conservation at the museum's on-site Sherman Fairchild Foundation Conservation Studio to return their appearances to the artist's original vision. The treatments entailed removing varnishes that had deteriorated and discolored over time, obscuring the

depth and subtlety of the pictures. This effort has restored a three-dimensionality to the compositions that were lost under decades of yellowed varnish and an accumulation of airborne grime, according to **Elizabeth Steele, Head of Conservation at The Phillips Collection.**

“Cezanne’s palette appears more vibrant and the brushwork more energetic, restoring the artist’s intent for his compositions. We are seeing them essentially as he would have seen them,” says Steele. “It is rewarding to now look at the paintings with such clarity and an authenticity that speaks to the artist’s vision.”

Phillips conservators and curators collaborated with scholars to closely study Cezanne’s materials and techniques at distinct moments in his career alongside four other previously conserved paintings by the artist: *Fields at Bellevue* (1892–95), *Ginger Pot with Pomegranate and Pears* (1893), *Seated Woman in Blue* (1902–06), and *The Garden at Les Lauves* (c. 1906). The exhibition includes supplementary wall text and images inviting guests to see what conservators discovered while examining paintings prior to their treatment, such as graphite underdrawings and changes made by the artist seen with infrared imaging. In the case of *Mont Sainte-Victoire* and *Self-Portrait*, the paintings were cut down from a larger size, presumably by Cezanne’s dealer Ambroise Vollard, and in other examples, the perimeter of some were later painted in by restorers to cover portions he had left blank. The reverse of the paintings were also examined for stamps, inscriptions, and labels that map their history.

Mont Sainte-Victoire and *Self-Portrait* were the first two paintings by Cezanne to enter the Phillips’s permanent collection, in 1925 and 1928 respectively. At a time when few American museum directors supported the French modernist’s art, founder Duncan Phillips’s appreciation of Cezanne informed, refined, and educated his eye while broadening his vision of modern art. Phillips had *Mont Sainte-Victoire* on constant view during his lifetime and Cezanne’s *Self-Portrait* was the first self-portrait by the artist to enter an American museum collection.

“Duncan Phillips admired Cezanne’s innovative painting approach, which had an important influence on later developments in abstract art,” says **Phillips’s Associate Curator Renée Maurer.** “Phillips studied Cezanne’s artistic evolution for decades. The artist’s highly personal language of expression is conveyed through Phillips’s deliberate acquisition of works that highlight definitive points in Cezanne’s career and represent the motifs that inspired him.”

Presented together, the Phillips’s Cezanne unit of six oil paintings of still lifes, landscapes, and portraits, and one lithograph, all acquired by Phillips between 1925–55, provides an up-close look at the artist’s distinct and experimental process. Featured are several of Phillips’s archival letters and texts on Cezanne, displayed for the first time in this installation. *Up Close with Paul Cezanne* is the first time since 1971, when the museum mounted the retrospective *Cezanne: An Exhibition in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Phillips Collection*, that the entire unit has been featured in a special exhibition.

Sponsored by Bank of America, the unveiling of the conserved paintings will be commemorated with a panel discussion and other programs taking audiences behind the scenes of the treatment process and beneath the paintings’ surfaces. Led by Steele and Maurer, the panel is scheduled for June 9 at 2 pm and will feature art historians and conservators discussing the history, examination, and treatment of select works by Cezanne.

ART CONSERVATION AT BANK OF AMERICA

The Bank of America Art Conservation Project provides grants to nonprofit museums and institutions to conserve works in need of preservation or repair to promote cultural sustainability and ensure audiences can admire and learn more about their cultural and historical significance for decades. To date, more than 237 projects across 40 countries ranging from paintings and sculptures to archeological and architectural pieces have received funding.

“From neighborhood murals to pieces by the world’s most celebrated artists, works of art have the power to encapsulate so much of our dynamic society,” said **Larry Di Rita, President, Bank of America Greater Washington, DC**. “Partnering with The Phillips Collection is part of the Bank of America commitment to the DMV and will help ensure we can all continue to appreciate and draw inspiration from some of humanity’s most impactful artwork for decades to come.”

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

This exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection and sponsored by [Bank of America](#).

Funding for the conservation of Cézanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire* and *Self-Portrait* was generously provided through a grant from the [Bank of America Art Conservation Project](#).

IMAGES: Paul Cezanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1886–1887, Oil on canvas, 23 1/2 x 28 1/2 in. The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1925; The Phillips Collection’s Head of Conservation Elizabeth Steele cleans the surface of Paul Cezanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1878–87) with a swab and solvent solution. Photo: Brendan Canty.

IMAGE GALLERY

High-resolution press images are available upon request. Please contact lcantrell@phillipscollection.org.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection, America’s first museum of modern art, was founded in 1921. The museum houses one of the world’s most celebrated Impressionist and American modern art collections and continues to grow its collection with important contemporary voices. Its distinctive building combines extensive new galleries with the former home of its founder, Duncan Phillips. The Phillips’s impact spreads nationally and internationally through its diverse and experimental special exhibitions and events, including its award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; renowned Phillips Music series; and dynamic art and wellness and Phillips after 5 events. The Phillips Collection’s extensive community partnerships include Phillips@THEARC, the museum’s satellite campus in Southeast DC. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

ABOUT BANK OF AMERICA

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