



CÉZANNE

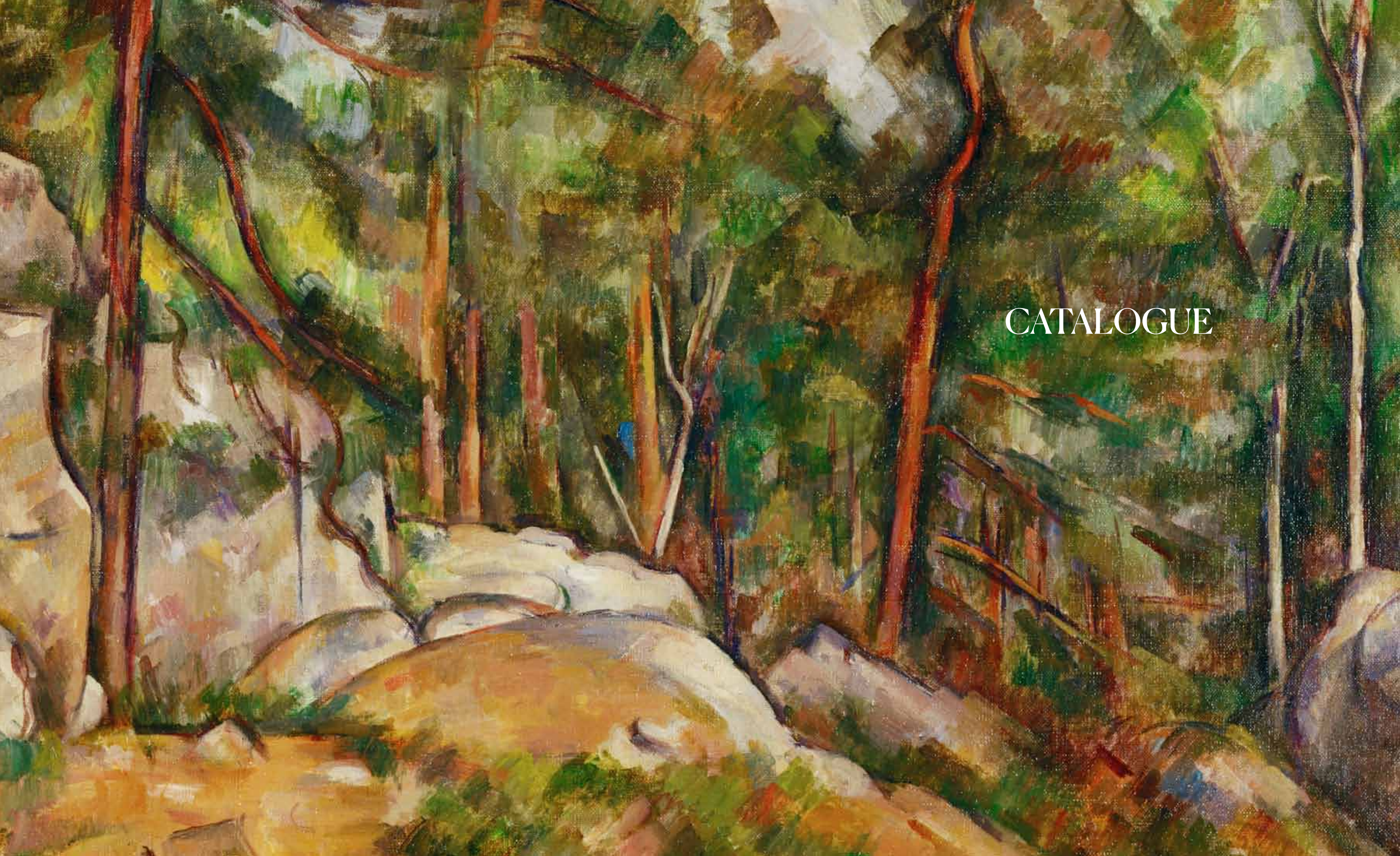
The Rock and Quarry Paintings

Edited by John Elderfield

With contributions by Faya Causey, Sara Green,
Annemarie Iker, Ariel Kline, and Anna Swinbourne

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CATALOGUE

L'Estaque

L'Estaque, the place where Cézanne periodically worked from 1864 to 1885, is only thirty kilometers from his hometown of Aix-en-Provence and was then an easy journey by carriage or rail.¹ Situated on an arc of coastline to the northwest of the bustling port city of Marseille (fig. 1), it had spectacular scenery, facing the anse de L'Estaque on one side and the rocky hills of La Chaine on the other—calming beauty of the Mediterranean balancing the rugged, rising land. Indeed it was a gorgeous place to go on holiday, as Cézanne was believed to from childhood,² and known to from 1864 when he visited his mother in the seaside house she had taken there that summer. His handful of works from those early years, 1864 to 1871, show a sensitive attraction to some of the site's most striking features, including its coastline, fishing village, rocky interior and burgeoning industrialization.³

By the late 1860s, however, L'Estaque had for Cézanne grown into more than a pleasant place to go on holiday and paint. It had afforded him something he then greatly desired: physical distance and the consequent privacy that came with it. Firstly, he wanted to be away from both his hometown and the capital, hoping to avoid military conscription during the Franco-Prussian war and Paris Commune, and also, specifically, from the family estate of Jas de Bouffan and his father, in order to hide the existence of his secret girlfriend, Hortense Fiquet (1850-1922). These practical needs had required longer-than-holiday stays in L'Estaque, nine months in 1869-70 followed by a lengthy sojourn in 1870-71, during which the couple reportedly took refuge in a cottage by the sea.⁴

The aspects of privacy, relative isolation, and freedom to concentrate on his painting surely inspired Cézanne's brief return to L'Estaque for the summer of 1876—the period of his above-mentioned epiphany, when he lived in the center of town at the Maison Giraud on the Place de L'Eglise, and principally painted the bay of Marseille⁵—and then again for a lengthier, nearly yearlong sojourn from March 1878, when he divided his time between the residence of

Hortense and their son, Paul (born in 1872), in Marseille, and another rented L'Estaque house nearby his previous Giraud residence.⁶ Under these conditions of space and place, Cézanne could thoroughly absorb and develop the mighty lessons he had learned from Pissarro during their preceding years together in Paris and Ile-de-France.

The pictorial inspiration on offer to do so—for an artist looking to paint the forms, light, and colors of his surroundings in his own way—was then plentiful, as the period in question coincided with remarkable growth in L'Estaque. From mid-century, largely thanks to technological advances in construction and transportation, the town's principal industries of fishing, tourism, and manufacturing were booming.⁷ And the neighborhoods accommodating them were rapidly transforming to keep pace. Cézanne was not, however, drawn to these scenes of modernity, and largely minimized the traces of it within his compositions. In his multiple views of the bay, for example, he either balanced a factory's smokestack in the distance with a vertical from an earlier epoch, such as a church steeple (fig. 2), or emphasized natural elements—the pines or sea—to overshadow it entirely (see Iker 1.2,

Fig. 1. View to the west above L'Estaque. John Rewald archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC





Fig. 2. *The Bay of Marseille Seen from the Village of Saint-Henri*, 1877–79. Oil on canvas, 66.5 × 83 cm. Yoshino Gypsum Co., Japan (FWN 118)

fig. 4). He would also physically turn away from the dense town streets and beguiling sea, and moved inland to explore on foot the rocky hills to the north.

In these arid, wilder elevations, so different from the cultivation along the coast, Cézanne celebrated the ancient rock formations and abundant vegetation enlivened by the blazing sun. The gray curvaceous masses at the center of São Paulo's *Rocks at L'Estaque* (cat. 2) seem to be dolomites of the Tithonian age (152–145 million years ago) of the Jurassic period, whose shapes are rounded when eroded. The lighter-colored forms in front of them, however, are more ambiguous. These could depict rocks from the much younger Oligocene epoch (34–23 million years ago); or red claystone accumulated in the fractures and caves of the dolomites and later exposed through erosion;⁸ or, alternatively, not rock but colored greenery. Vegetation did after all flourish at that site, as the painting indicates and documentary photograph confirms (see Iker 1.2 fig.5). It seems to be the garrigue typical of the region: a mélange of kermes oak bushes, white rockrose shrubs, rosemary and thyme.⁹ It is the same mixture that seems to commingle with the rocks and Aleppo pines in another landscape of the period, *Au Fond du*

ravin of 1878–79 (pl.). But in this case, with the painting's exact location still uncertain,¹⁰ we can only approximate the rocks depicted. They could be dolomites like the São Paulo painting, but their more jagged forms indicate limestone, which is similar in aspect and chemistry but has sharper edges when eroded.¹¹

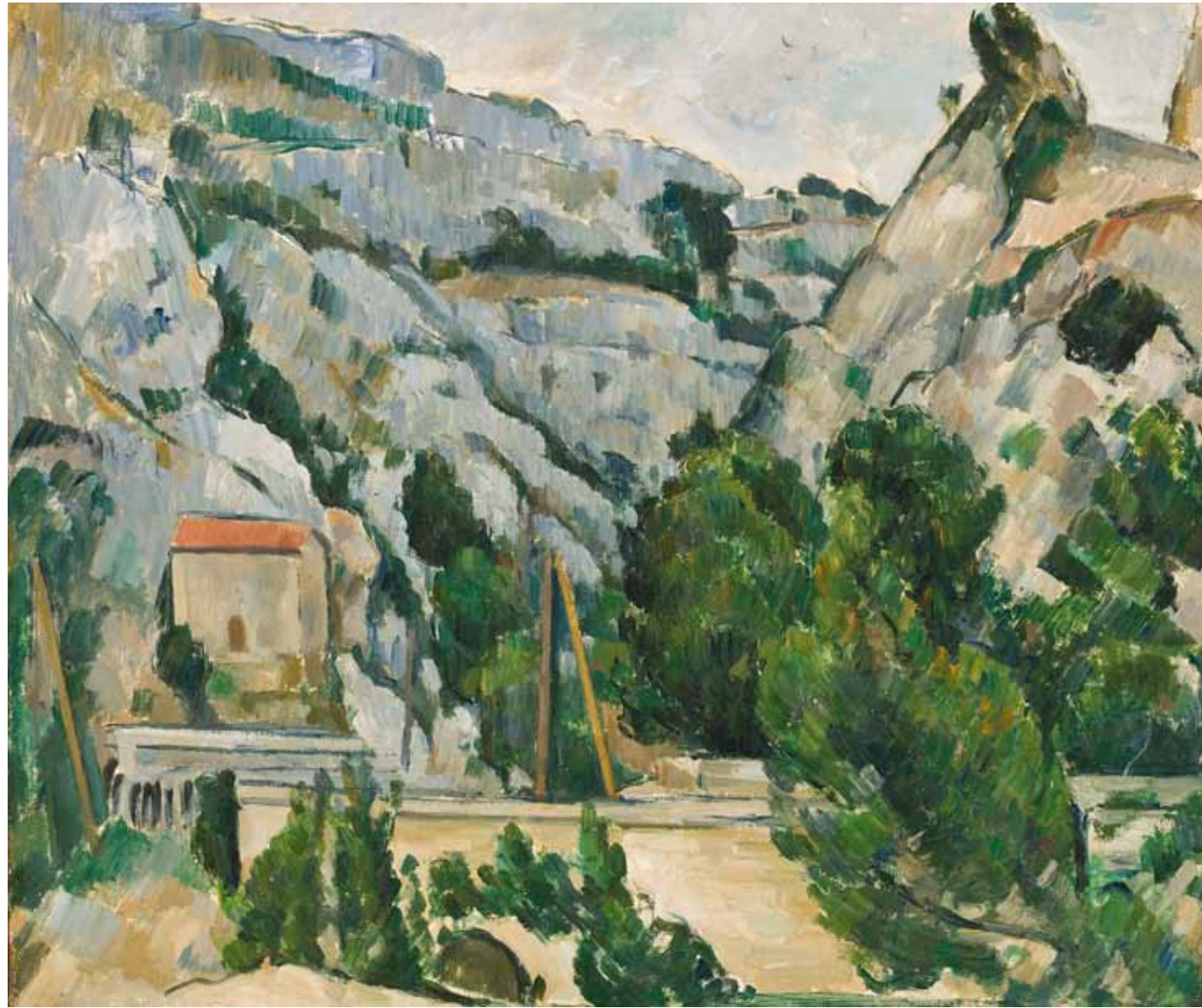
These natural glories, as impressive as they may have been, were not enough to hold Cézanne in L'Estaque indefinitely. Ever searching, he left for northern France in March of 1879, yet returned for a short stay of four months over the autumn and winter of 1881–82. During it, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) stopped on his journey from Rome to Paris for a visit. Picking up where he had left off and pulled like a magnet to the rocks of the region, Cézanne led Renoir through the hilly terrain to a spot where the pair could paint together.¹² The painting we believe Cézanne made on that excursion is *Viaduct at L'Estaque* (see cat. 5), and if the location is indeed near the entrance to the tunnel in the Nerthe Valley (fig. 3),¹³ he had led one friend, Renoir, to a place he likely knew from another, Antoine-Fortuné Marion (1846–1900), a geologist who years earlier had discovered Neolithic artifacts in caves nearby.¹⁴ No caves are apparent in Cézanne's



Fig. 3. Édouard Baldus (French, born Germany, 1813–1889), *Souterrain de la Nerthe*, ca. 1861. Albumen silver print, 32.7 × 43.2 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Fig. 4. Fabius-Germain-Joseph-Brest (French), *Landscape of La Nerthe with the Rove Tunnel*, 1848. Régie Culturelle Régionale Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur



CAT. 5

spans the Riaux Valley—in favor of the rocky gorge into which the railway disappears.

Recently, the art historian Pavel Machotka produced a photograph that aligns even more closely with the Oberlin *Viaduct at l'Estaque* (fig. x).¹⁸ In the photograph, as in the painting, stone scarp fills the frame, relieved only by sparse vegetation and a wedge of sky. Yet the photograph, unlike the painting, includes the entrance to the Tunnel de la Nerthe, implying that Cézanne occupied a slightly different vantage point in relation to his motif, or simply chose to exclude the opening of the tunnel altogether. Another conspicuous difference between photograph and painting is the presence, in the latter, of the viaduct in the immediate foreground. In his account of the Oberlin painting, John Rewald observes that Cézanne uses the strong horizontality of this viaduct to “thwart any attempt at ‘penetrating’ into the picture’s depth.”¹⁹ But pictorial depth, continues Rewald, is precisely what Cézanne generates elsewhere in the composition with his diagonal brushstrokes and subtle shifts in palette and texture; each, he writes, leads the eye from the viaduct to the ridge, at once through and across the landscape. AI



Fig. 4. “Chemin de fer d’Avignon à Marseille—Viaduc du Rio [sic],” *L’Illustration* (November 13, 1847)



Fig. 5. Pavel Machotka (American, born Czech Republic, 1936–2019), “Viaduct at l’Estaque,” from *Cézanne: Landscape into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014 [1996]), 93