

## Self-Portraits

### Four Self-Portraits

As an introduction to the subject of Cézanne and his immediate successors, four of our protagonists are shown in self-portraits. Among the artists included in this exhibition, the degree of interest in self-depiction varied considerably.

Georges Braque, for example, unlike other painters influenced by Cézanne, never explored the genre of portraiture and seldom painted the figure. As might be expected, therefore, neither did he produce a self-portrait.

Henri Matisse, too, quite obviously felt no vital or life-long need to create images of himself. The present work (fig. p. 18), doubtless the most important of his self-portraits, was preceded by only three smaller paintings,<sup>1</sup> and later he no longer painted any self-portraits.

André Derain, on the other hand, seems to have suffered a compulsion to pose for himself (fig. p. 19). The term "pose" is intentional, for after several small-scale studies devoted exclusively to his own face,<sup>2</sup> he began to produce a series of self-portraits that convey a downright affected mien. In his later years, he repeatedly represented himself amidst his family in a self-confident, dominant posture.<sup>3</sup> Such images are reminiscent of the similarly theatrical self-portraits of Giorgio de Chirico, an artist eight years younger than Derain who repeatedly painted his own image in a flattering light.<sup>4</sup>

Pablo Picasso dealt intensively with the genre of self-portraiture during two phases of his long life: in his younger years up until the eve of Cubism (1907), and then not again until after 1965. In this late period he produced, in addition to a few painted versions, a plethora of etchings showing his own countenance, often revolving around the theme of the painter and his model.

In contrast to these artists, however, Cézanne's interest in depicting his own appearance was ongoing and continuous. The catalogue raisonné by John Rewald records a total of twenty-five self-portraits.<sup>5</sup> Twelve of

them, mostly small-scale works, show only his head, often turned sharply over one shoulder. Eleven paintings may be described as busts, while only one is a three-quarter view (significantly, it was painted after a photograph). Finally, the principal work in this genre is the present painting, the largest of the entire group and the only one in which Cézanne depicts himself explicitly as an artist.

These four self-portraits were specifically chosen because all of them show their subject as a painter, bearing the palette as an attribute. It is noteworthy that in the self-portraits by Cézanne and Matisse, the artist holds the palette in his right hand, that is, as if seen in a mirror; while in the portraits by Picasso and Derain the palette is placed in the figure's left hand. The date of Cézanne's masterful self-portrait was a matter of some controversy in the older art historical literature.<sup>6</sup> Rewald's dating to circa 1890 has been widely accepted, and with good reason, since the precisely composed arrangement shows all the features of the strict, constructive approach of the late 1880s. The manner in which the figure appears to withdraw behind the tools of his trade is striking. The palette is tipped upward, parallel to the picture plane, while the massive canvas, positioned on an easel of which only one support is visible, is cut off by the lower and the right-hand edges of the picture. These elements tend to push the figure back into a deeper spatial zone, despite the integral connection between the contours of figure and the painting utensils. This connection is especially apparent at the far left of the picture, where the vertical edge of the palette continues the line of the artist's sleeve; the lower arm, in turn, is completely covered by the palette.

The emphatic formal relationship between the painter's attributes and the figure of the artist is reminiscent of Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait* of 1650,<sup>7</sup> in which the figure is securely anchored by the overlapping picture frames in the background. In view of