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***Images Available Upon Request**

Cincinnati Art Museum discovers hidden work under a Cézanne painting in its collection

“We went from having two Cézannes to three with this discovery”

CINCINNATI—December 15, 2022—While examining Paul Cézanne’s *Still Life with Bread and Eggs* for possible treatment and cleaning, Cincinnati Art Museum Chief Conservator Serena Urry noticed some odd cracks indicating the artwork could be hiding a secret.

“I had a hunch,” said Urry. She had the painting x-rayed to see if the still life was painted over an earlier work.

Imagine her surprise when the digital x-ray image revealed a well-defined portrait hidden beneath the painting of food and drink on a kitchen table we see today.

The still life, made in 1865, is one of only a handful of works that Cézanne dated, so the portrait underneath the still life could be the earliest firmly dated portrait by the artist. It is certainly one of his most ambitious portrait compositions to that date, and several features suggest it could be a self-portrait.

“Serena had an excellent hunch. We are lucky it came into the lab when it did, because intuition like that can only come from extensive experience with historical paintings and deep understanding of the working methods of 19th-century artists, both of which she has in spades,” said Peter Jonathan Bell, PhD, Curator of European Paintings, Sculpture and Drawings at the Cincinnati Art Museum. “This is a huge discovery!”

The French painter Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) participated in the first Impressionist exhibitions in the 1870s, before charting his own artistic course in the 1880s and '90s. Considered a leader of the Postimpressionist movement, he is one of the most influential artists in the history of modern painting. Cézanne created the Cincinnati still life in his 20s, when he was under the sway of Spanish Baroque paintings and Gustave Courbet’s Realism and before he developed his signature modern style by deploying brighter colors in thinner layers to explore optics and the “sensations of color.”

“We want to follow up in the coming months and years by conducting more imaging and analysis of the painting and research into the portrait’s subject, ideally in partnership with an institution well-equipped for technical study and with leading Cézanne scholars,” said Bell. “This will result in a publication and possibly an exhibition, as we seek to reveal as much as we can about this important, long-hidden portrait.”

First, more detective work is needed. Further insights, including the colors of the hidden painting, might be gained using cutting-edge technology such as multi-spectral imaging and x-ray fluorescence mapping. Working with conservation scientists may yield more details. Many artists reused canvases, and in recent years, paintings have been found hidden beneath works by Picasso, van Gogh and other famous artists with the help of x-rays and other technologies.

Urry examined the painting when it was taken off the gallery walls at the conclusion of the special exhibition *One Each: Still Lifes by Cézanne, Pissarro and Friends*, on view at Cincinnati Art Museum this past spring (March 11–May 8, 2022).

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Still Life with Bread and Eggs was acquired in 1955, a gift of the great Cincinnati philanthropist and modern art collector, Mary E. Johnston, and is one of two paintings by Cézanne in the museum's permanent collection.

"We went from having two Cézannes to three with this discovery," said Urry.

Cézanne's *Still Life with Bread and Eggs* returns to view December 20 in Gallery 227.

About the Cincinnati Art Museum

The Cincinnati Art Museum is supported by the generosity of individuals and businesses that give annually to ArtsWave. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund the Cincinnati Art Museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cincinnati Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the City of Cincinnati, as well as our members.

Free general admission to the Cincinnati Art Museum is made possible by a gift from the Rosenthal Family Foundation. Special exhibition pricing may vary. Parking at the Cincinnati Art Museum is free.

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