This paper was first presented as a talk November 11, 1994, on the occasion of my retirement from the Department of the History of Art at the University of Michigan. This is a lightly edited version of the talk as presented at that date and makes no attempt to account for subsequent literature on the subject.

"BABETTE CAN COOK": CÉZANNE'S STILL LIFES AND BABETTE'S FEAST

"Babette's Feast" was written on speculation. A friend bet the Danish writer Karen Blixen, or Isak Dinesen, as she is known in this country, that she could not get a story accepted by the American magazine The Saturday Evening Post. She won the bet, but with a different story; "Babette's Feast" was rejected by the *Post* and, afterwards, by Good Housekeeping, whose editor wrote that although the story had caused quite a stir in the office they felt that it would appeal only to "those in the upper income brackets." Ultimately, the story, which Dinesen wrote in English, was taken by the Ladies Home Journal and published the following year, 1950. It was turned into a film in 1987, and that was my introduction to the tale.

The film follows the story closely, except for a few key details. Those details are of considerable importance, however; they give the story a social and political concreteness that the film lacks. Those omitted elements are, in fact, my chief concern. Don't get me wrong. I like the film and was inspired by it to inquire further. But it is the written tale, not the film, upon which I base my presentation.

The story takes place in the tiny fishing village of Berlevaag in Norway and involves primarily Martine and Philippa, two middle-aged sisters, their new maid Babette, and the aging members of a strict Lutheran sect founded by the sisters' father many years before. The celibate piety of each sister had been threatened once in the past; memories of those long-distant occurrences are triggered by the presence of Babette in their household.

Babette arrived one stormy night in June of 1871, having barely escaped with her life from the brutal vengeance exacted by French government troops upon the defenders of the Paris Commune the previous month, in May. She carries with her a letter of introduction from the would-be lover of Philippa, a Paris opera singer who had spent two weeks in the village fifteen years earlier and had hoped to turn Philippa, with her magnificent singing voice, into a great opera star. But Philippa rejected the promise of love and fame, yielding to her own fears and her father's severe disapproval. Now Achille Papin, the disappointed lover, sends Babette to the sisters for safekeeping, asking that they take her on as their maid. He writes:

> The bearer of this letter, Mme. Babette Hersant . . . has had to flee from Paris. Civil war has raged in our streets. French hands have shed French blood. The noble Communards, standing up for the Rights of Man, have been crushed and annihilated. Mme. Hersant's husband and son . . . have been shot. She

> herself was arrested as a Petroleuse [one of a group of incendiaries who supposedly terrorized Paris by burning houses] . . . and has narrowly escaped the blood-stained hands of General Gallifet. . . .   I send her to you.

And then Papin recalls his brief stay in Norway many years before and his love and hopes for Philippa:

> For fifteen years, Miss Philippa, I have grieved that your voice should never fill the Grand Opera of Paris. . . . [but] What is fame? What is glory? The grave awaits us all!
>
> And yet. . . .   I feel that the grave is not the end. In Paradise I shall hear your voice again. There you will sing . . . as God meant you to sing. There you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Ah! How you will enchant the angels.
>
> Babette can cook.

Suddenly, we are transported from grand opera to simple prose, from fancy to fact. "Babette can cook." That line resounds, though unrepeated, throughout the rest of the story.

For the next twelve years her one contact with Paris has been a lottery ticket that a friend has renewed for her yearly. One day she receives a letter informing her that she has won ten-thousand francs in the French lottery, whereupon she asks the sisters if she may use the money to prepare a real French meal to honor their late father's one-hundredth birthday. Despite misgivings, they approve, although as the date approaches they are terrified by the ingredients that Babette has ordered from Paris, especially the huge turtle—whose head darted out from its shell like a serpent—that was required for the soup.   They fearfully prepare to face a Witches' Sabbath. At this juncture, General Lorens Loewenhielm, a former aspirant for Martine's love, enters the story as he accompanies his elderly aunt to the old preacher's birthday meal. Loewenhielm, a man of the world, has eaten at the Café Anglais, the best restaurant in Paris, prior to the Franco-Prussian War and Commune, where the renowned chef was a woman. He is dumbfounded to find that the same specialties he had savored at the Café Anglais now appear before him, miraculously, in the sisters' house in Berlevaag. There are many comic moments during the meal as the members of the congregation try to deny the pleasures of the senses, while becoming mellower and mellower as the meal unfolds.

At the end of the dinner the guests have departed and Babette sits alone in the kitchen as the sisters enter. "We will all remember this evening when you have gone back to Paris, Babette."

"I am not going back to Paris."

"You are not going back to Paris?"

> "No. What will I do in Paris? They are all gone. I have lost them all, Mesdames."

The sisters' thoughts run immediately to her slain husband and son, and they say, "Oh, my poor Babette." As if not hearing them, Babette continues: "Yes, they have all gone. The Duke of Morny, the Duke of Decazes . . . General Gallifet . . . the Princesse Pauline! All!"

Besides, she adds, "I have no money" to get back to Paris, and the sisters are shocked to learn that the entire 10,000 francs has been spent on the meal. After all, Babettte says, "A dinner at the Café Anglais would cost ten thousand francs."

"Dear Babette, you ought not to have given away all you had for our sake."

"For your sake? No, for my own." "I am a great artist, Mesdames." Then Martine says: "So you will be poor now all your life, Babette?"

"Poor?" said Babette. "No, I shall never be poor. I told you that I am a great artist. A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing."

"But all those people whom you have mentioned, those princes and great people of Paris whom you named, Babette? You yourself fought against them. You were a Communard! The General you named had your husband and son shot! How can you grieve over them?"

"Yes," Babette says, "I was a Communard. Thanks be to God, I was a Communard! And those people whom I named, Mesdames, were evil and cruel. They let the people of Paris starve; they oppressed and wronged the poor. Thanks be to God, I stood upon a barricade. . . . But all the same, Mesdames, I shall not go back to Paris, now that those people of whom I have spoken are no longer there.

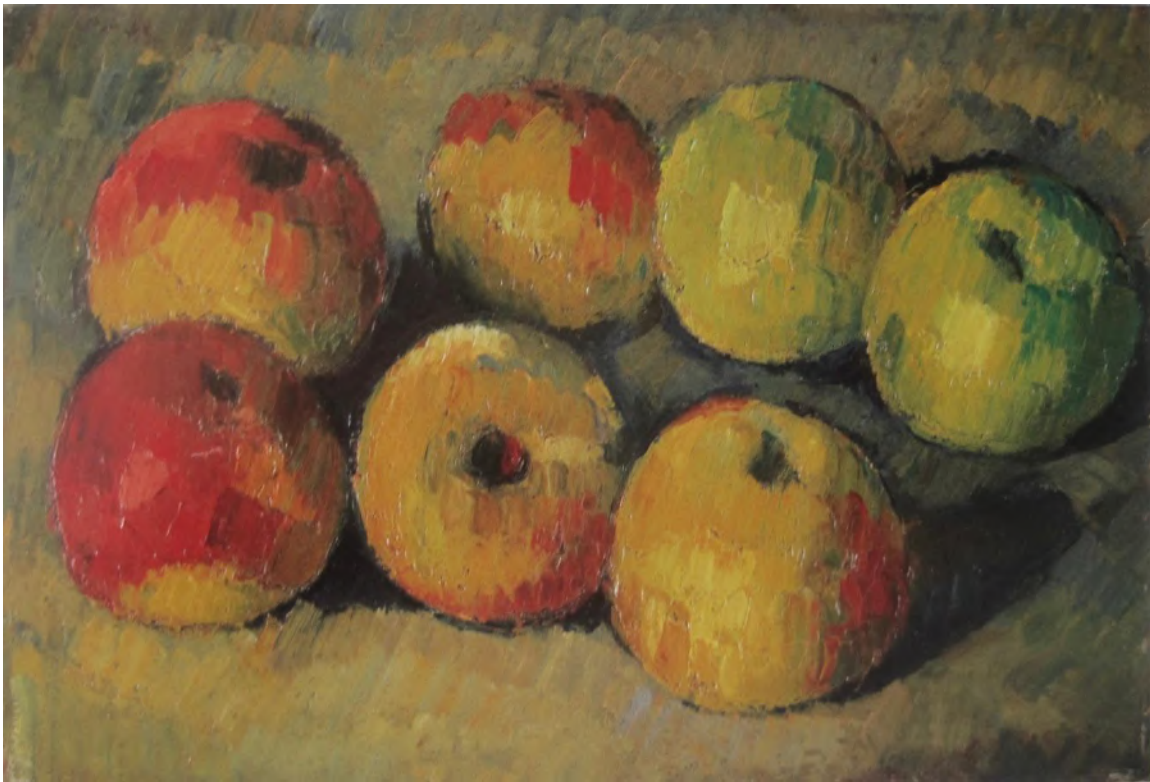
"You see, Mesdames, . . . those people belonged to me, they were mine. They had been brought up and trained, with greater expense than you, my little ladies, could ever imagine or believe, to understand what a great artist I am. I could make them happy. When I did my very best I could make them perfectly happy."

And she recalled to Philippa her opera-lover, Achille Papin, who had sent Babette to them. "It was like that with M. Papin, too," who "told me," she said, that "It is terrible and unbearable to an artist . . . to be applauded for doing his second best. He said: 'Through all the world there goes one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost'!"

Now, it is possible for us to wonder, given the imagery of the Witches' Sabbath that pervades the preparations for the birthday dinner, whether the story also contains Faustian overtones, whether it poses, at the end, the artist's bargain with the devil.

The last lines of the story, which follow immediately, take, however, a different tack. Dinesen ends with grand opera, as Philippa embraces Babette and says: "In Paradise you will be the great artist that God meant you to be!" Thinking, of course, of herself and recalling the words of the letter with which Papin introduced Babette to them, she adds, "Ah, how you will enchant the angels!"

I, myself, prefer: "Babette can cook."



Cézanne, *Still Life with Apples* (c. 1878) oil on canvas, 7 ½ x 10 ½" (19 x 27 cm.), Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The brushstrokes are so persistent, they suggest a system independent of the apples, i.e., the pattern of brush work might have been nearly the same if the apples weren't there. Cézanne had to establish his closeness to everything—the table as well as the fruits. And the shadows had to be hard, awkwardly pressed into, embedded in the table, grinding out a hollow there. The shadows and the ragged, dark outlines serve to manacle the apples so they do not lose their place in the malleable, relief-like mold that the table provides.

This is painting as if to possess (to adapt a phrase of Leo Steinberg's), but it is also painting for dear life, painting to hold on to, to learn to possess oneself.

These are the apples of Norway, of the peasants of Berlevaag. They are the proper accompaniment to bread and ale soup, a mainstay of the peasants' diet--thick, porridge-like, unappetizing—and yet calculated to affect, to engage and challenge the senses—the sense of sight, of course, but also, and maybe primarily, of touch. This is rude, crude painting. This is personal painting. This is dogged and necessary painting, necessary to the salvation of self. It is not painting that goes out into the world. It is painting that is made of the rough wood tables of peasant huts.

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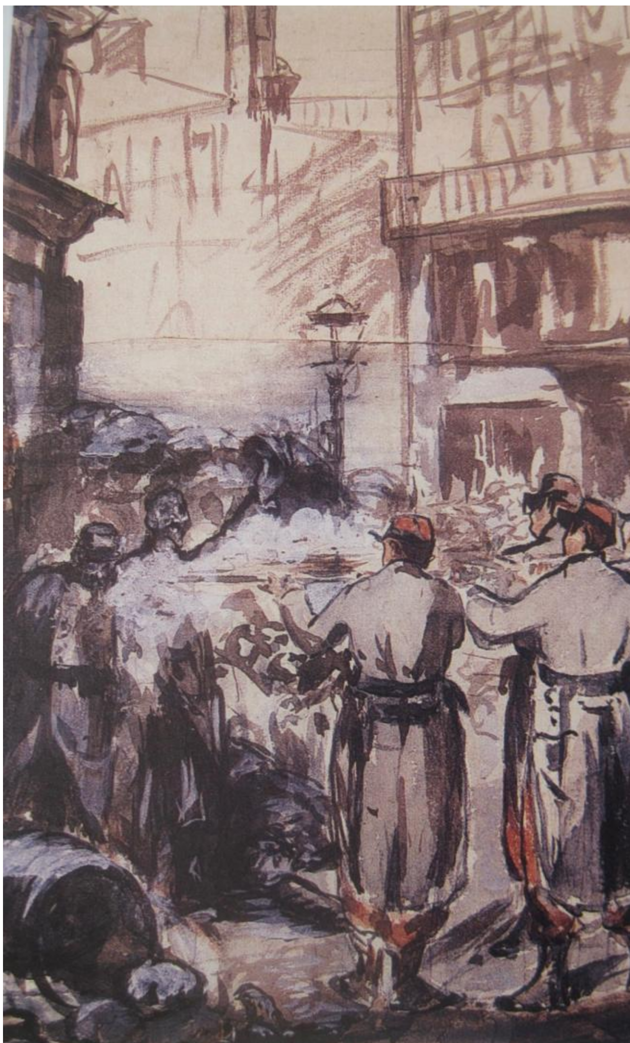
Cézanne was a draft dodger in 1870-71. An opponent of the Empire, he had no wish to serve in the French army in the build-up to the Franco-Prussian War, which Napoleon III foolhardily declared in July 1870. France was quickly defeated; in September Paris was surrounded and remained under siege for the next eight months. As successor to the Empire, the Third Republic was inaugurated in France, but division between the new government and the administration of Paris, which opposed capitulation to Germany, led to civil war. An armistice between the two countries was signed at the end of January, 1871, but the Prussians remained in position around Paris. Soon, however, one siege was replaced by another; the newly formed Commune of Paris found itself under attack by the government of the Third Republic, now settled at Versailles, which proved zealous in its campaign to subdue the city.

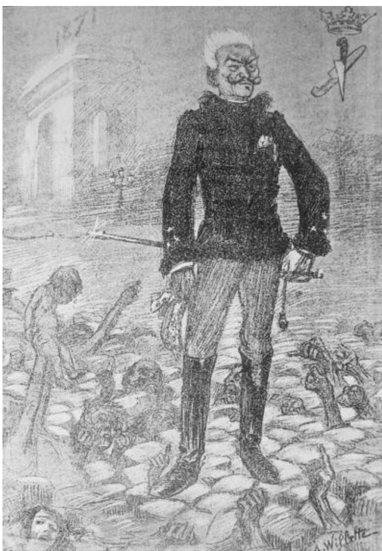


Edouard Manet, *TheBarricade*, (1871) ink, watercolor and gouache, 18 ¼ x 12 ¾" (46.2 x 32.5 cm), Szépmüvészeti Museum, Budapest

In May the defenders of Paris erected barricades at strategic points, and fighting took place from street to street. Both sides subjected prisoners to the firing squad, although the Versailles forces proved particularly brutal in that respect. The bloody week beginning May 21 saw wholesale executions and the fire bombing of many buildings in central Paris by the forces of both sides, although the tales of rampant house-burning with petroleum bombs by women of the Commune—an act of which Babette was accused, causing her to flee before the threat of immediate execution—was later found to be a false rumor born of terror. She was lucky to escape with her life.

In the repression of the Commune, one of the most brutal figures was the Versailles general, the Marquis de Gallifet. He also stands out in Dinesen's story. At the end of the tale Babette names those patrons who provided her support, who recognized her artistry. They were indeed princes and prominent members of society: the Duke de Morny, half-brother of Napoleon III; the Viscount Paul Daru, president of the Jockey Club, that caste of wealthy men whom one often sees in the paintings of Degas, prowling the wings of the Opéra in tuxedo and top hat in search of young female flesh; the Duke Decaze, once Prime Minister and legal adviser to the Emperor; Princess Pauline Metternich, wife of the Austrian ambassador and an intimate of the empress Eugénie, as was the elegant Marquise de Gallifet, wife of the general. In the film, as in the story, the Marquis de Gallifet is cited when general Lorens Loewenhielm recalls the extraordinary dish he had once enjoyed at the Café Anglais as the guest of the then Colonel Gallifet. Gallifet told him the dish was called "Cailles en sarcophages" (literally "quails in a coffin"), and that it had been invented by the chef—a woman, of all things—who was "known all over Paris as the greatest culinary genius of the age." Colonel Gallifet continued:

> this woman is now turning a dinner at the Café Anglais into a kind of love affair . . . in which one no longer distinguishes between bodily and spiritual appetite . . . ! I have, once before, fought a duel for the sake of a fair lady. For no woman in all Paris, my . . . friend, would I more willingly shed my blood!

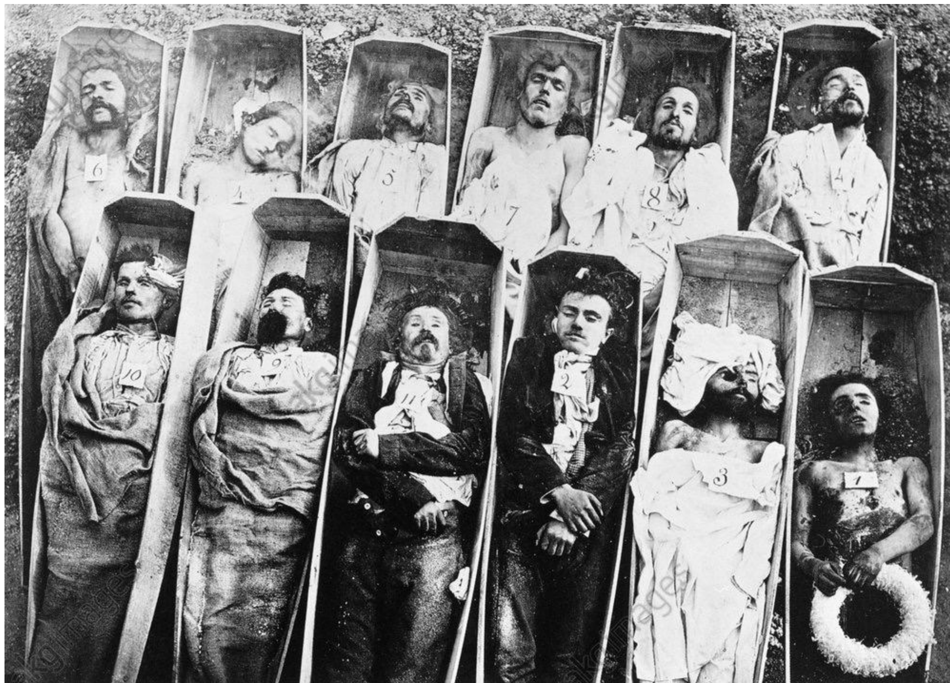


Adolphe Willette, *The Count with Red Claws* [Marquis de Gallifet]

Dinesen's irony is perhaps heavy-handed. During and after the suppression of the Commune, Gallifet was among the most ardent in shedding the blood of those who came under his hands. On April 3 he had five prisoners shot and issued a declaration of his intentions:

> War has been declared by the bands of Paris. . . . they have assassinated my soldiers. I declare a war in which there will be neither truce nor mercy. . . . I have had to make an example. . . .

It was the beginning of the bloody reprisals that took place during the next two months. The execution of prisoners became Gallifet's specialty. Following the Communards' capitulation in late May, long lines of prisoners were made to march from Paris to Versailles. On at least two occasions, the 26th and 28th of May, Gallifet halted the line and arbitrarily, even capriciously, selected those to be executed on the spot, eighty-six on May 28, one hundred eleven two days later, a number to which we may add the husband and son of Babette Hersant. In retrieving his historical reality we see another profile of Babette's Gallifet, a man who, through wealth and training, had come to appreciate the exquisite offering of "cailles en sarcophages."

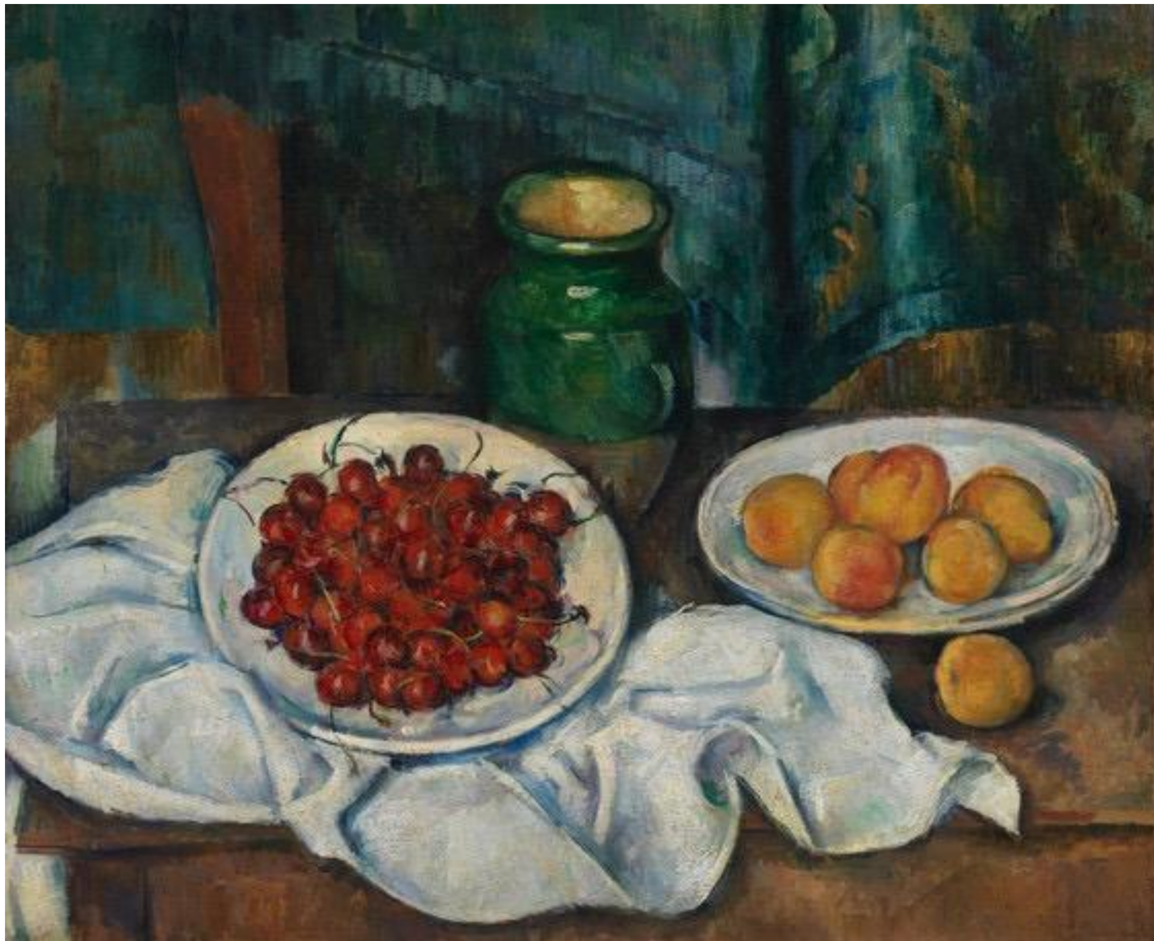


André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, Communards in their coffins, photograph, May 1871

Dinesen presents us an extraordinary situation. The artist, in order to be enabled to do her utmost, is enfolded in the arms of her enemies. I am prompted to paraphrase Baudelaire's jaundiced salutation to the reader in the last line of his prefatory poem to the <u>*Fleurs de mal*</u>: "Hypocrite patron—my brother—my twin." Is Dinesen too extravagant, a bit racy, as she draws a single noose around Babette and her clientele? Perhaps. But consider the situation. Nothing in it deviates from actually existing conditions at the

time. Dinesen may at the end give her story the elliptical twist of a dark poem, but she offers as well, in encapsulated form, a critique and acknowledgment of the bitter contingencies that are encased in the artist-patron relationship that had, by 1871, taken on its familiar modern form.

I'll return to that later. Right now, I am eager to go back to Cézanne, an artist who, through fortune (his father's money) and temperament (his preference for hermit-like isolation) was able to circumvent the requirements of the marketplace and work out his direction, gropingly, often painstakingly, on his own. It's as if he was a permanent lottery winner.



Cézanne, *Still Life with Cherries and Peaches* (1883-87) oil on canvas,
19 ¾ x 24" (50.17 x 60.96 cm) Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Cherries on a circular plate. Peaches on an oval. Why aren't the two plates the same? An analysis frequently offered suggests that Cézanne adopted more than one point of view, that he got up from his chair, moved around, and actually observed the objects

from different angles. I don't subscribe to that view. I feel quite certain that he held to his chair, but played certain games of perceptual inquiry—perhaps closing one eye, then the other; squinting; peering at things by leaning a bit to the right, a bit to the left (he spoke of the discoveries one could make by doing that). Working in that fashion, he confronted a familiar riddle of perceptual psychology—circle or ellipse? That is, did he paint the geometry of the circle or its foreshortened appearance, did he paint according to knowledge or the eye? He spoke frequently of putting knowledge aside, of entering into a new state of readiness, of an openness to perceptual discovery.

Perhaps one sees that in the green pitcher, where the arc above the handle at the pitcher's shoulder—more like a straight horizontal line than an arc—does not match the rim of the pitcher's mouth, seen as a foreshortened oval shape, but edging toward the fullness of a circle.

Presenting it in that way, he may be providing an image derived from successive visual probes, but is that also the case with the two dishes laden with fruit? There, rather than a record of direct observation, he presents the viewer with something else, a comparison of vision and knowledge: the foreshortened circle, the ellipse filled with peaches at the right; at left, the full circle containing the interior circle of cherries clustered neatly within the plate's perimeter, the plate as if seen from above, the plate as we know it, having the shape that it has to have if it is to contain the cherries within.

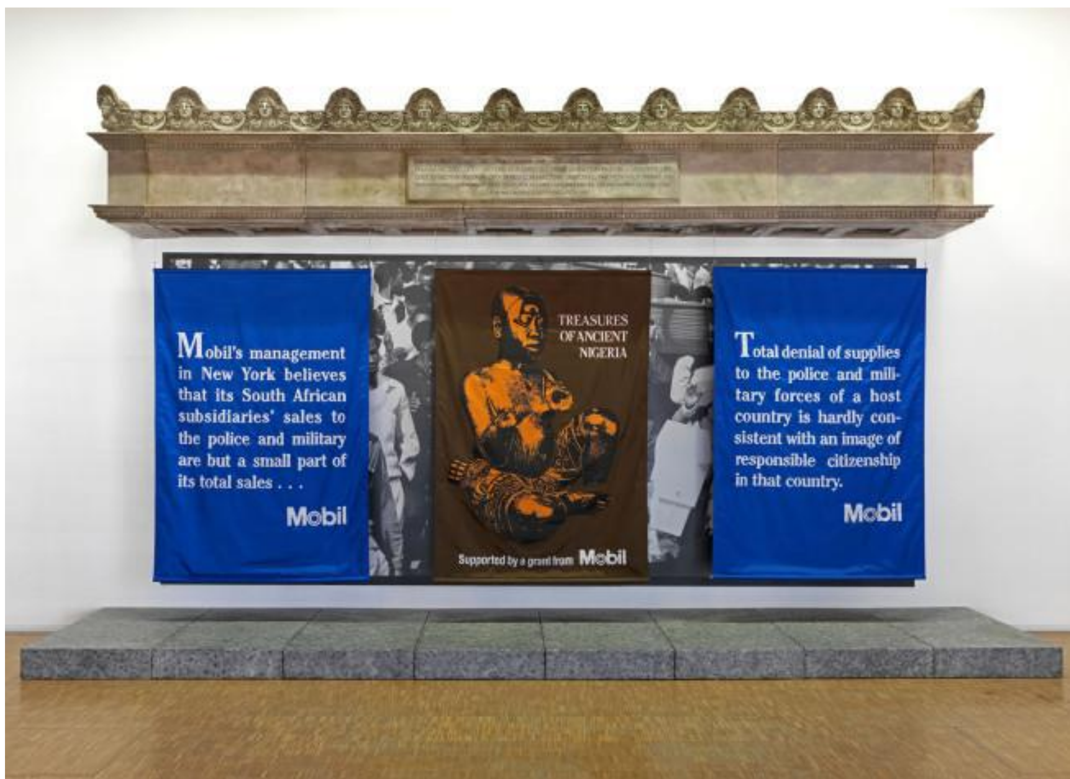
Comparison, an intellectual game enacted upon the playing field of perception. That artifice is his concern is made evident, I believe, by the tablecloth, which seems to go its own way. Its radiating folds supply, perhaps, a sculptural intensification of the lightly drawn cherry stems that spiral out to the circumference of the plate. But otherwise the cloth seems to have no clear relationship to the other objects in the picture; it seems to have a mind of its own, establishing its own internal cause for its exaggerated curves and swells and for that strong, stiff rush to the left edge of the picture.

The last sentence of "Babette's Feast"—"Ah, how you will enchant the angels"—looks to Paradise as the promised realm of artistic freedom; that is one element of comedy in what has been called a comic tale. Dinesen's more earthly conclusion lies, however, in the relationship she draws between Babette and General Gallifet. The issue she raises is not far from present day concerns of artists and art institutions, and of the broader public that attends and supports the arts. Among recent artists, one who has been persistently concerned to articulate in his work the relationship between art and patronage is Hans Haacke, a German artist who has developed his career largely in the United States since the 1960s. One of his primary subjects has been corporate sponsorship of the arts, which he examines under an artist/sociologist's lens. His general message, to borrow a formulation from Theater Oobleck, my favorite non-profit Chicago theater group, is: "Corporate sponsorship sponsors nothing but corporate interests."

One of Haacke's principal concerns has been investment in South Africa under apartheid. There is little ambiguity and certainly no ambivalence in Haacke's work and attitudes. Apartheid is evil, and companies that support its structure share in that evil. Divestment was of course a hotly contested issue during the 1980s, but for the Mobil Oil Corporation at the time there was little debate. Haacke produced a piece as early as 1981 titled *Upstairs at Mobil*, satirizing Mobil's longstanding sponsorship of Masterpiece Theatre's "Upstairs, Downstairs" on PBS (otherwise known at the time as the Petroleum Broadcasting System). In his piece Haacke presented a placard containing the text of an ad that Mobil's South African subsidiary had placed in a Johannesburg business journal. The text makes Mobil's position clear:

> Our refinery at Durban has a capacity of 100,000 barrels a day. We market 18 per cent of all the oil in the country. . . . we are indeed the largest U. S. investor in South Africa. A proud record.
>
> To protect such a major investment Mobil does everything to insure the stability of South Africa. Our Board argues: "The denial of supplies to the police and military forces of a host country is hardly consistent with an image of good citizenship in that country."

We are not deterred in this by objections from misguided church group shareholders. However, to blunt attacks from Black Americans and to preserve our interests in Nigeria we sponsored a show of Nigerian art at the Metropolitan Museum.



Hans Haacke, *Metromobiltan*, (1985) installation, 11' 8" x 20' x 5' (355.6 x 609.6 x152.4cm.)

Haacke dealt with the Nigerian exhibition, "Treasures of Ancient Nigeria," in a separate large-scale piece called *Metromobiltan*, shown at the John Weber Gallery in New York in 1985. It brought the separate elements together under the classicizing entablature of the Metropolitan Museum, with descending banners announcing the exhibition and excerpting Mobil's words about its corporate policy, including those in support of the police and military just cited. Above, on the entablature, engraved in pseudo-marble, are words of corporate welcome from a Metropolitan statement addressed to potential corporate sponsors and titled "The business behind Art is the Art of Good Business." The Met's engraved tablet reads:

> Many public relations opportunities are available through the sponsorship of programs, special exhibitions, and services. These can often provide a creative and cost-effective answer to a specific marketing objective, particularly where international, governmental or consumer relations may be a fundamental concern.

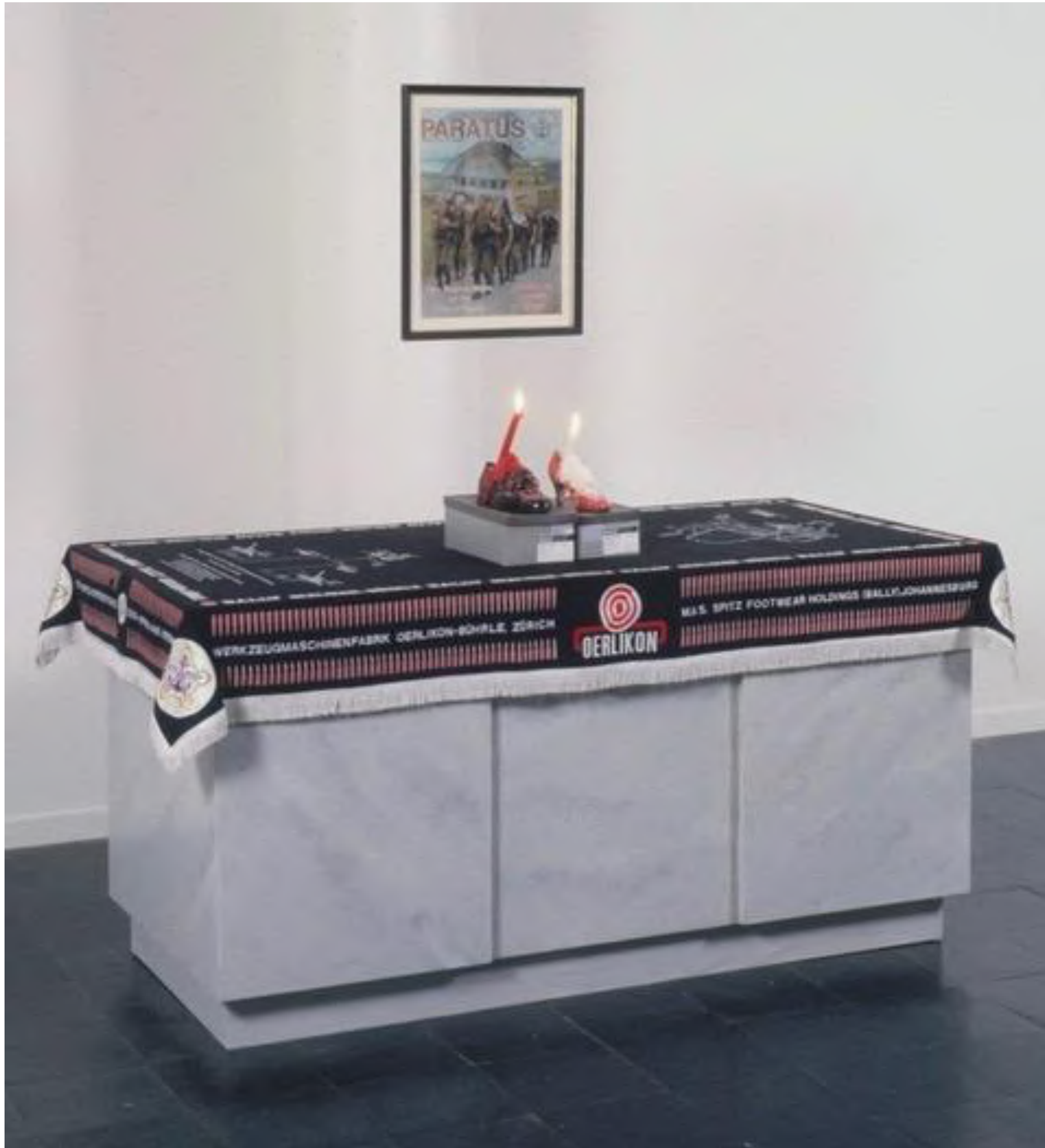
Behind the banners, and partially obscured by them, is a large photomural in black and white depicting the funeral procession for black victims shot by the South African police at Crossroads, near Cape Town, on March 16, 1985.

Another Haacke piece also concerns armaments and South Africa and relates to exhibition policy in the United States, this time at the National Gallery in Washington. It concerns an exhibition held at the National Gallery in 1990, "The Passionate Eye: Impressionist and other Master Paintings from the E. G. Bührle Collection," Zūrich. The exhibition catalogue was published in commemoration of the one-hundredth birthday of Emile Bührle, a man who, having made his fortune in armaments during the 1930s and 1940s, supplying, among other clients, anti-aircraft weapons to Hitler's Germany during World War II, began to amass an art collection of major dimensions in the post-war decade from 1946 to his death ten years later. It is an impressive collection, containing important works by Pissarro, Cézanne, and Monet along with other Impressionist painters.

When the exhibition opened at the National Gallery, Michael Kimmelman of the New York Times in a review headlined "Was this Exhibition Necessary?" wrote that although it was an opportunity to see paintings of unusually high quality, "it is an exhibition that the National Gallery should never have undertaken. The astonishing thing," he continued, "is that this public institution evinces no embarrassment." His main points were that Bührle's industrial record is of dubious morality, that the catalogue's introductory essays were puff pieces written by members of Bührle's family and staff, and that the exhibition would serve to raise the value of the paintings exhibited, many of which remain in the hands of family members, with no tangible benefit whatsoever to the museum. The museum thus enters into a collusive relationship with the collectors and serves to enhance their status both financially and in the way of prestige.

This last consideration is a familiar one and an important one that has frequently been ignored by museums in recent years. But let's return to Emile Bührle's history as an industrial entrepreneur along with that of his family. Michael Kimmelman could well

have based himself on the documentation brought forth by Hans Haacke in support of a piece he created in 1985 titled *Buhrlesque*.

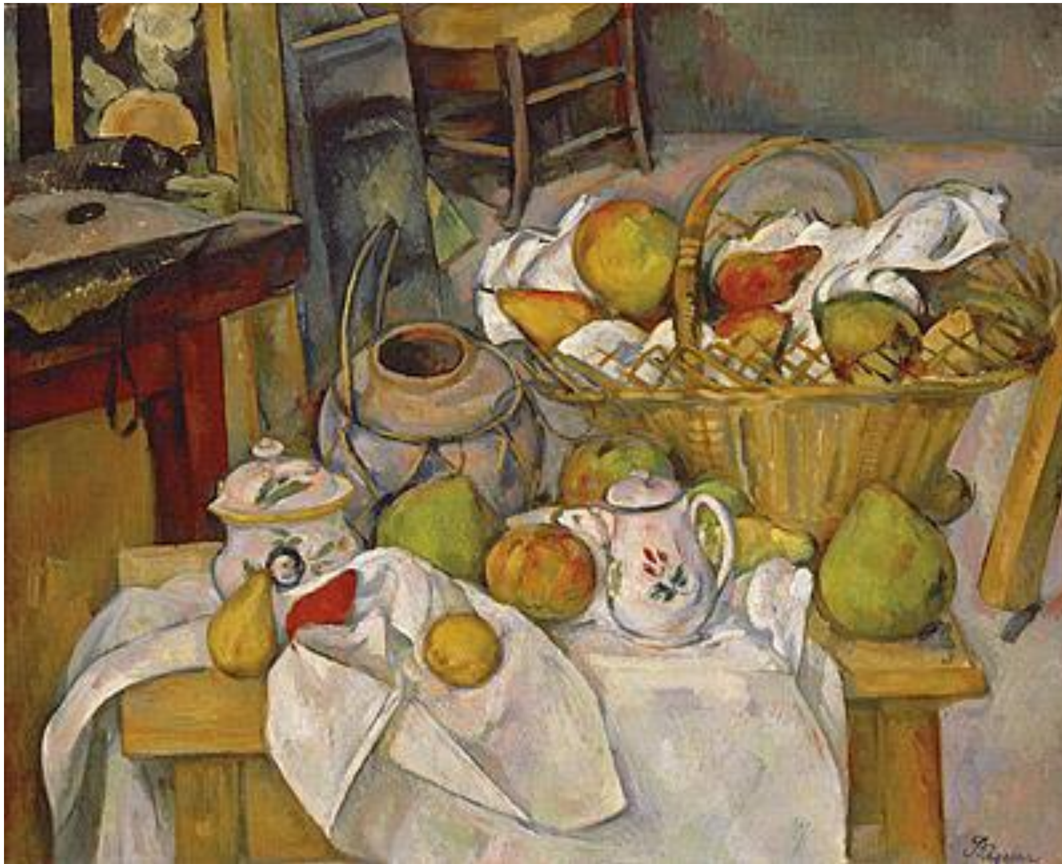


Hans Haacke, *Buhrlesque* (1985) installation, base, 37 x 76 ½ x 37" (94 x 194 x 94 cm)

It focuses on the activities of Bührle's international corporation, Oerlikon-Bührle, based in Zürich and run by his son Dieter as chairman and CEO. Oerlikon-Bührle's military products division, with subsidiaries in several countries, brought in more than a quarter of the company's sales in 1983 (it had a contract to produce anti-aircraft weapons with the American munitions giant Martin Marietta, which sponsored the show at the National Gallery). Dieter Bührle is himself an art collector and supporter of the Zürich Kunsthaus;

he was also convicted of violating Swiss law by providing anti-aircraft weapons to South Africa (his sentence was suspended), in response to which Bührle promised that South Africa "would no longer be supplied by Switzerland, but from another country." Thus, its Italian subsidiary reaped the profits.

Not all of Oerlikon-Bührle's business is in weaponry, however. Its best known civilian products are the shoes and handbags produced by its Bally division. Hence the Bally shoes on the marble table fixed at the proper launching angle, with lighted anti-aircraft candles.



Cézanne, *The Kitchen Table,* (1888-90) oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 31 7/8" (65 x 81.5 cm) Musée d'Orsay, Paris

One of the strangest paintings Cézanne ever did, I think. Nothing quite makes sense. It makes me think of a remark E. H. Gombrich has made about Cézanne's drive towards visual honesty through intense scrutiny. Gombrich wrote that "if you were really faithful to your vision in every detail the equation would not work out; the elements will not fuse

into a convincing whole." And to a great extent that is what happens here, nothing quite adds up. Where to begin? Start at the beginning: lower left—the corner of a table as if seen from slightly above, set at an odd angle to the much taller, darker table, which rises above it at the left. Among the hills and valleys of the tablecloth a sugar bowl and creamer are set slightly atilt and placed among a group of fruits of outlandishly diverse sizes. The table top reappears at the right, seen in sharper foreshortening, supporting a big green pear. The table is not very deep; it barely contains the large spherical clay pot set in a straw holder. The large basket of fruit at right has almost completely lost any purchase on the table; it has grown outlandishly and seems to hover, almost in a space of its own.

We can observe how the basket has increased in size and we can assess only with difficulty Cézanne's efforts to keep it in check. It is not a question, though, of damage control. What we see here is, I think, an extreme example of Cézanne playing out the consequences of his method. That method has been accurately described, I believe, by Meyer Schapiro, who wrote a long time ago that in loosening the perspective structure of traditional art "Cézanne gave to the image the aspect of a world created freehand and put together piecemeal from successive perceptions." That is it, I think, not comprehensive viewing, not a deliberate combining of vantage points, but a matter of putting things down, one thing next to another. If you were really faithful to that, as Gombrich said, the equation will not work out; but he also said, "the elements will not fuse into a convincing whole." That's where I would differ from him. To me, the painting is convincing precisely because it does not add up. If it did the basket would probably be sitting on the table.

None of the Impressionist painters were active supporters of the Commune. Degas and Manet became members of the National Guard during the Prussian siege of the city in the fall of 1870, but both were absent from Paris the following spring, save for Manet's return during the last days of fighting. Renoir was drafted into the army, but was away from Paris and saw no military action. Monet and Pissarro escaped to London. Berthe Morisot stayed in Paris and its western suburbs with her family through the fall and winter of 1870-71, where she suffered from poor health due in part to the rigors of the siege; she had gone to Normandy to join her sister prior to the last days of the Commune. Cézanne, of course, was in Aix.

The artist who took the leading role in the affairs of the Commune government was their immediate predecessor, well known to several of them personally, the realist painter Gustave Courbet. Courbet, whose rocky career included numerous skirmishes with the Second Empire regime of Napoleon III, had earlier on, during the Second Republic of 1848-52, declared his wholehearted support for the emancipation of the artist from government regulation and direction. With the proclamation of a new French Government of National Defense—the Third Republic—in the face of the continued

siege of Paris, Courbet became active in the effort to preserve works of art within the city from a feared German occupation.

The following spring, amidst growing tensions between contending factions in the new government that saw the departure of the newly formed National Assembly to Versailles and calls for a Commune de Paris to serve as the city's government, Courbet became active in the formation of a new association committed to defend the professional interests of artists. He urged adherence to the new Paris administration, exhorting artists to take it as their moral obligation to support their city, which, as he put it, had "just shaken off the dust of all feudalisms." He said that the long Prussian encirclement of Paris, the hunger and privations it had produced, had had the salutary effect of "causing us . . . to reconquer our moral life and to raise up everyone to human dignity."

Three weeks later, more than 400 artists, designers, and craftsmen met to form a federation devoted to promoting the freedom of artists of all types to govern their own affairs. This was not anarchy, however; freedom was to be coupled with the mission to undertake three main tasks:

1) to conserve the past: they undertook to guard the museums and the works in their care and to reopen them to the public as soon as possible;

2) to promote at all levels a broad, rather than exclusive, education in the techniques of art, as well as in esthetics and the history of art, unimpeded by the ideological constraints associated with academic training;

3) to improve conditions for the creation of new work, to distribute commissions fairly and broadly among artists chosen by their peers, to facilitate the exhibition of new work to the public, and to prohibit "any commercial exhibition tending to substitute the name of the publisher or manufacturer for that of the true creator."

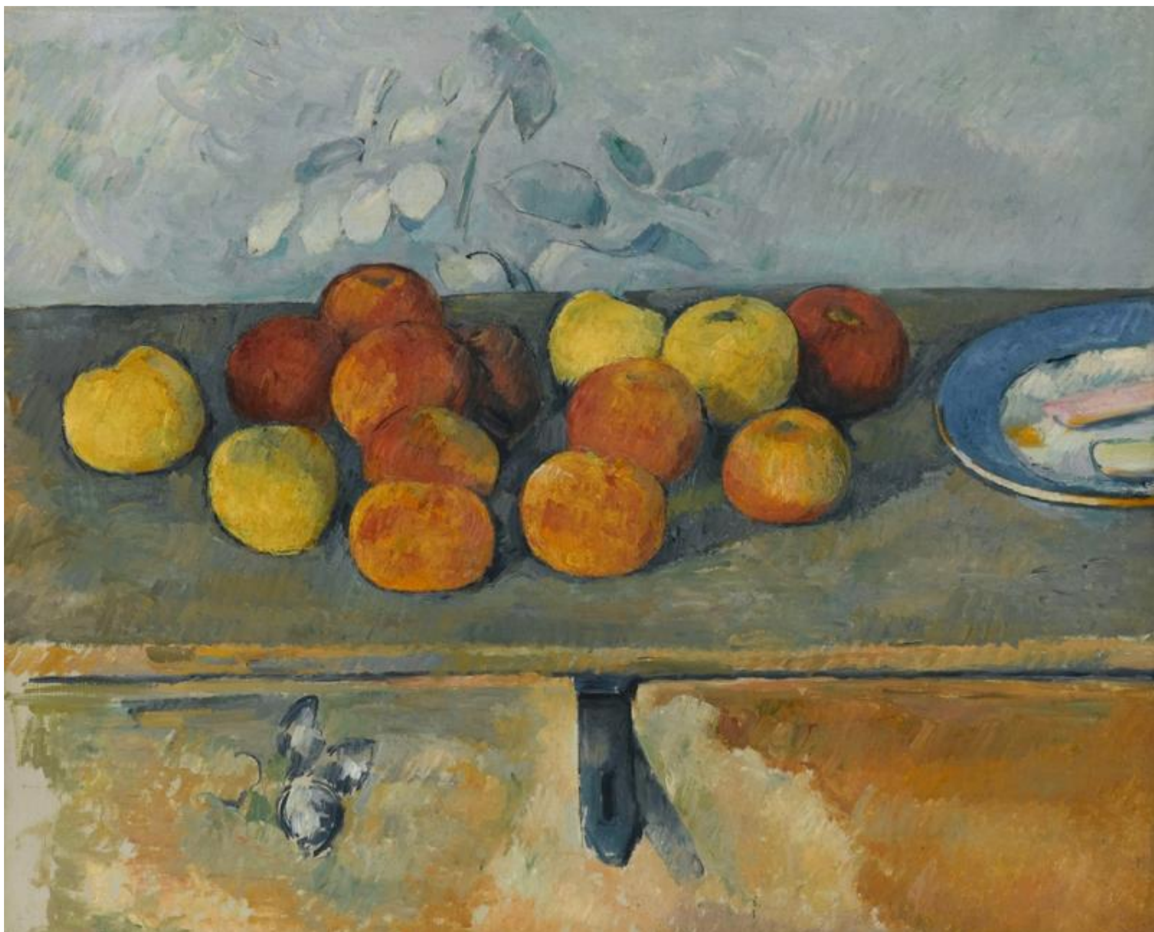
The Federation of Artists was short-lived, as was the Commune itself. Few of its plans had a chance to be put into practice. But I think it is of interest to be aware that at the same time that Babette, in Dinesen's construction of the matter, was articulating the dependent position of the artist within the economy of the modern state, an actual group of artists was attempting to question existing arrangements and formulate programs that would establish the dignity and freedom of artists on a new set of bases.

The question of the social character of art was caught up in the 1860s and 1870s in a complex of tensions that stretched between demands for an art that would uplift the moral character and serve the nation or some goal of social good, on the one hand, and calls for the autonomy and total freedom of the artist, on the other. In the first instance, artists would work according to a program and often in a specified style so as to most effectively serve the aims of an administration and a public in need of direction or uplift. Such calls were made by academicians and conservative republicans, as well as by radicals like Courbet's good friend, the philosopher P. J. Proudhon, who linked art to the task of social amelioration, defining art as "an idealistic representation of nature and

ourselves for the purpose of the physical and moral improvement of our species." Courbet's stress on individual and artistic freedom, however, led him and his confreres to construe morality in a diametrically opposed manner. According to the pro-Commune paper Le Père Duchêne, "every work of art . . . is moral, and that good fellow Proudhon was absolutely crazy when he said that the aim of art is to instruct the patriots in morality. That's not true. If you want to produce a moral treatise, don't make a painting, but a declaration of the rights of man. A work of art is moral when it is well done."

"Babette can cook."

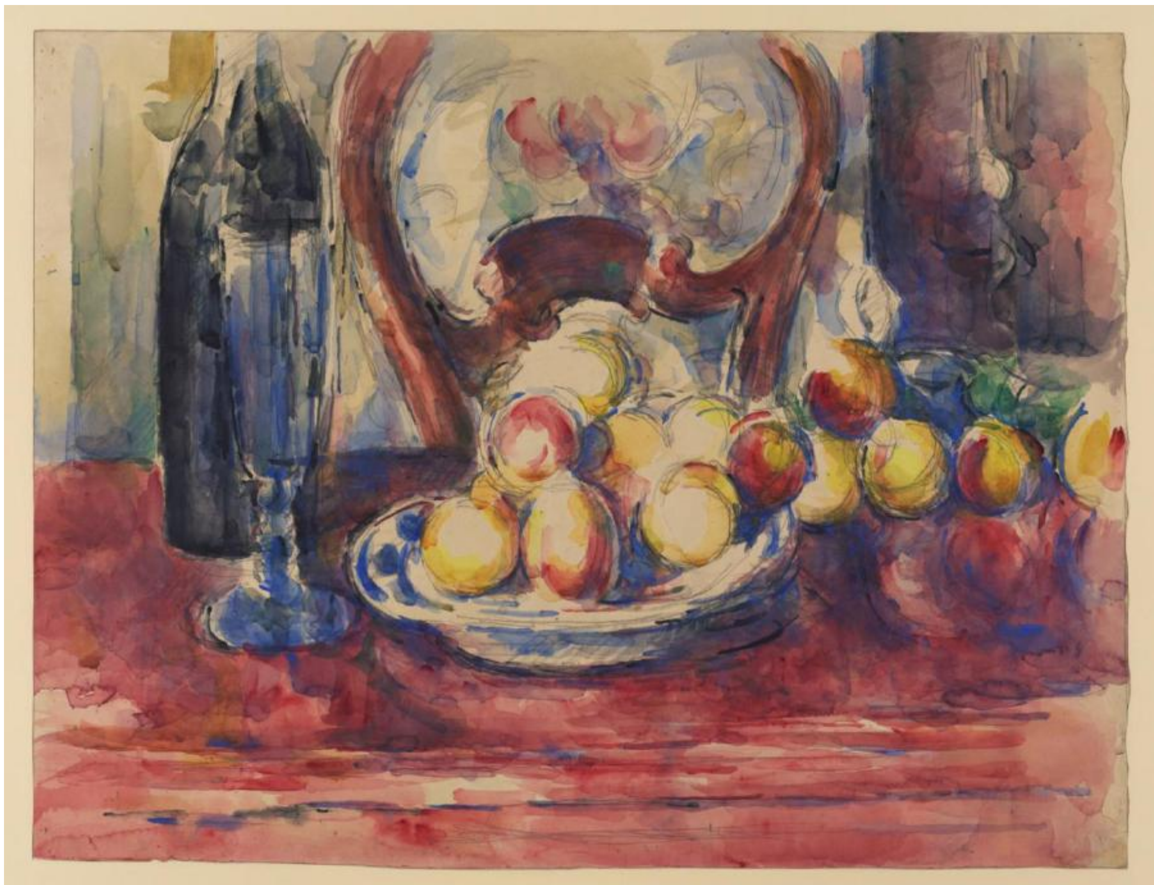
In that sense, Cézanne's groping, complex canvases are moral in their very nature, for they are ultimately honest, hard won and convincing records of perceptual inquiry and personal conviction.



Cézanne, *Apples and Biscuits* (c. 1879-1880) oil on canvas, c. 17 ¾ x

21 5/8" (45 x 55 cm) Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris

A spare painting. A sprawl of red and yellow apples, contained within the two horizontals of the table top that run across the canvas. A plate of biscuits, barely half a plate, is cut off unceremoniously at the right edge. A wallpaper pattern behind; the arrangement of leaves provides a lively variation on the stolid formation of apples below it. Lightly sketched in, the leaves seem to float, half freed from the plane on which they were imprinted. The sculptural apples are flattened out by repeated workings, thickly embedded in the heavy texture of the table surface, which is also the surface of the painting. This is the solid Cézanne of 1880, given to materiality, to verification by touch.



Cézanne, *Apples, Bottle, and Chair Back* (c. 1904-06) watercolor,
17 ½ x 23 ¼" (c. 46 x 60.4 cm) Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

At the end of his life, especially in his watercolors, Cézanne opened up a good deal more and gave to many of his paintings a kind of rococo-barocco flair. He shifted, at least in the watercolors, from bass to treble. Here the floral upholstery of the chair back seems to hover above the exuberant apples piled up on the dish below. The apples are light, opened up to the white of the page, gloriously tinted in pinks, yellows, and violets and enlivened by multiple contours; they mound up eagerly and appear as assertive variants on the delicate tints of the flowered fabric above. At the right, the multiple hues of the

fruits are repeated just below, reflected darkly in the shimmering surface of the table on which they sit.

Cézanne can paint in many moods; he can paint with plaster and paint with glass.

At long last, I reach the end of this perhaps whimsical journey. And I end, as does Isak Dinesen, with the artist and the artist's position in society. The social, as well as social history, provides a theater in which artists act. Courbet's view, as that of Le Père Duchêne and the Fédération des Artistes, was that the actor might act without a director. He, and they, sought a freedom for artists that might enable them to do their utmost, and to do so without the agonizing dependence experienced—and even, in her circumstances, desired—by Babette.

If I end by emphasizing that freedom, does that mean I ignore the actual structure of our world, which, it must be admitted, makes such independence an impossibility? Am I putting history aside in favor of mythology, the hoary romantic myth of artistic genius? I think not. I would rather see it as Cézanne's boyhood friend Emile Zola did when in 1867 he said that in modern society the artist is an ordinary bourgeois, who paints his paintings in his studio as the shopkeeper sells pepper behind the counter. If I denied history I would not be concerned about the social position of Babette. I would not turn to Hans Haacke and the reality behind the façade of the Bührle's extraordinary art collection; I would ignore the role of Mobil Oil
as a premier sponsor of culture. My somewhat antiphonal approach in this talk—Babette and Cézanne—is meant to keep both in play—society and the work of the artist, history and the life of the individual. I hope that that dynamic is not forgotten, not lost to critical analysis, if, at the end, I return to that clear, sharp line in "Babette's Feast": "Babette can cook."

In our examination of the world, and in the practice of art history, wherever our contextual inquiries may take us—and they may take us far, not far afield, but into the field of legitimate inquiry—wherever they may take us, there has to be a place for "Babette can Cook"; there has to be room for "Cézanne can paint."