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Susan Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2009. xii + 302 pp. Color plates, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$57.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-520-25745-0.

Review by Nancy Locke, The Pennsylvania State University.

With *Cézanne's Other*, Susan Sidlauskas frames a question that will remain a significant contribution to the field: what to make of the nearly thirty portraits of Hortense Fiquet, who became Madame Paul Cézanne in 1886. Museum visitors and writers on Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) have long recognized that the portraits form a distinctive facet of the artist's oeuvre, yet art historians have never before given these works their due. The paintings date to the period 1883–1894, which is to say, after Cézanne's invention of the so-called "constructive stroke," but before the furious intensity of the late figure paintings and *Mont Ste.-Victoire* series. It is the period of Cézanne's maturity, of his becoming Cézanne, we might say, and Sidlauskas argues that he could not have become the artist we know without the crucial exploration of the form of the woman closest to him in those years. By taking this tack, Sidlauskas makes a dramatic departure from previous commentators on the Hortense portraits, who inevitably view them as affectless, inanimate, and unappealing as portraits of a woman (much less of a beloved).

In four substantial chapters, Sidlauskas tackles the reception history of the portraits, the use of color as a vehicle for emotion, the "conjunction of touch and vision" in Cézanne's art (p. 18), and questions of resemblance, gender, and sex as seen through a comparison of oil paintings with watercolors and drawings. Throughout the book, the author substantiates her claims along two fronts: through detailed formal analysis of the works themselves, and through reference to nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of emotion, personality, and self in relation to other.

One of Sidlauskas's central contributions in *Cézanne's Other* is the idea that the image of Hortense changes over time. Her image changes without necessarily aging in any noticeable way. Sidlauskas catalogues vast differences in just about every aspect of what we might call resemblance in the portraits: the shape of the face, the form of individual features such as the eyes and nose, even the body type can look dramatically different from one work to another. The malleability of Hortense's image lends credence to Sidlauskas's claim that the portraits form a special subject of Cézanne's "research": they become in a way a laboratory for the artist's intricate development of painted form. Sidlauskas not only draws out the salient characteristics of each portrait so that readers can easily grasp the works' differences, but also marshals the differences in her campaign against earlier accounts that have lumped the portraits together as almost interchangeable in their inanimate states.

Cézanne's Other is particularly successful in defeating the old assumptions that the portraits' lack of traditional signs of feminine beauty and sociability equals an absence of emotional content in the works. Sidlauskas's readings of the works find emotion at every point: the portraits of Hortense "insist on the presence of emotion, in all its liveliness, conviction, and changeability" (p. 91). The author's analysis of color is her main contribution to this thesis: Cézanne "modulated, separated, and analyzed each incremental stroke to deepen and dramatize the color relationships" (p. 87). She finds evidence for

emotion in the intensity of Cézanne's impressive modulations of color, which she relates to Cézanne's study of earlier masters such as Rubens and to the history of theories of color in painting.

Sidlauskas quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, author of the famous essay "Cézanne's Doubt," commenting (in *The Visible and the Invisible*) on the "quivering quality of the visible," on the idea that the surfaces of objects and bodies are not stable, but rather, mobile and even teeming (p. 115). Cézanne's young friend and admirer Joachim Gasquet wrote that according to Cézanne, "everything moves, everything shimmers" (ibid). Although many writers on Cézanne have tried to attend to the perceptual instabilities in his constructions of form and color, it is novel to suggest that Cézanne might have been representing an instability that inhered in its object—here, Hortense Fiquet Cézanne as significant other. "These layers [of paint as skin] are not surfaces," she writes, "nor do they create a 'self,' that can be easily navigated" (p. 126). Thus Sidlauskas not only argues that Cézanne sought to represent a depth in his subjects that could not be articulated merely via the surface (as Manet and the Impressionists would have it), but also that a person's being in the world was necessarily changing, never fixed. In a sense, then, for Sidlauskas, Cézanne's portraits of Hortense become the very opposite of the inanimate, the portrait-as-still life seen dismissively by so many before her. By the time the author launches her analysis of the spectral portrait in the Beyeler Collection, Basel (pp. 132–33), it is clear that the portraits depart so wildly from one another and from traditional notions of resemblance that they might best be considered as analogous to musical compositions like Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*.

The aspect of Sidlauskas's approach that is sure to cause the most disagreement is her view that Cézanne somehow merges self and other in the representations of Hortense.[1] "Where does one self stop and the other begin? And how can we tell?" she asks in her introduction (p. 18). She frequently suggests that Cézanne felt or suggested in paint a dissolving of boundaries between self and other, between artist and wife/model: "the painted canvas might serve as the intervening surface that conjoined self to other, artist to subject" (p. 54); "Cézanne's sense of fusion between himself and his *motif* was apparently just as acute when he was painting a portrait of a sympathetic *living* subject" (p. 82). Chapter four is entitled "Toward an Ideal: Dissolving Difference." It seems to me that it is eminently reasonable to read intensity, changeability, and hence emotion into the portraits, and to argue that the "other" constructed by Cézanne was mutable and unstable. It is quite another thing to suggest that Cézanne actually achieved a kind of fusion of self with this constantly-changing other. *What would such a fusion look like in a painting?* one is tempted to ask. Yet even in this controversial area, Sidlauskas's approach does have something valuable to say about Cézanne. Whether Cézanne was representing Hortense as variable, or whether he sought some kind of dissolution of boundaries between self and other, what he was certainly *not* pursuing was a construction of identity—at least, not identity in the sense of sameness over time, fixity, a recognizably unchanging core.[2]

Since the publication of Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*, the discipline of art history has witnessed a growing literature on Cézanne that stresses the painter's subjectivity and departs from the earlier prevailing view that the artist's human subjects were somehow indistinguishable from his baskets of apples.[3] Another important contribution to this literature is André Dombrowski's *Cézanne, Murder, and Modern Life*, which makes a case for the artist's expressionism as not confined to raw, pre-Impressionist works.[4] *Cézanne's Other* thus contributes to an emerging approach that takes Cézanne's subject matter seriously and discovers meaning by relating those subjects to a contextual field. Sidlauskas's book has already proven to be a key point of inspiration for an exhibition of the portraits of Hortense scheduled to go on view at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, in late 2014 through early 2015. In addition, Alex Danchev's biography *Cézanne: A Life* has reread the few extant letters we have in Hortense's hand to paint a more three-dimensional picture of the role she played "transacting business on behalf of her husband." [5] Both exhibition and biography lend further weight to Sidlauskas's claim that Cézanne's portraits of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne must be seen as singular, and even formative, to the work and development of this pivotal figure. What is indisputable is that the very sustained account of the portraits that we find in Sidlauskas's book makes it

impossible to look past the paintings, and readers are almost certain to look at them again with a fresh eye.

NOTES

[1] See especially Todd Cronan, "Mysterious Exchange: On Susan Sidlauskas's *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense*," *nonsite.org* 1 (January 25, 2011), < <http://nonsite.org/issues/issue-1/sidlauskas-s-cezanne-s-other>>

[2] See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[3] Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[4] André Dombrowski, *Cézanne, Murder, and Modern Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: The University of California Press, 2013). See also Elizabeth C. Mansfield's review of Dombrowski in *H-France* Vol. 14 (February 2014), No. 30.

[5] Alex Danchev, *Cézanne: A Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), p. 172.

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