CÉZANNE

MORRI CREECH

1.
The man with brush and palette knife
Watches the gleaming light of Aix.
A scrim of cloud goes skimming by.
If it is a solitary life
To paint with brush and palette knife
The spheres, the cones, and cylinders
Of nature in a layered light,
Then this is the man and these the right
Structures and geometric shapes
To see things by. The colors shift
Beneath the essences distilled
Of mountain, orange, pine, or peach.
The world and his perception rhyme
On a canvas of arrested time.

2.
An ancient sun has shed its blue.
Here the wind goes slow, then still,
Beneath a smear of deeper brown
On rooftops at the edge of town.
A balding man stands on the hill.
He sees the sea, shades it the hue
Of consciousness, with strokes of white,
One island like a far meringue.
To set things down the way they seem
And get the sullen colors right,
Shape of a woman’s folded hands
Or oranges wrapped in swaddling bands,
Those stray folds where the shadows start,
Are all his labor and his art.
3.
Paint the colors, paint them on
The quiet hills at dusk or dawn.
Paint Harlequin and Pierrot.
Whatever else the angels do,
None whispers in a bishop’s ear
Or crowds by an important chair.
None wears a father’s leather shoe.
They do not natter in the blue
Of ordinary fields. The mind
Grows anxious in its search to find
Some meaning in the daub of day.
When the paint of thought is scraped away
It reveals not the world we know
But another, deeper, just below.

4.
Celestial things have no place here.
The commonest will do: a pear,
A bottle, two eggs, a loaf of bread,
A man whose beard and sober head
Display the changes of the year.
He shifts a bit to adjust his view,
The man with brush and palette knife,
In a world of shifting constancies.
Though in the teeth of time and change
He has managed to arrange
Permanent shapes that will outlast
The subjects that decay so fast,
His apples rot as the paint dries.
He hears the buzzing of the flies.
5.
The real is what we think it is:
Melting snow at Fontainebleau,
Lavender touched by morning dew.
It is a man in a white-stained cap
Who holds his brushes in his lap
And works to make his vision true.
But atoms in the clearest air
Compose the easel and the chair
Where he paints, that man from Aix.
Each brushstroke makes it seem as though
Aqueduct, garden, and chateau
Are motions in a stillness, bare
And rinsed, a smutch of white and green,
Until one sorts what one has seen.

6.
Sensation is the aim of thought.
It is a matter for the eye
That one’s perspective alters sky
From gray to cobalt by device,
That one can see the same thing twice,
Three, no, a hundred times, and note
A difference in the dusky hues
Each time the pupil takes it in.
Let’s paint the familiar thing again.
Let’s watch the steel blue at L’Estaque
Become, on second glance, the black
Of heavy clouds, late winter, when
Perception sees the shapes unwind
Before they reach the shaping mind.
7.
An atmosphere of autumn light
Against a backdrop of green pines,
Old woman with a rosary,
A bather slumped against a tree,
The chateau on the hill at night
Are all a part of his designs,
The man from Aix. He shuts his eyes.
And what he sees is past surmise.
Behind the eyelids’ crucial dark,
The imagined and the real
Blend to what we think and feel.
He blinks and makes a final mark.
Shapes appear as they appear.
The shadows, lengthening, grow near.