

## Country and City: An Evolving Sense of Place

### Stop 7. Comparison: Cézanne *Reflections on Water*, ca. 1888 and Morita Tsunetomo, *Scene in Aizu*, 1916

GEORGE TAKEI: Paul Cézanne created this dramatic, nearly abstract painting of a landscape in the late 1880s. He had experimented for years with compositions made up of strong horizontal and diagonal lines and multiple angles of vision. During the 1890s, he made a series of paintings of water. In this one, the far bank of the river cuts a strong horizontal line across the canvas. Cézanne developed a totally original way of structuring a painting. His stylistic innovations had a special influence on Japanese artists who felt that the traditions of French painting were too confining; in Cézanne, they found a model of the independent artist who obeys his own vision. Japanese tradition had long recognized the inner life of the artist as an essential part of the creative process. As modern European painters like Cézanne began to prioritize individuality and self-expression, Japanese artists found western painters in tune with traditional Asian artistic values.

Move to the right. You'll see a painting of a landscape marked in the foreground by the tall vertical lines of bare trees, and in the background by rolling hills leading to the horizon. This is the work of Morita Tsunetomo, a Japanese artist who was particularly devoted to Cézanne. Morita traveled to France around 1914, several years after Cézanne's death. He visited Cézanne's studio, studied his work, and began to paint in the style of the great French master. After two years, Morita returned home.

Around the turn of the century, Japan was undergoing rapid modernization. Like many artists of his generation, Morita struggled to reconcile the influence of the West with his Japanese identity. In an essay from 1921, he described his struggle. If you'd like to hear a passage from that essay as you look at other works in this gallery, press Play.