

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

- Renoir grew up in Paris. From the age of 15 he worked as a porcelain painter and saved enough money so that he could study art.
- Renoir copied old master paintings in the Louvre.
- He was influenced by Courbet.
- As a young artist in the 1860s, Renoir had paintings accepted for the Salon Exhibition.
- In 1860 he enrolled at the teaching studio of the academic artist Charles Gleyre, where he befriended Monet and Sisley. His friendship with Monet was crucial and resulted in Renoir's adoption of the plein air painting, his use of brighter colours and freer handling of paint.
- His early Impressionist paintings were rejected and Renoir struggled to support his family.
- The impressionist style was founded during the summer of 1869, when Monet, Sisley and Renoir painted scenes along the river Seine. Renoir and Monet's paintings were remarkably similar when they worked together in the early years.

Together they :

**Observed that the colour of an object is affected by the light and reflections of surrounding objects.*

**Discovered that shadows are not brown or black but in fact coloured.*

**Became fascinated with flickering light and shimmering colour in outdoor scenes.*

- Renoir helped to organise the first impressionist exhibition and showed his work in the first three exhibitions (1874-77) and again in 1882.

Personal Style and Technique

- After painting in the impressionist style for over 10 years Renoir began to question Impressionism's emphasis on visual effects. He burned some of his work.
- In 1881, having 'wrung impressionism dry', he went to Italy to study renaissance art seeking 'an art of more 'permanent qualities', as he put it.
- On his return he developed a harder, more realistic style. His style softened again in the 1890s.

Subject Matter

- Up to the 1880s Renoir portrayed people relaxing in gardens, in the countryside, at the opera, at dances and in boats on the Seine. His later works focused on family life and female bathers.
- Renoir chose light-hearted, happy themes throughout his life, despite his financial difficulties. Some critics accused him of being superficial. He dismissed them by saying, 'Why shouldn't art be pretty? There is enough unpleasant things in the world.'

Ball at Le Moulin de la Galette (or Le Moulin de la Galette)

La Moulin de la Galette was the Café at the foot of Montmartre Hill that held outdoors dances on its terrace. Renoir's studio was nearby.

- In this painting, the joyful movement of the dancers, combined with their expressive gestures and glances, creates a lively scene. It was described as the most beautiful picture of the 19th Century. Several of his friends posed for him and it was the first time that such a large painting with so many figures had been painted entirely en plein air.
- He depicts a mixture of Parisian upper, middle and working classes who are attending a fashionable Sunday afternoon music-hall dance.
- The figures of the two girls in the foreground, while in fact chatting to the men on the right, face outwards, inviting the viewer to participate in the scene.
- Renoir carefully captures the play of light through the trees by painting an irregular pattern of glowing sunlit patches which give the impression of transient light and shifting movement.
- There is a variety of skin colours depending on whether the figure is sunlit or in shadow.
- Most of the people are wearing dark colours, blending into the shade, and highlighted by the dapples of sunlight. There is a uniformity of colour which unites the painting, as the artist repeats the pink and red tones in the ladies' dresses, contrasting with the greens of the foliage and background buildings and the golden hues of the straw boater hats. The dapples of light in the ground are echoed in the globes of light in the top of the picture.
- By changing the scale of the dancers as they recede into the background, Renoir achieves a sense of space. He also concentrated on depicted small details in the foreground figures clearly, while reducing the background figures to daubs of colours. This makes them appear out of focus, giving the impression of the throngs of people at the dance without necessarily showing each individual.
- The placement of the figures within the picture seems casual and unplanned, as do the carefree, smiling faces of the characters, lending the work the feeling of snapshot depiction of life as it was at the time.
- The painting shows the typical loose brushstrokes of the impressionist style. Renoir's characteristically
- blurred outlines help to capture the carefree mood. there is no black in the painting.
- Here Renoir purposely used a strong large-scale canvas, normally reserved for history paintings, to depict modern Parisian life.

Ball at Le Moulin de la Galette, Renoir, oil on canvas, 1876, Musée D'Orsay, Paris

The Umbrellas (les Parapluies)

- This large scale painting reveals the anonymity of the big city. Only two characters look directly at the viewer: the young girl on the right show with a hula hoop and the working woman on the left, who is clearly alone. They glance out of the frame, connecting with the viewer and involving them in the picture. The little girl is typical of Renoir's portraits of children with her soft innocent expression. Her mother appears to be trying to engage her attention which seems to be riveted on something or someone

- outside the picture.
- The painting appears at first glance to be quite shallow in depth due to the dominance of the large full-length figures in the foreground and the canopy of umbrellas obscuring most of the background. There is however, a real sense of depth and space, seen in smaller figures in the background and in the trees depicted in the top of the composition.
- The picture shows the development of Renoir's style. Renoir began the Umbrellas before visiting Italy in 1881.
- He was heavily influenced by the Renaissance paintings he saw there. On his return to Paris, he reworked the melancholy woman on the left in a more restrained style.
- He repainted her clothing with muted, sober tones. He clearly outlined her figure and made her look more three-dimensional.
- He left the girls on the right as he had originally painted them, in his Impressionist style with vivid colours and loose brushwork.
- Overall there was more order to the composition of the characters and there is a strong pattern emerging in the shapes of the overlapping umbrellas. The little girl's hoop and the hatbox held by the woman on the left provide a balance of curves in the foreground.
- The cut-off figures on either side have a random snapshot appearance showing the influence of photography.
- There are still many elements of Renoir's Impressionist technique visible in the painting. His beloved blues and purples feature largely in this somewhat dark painting, while the effects of the dull, drizzly weather can be seen in the misty blues and grey, overhead and in the orange-gold highlights of the milliner's basket and stems of the umbrellas.

The Umbrellas, Renoir, oil on canvas, 1881-86, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

Later Life

- Renoir spent his last years in the south of France. He suffered with severe arthritis but continued to paint.
- When the Louvre acquired one of his paintings in 1919 he travelled to Paris.
- He was honored as a world-renowned artist and was escorted through the galleries in a wheelchair. He dies shortly after.

Influence

- In the 1880s the art dealer Durand-Ruel regularly sold Renoir's work, and Renoir became well known as an artist and consequently more financially secure.
- By the time he died, one of his paintings hung in the Louvre.
- Renoir was widely influential in spreading the Impressionist style internationally. His loose brushstrokes and mastery of colour also influenced Matisse and Picasso.

Exam Questions

2014

Answer (a), (b), and (c).

(a) Choose and name a work that fits into one of the following categories:

a sculpture by Gislebertus (b. 12th century)

a painting by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

a painting by Turner (1775-1851)

a painting by Renoir (1841-1919)

a sculpture by Henry Moore (1898-1986).

(b) Discuss the work you have chosen in detail, making reference to the artist, style, composition / design, materials, technique, and the period in which it was produced.

(c) Name, and briefly describe and discuss, one other work by the artist you have chosen.

Illustrate your answer.

2012

Claude Monet (1840-1926) and Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) embraced the general principles of Impressionism while developing their own individual style.

Discuss this statement referring to the characteristics of Impressionism and to one named painting by each artist.

and

Name another Impressionist artist and briefly describe one named work by him/her.

Illustrate your answer.