

RENOIR AFTER IMPRESSIONISM

JEAN RENOIR, FILMMAKER AND SON OF THE FRENCH ARTIST PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841–1919), ONCE said of his father that he "considered the world and its inhabitants to be a reservoir of motifs created for his own ends." Throughout his career, Renoir represented his world in landscapes; views of Paris and the surrounding countryside; intimate portraits of friends, family, and fellow artists; detailed scenes of modern life; and idealized images of women. His artistic style evolved over the course of his lifetime and even late in his long and successful career, at the age of seventy-two, Renoir declared, "I am just learning how to paint."

Although he worked until his death, Renoir is most recognized for his early work with the group of artists known as the impressionists. Impressionism departed from past artistic traditions. It aimed to depict fleeting observations of color and light, along with scenes from modern life. These materials explore Renoir's contributions to impressionism, as well as the innovative and highly personal artistic style he developed later in his career. Renoir's interpretations of the human figure and other themes from the art of the past, along with his desire to improve upon his abilities as an artist and his drive to continually develop his personal aesthetic, inspired the next generation of artists, including Pierre Bonnard and Pablo Picasso.

View a selection of Renoir's works of art on the enclosed CD, LACMA's Collections Online (lacma.org), or the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collections database (metmuseum.org). Create a chronology of his artistic style. Look closely at each image. What is the subject? How has Renoir represented it in each artwork? Discuss the ways his style changed and developed over the course of his life. What characteristics remain the same? Consider subject matter, color palette (or range of colors), and mediums.

Works by Renoir, Bonnard, and Picasso are included in these materials. Several paintings by Renoir explore his affinity for creating works that unite traditional elements and subjects with observations of everyday life. These images combine both natural and imaginary elements. Paintings by Bonnard and Picasso are highlighted to address both the overt and subtle ways Renoir influenced a younger generation of artists.

Painting Modern Life

In the second half of the nineteenth century, France experienced extensive industrialization and urbanization. The capital city of Paris, in particular, was the site of many profound changes. Emperor Napoleon III (governed 1852–70) wanted the city renovated to accommodate its growing population. He named Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann to oversee the project, which included new sewer and water systems, street lighting, residential and commercial buildings, as well as a network of broad boulevards to provide a sense of order and organization—as opposed to the tangle of winding, medieval streets that had made up the city. The style of painting known as impressionism developed in the context of the increasingly industrialized and newly modern Paris.

Many artists in the early decades of the 1800s began to move away from the romantic, historical, and mythological subjects that were promoted by the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. The impressionists rejected the traditional and established conventions of the academy in favor of subjects that reflected their experience of life in modern Paris. Artists such as Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Alfred Sisley often painted outdoors in order to study and capture the changing effects of light and weather on their perception of color and shape.

Impressionists represented life in modern France in intimate or informal portraits of people, landscapes, and cityscapes of the newly constructed boulevards and train stations. If you were to create an artwork that embodies contemporary life, what images, objects, or events would you represent?



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (France, 1841–1919)
Two Girls Reading, c. 1890–91, Oil on canvas, 22 5/16 x 19 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Frances and Armand Hammer Purchase Fund, M.68.46.1.
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

Renoir's painting *Two Girls Reading* (c. 1890–91) illustrates qualities of both his impressionist style and his later period. He, and many other impressionists, often depicted women and children engaged in domestic and leisure activities. This painting also alludes to Renoir's interest in the traditions of great art of the past. It shares many characteristics of seventeenth-century genre paintings, which depict people absorbed in everyday activities in domestic interiors. The loose application of paint and the bright color palette suggest a sunlit day, and the girls' poses create a mood of intimate calm. Jean Renoir once said that "Renoir was always discovering and rediscovering the world at every instant of his existence, with every breath of fresh air he drew." Around the time he executed this painting, he was already considering how he could further develop his artistic style.

After Impressionism

In the 1880s, many impressionists, including Renoir, wanted to explore other styles. Renoir had grown dissatisfied with creating fleeting images of modern life. After traveling to Italy and North Africa in 1881 and 1882, Renoir was determined to reinvent himself and turned to the traditional values of classical art that he believed were lacking in impressionism.

Renoir greatly admired the work of old masters such as Raphael, Peter Paul Rubens, and Titian, as well as the work of French artists Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Francois Boucher, Jean-Antoine Watteau, and Jean-Honoré Fragonard. (See the enclosed CD or go to Collections Online at lacma.org to see paintings and drawings by many of these artists.) His examination of these and other artists from the past spurred a shift in his art away from capturing the ephemeral details of modern life to a style that combined his observations of the everyday with a more timeless, idealized version of his subjects.

Renoir lamented the urbanization and modernization of Paris. He mourned the loss of the premodern France that he had found charming and brimming with life. In a 1910 letter to a young protégé, Renoir wrote, "Painting is a happy occupation since it is capable of maintaining our illusions and bringing us joy." His works from the 1890s on—including landscapes, portraits, female nudes, and staged studio scenes featuring striking costumes—seem situated somewhere between real life and myth, suggesting his desire to create an ideal and unchanging world of beauty in his works of art.

Discuss the purposes and functions of art. Consider different mediums such as graphic design, photography, painting, and sculpture, as well as various genres of art including portraiture, scenes of everyday life, or images of social or political relevance. What is the role of fantasy versus documentation in art?

A "New Classicism"

Renoir's style in the later years of his career is often described as a "new classicism" aiming to bridge the classical tradition in art with his own direct visual experience of the world. His successful combination of modern and traditional subjects, perspectives, and techniques deeply affected many younger artists working in the twentieth century. Picasso, Bonnard, and other artists—including Henri Matisse and Maurice Denis—collected and studied Renoir's work, drawing inspiration from his example.

Picasso and Bonnard were influenced by Renoir's work in different ways. Bonnard and Renoir often showed their work in the same exhibitions and in the homes of the same collectors. Occasionally, they shared models and corresponded. Bonnard's *Landscape by the Sea* uses a color palette like that favored by Renoir; it adopts a similar approach to representing the landscape as well. Although Picasso did not benefit from direct contact with Renoir, the trajectory of his artistic study paralleled Renoir's in many ways. After early experimentation with a variety of subjects and compositional techniques, Picasso, like Renoir, turned to the monumental figure. While the sculptural qualities in his *Woman with Blue Veil* differ from the rosy-fleshed nudes of Renoir, Picasso shared a fascination with the substantiality of figures from ancient art. These were in direct contrast with the sketchily brushed, fleetingly glimpsed figures of the impressionists. Picasso also admired that Renoir, even in his old age, was still exploring new subjects and searching for the one thing that would be the culmination of his career. Picasso later would follow a similar path.

In what ways can artists learn from other artists both past and present? What are the benefits of exchanging ideas or learning about the artistic traditions of a variety of cultures?

PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (France, 1841–1919)

Terrace at Cagnes, 1905

IN *TERRACE AT CAGNES*, RENOIR REPRESENTS A QUIET HILLSIDE TOWN DEVOID OF HUMAN ACTIVITY APART FROM two figures in the lower right. The application of paint in soft, defined brushstrokes and the warm reds, oranges, and pinks reference the sun-drenched landscape of Cagnes-sur-Mer in the south of France. In 1907 Renoir purchased the estate of Les Collettes at Cagnes on the Mediterranean near Nice and split his time between it and Paris.

Renoir often spoke about his desire to paint an “earthly paradise.” In his land- and cityscapes from the early twentieth century, the details of site and location seem less important than the creation of an ideal image. The rich colors and abundant greenery in this painting allude to the lush landscapes in and around Cagnes and Les Collettes, rather than a specific place.

The “earthly paradise” Renoir created consists of landscapes, cityscapes, portraits, and images of everyday life. Look closely at this painting as well as Two Girls Reading, Dancing Girl with Tambourine, and Dancing Girl with Castanets. What do they reveal about Renoir’s ideal of paradise and beauty? In what ways do these images reflect reality? What parts seem imaginary or idealized?

Throughout his career, Renoir often painted outdoors. Although he considered himself primarily a figure painter, he once stated that landscape painting is “useful for the painter of figures.” He went on to say that “in the open air you are inspired to use colors that would have been unimaginable in the attenuated lighting of the studio.” Renoir’s attention to light and shadow in this painting suggests the continued impact of impressionism on his art. Although his aim was to move beyond that style, he did not entirely abandon his exploration of the effects of light on color and form.

Renoir’s approach to landscape painting was influenced by his early interactions with artists of the Barbizon school, particularly their practice of painting outdoors. The Barbizon school consisted of a group of landscape artists who depicted the countryside around the town of Barbizon, south of Paris, from the early 1830s to the 1870s. They worked outdoors in order to achieve a more realistic representation of nature. See the enclosed CD for an example of Barbizon painting, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot’s Wooded Landscape with Cow in a Clearing (c. 1855). In what ways is Renoir’s Terrace at Cagnes similar? What do Renoir’s color palette and brushstrokes have in common with Corot’s?

When Renoir lived in Cagnes, it was largely an agricultural village unaffected by the rampant urbanization and development of Paris. The rural quality of the place likely appealed to Renoir, who sought to retreat from modern life and was nostalgic for premodern France. The quiet calm in this composition reveals Renoir’s affection for Cagnes. Despite failing health, Renoir painted every day during his time there. He painted on the grounds of Les Collettes and in the surrounding village and countryside, often including his family members and the men and women of Cagnes in his compositions.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (France, 1841–1919)

Terrace at Cagnes, 1905

Oil on canvas, 18 x 21 7/8 in.

Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, Tokyo

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PIERRE BONNARD (France, 1867–1947)

Landscape by the Sea, n.d.

SHADES OF ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN, AND BLUE COMBINE WITH FLATTENED SHAPES AND FORMS IN Bonnard's *Landscape by the Sea*. Large succulent plants frame the view. From the high vantage point, a group of buildings is seen below and, farther off, mountains and the sea. The warm colors recall both the sunlit Mediterranean landscape of Le Cannet in the south of France, where Bonnard owned a home, and the rural landscape surrounding his parents' home in Le Grand-Lemps near Grenoble in the French Alps. Bonnard's works, including landscapes, portraits, and scenes of everyday life, reveal the artist's skill in observing nature and translating it into vibrant colors and interrelated forms.

Bonnard and Renoir were represented by the same dealers and were friends. They often showed their work in the same exhibitions and in the homes of the same collectors. They sometimes shared models and periodically corresponded. Bonnard visited Renoir in his house in Cagnes and occasionally would paint there. Bonnard commented on his relationship to Renoir in 1941: "I regarded Renoir as a rather strict father." Bonnard felt strongly that painting must not imitate life; instead, it should communicate the artist's visual experience. He admired Renoir's ability to strike a balance between directly referencing nature and reinterpreting it. Renoir's use of color for expressive purposes rather than imitation also inspired Bonnard.

Bonnard was a founding member of the artists' group known as the Nabis, a Hebrew word meaning "prophets." Around 1888, Bonnard and other young artists, including Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier, had grown dissatisfied with the representational painting methods taught at their art school, the Académie Julian in Paris. The artists banded together to explore form and color apart from their representational qualities. Their aim was to include subjects from the modern world that expressed personal emotions. Denis once stated that painting "is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order," alluding to the Nabis' rejection of linear perspective and modeling in favor of broad areas of saturated color, thick outlines, and bold patterns.

Explorations of color and form were primary inspirations for Bonnard. Like Renoir, Bonnard saw himself as part of a tradition informed by impressionism, but he also wanted to build on and move beyond the theories and techniques of that style. For Bonnard, this meant reviving the use of color as a means of expression. He said, "When one covers a surface with colors, one should always be able to try any number of new approaches, find a never-ending supply of new combinations of forms and colors which satisfy emotional needs." Bonnard believed color, line, and composition were powerful components of an expressive language that can evoke feeling and thought. His goal was not to precisely capture in his paintings what he saw before him, but to re-create his own sensory experience in colored surfaces.

Bonnard once said, "Drawing is a matter of remembering what you have perceived and recording it as quickly as possible." Numerous drawings in his diaries and sketchbooks are spontaneous recordings of reality as he observed it. Create an artist's book to record your observations of the world. Use a notebook or staple together sheets of paper stacked and folded in half. How will you record the world around you? Consider sketching, collecting magazine images, and writing words or short descriptive phrases.



Pierre Bonnard (France, 1867–1947)
Landscape by the Sea, n.d.
Watercolor, 12 x 16 7/8 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Gift of Mrs. Harold M. English, in memory of Harold M. English, 58.23.1
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (France, 1841–1919)

Dancing Girl with Tambourine, 1909

Dancing Girl with Castanets, 1909

RENOIR EXECUTED THIS PAIR OF PAINTINGS IN 1909 FOR THE DINING ROOM OF FRENCH BUSINESSMAN Maurice Gangnat. Both women hold a musical instrument, wear flowing clothing, and appear to move gracefully with the music. Their costumes recall the colorful clothing worn by Algerian women in the late nineteenth century.

Renoir traveled to Algeria, in North Africa, in 1881. The area, along with Turkey, Greece, and the Middle East, had fascinated artists for centuries and was a popular travel destination. Renoir spent most of his time in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, and many of his paintings from that period reflect his interest in the vivid colors of the North African landscape as well as a fascination with the colorful clothing of Algerian women. Although he never returned, he continually referenced his impressions and memories of Algeria in works of art such as these paintings and his *Terrace at Cagnes*, with its palm trees and compact buildings that recall the Algerian landscape.

Painted years after his trip, this pair of decorative paintings reveals Renoir's interest in fantasy. The costumes reflect both Algerian influences and a mix of other ethnic details. In *Dancer with Castanets*, the embroidered *ghlila* (waist-length vest) and pink *babouches* (shoes with pointed toes) reference North African dress, while the full-length gown recalls a peplos or chiton, a style of dress worn by women in classical Greece. The castanets, in contrast, reference the typical accessories of Spanish dance. The dancer with the tambourine, meanwhile, wears billowing harem pants covered by a thick red skirt trimmed in green fringe. The posture of each woman suggests traditional North African dance, which involved minimal movements of the feet and subtle undulations of the hips and limbs.

In his later years, Renoir produced many paintings of models posed in his studio wearing costumes, taking tea, lounging on cushions, or making music. In these paintings, Renoir combined multiple sources of inspiration to create an imaginary type that was removed from direct observation and existed only as an artistic fiction—a hallmark of modern art.

Not long after Renoir produced these paintings, North African costume began to influence French clothing design. Think about contemporary fashion design and the clothes you like to wear. How do you select your clothing? What influences your style? In what ways is contemporary fashion design affected by international influences?

These paintings also allude to Renoir's interest in the female figure. Renoir was generally intrigued by certain types of women, rather than individuals. The combination of styles and the lack of specificity seen in his images of women reflect Renoir's interest in moving away from the particularities of individual models in order to capture a more generalized ideal. Although he painted society women, women in the home, classical nudes, and women in costume, the outward appearance of most women in his works is similar. Like the model in these paintings, who is thought to be Georgette Pigeot, many of the women painted by Renoir have softly rounded bodies with luminous skin, full mouths, and wide eyes.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (France, 1841–1919)
Dancing Girl with Tambourine, 1909
Oil on canvas, 61 x 25 1/2 in.
The National Gallery, London, purchased 1961
Photo © 2009 National Gallery, London/akg-images



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (France, 1841–1919)
Dancing Girl with Castanets, 1909
Oil on canvas, 61 x 25 1/2 in.
The National Gallery, London, purchased 1961
Photo © 2009 National Gallery, London (NG6318)

PABLO PICASSO (Spain, 1881–1973)

Woman with Blue Veil, 1923

THIS IMAGE OF A WOMAN WEARING A FLOWING DRESS AND A LONG BLUE VEIL REFLECTS PICASSO'S INTEREST in art of the past and his desire to transform its elements for his own work. Bold outlines and areas of light and dark imbue the image with a sculptural quality. The red background contrasts sharply with the delicate tones of her flesh and clothing.

Picasso maintained a fascination and admiration for the European painting tradition throughout his career. Much like Renoir, who once stated that "the only worthwhile thing for a painter [to do] is to study in the museums," Picasso studied the works of artists such as Titian, Raphael, and Diego Velázquez. (Go to Collections Online at lacma.org to see examples of work by Titian.) He returned repeatedly to their themes, techniques, and artistic concerns in his own paintings in an effort to reinterpret the classical European tradition for the modern era. Whereas Renoir was concerned with synthesizing traditional elements and subjects with observations of the modern world, Picasso took a bolder approach, creating works that reference past art and sometimes use parody and irreverence.

Like Renoir before him, Picasso traveled throughout Italy, studying works of art in Rome, Naples, and Pompeii. His direct experience with classical works of art had a major impact on his artistic style. Not long after his time in Italy, Picasso began to explore a new approach to art making that was inspired by ancient Greek and Roman sculpture (classical sculpture). His work from this time is described as his neoclassical period. In this painting, the figure's idealized beauty, and the draping fabric that subtly reveals the form of her body beneath, recall characteristics of classical statues.

Picasso's representation of the female figure in Woman with Blue Veil is often compared to the artistic style of Greek vase painting. See the enclosed CD for an example of a Greek and Roman Attic red-figure vase, Attic Red-Figure Hydria with (shoulder) a Dancing Warrior, Accompanied by a Woman Playing the Pipes, and (body) Two Women Facing a Woman Holding a Kithara (c. 440 B.C.). In what ways are the figures on the vase similar to the figure in this painting? How has Picasso reinterpreted the Attic red-figure style?

Picasso continually examined and developed his style. He created more than 20,000 works of art in a variety of styles, techniques, and mediums. Yet, in a sentiment shared by Renoir, Picasso—when he was almost ninety years old—said, "I feel as if I am close to something . . . I have only just started."



Pablo Picasso (Spain, 1881–1973)
Woman with Blue Veil, 1923
Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 32 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Mr. and Mrs. George Gard De Sylva Collection, M.46.8.1
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

These curriculum materials were prepared by Elizabeth Mackey, Rachel Bernstein, and Eunice Lee and designed by Jenifer Shell.
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Funding for Evenings for Educators is provided by the Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Foundation, Joseph Drown Foundation, and the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

Education programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are supported in part by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund for Arts Education, and Rx for Reading.