

RENOIR



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MASTERS IN ART

RENOIR

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PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL Louvre Museum, Paris

HYPERION MINIATURES

RENOIR

BY

ANDRE LECLERC

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RECLINING WOMAN Durand-Ruel

RENOIR

THE essential thing in art cannot be explained." This phrase of Renoir's places him outside and above any definite rule to which his manner of painting could be reduced. His art is nothing if not spontaneous; it serves to illustrate no theory, it has no social portent and no concern with the realistic trend of his time. To our modern eyes it needs no explanation; it is, as a whole, the nearest possible approach to art for art's sake.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir was born at Limoges on February 25th, 1841. When he was three, his father, a struggling tailor, gave up trying to eke out a livelihood in the provincial town and brought his family to Paris where opportunities seemed greater. He prospered no better, however, and was unable to give his children, of whom there were five, more than an elementary education, which the streets of Paris completed to Renoir's advantage. From early childhood the boy showed talent; not only was he good at drawing and painting but also, it is said, his voice was noticed by the school inspector, who at that time happened to be Gounod.

Upon leaving school, Renoir earned his living by decorating china, window-blinds, fans, anything that came his way. His ambition, however, was to paint "real pictures," and with this in view he entered the studio of Gleyre, an academic painter then in great repute. There he met Monet and Sisley, amongst other young painters, all of whom, and in particular Frédéric

Bazille, became his friends and influenced him profoundly. They were all interested in the new, realistic ideas as upheld by Courbet and Manet in defiance of public taste.

It was Renoir who, finding Gleyre's academic tuition stifling, suggested to his friends that they strike out on their own. Under Monet's leadership and the patronage of the aristocratic Degas, the group started to study by themselves the magic of light and the mingling in the eye of primary colors set side by side according to the theories of Chevreul. They discussed their ideas and attempts every evening at the Café Guerbois, where they were joined by Pissarro, Cézanne and his friend Zola, as well as other painters and writers, most of whom became well-known. On fine days they met at Barbizon or in the country-side nearer Paris. Their practice was to paint in the open and not in the false light of the studio as had hitherto been the rule.

Renoir, however, had no hard and fast habits. Sometimes he found outdoor light disturbing and preferred to paint in his studio on Montmartre. He also disliked the rough aspect given to painting by the juxtaposition of touches; most of his pictures have a smooth surface. He did not avoid the use of black and was a slave to no theory, beauty being his only aim.

He greatly differed from his friends not only in his manner of painting but also in his choice of subjects. Monet chiefly painted landscapes in which he strove to catch the very vibration of light, whilst Cézanne, to whom painting did not come easily, pursued form and color in still lifes and landscapes of a geometrical design. Degas in his *Dancers* studied movement and line while his laundresses and realistic nudes portray social interest and pity. As for Renoir, his passion was for the human form with no ideas attached. He found nothing more beautiful than the texture of skin, the molding of breasts and hips, the chubbiness of children, the play of light on hair. All his models are full of health and high spirits and sunlight pervades nearly all his paintings.

The war of 1870, during which Renoir served in a remount depot at Tarbes, broke up for a while the group of friends, but when it was over they all returned to Paris, except Frédéric Bazille, Renoir's particular crony, who was killed.

In 1873, Renoir settled down to paint in real earnest and moreover found a purchaser for his works; Durand-Ruel, a picture dealer who from the very first had encouraged the young group.

The following year is a date in the history of the movement; for the first time the friends organised an Exhibition which created the greatest sensation since the Salon des Refusés of 1863. It was in 1874 that Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Berthe Morisot and their companions were called



WASHERWOMEN Louvre Museum, Paris



ROWERS AT BOUGIVAL Durant-Ruel

derisively "Impressionists" by a journalist who found the title of one of Monet's pictures no less amusing than the painting itself.

Strange as it may seem to us, the critics of the day failed to see any beauty in the works of Renoir and his friends. They were puzzled by Renoir's sunlight filtering through the foliage and wondered what those "livid" spots on the people really meant. The brilliancy and lightness of the colors dismayed them, and they were appalled by the liberty with which the "Impressionists" changed the accepted aspect of objects when seen from a distance. He went to Italy, where he met Wagner and painted his portrait; he also visited Spain and Northern Africa. He did not, however, give way to exoticism, and comparatively few pictures show the influence of a change of scene.



THE SEINE AT CHATOU The Art Gallery of Toronto

His chief interest lay in the museums of Italy and Spain; indeed Renoir disliked travelling and found no lack of subjects at home.

After his final return to France, his life was uneventful; his painting and his family absorbed him entirely. He often painted his three small sons: Pierre, Jean and the youngest, Claude, known as "Coco." Most of his other models were servant-girls, and for that matter it is said that he made every woman within reach sit for him, dressed or nude, provided she were young and reasonably plump and that her skin "held the light well." He had no use for thin women, nor did he ever paint winter landscapes, people at work, or anything that was not an expression of the sheer joy of living.



YOUNG GIRL LOOKING AT FLOWERS
Fransworth Museum, Wellesley College

Early in middle age he was afflicted by rheumatism which obliged him to spend his winters in the south of France. After several seasons at Magagnosc, Le Cannet, Antibes, he finally settled down at Cagnes and lived there all the year round. Fame had reached him and admirers came to see him from all over the world.

Neither illness nor even the death of his wife prevented Renoir from painting every day of his life, from early morning until late at night. His

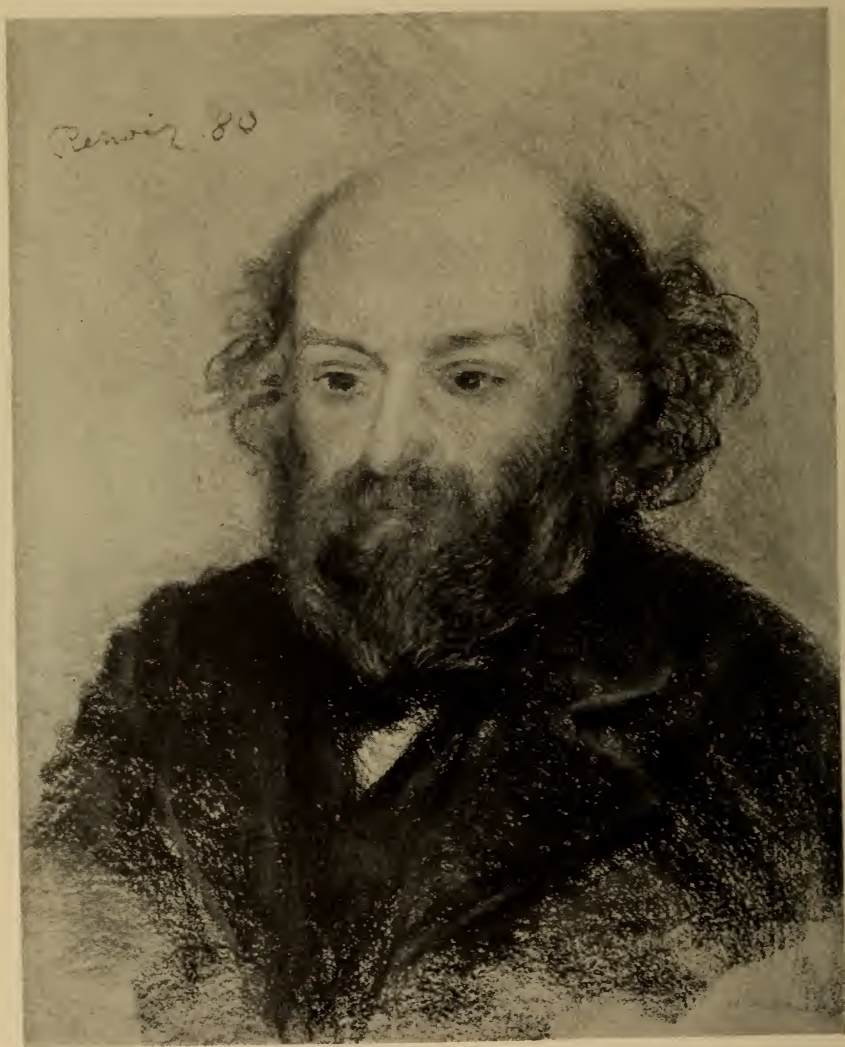


THE DREAMER, Courtesy City Art Museum, St. Louis

enthusiasm never abated and when he painted landscapes or flowers, or especially fruit, he endowed them always with the rounded tenderness, the velvety, caressing grace of his nudes and portraits of chubby little girls and soft-haired young women.

He loved oil-paint which was his chief medium, although he sometimes used watercolors or pastels and often drew or etched. His canvases were always highly glazed and carefully prepared. He painted quickly, modelling, smoothing out his figures; when he felt the flesh would be pleasant to pat, he knew his work was finished. To the last he painted, inspired by the love of light and of woman's harmony, the brush tied to his paralyzed fingers. He died of a stroke, on December 3rd, 1919, at Cagnes.

ANDRE LECLERC



PORTRAIT OF CEZANNE

[12] Courtesy The Art Institute of Chicago R. A. Waller Fund



HALF-LENGTH STUDY OF JEANNE SAMARY

Museum of Art Occidental, Moscow

[13]



A GIRL WITH A WATERING CAN detail

[14] National Gallery of Art, Washington D. C. Chester Dale Collection.



LE BALL A BOUGIVAL
Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



ROWERS AT CHATOU Collection Sam Lewiso



LANDSCAPE NEAR MENTON Collection John T. Spaulding, Boston



THE GIRL WITH THE WATERING CAN National Gallery of Art,
[18] Washington, D. C. Chester Dale Collection, Loan



GABRIELLE WITH A ROSE, Louvre Museum, Paris



LE BAL A BOUGIVAL detail
Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.





[22] MOTHER AND CHILD Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo



WOMAN WRITING Carroll Carstairs Gallery, New York [23]



PORTRAIT OF M^{LE}. ROMAINE LACAUX
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Hanna Fund





LE MOULIN DE LA GALETTE, John Hay Whitney, New York



THE LUNCHEON OF THE BOATING PARTY, Phillips Memorial Gallery





IN THE MEADOW detail
Courtesy Lewisohn Collection, N. Y.



MOTHER AND CHILD

Private Collection, San Francisco



ROSES IN A BLUE VASE Bignou Gallery, New York [31]







TWO YOUNG GIRLS AT THE PIANO

[34] Collection Society of Liberal Arts, Jocelny Memorial, Omaha



THE DANCER National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.
Widener Collection.







[38] CLAUDE AT THE EASEL The Metropolitan Museum of Art





THREE BATHERS The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Purchased by Income J. H. Wade Fund



BATHERS WITH A CRAB Durand-Ruel

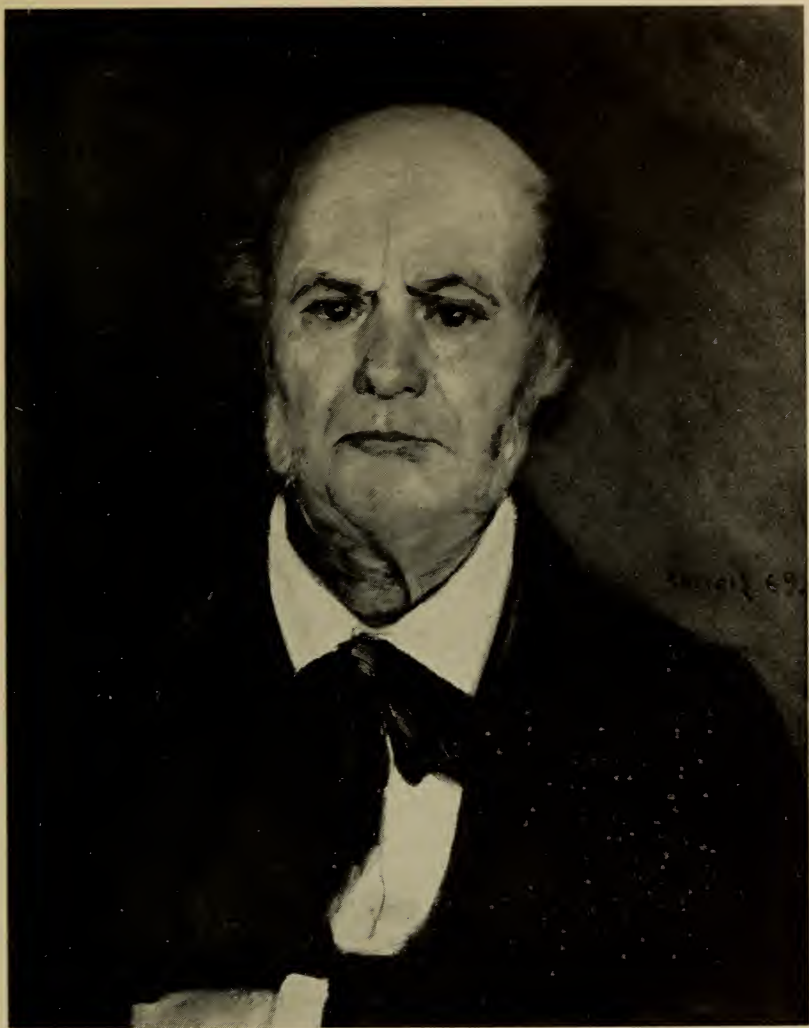




THE SOURCE Durand-Ruel



[44] SELF-PORTRAIT Mr. William H. Taylor, Philadelphia



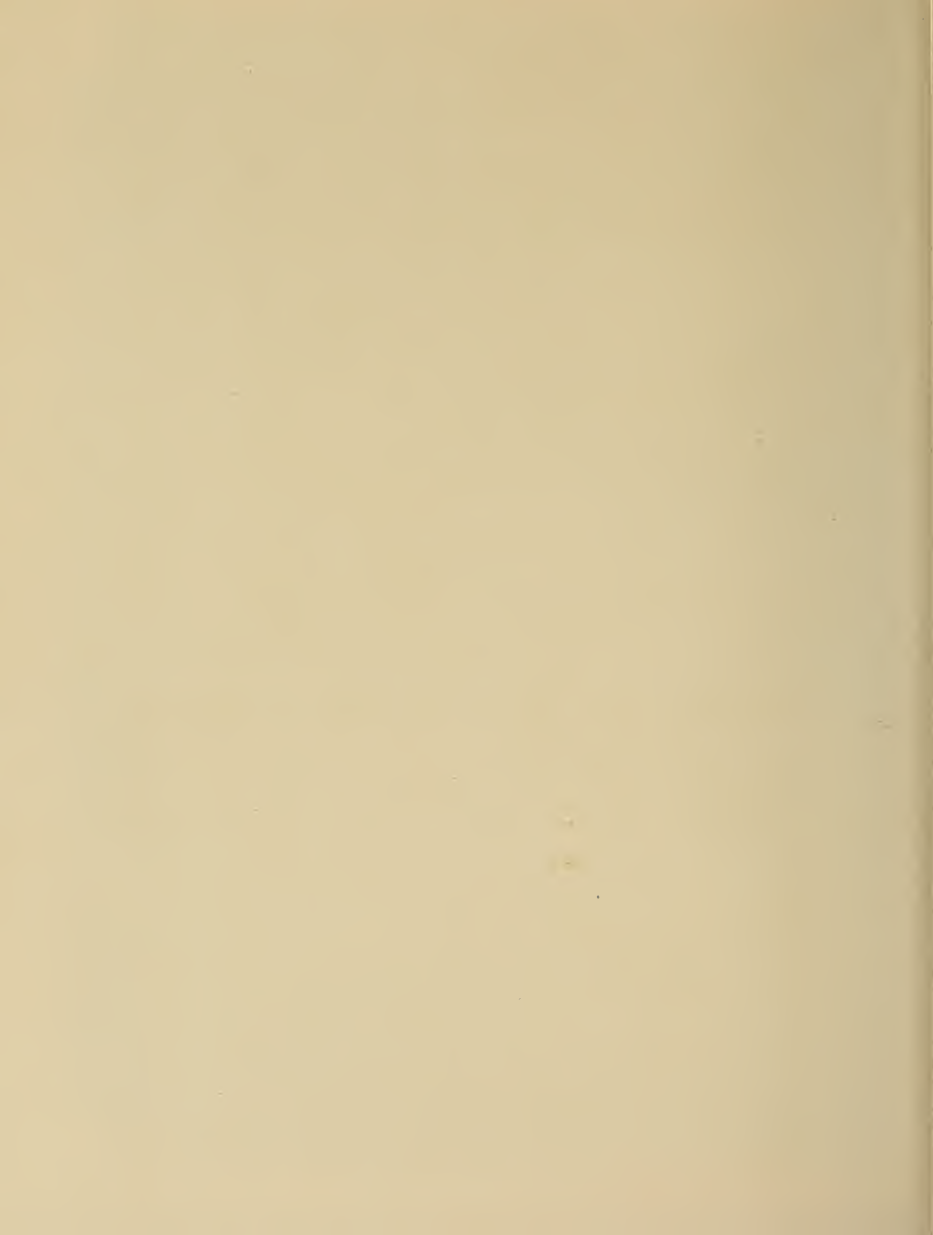
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S FATHER
Courtesy of the City Art Museum, St. Louis



FRUITS The Art Institute of Chicago, Collection Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Ryerson



FRUITS Louvre Museum, Paris



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