



Renoir

Mega Square

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Renoir

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir was born in Limoges on 25 February 1841. In 1854, the boy's parents took him from school and found a place for him in the Lévy brothers' workshop, where he was to learn to paint porcelain. Renoir's younger brother Edmond had this to say about the move: "From what he drew in charcoal on the walls, they concluded that he had the ability for an artist's profession. That was how our parents came to put him to learn the trade of porcelain painter." One of the Lévy's workers, Emile Laporte, painted in oils in his spare time. He suggested Renoir makes use of his canvases and paints. This offer resulted in the appearance of the first painting by the future impressionist. In 1862 Renoir passed the examinations and entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and, simultaneously, one of the independent studios, where instruction was given by Charles Gleyre, a professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The second, perhaps even the first, great event of this period in Renoir's life was his meeting, in Gleyre's studio, with those who were to become his best friends for the rest of his days and who shared his ideas about art. Much later, when he was already a mature artist, Renoir had the opportunity to see works by Rembrandt in Holland, Velázquez, Goya and El Greco in Spain, and Raphael in Italy. However, Renoir lived and breathed ideas of a new kind of art. He always found his inspirations in the Louvre. "For me, in the Gleyre era, the Louvre was Delacroix," he confessed to Jean. For Renoir, the First Impressionist Exhibition was the moment his vision of art and the artist was affirmed. This period in Renoir's life was marked by one further significant event. In 1873 he moved to Montmartre, to the house at 35 Rue Saint-Georges, where he lived until 1884. Renoir remained loyal to Montmartre for the rest of his life. Here he found his "plein-air" subjects, his models and even his

family. It was in the 1870s that Renoir acquired the friends who would stay with him for the remainder of his days. One of them was the art-dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who began to buy his paintings in 1872. In summer, Renoir continued to paint a great deal outdoors together with Monet. He would travel out to Argenteuil, where Monet rented a house for his family. Edouard Manet sometimes worked with them too. In 1877, at the Third Impressionist Exhibition, Renoir presented a panorama of over twenty paintings. They included landscapes created in Paris, on the Seine, outside the city and in Claude Monet's garden; studies of women's heads and bouquets of flowers; portraits of Sisley, the actress Jeanne Samary, the writer Alphonse Daudet and the politician Spuller; and also *The Swing* and *The Ball at the Moulin de la Galette*. Finally, in the 1880s Renoir hit a "winning streak". He was commissioned by rich financiers, the owner of the Grands Magasins du Louvre and Senator Goujon. His paintings were exhibited in London and Brussels, as well as at the Seventh International Exhibition held at Georges Petit's in Paris in 1886. In a letter to Durand-Ruel, then in New York, Renoir wrote: "The Petit exhibition has opened and is not doing badly, so they say. After all, it's so hard to judge about yourself. I think I have managed to take a step forward towards public respect. A small step, but even that is something."

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Foreword

Auguste Renoir was the great Impressionist painter of the female form. His voluptuous, seductive women appear to be as delighted to be painted as the painter delighted in painting them.

The paintings in this book include the early open air scenes along the Seine and in the gardens, as well as nudes and two portraits of the actress Jeanne Samary, one a head-and-shoulders, the other full-length. Although most of the paintings date from the 1870s and 1880s, there is a landscape dated 1902 which is strikingly different from the rest in its violent brushstrokes and the almost sketchy haste in which the artist rushed to depict the subject on the canvas. This set of beautiful, full-colour reproductions is a unique opportunity to see some of the little-known works of Renoir as well as some of the very famous ones.

Biography



Pierre Auguste Renoir, photograph

1841: Born on 25 February into the family of the Limoges tailor Léonard Renoir.

1844: Renoir's family moves to Paris.

1848–1854: Goes to school and sings in the choir of Saint-Eustache, where Charles Gounod was choir-master.

1854: Works in the porcelain-painting workshop of the Lévy brothers.

1858: Copies Watteau, Fragonard and other masters of the past in the Louvre.

1862: Enters the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Studies at Charles Gleyre's studio. Meets Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, Frédéric Bazille.

1863: Leaves Gleyre's studio.

1864: Exhibits the painting *Esmeralda* at the Salon.

1866: Completes his first large painting *At the Inn of the Mother Anthony*.

1870–1871: On the declaration of the Franco-Prussian War, Renoir is drafted as a common soldier.

1872: Meets Paul Durand-Ruel. Exhibits his painting *Parisiennes Dressed as Algerian Women* at the Salon.

1873: Exhibits *Riders in the Bois de Boulogne* at the Salon des Refusés.

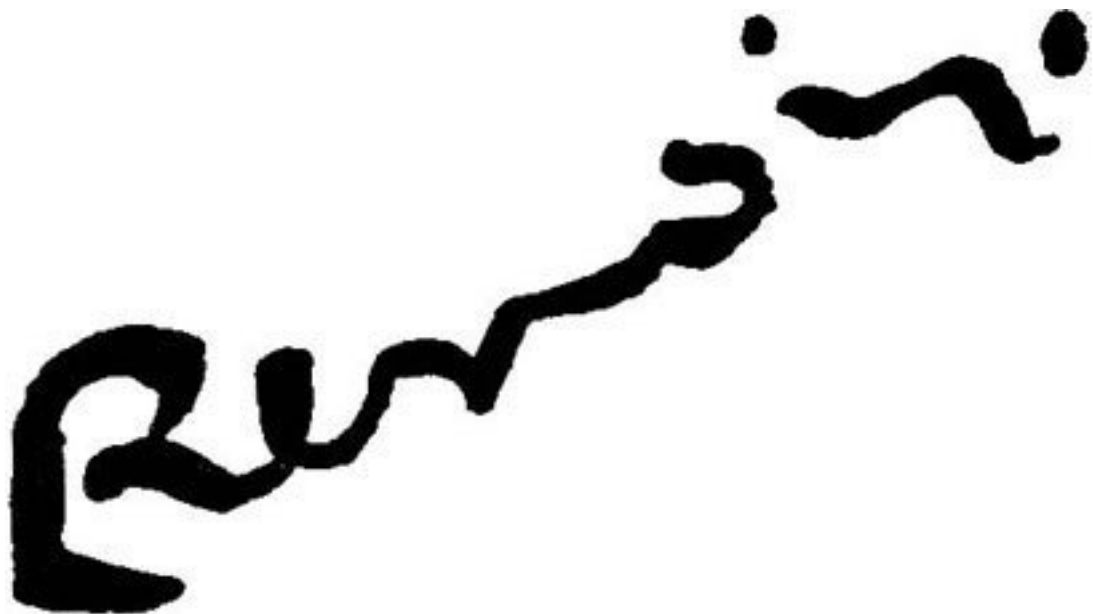
1874: Exhibits 1 pastel and 6 paintings at the First Impressionist Exhibition.

1876: Exhibits 15 paintings at the Second Impressionist Exhibition. Paints *Garden in the Rue Cortot, Montmartre, Nude, The Ball at the Moulin de la Galette*.

1877: Exhibits 21 paintings, including *Portrait of Jeanne Samary*, at the Third Impressionist Exhibition.

1879: Exhibits *Portrait of Madame Charpentier with Her Children* and *Portrait of Jeanne Samary*.

First one-man show at the gallery of the magazine *La Vie Moderne*.



1880: Meets Aline Charigot.

1881: Journeys to Algeria and Italy. Paints *The Luncheon of the Boating Party*.

1883: Retrospective exhibition (70 works) on the Boulevard de la Madeleine.

1885: Birth of son Pierre. Paints portraits of Senator Goujon's children.

1886: Durand-Ruel arranges an exhibition of 39 paintings and pastels by Renoir in New York.

1887: Completes *The Great Bathers*.

1892: Retrospective exhibition at the Galerie Durand-Ruel (110 works).

1894: Birth of son Jean.

1901: Birth of son Claude.

1915: Aline Renoir dies in Nice.

1919: Pierre-Auguste Renoir dies on 3 December in Cagnes-sur-Mer.

* * *

Pierre-Auguste Renoir was born in Limoges on 25 February 1841. He was the sixth child in the family of Léonard Renoir and Marguerite Merlet. Three years later, in 1844, the Renoirs moved to Paris. In 1848, Auguste began attending a school run by the Frères des Ecoles Chrésiennes. Renoir was lucky with the music teacher – it proved to be the composer Charles Gounod, who took the boy into the choir at the church of Saint-Eustache.





Portrait of the Artist's Mother

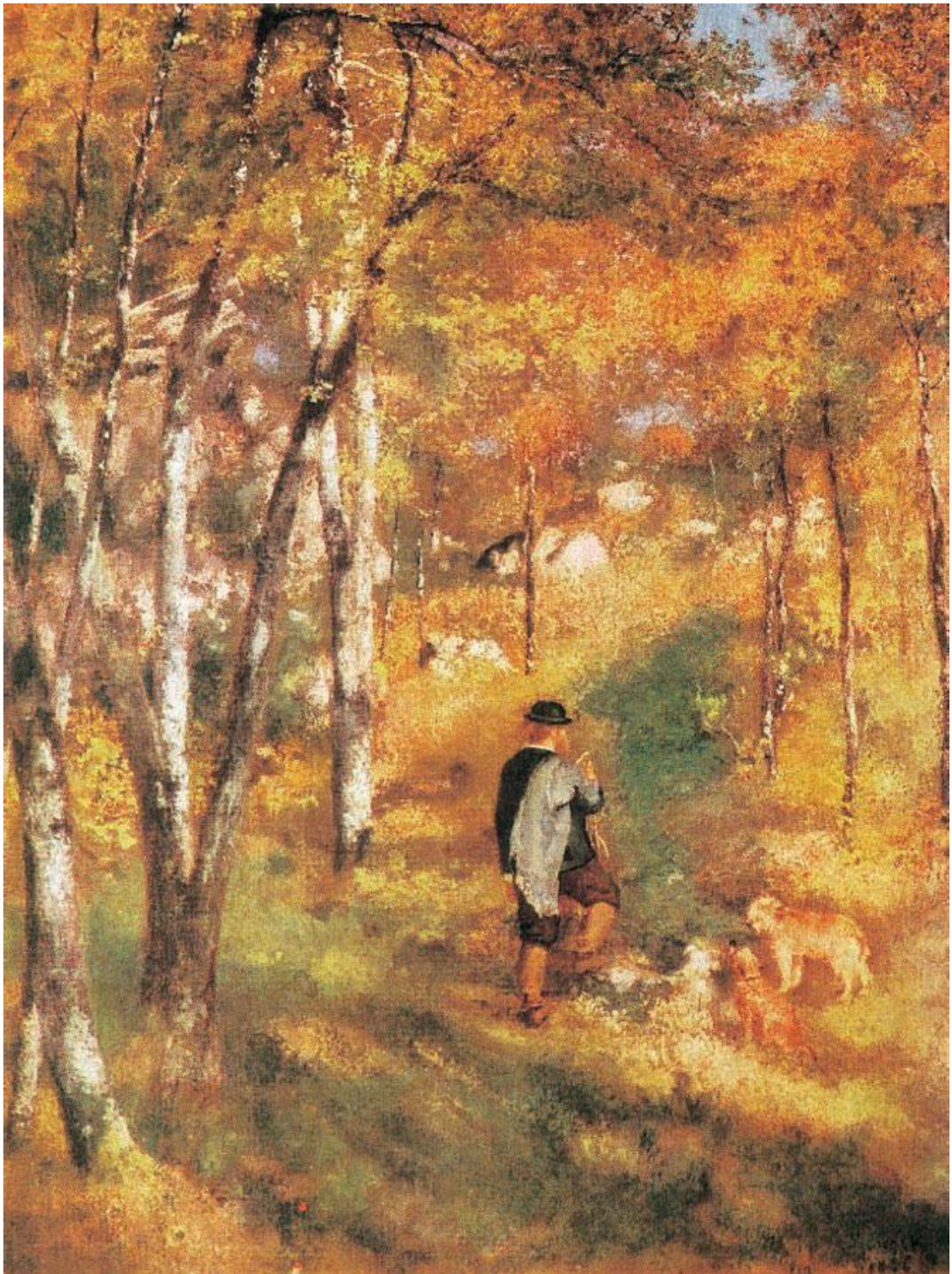
1860

Oil on canvas, 45 × 38 cm

Private collection

In 1854, the boy's parents took him from school and found a place for him in the Lévy brothers' workshop, where he was to learn to paint porcelain. Renoir's younger brother Edmond had this to say: "From what he drew in charcoal on the walls, they concluded that he had the ability for an artist's profession (...) The young apprentice set about mastering the craft seriously: at the end of the day, he armed himself with a piece of cardboard bigger than himself and headed for the free drawing courses. It went on like that for two or three years."





Jules Le Cœur Walking in the Fontainebleau Forest with his Dogs
1866
Oil on canvas, 106 × 80 cm
Museu de Arte, São Paulo

He made rapid progress: a few months into his apprenticeship, he was already being set to paint pieces that they usually gave to qualified workers. That made him the butt of jokes. They called him Monsieur Rubens and he cried because they were laughing at him. One of the

Lévys' workers, Emile Laporte, painted in oils in his spare time. He suggested Renoir make use of his canvases and paints. This offer resulted in the appearance of the first painting by the future Impressionist. It was solemnly presented for Laporte's inspection at the Renoir's home.





At the Inn of the Mother Anthony
1866

Oil on canvas, 195 × 130 cm
National Museum, Stockholm

Edmond Renoir recollected: “It’s as if it happened yesterday. I was still a boy, but I understood perfectly that something serious was taking place: the easel with the celebrated painting on it was set up in the middle of the largest room in our modest dwelling on the Rue d’Argenteuil. Everyone was nervous and burning with impatience. I was dressed up nicely and told to behave myself. It was very grand. The ‘maître’ arrived... At a signal, I moved his chair up close to the easel. He sat down and set about examining the ‘work’.





Flowers in a Vase

1866

Oil on canvas, 81.3 × 65.1 cm

Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris

I can see it now – it was *Eve*. Behind her, the snake was twined around the branches of an oak. It was approaching with open jaws, as if it wanted to cast a spell over Eve. The trial lasted a quarter of an hour at least, after which, without any superfluous comments, that poor old man came up to our parents and told them: “You should let your son go in for painting. In our trade the most he will achieve is to make twelve or fifteen francs a day. I predict a brilliant future for him in art. Do all you can for him.” That is how family legend recorded the birth of Renoir, the artist.



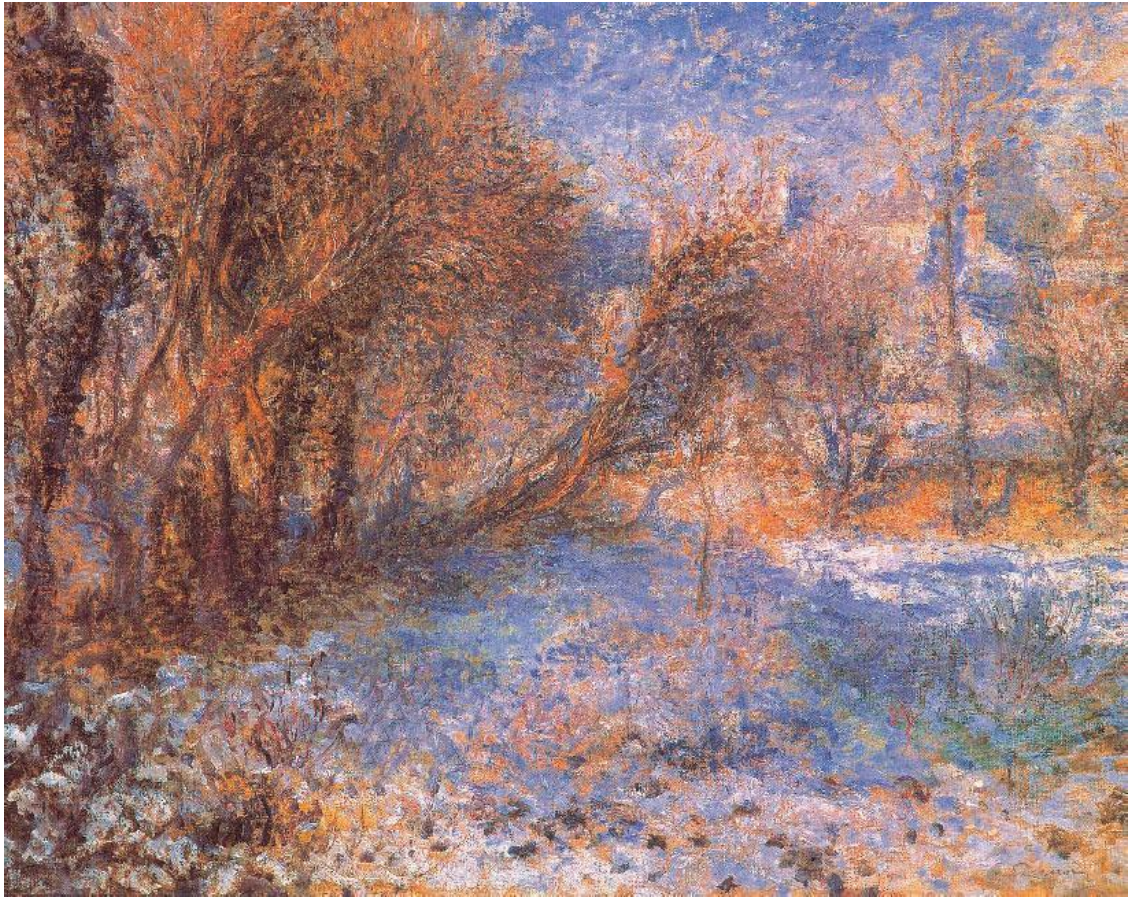


Frédéric Bazille at His Easel
1867
Oil on canvas, 106 × 74 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Auguste Renoir positively acknowledged the role his family had played in shaping his future. It was from his parents that he obtained the respect for the crafts which remained with him all his life. Renoir liked the fact that his father and mother were simple people:

“When I think that I might have been born to intellectuals! I would have needed years to divest myself of all their ideas and to see things as they really are, and in that event I would not have had enough dexterity in my hands.”





Snowy Landscape

1868

Oil on canvas, 51 × 66 cm

Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris

Besides the family, however, there was one other major educator in Renoir's life – Paris. In his conversations with his son Jean, the artist constantly recollected those little corners of the capital where he had spent his childhood and youth, many of which had disappeared before his eyes. One might see the hand of fate in the fact that after moving from Limoges, Léonard Renoir installed his family in the Louvre. The houses constructed in the sixteenth century between the Louvre palace and the Tuileries for noble members of the royal guard had by the middle of the nineteenth century lost their former imposing appearance.





Bathing on the Seine (La Grenouillère)

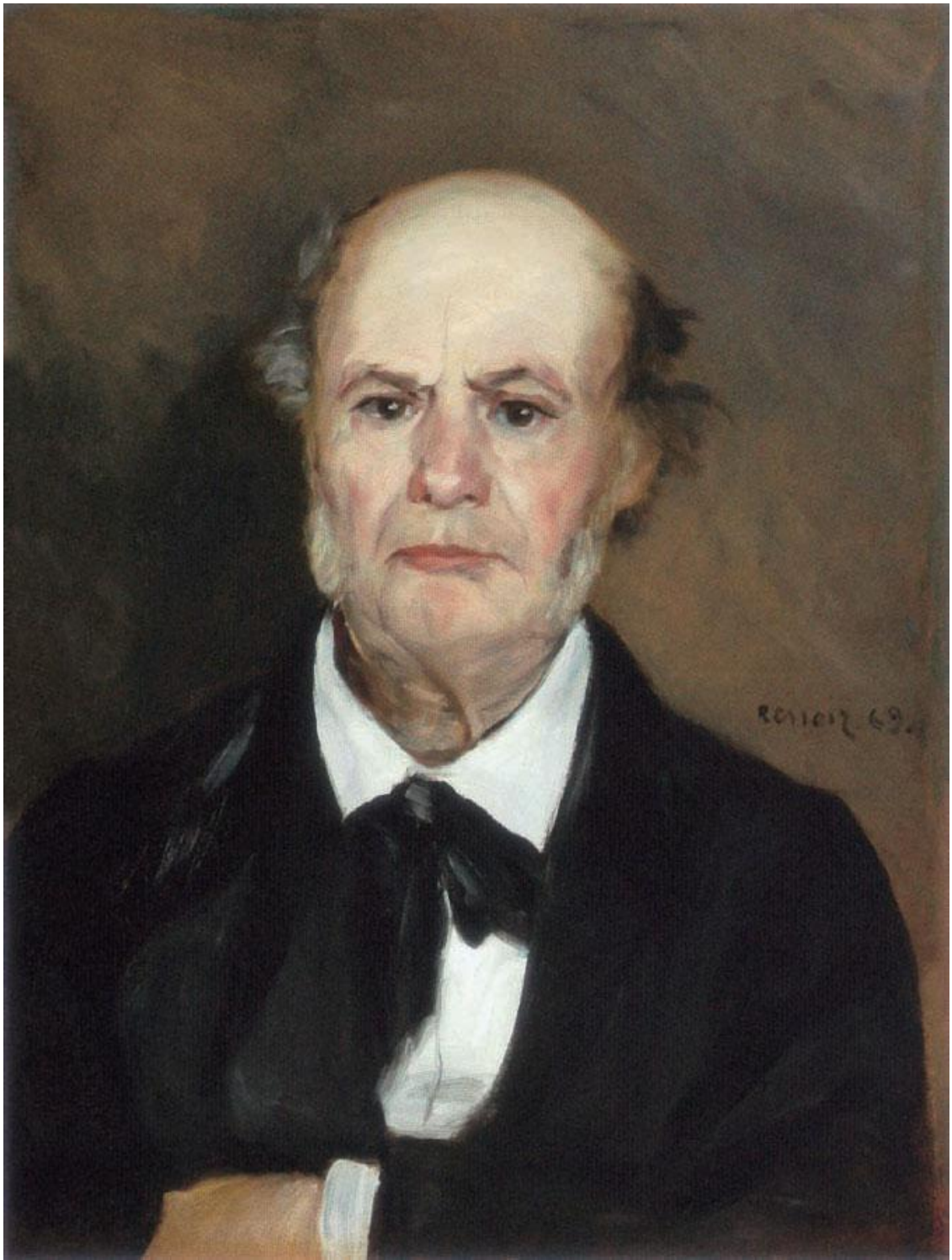
1868

Oil on canvas, 59 × 80 cm

Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

Only remnants of the old decoration – coats-of-arms, capitals, empty niches that once held statues – served as reminders of the past. Now occupied by lower class Parisians, this little district had a special atmosphere about it, oddly combining the everyday and the elevated. The Renoirs lived on the Rue d'Argenteuil, which ran through the whole area down to the Seine. Here, in the courtyard of the Louvre, the little Renoir played with other boys.





Léonard Renoir, the Artist's Father
1869
Oil on canvas, 61 × 46 cm
Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis

It was entirely natural to go inside the palace which had become a museum at the time of the French Revolution. “When I was a boy, I often went into the galleries of ancient sculpture, without even knowing precisely why. Perhaps because I passed through the courtyards of the Louvre every

day, because it was easy to get into those halls, and because there was never anyone there. I stayed there for hours, lost in day-dreams,” Renoir told the artist Albert André.





La Grenouillère
1869
Oil on canvas, 66 × 80 cm
Statens Konstmuseer, Stockholm

The young Renoir's wanderings covered a far wider area than the Louvre district. An organic, almost physical sense of himself as part of the city was even then, in childhood, shaping the future artist's work. He saw beauty in the narrow, almost mediaeval streets of old Paris, in the heterogeneity of the elements of Gothic architecture, in the never-corseted figures of the female market traders. And he suffered from the fact that the old Paris, his Paris, was being destroyed.

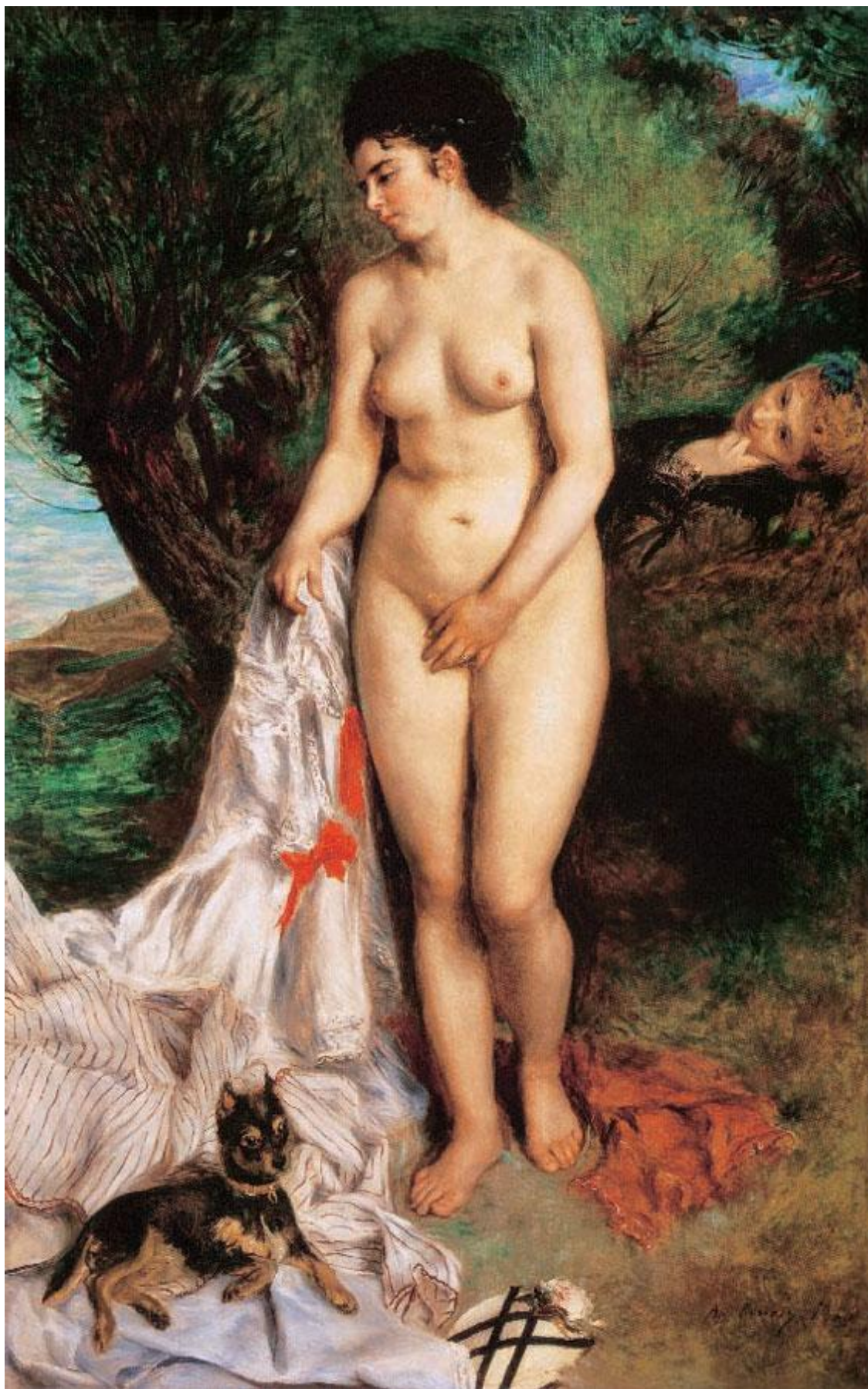




Flowers in a Vase
c. 1869
Oil on canvas, 64.9 × 54.2 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Ironically, it was the period of Renoir's childhood and youth that saw the greatest burst of reconstruction and modernization in the history of the city. For a time, probably in 1859, Renoir worked for a Monsieur Gilbert on the Rue du Bac painting screens which served as portable religious images for missionaries. At this time he bought all he needed to work professionally in oils and painted his first portraits. The archives of the Louvre contain a permit issued to Auguste Renoir in 1861 to copy paintings in the museum.





Bather with a Griffon

1870

Oil on canvas, 184 × 115 cm

Museu de Arte, São Paulo

Finally, in 1862 Renoir passed the examinations and entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and, simultaneously, one of the independent studios, where instruction was given by Charles Gleyre, a professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

The second, perhaps even the first, great event of this period in Renoir's life was his meeting, in Gleyre's studio, with those who were to become his best friends for the rest of his days and share his ideas about art.





Algerian Woman

1870

Oil on canvas, 69.2 × 122.6 cm

National Gallery of Art, Washington

In the studio Renoir immediately noticed a tall youth “with the elegance of people who let their servant put some wear on a new pair of boots for them.” Jean-Frédéric Bazille was indeed from a rich family. His parents owned an estate near Montpellier and were able to provide him with enough money to rent a studio in Paris. Even more important was the fact that his parents knew Edouard Manet, and Bazille had visited his studio many times.





The Algerian (Madame Clémentine Stora in an Algerian Costume)

1870

Oil on canvas, 84.5 × 59.6 cm

Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco

“You understand, Manet is as great for us as Cimabue and Giotto for the Italians of the Quattrocento. Because a Renaissance is beginning and we need to take part in it,” he told Renoir. It was Bazille who first began, even at that time, to speak of the need to form a group. It did happen, but at a later date, when Bazille had already met his untimely death in the Franco-Prussian War. He never did get to exhibit together with the others but he was nonetheless dubbed an Impressionist.





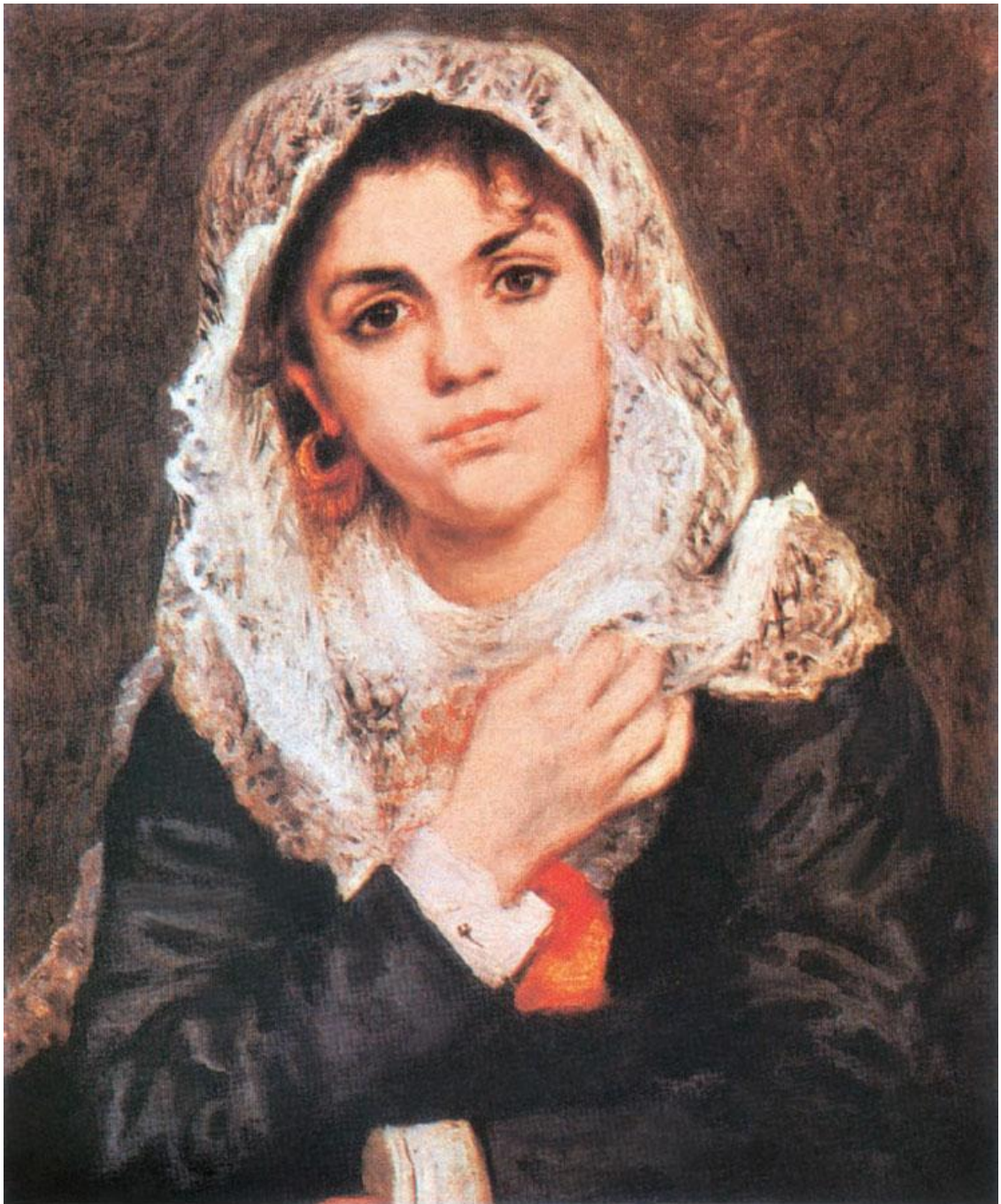
Promenade
1870
Oil on canvas, 80 × 64 cm
British Rail Pension Fund, London

According to Renoir, Bazille was the one who brought Alfred Sisley to Gleyre's studio. Perhaps, he was mistaken though, and Sisley found his own way there.

Sisley was born in Paris, to a French mother and an English father. When Jean-Frédéric Bazille first walked home from the studio with Renoir, they dropped into the Closerie des Lilas and

Renoir asked him why he had wanted to talk to him. “Because of your way of drawing,” Bazille replied. “I think you are somebody.”





Lise Wearing a White Shawl
1872
Oil on canvas
E. Reves collection

Besides, Renoir made a brilliant showing in all the compulsory competitions, earning the highest awards for drawing, perspective, anatomy and “likeness”, which is incontestable evidence of the fact that his years with Gleyre were not spent in vain. Renoir told his son with satisfaction that he had once painted a nude following all the rules that Gleyre had taught them. The Professor was astonished: it seems that his pupil, having perfectly mastered the science of painting, nevertheless continued to work “for his own amusement”.

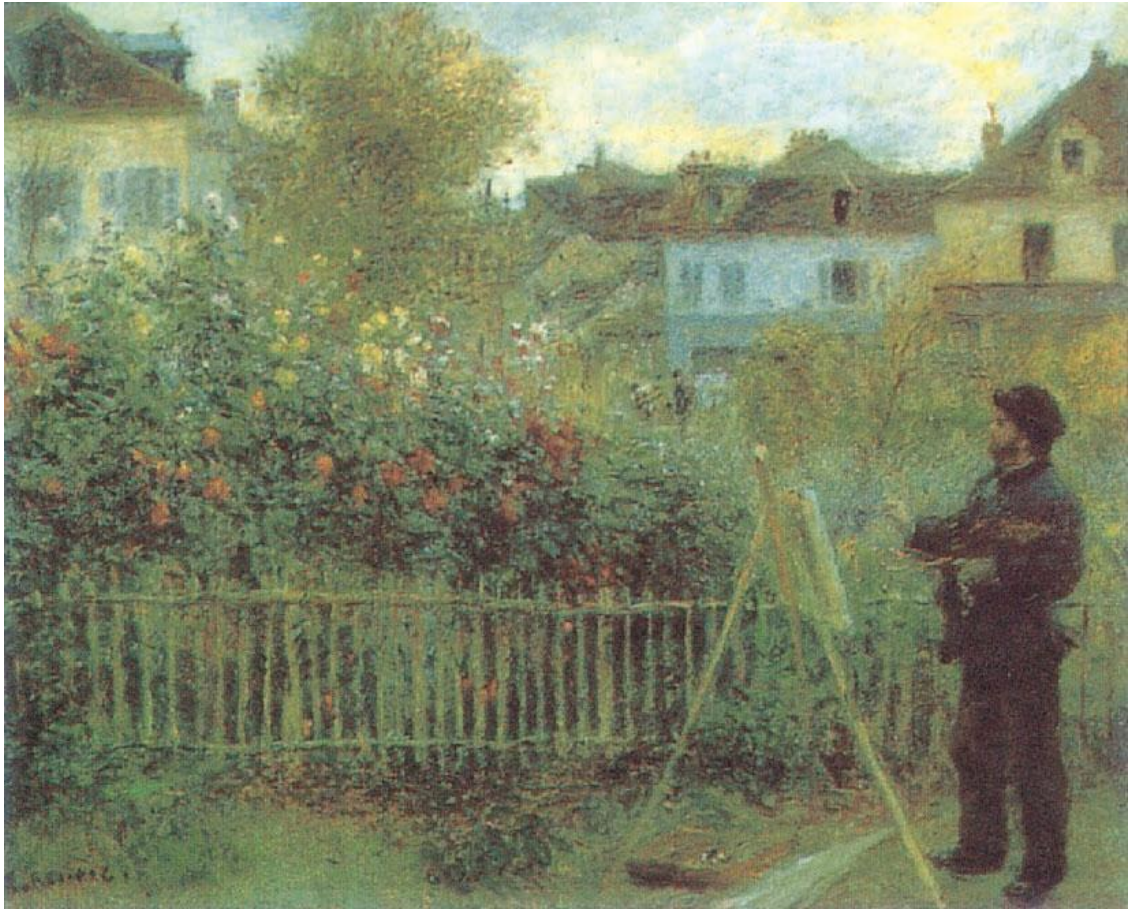




Portrait of Claude Monet
1872
Oil on canvas, 61 × 50 cm
Musée Marmottan, Paris

As with every artist, Renoir's passions in art altered with age, but from childhood the Louvre remained for him something unassailable. "It is in the museum that people learn how to paint," he said. "I often argued about that with some of my friends who put up against me the absolute preferability of working outside, among nature. They disparaged Corot for reworking his landscapes in the studio."

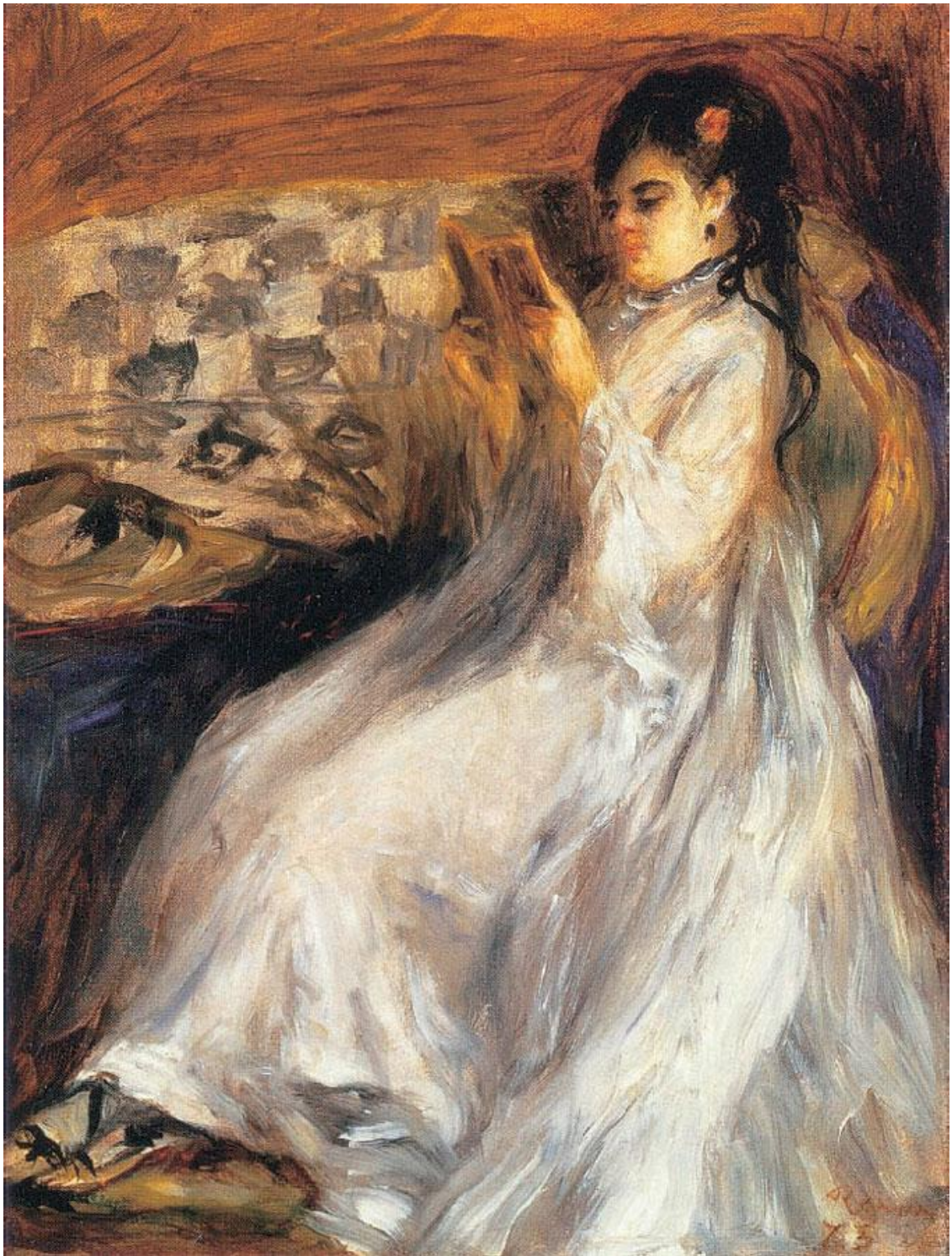




Monet Painting in His Garden in Argenteuil
1873
Oil on canvas, 50 × 62 cm
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (Connecticut)

Much later, when he was no longer young and already a mature artist, Renoir had the opportunity to see Rembrandt in Holland, Velázquez, Goya and El Greco in Spain, Raphael in Italy. His encounter with each of the Old Masters brought him joy: “You have to be able to take from each master that satisfaction that he wanted to give us... But it is there, in the museum, that you get a taste for painting that nature alone cannot give you”.





Young Girl Reading a Magazine
c. 1873
Oil on canvas, 35.5 × 27.5 cm
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island

At that time, however, when the friends gathered at the Closerie des Lilas and Renoir lived and breathed ideas of a new kind of art, he always had his own inspirations in the Louvre. “For me, in the Gleyre era, the Louvre was Delacroix” he confessed to Jean. The death of Eugène Delacroix

in 1863 caused the whole young generation of French artists to realize what the painting of the great Romantic had been for them.

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