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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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FIRST COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF RENOIR'S FULL-LENGTH CANVASES BRINGS TOGETHER ICONIC WORKS FROM EUROPE AND THE U.S. FOR AN EXCLUSIVE NEW YORK CITY EXHIBITION

RENOIR, IMPRESSIONISM, AND FULL-LENGTH PAINTING

February 7 through May 13, 2012



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Dance at Bougival*, 1883, oil on canvas, 71 5/8 x 38 5/8 inches, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Picture Fund; photo: © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

This winter and spring The Frick Collection presents an exhibition of nine iconic Impressionist paintings by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, offering the first comprehensive study of the artist's engagement with the full-length format. Its use was associated with the official Paris Salon from the mid-1870s to mid-1880s, the decade that saw the emergence of a fully fledged Impressionist aesthetic. The project was inspired by Renoir's *La Promenade* of 1875–76, the most significant Impressionist work in the Frick's permanent collection.

Intended for public display, the vertical grand-scale canvases in the exhibition are among the artist's most daring and ambitious presentations of contemporary subjects and are today considered masterpieces of Impressionism. The show and accompanying catalogue draw on contemporary criticism, literature, and archival documents to explore the motivation behind Renoir's full-length figure paintings as well as their reception by critics, peers, and the public. Recently-undertaken technical studies of the canvases will also shed new light on the artist's working methods. Works on loan from international institutions are *La Parisienne* from the National Museum Wales, Cardiff; *The Umbrellas (Les Parapluies)* from The National Gallery, London (first time since 1886 on view in the United States);

and *Dance in the City* and *Dance in the Country* from the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Paintings coming from American institutions are *The Dancer* from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; *Madame Henriot "en travesti"*

(*The Page*) from the Columbus Museum of Art; *Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando (Francisca and Angelina Wartenberg)* from The Art Institute of Chicago; and *Dance at Bougival* from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Renoir, Impressionism, and Full-Length Painting will be presented in the Frick's East Gallery, marking the first time that this elegant space will be used in its entirety for a special exhibition. The exhibition is organized by Colin B. Bailey, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator. Principal funding for the exhibition is provided by The Florence Gould Foundation and Michel David-Weill. Additional support is generously provided by The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation, The Grand Marnier Foundation, and the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation. Corporate support is provided by Fiduciary Trust Company International. The exhibition is also supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Comments Colin B. Bailey, "This exhibition, five years in the making, is a remarkable opportunity for our public, who will never have seen these nine works together before. We are indebted to our generous lenders who have agreed to part with icons from Renoir's oeuvre, which are among their most popular and beloved works. With our colleagues, we've embraced the opportunity to consider this group of paintings in a new light, conducting fresh research—and in several cases new technical studies—on these canvases. The assembling of such a group will enrich our understanding of Renoir's ambitions as a figure painter working in the Impressionist idiom. Although the exhibition has but one venue, we are pleased that it is accompanied by a publication that will add significantly to the literature on this artist." An extensive series of public programs is scheduled, and visitors to the Frick may enjoy companion video presentations in the nearby Multimedia Room.

Impressionist paintings tend to be relatively modest in scale, daring in viewpoint, impromptu in compositional structure, and of a bright tonality that, while acceptable today, caused distress among critics and collectors at the time. The painters who joined forces in Paris during the early 1870s to organize the Impressionist group exhibitions in defiance of the official Salon—chief among whom were Renoir, Monet, Degas, Pissarro, and Cézanne—enjoyed a certain notoriety at the Salons of the previous decade, garnering attention in the press and interest from dealers, as well as the occasional sale. To make an impact, these young artists were encouraged to paint works of a certain scale and vigor: works that today might be described as having "wall power." The large-scale format was especially congenial to Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who, as an eighteen-year-old apprentice, had painted full-length images of the Virgin and Child in imitation of stained glass windows on blinds manufactured for export to missionary churches. The young Renoir had also painted mural decorations in cafés, working directly on the walls. Between the mid-1870s and the mid-1880s, when he and the artists who came to be known as the Impressionists were constructing a new pictorial language, Renoir continued to execute large figurative compositions in the time-honored tradition of the *chef d'oeuvre*. Between 1863 and 1883, Renoir submitted works to the Salon every year but three; in 1874, 1876, and 1877 he showed his paintings in the Impressionist group exhibitions.

The Dancer and *La Parisienne*, both in the exhibition, were among the seven works that he submitted to the First Impressionist Exhibition, in April 1874. These may be considered the earliest examples of the artist painting quickly on a large scale. Both are executed with visible brushwork on canvases prepared with light grounds, and in both traces of impasto alternate with the most summary application of color. In *The Dancer*, Renoir's chestnut-haired, blue-eyed ballerina—a trainee “rat de l'opéra”—is shown posing on the diagonal floorboards of the practice room, with the back of her voluminous tutu flaring up behind her. Renoir's bright palette, so familiar to us today, would have struck contemporaries as audacious, even transgressive. The girl's neck, clavicle, and shoulder are modeled in blue; the shadows on her upper-left arm are rendered in green; and the flesh tones throughout are inflected with touches of blue, green, and yellow. Despite the speed with which Renoir worked and his lack of conventional finish, he was attentive to details such as the black velvet choker that continues down the dancer's neck and the blue jeweled gold bracelet on her wrist.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *The Dancer*, 1874, oil on canvas, 56 1/8 x 37 1/8 inches, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Widener Collection; photo: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *La Parisienne*, 1874, oil on canvas, 64 3/8 x 42 3/4 inches, National Museum Wales, Cardiff, Miss Gwendoline E Davies Bequest, 1951; photo: © Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales

La Parisienne reminds us that Renoir, more than any other Impressionist, was fascinated by Paris fashions, especially female fashion. His father was a tailor, his mother was a seamstress, and he kept abreast of the latest trends. In the early 1870s bright blues and mauves were in high fashion, as were the shaped bodice, bustle skirt, and pleated hem. Here Renoir presented his pert subject dressed from head to foot in an outdoor morning toilette of striking blue silk with matching toque, choker, and fur-trimmed gloves. Initially Renoir may have intended to present his model in a more defined setting, since he appears to have laid in background elements such as a doorway or column at left (subsequently painted out), and there are also indistinct shapes in the background on the right-hand side. Although *La Parisienne* is not, strictly speaking, a portrait, it was most likely modeled for by the seventeen-year-old Marie-Henriette-Alphonsine Grossin, an aspiring actress who had adopted the stage name of Mademoiselle Henriot. Modeling for Renoir may have helped

Henriot to gain exposure as well as pay the rent, and between 1874 and 1876 she posed for five of his most ambitious full-length pictures, including *La Promenade*. Not a particularly beautiful woman, Henriot was transformed by Renoir's benevolent eye into a charming and welcoming presence in all these full-length paintings.

La Promenade (following page), the centerpiece of Renoir's submission to the Second Impressionist Exhibition, which opened in March 1876, shows an elegantly attired young woman with magnificent light-brown hair shepherding a pair of identically dressed sisters along the path of a well-maintained public garden. All three figures are dressed for the cold weather. The eldest wears a blue velvet jacket, or *paleto*, with wide sleeves trimmed with red fox; her gathered skirt is of more simple material, probably cotton, and the edge of her white petticoat shows through at lower right. The young woman's *paleto* is tied at the neck by a dark blue ribbon, and she wears a

heavily starched collar and cuffs. The ensemble is completed by a frilly white silk bonnet with a blue silk ribbon and trimmings of lace and artificial roses. The little girls wear miniature blue-green *paletots*, possibly of cashmere, trimmed with either swans down or white mink, with matching skirts and fur-trimmed silk toques. Delicate lace cuffs peek out from the sleeves of their jackets and their underskirts are also trimmed with lace.

Behind this principal group, further up the pathway to the right, Renoir has included no fewer than eleven additional figures and two playful dogs. Vigorously and confidently painted, *La Promenade* is exemplary of Renoir's ambitions to create solidly modeled figural compositions in the newly enfranchised Impressionist style. A range of touches and techniques is apparent, from the quickly painted, washlike bands of color that demarcate the wintry trees and pathway of the background, to the abbreviated, sketchy manner of the secondary groups at upper right. Renoir's handling is at its most delicate in the construction of the young woman's face, where the pinks and whites are suavely integrated and the eyelashes are delineated in tiny strokes of blue. To Renoir's dismay, most critics ignored his ambitious figure painting of winter fashions; those who commented on it at any length did so unfavorably. The most hostile review came from Arthur Baignères, for whom Renoir's figures were little more than "imperceptible clouds." Although *La Promenade* failed to find a buyer for many years, Renoir remained committed to exploring issues of modernity, fashion, and the grandeur of Parisian life in the full-length and large-scale horizontal formats.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *La Promenade*, 1875–76, oil on canvas, 67 x 42 5/8 inches, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *The Umbrellas (Les Parapluies)*, c. 1881–85, oil on canvas, 71 x 45 inches, The National Gallery, London, Sir Hugh Lane Bequest, 1917; photo: © The National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

One of his most ambitious full-length paintings of these years is *The Umbrellas*, a work probably begun in the autumn of 1881. This multifigured composition was undertaken without a client or destination in mind; by the time it was finished, in 1885, Renoir's style had evolved from the luminous palette and feathery handling of Impressionism to the more linear and muted handling associated with his "Ingresque" period. Six principal figures dominate the foreground; behind them appear innumerable heads and shoulders and at least twelve umbrellas in a seemingly endless vista. The group on the right consists of an elegantly attired mother accompanied by her two daughters. On the left, a tall young *modiste*, or milliner's assistant, carries a cane bandbox over her left arm. In the background, various diminutive figures, all in hats, raise their umbrellas. The trees at upper left, in full leaf but with touches of brown, might suggest springtime or early autumn. The location of the scene is also ambiguous: from the sea of umbrellas emerge the roof of a kiosk faintly outlined in red at upper left and the blue-gray façade of a distant apartment building at upper right. These are the sole indicators of the modern Parisian boulevard.

It has long been recognized that *The Umbrellas* was painted in two stages, at least four years apart. Renoir initially may have conceived of his painting as a frieze of fashionably dressed women of different ages and classes shown in an elegant Parisian park. His reworking of the canvas in 1885 led him to adjust the two figures on the left and to include the many supporting figures in the background as well as all the umbrellas. The disjunctions of facture and fashion that made *The Umbrellas* difficult to sell during Renoir's life have assumed different values over time. The juxtaposition of modern and old-fashioned clothing has become far less noticeable and is remarked upon, if at all, only by specialists. The stylistic incongruities in the composition have become more striking and impose themselves immediately upon modern audiences, for the majority of whom *Umbrellas* is a work of incomparable charm and appeal. Renoir may have been encouraged to complete this half-finished composition in the autumn of 1885 so that it could be included in the first survey of Impressionism for an American audience, organized by his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. *The Umbrellas* was one of thirty-eight paintings by Renoir in the exhibition, which opened in New York on April 10, 1886. Retitled *Rain in Paris*, it was shown with eleven of Renoir's most ambitious figure paintings at the American Art Galleries on Madison Square South and East 23rd Street. The critic of *The Art Amateur* noted that the main gallery was "almost given up to M. Renoir," whom he considered "a remarkable painter," even though he spoiled "several of his pictures by tawdry backgrounds and accessories." A more philistine review appeared in the *Brooklyn Eagle* a day after the exhibition opened, which ridiculed the event as "the funniest performance to be seen in New York."



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Dance in the Country*, 1883, oil on canvas, 70 7/8 x 35 1/2 inches, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

Renoir's struggle to complete *The Umbrellas* is all the more difficult to understand in light of his extraordinarily productive winter and early spring of 1883. Galvanized by the deadline of a solo exhibition of his work, he embarked on a trio of monumental dance pictures (all of which are in the exhibition) that rank among his most ambitious and perfectly realized Impressionist figure paintings: *Dance in the City*, *Dance in the Country*, and *Dance at Bougival*. *Dance in the City* shows a young couple waltzing alone in a marble salon. The young woman, her hair in a chignon adorned with a single pink rose, is wearing a *toilette de bal* of white satin or silk taffeta. Here Renoir posed two of his friends: the artist and habituée of Montmartre Suzanne Valadon and the handsome journalist Paul Lhote. The companion painting, *Dance in the Country* shows a couple dancing on the terrace of an outdoor restaurant, with chestnut trees in the background. The dancers have presumably just



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Dance in the City*, 1883, oil on canvas, 70 7/8 x 35 1/2 inches, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

left their table, which is covered by a small tablecloth and set with napkins, a cup and spoon, and a half-filled decanter and glass. Lhote posed again for the dancer in a dark woolen lounge suit; his red-cheeked, partner, with a wider countenance than her counterpart in *Dance in the City*, wears a printed cotton tunic dress. The model for this figure was the twenty-three-year-old Aline Charigot, Renoir's mistress of three years, who would bear the first of their three sons in March 1885.

Dance at Bougival (illustrated on page one) is Renoir's most romantic work in this trilogy: the tender yet passionate pose of the dancing couple conveys an ardor and eroticism that are almost palpable. Eyes masked by his boatman's straw hat, the male dancer expresses his intentions through a body language that is as legible today as it would have been more than a century ago. His companion's willing compliance completes the harmony, both visual and sensual, that is at the heart of this painting, while the touching of ungloved hands and proximity of the dancers' faces would have appeared audacious to a late nineteenth-century audience. Executed in his Paris studio, *Dance at Bougival*—of the same height but wider than the pair of companion paintings—achieves the luminosity of Renoir's earlier experiments en plein air while maintaining the solidity of modeling that characterized his most recent portraits and figure paintings. Renoir's technique is both sufficiently deft to evoke the easy sociability of the supporting cast in the background while fixing our attention on the central couple.

Recently taken X-radiography and infrared reflectography reveal, quite unexpectedly, that Renoir started out with a different model for his female dancer. The X-ray shows a round-faced woman, with coarser features and a heavier body, whose downcast head is placed more squarely on her shoulders and at less of an angle to that of her partner. It transpires then that the female dancer in *Dance at Bougival* started life looking a lot more like Aline Charigot, who had posed for *Dance in the Country*. As the painting progressed, Renoir seems to have enlisted the services of Suzanne Valadon, the protagonist of *Dance in the City*. In fact, the radiant young dancer with her splendid red hat is something of an amalgam of these two female dancers. As for her partner, traditionally identified as Paul Lhote—the male figure in the companion dance panels—it must be acknowledged that Renoir took considerable license in transforming his dark beard and mustache into those of a blonder variety. In fact, a more likely candidate for the burly auburn-bearded dancer in *Dance at Bougival* is the thirty-four-year-old Hippolyte-Alphonse Fournaise, son of the owner of the restaurant Fournaise, who assisted in the running of his family's dining establishment and boat-rental business in Chatou.

Ultimately, the full-length format was eschewed by most of his fellow Impressionists as too traditional. Renoir, meanwhile, continued to paint large scale works, enjoying for several more years the opportunity to devote himself to the heroic painting of everyday life, and also to linger on the finest details of his figures' fashionable costumes and accessories. Today these works are among the most iconic and beloved of his oeuvre.

PUBLICATION

Accompanying the exhibition is a richly illustrated catalogue published by The Frick Collection in association with Yale University Press. This stunning book offers fresh insights into Renoir's complex ambitions as a young artist, when he submitted works to both the avant-garde Impressionist exhibitions and the official Salon. It will provide a new conceptual and contextual framework for approaching his oeuvre in the first decade of the Impressionist movement and will stand apart from the exhibition as a valued resource on the artist for years to come. Technical studies of the canvases shed new light on the artist's working methods, while the juxtaposition of these full-length

portraits will bring the glamour of the Belle Époque vividly to life. The catalogue, written by Colin B. Bailey, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, contains a substantial essay on Renoir's use of the full-length format and chapters on each work in the show as well as a tenth example from the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. For additional context, the book includes an illustrated appendix that lists the sixty-six known grand-scale works painted by Renoir during the period 1863 through 1890 (ISBN 978-0-300-18108-1; hardcover, 264 pages, 255 color illustrations, \$65, member price \$58.50) is available in the Museum Shop, on the Frick's Web site (www.frick.org), and by phone at (212) 547-6848.

TICKETING INFORMATION

Renoir, Impressionism, and Full-Length Painting is included with paid museum admission. Timed tickets will be issued for this special exhibition, and reserving them in advance is strongly recommended. Beginning in January, timed tickets (a maximum of four per order) may be reserved online for a small processing fee at www.frick.org or by calling Telecharge at 212.239.6200. Online tickets must be purchased at least 24 hours in advance. Subject to availability, same day and advance timed tickets may also be obtained—without a processing fee—at the Frick's admission desk. For more information about reserving tickets, please visit the Frick's Web site.

Museum Members may view the special exhibition without advance reservations. To join, please contact the Membership Department at 212.547.0709 or visit <http://www.shopfrick.org/support/membership.htm>.

Group visits must be booked a minimum of two weeks in advance. To arrange a group visit, please call 212.288.0700 or e-mail groupvisits@frick.org.

RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Special Exhibition Lectures

Wednesday evening lectures are free and do not require reservations. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. (if those planning to attend arrive earlier, they are expected to pay the regular museum admission fee). The Saturday afternoon lecture in this group is free with museum admission; doors for that program open at 1:45 p.m.

Date Wednesday, February 8, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Colin B. Bailey, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection
Title *Renoir's Wall Power: Painting Large as an Impressionist*

Date Wednesday, February 22, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Gloria Groom, David and Mary Winton Green Curator of Nineteenth-Century European Painting and Sculpture, The Art Institute of Chicago
Title *Fashioning the Mistress*

Date Wednesday, March 7, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Anne Distel, independent scholar
Title *Renoir and the Woman of Paris*

Alex Gordon Lecture in the History of Art

Date Wednesday, March 28, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Aileen Ribeiro, Professor Emeritus, Courtauld Institute of Art, London
Title *Renoir and the Democracy of Fashion*

Date Wednesday, April 4, 6:00 p.m. (**UPDATE: this will now be a repeat of the February 8 lecture**)
Speaker Colin B. Bailey, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection
Title *Renoir's Wall Power: Painting Large as an Impressionist*

Artists, Poets, and Writers Lecture Series (made possible through the generous support of the Drue Heinz Trust).

Date Wednesday, April 25, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Anka Muhlstein, author
Title *Pen and Palette: Painters in Balzac, Zola, and Proust*

Date Saturday, May 5, 2:00 p.m.
Speakers Colin B. Bailey, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection, and Charlotte Hale, Conservator, Department of Paintings Conservation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Title *Up and Down the Garden Path: Secrets of La Promenade Revealed*

Seminar

Limited to 20 participants. Register online or call 212.547.0704. Fee: \$100 (\$90 for Members)

Date Monday, February 13, 2:00 to 3:30p.m.
Speaker Colin B. Bailey, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection
Title *Renoir: The Gainsborough of Belle Époque Paris*

Extended Hours Event: *Renoir Night*

Date: Friday, April 27, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a free after-hours viewing of the Frick's permanent collection and the special exhibition *Renoir, Impressionism, and Full-Length Painting*. Meet curators, hear lectures and gallery talks, sketch in the Garden Court, and listen to live music. For more information, please e-mail education@frick.org. No reservations are required, but space is limited. Visitors will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis.

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Hours: open six days a week: 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11am to 5pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$18; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11am to 1pm; see page 7 for information on timed ticketing for this special exhibition.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212. 288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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