

Renoir

The great, nineteenth century French painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir was born in Limoges on the 25th February 1841. Renoir came from a rather narrow middle class background. His family moved to Paris in 1845, hoping for better prospects, they did not get them. Renoir had almost 60 years of his life as an artist, during this time he is said to have produced about 6000 pictures. With the exception of Picasso, this was the most profitable achievement of any painter.

When Renoir first showed signs of being talented at painting and drawing, he could only make use of his gift by working in a china factory. At the age of 13 he worked in a porcelain factory painting flowers and shepherd scenes onto coffee cups, bowls plates and tea & coffeepots. Renoir only spent four years as a porcelain painter.

He then turned to painting lady's fans and church banners. His work's soon began to ear him money and by the time he was 21 he had enough money to join the College of Fine Art in Paris. Renoir's paintings turned out to be the most daring and progressive, of the class.

Certain objects lent themselves more than others to Renoir's style of painting and drawing. Such things were tree foliage, flowers, water, clouds, smoke and skirts. Characters were meant to look graceful but casual.

Renoir went on to become a great impressionist. He painted all aspects of real life that he saw and approved of. Aspects like portraits, individual figures, dances, still life, country walks, landscapes and the hustle & bustle of the city.

Renoir was taught by a number of professors, but his real teacher was Charles Gleyre who, twenty years before, had become famous for a rather frosty allegorical picture.

Above all, Renoir used to go to private classes with Glyre, taught outside the Ecole and in which thirty or forty students drew or painted nude models.

Thanks to his previous experience Renoir was very confident and eager to complete each task to the best of his ability. Whether it was by nature or the rococo paintings he had copied previously, he loved strong and glowing colours. These colours, however were not perticularary popular at the time.

During the very first week Renoir fell out with Gleyre and years later Renoir commented 'I had done my utmost to paint the model. Gleyre looked at it and said, with an icy expression on his face 'You really paint for your own enjoyment, don't you?' – But of course I replied, 'you can be sure that I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy painting.' I'm not sure if he understood me

correctly'. Renoir added. His answer was probably not meant as a provocatively as it sounded, but it did however sum up a totally new attitude to art. A less solemn and dutiful towards 'the noble goddess of art' but more sensuous, alive and personal.

The young painters were struggling to find their new artistic styles and principles. Whenever they were in Paris, they used to go to the Café in the Grande rue de Batignolles in the evenings. They were soon known as 'The Painters of Batignolles.' Manet was at the centre of their group, which also included writers and art critics of such as Zola, Theodore Duret, Zacharie Astruc and Edmond Duranty. Renoir was thin and rather nervous and this time, he never contributed much to their discussions. He could be lively and was intelligent with a sense of humour, but he did not believe in fighting or in theorising. For him painting was not a matter of strict rules but a beautiful craft, which he practised humbly and joyfully. His paintings turned out to be quite daring and the most progressive of all. His principle was to paint only what could be seen with one eye and render this as faithfully as possible. The Barbizon painters had started this, but most of their paintings had been done inside in the studio so they lacked the brightness that made objects beautiful, outside in the sunlight. In their task to paint nature more and more truthfully the painter came up against the problem of coloured shadows. On close inspections the painters discovered that there are many different shades even in shadows, with blue as the predominant colour. This was something that could only be studied outside and for this reason Renoir did most of his paintings outside.

What they were looking for was beauty in the life of people around them. Renoir's first masterpiece was 'LISE' of 1867, it was displayed in the Salon the next spring. It was a life-size portrait of a girl friend, Lise. The sort of portrait normally only used for royalty. Three years later Renoir used Lise as his model for his 'Woman of Algiers', a spectacular painting in oriental style, which was fashionable at the time.

Now the 'impression of nature' had been put into practice in Renoir's pictures. Once the decision was made that scenes like these should be painted rather than a bathing lady, it was obvious to see that a new subject had to be matched with the artist's new styles. In the process of trying them out a new subject was discovered. Mostly landscapes & portraits were worked on and every thing was moving and the light was always changing. These were the kind of paintings that were not given a name until five years later, 'Impressionism'.

In the spring of 1870 Renoir and almost all his friends were represented at the 'Salon'. But in July war broke out and Renoir joined the army, they beat Napoleon III and France became a republic.

When Renoir submitted his pictures to the 'Salon' again in 1872, his 'Parisian Woman in Algerian Costumes' was rejected.

After the revolution the middle classes were doubly suspicious of innovations, of any kind. This attitude did not change in the years to come and artists like Renoir suffered bitter hardship and rejection. However many artists and Renoir were further developing their style and their studios were unfolding in all their splendour.

These were the days when the maturest works of French impressionism were produced and Renoir, produced some of the most magical works of art at the time.

Renoir painted all aspects of life that he saw and approved of, but although his art did not encompass everything about society, we can call it realistic because it shed some light on the aspects of society that did indeed exist. It helped people except themselves in a new way, for once they were able to look at all aspects of their lives.

Both Renoir's pictures and portraits of people showed his talent for exposing the feminine side and show deep joy. Renoir was capable of turning an ugly woman into a gleaming duchess in silk and velvet, but he never did it unless his heart was in it.

His best pictures are of people with whom he had a personal relationship. He frequently painted his friends and his wife. His bright and glowing paintings seem to express a feeling of chance, this can be seen in all his paintings even when he had to work to sustain orders.

Later in the year the fashion changed and people began to buy Japanese style paintings to decorate their homes. Renoir of course refused to jump on this Japanese bandwagon, however to make money he could not really avoid it.

Renoir always seemed to bring his paintings to life by contrasting colours. He once said that black was the queen of colours.

Renoir painted a large number of children's portraits during the year of 1876. He developed a rosy complexion to children's skin, he gave gentleness to their eyes.

In his portraits Renoir gave his subjects a pose that was both natural and characteristic. He always tried to make an impression that was true to life. The seventies were such a fruitful period in Renoir's life, he also did lots of landscapes, among these was his 'Country footpath in summer', it's

particularly beautiful and quite typical. His landscapes were, nearly always dominated by flowers and other colourful effects.

After 1888 all of Renoir's paintings had a beautiful quality to them. His pictures had strong sparkling colours that were evenly distributed. The colours he used had become even more bright and powerful. Whenever he painted people in a natural environment he linked their surroundings by using the same colours and textures, this kept your attention on the person.

Renoir, when not under instructions, always seemed to paint overweight women, I chose him for my art project because he was one of the painters that started a whole new style of art and made art beautiful and decorative. Before art was just made to make you feel a certain way and was often ugly, from my point of view. Renoir died on the 3rd of December 1919., he is buried in Essoyes cemetery.