

Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841 – 1919)

Le Bal du Moulin de la Galette

Costume: Lacy blouse, frilly straw hat

(Have Strauss' Waltz play in the background, then turnover print)

Our painting today is a picture of people waltzing and dancing to music like that of Strauss.

How do the people in the painting look? What is their mood? What are they doing? Where do you think they are? (They are outdoors; relaxing and socializing; they appear happy).

The name of the painting is Le Bal du Moulin de la Galette (luh ball doo moo-LEN day la ga-LET). In French, "moulin" means mill, and a "galette" is a small, round, flat French pastry similar to an American pancake. The closest translation would be "The Ball at the Mill of the Pancake." It was the fashion to hold Sunday afternoon dances at this café in the artists' section of Paris called Montmartre (moant-mart). There, struggling artists could pass a lovely afternoon at little expense. They could talk and dance and enjoy each other's company.

Do you remember these paintings? (Show prints of Cassatt's *Woman with Dog*; Monet's *Water Lilies*; Degas' *Ballet Class*). Do you know the name given to this style of painting? (Impressionism).

Do you recall where Impressionists like to paint? (outdoors using natural light and bright colors) Our artist today, Pierre (pee-air) Auguste (ow-goost) Renoir (ren-wa), was an Impressionist painter. He asked his friends to help him carry the enormous canvas to the old mill and then pose for him. He scrutinized the effects of the light trickling through the leafy trees, the spots of sunlight on the faces of his friends, and the flickering shadows. Renoir then applied that pure and brilliant color with the short brush strokes that were one of the characteristics of Impressionism.

Let's focus on his use of light and shadow. I need two volunteers to demonstrate (have one student dim lights. Shine flashlight through tree branch and onto the other student's face). What do you notice about the way the light shines on the face? (mottled, dappled). Where do you see this effect in our painting?

Renoir is famous for the way he painted skin making it look warm and full of life. He was also very good at making us think about how things feel. Can anyone remember what element of composition tells about how things feel and look like they feel? (texture). Where do you see texture in the painting? (scratchy laces, smooth silks, soft velvets, crisp straw hats, and hard, reflective glass).

Biography

When Pierre Auguste Renoir was four years old, his family moved from the small town of Limoges (lee-mozsh) to Paris, the capital of France. They rented an apartment near the Louvre (Loov), the royal palace of the King and Queen. Part of the palace was a museum where people could see the great paintings and sculptures collected by the

rulers of France. Auguste, which is what his family called him, played marbles with his friends in the courtyard. When he was a young man, he spent many hours in the Louvre studying works of the old masters.

Even when he was very little, Auguste loved to draw. He would use his father's tailor's chalk to draw pictures, on the floor of the tailor shop. His parents were hard working and had three other children. At age 13, Auguste took a job in a workshop painting decorations on china plates, cups and vases. He was a fast painter and earned enough money to buy his parents a small cottage. Soon machines took over printing "regular, even" designs on porcelain, and this profession ended.

He moved on to painting fans, window blinds, and walls in cafes. He could paint murals as fast as three other artists together, but he grew bored. There was no challenge, and not much money. His disenchantment caused a big change. Family and friends remarked on his exceptional artistic talent (his first painting was done at age 16). It was decided that Auguste would paint a test picture, and the most knowledgeable family friend in the field of art would serve as judge. After looking at the painting for a long time, he said, "You must let your son take up painting as an art...I predict a brilliant future for him in the arts."

Renoir took his savings and entered an art school associated with the prestigious Les Beaux-Arts (Lay boz art). He worked quietly and steadily; he was a serious student. He was also quite poor at this point, and picked tubes of paint out of the garbage after the others had gone home. He would squeeze every last bit of paint out of them in order to have paint for the next day (show nearly empty toothpaste tube as example).

It is ironic that this painting sold for \$78 million in 1990, and it is the 5th on the list of most expensive paintings ever sold to date.

Renoir loved women both as a man and as an artist. His paintings feature women with their children and pretty girls wearing hats. He married Aline Charigot, an auburn haired seamstress in 1890. She was a warmhearted, simple country girl whom he loved deeply. They had three sons together, Pierre, Jean and Claude, nicknamed Coco. He loved his sons very much and he was always concerned about their happiness and safety.

Later in life, Renoir was crippled by rheumatism (like arthritis). It attacked the joints in his hands, making them stiff and painful. Because he couldn't bear to live without painting, brushes were strapped to his hands. Do you think it would be difficult to paint like this (yes). Do you think Renoir gave up? (no) He told his son, "One doesn't truly paint with one's hands, but with one's heart."

He went on painting joyful scenes, vibrant with color and texture, until his death at age 78 from a heart attack.

Optional art activity: Have students try to create texture by coloring Renoir's "Luncheon of the Boating Party" (incidentally in the real painting, the woman holding the dog is Renoir's wife, Aline Charigot).