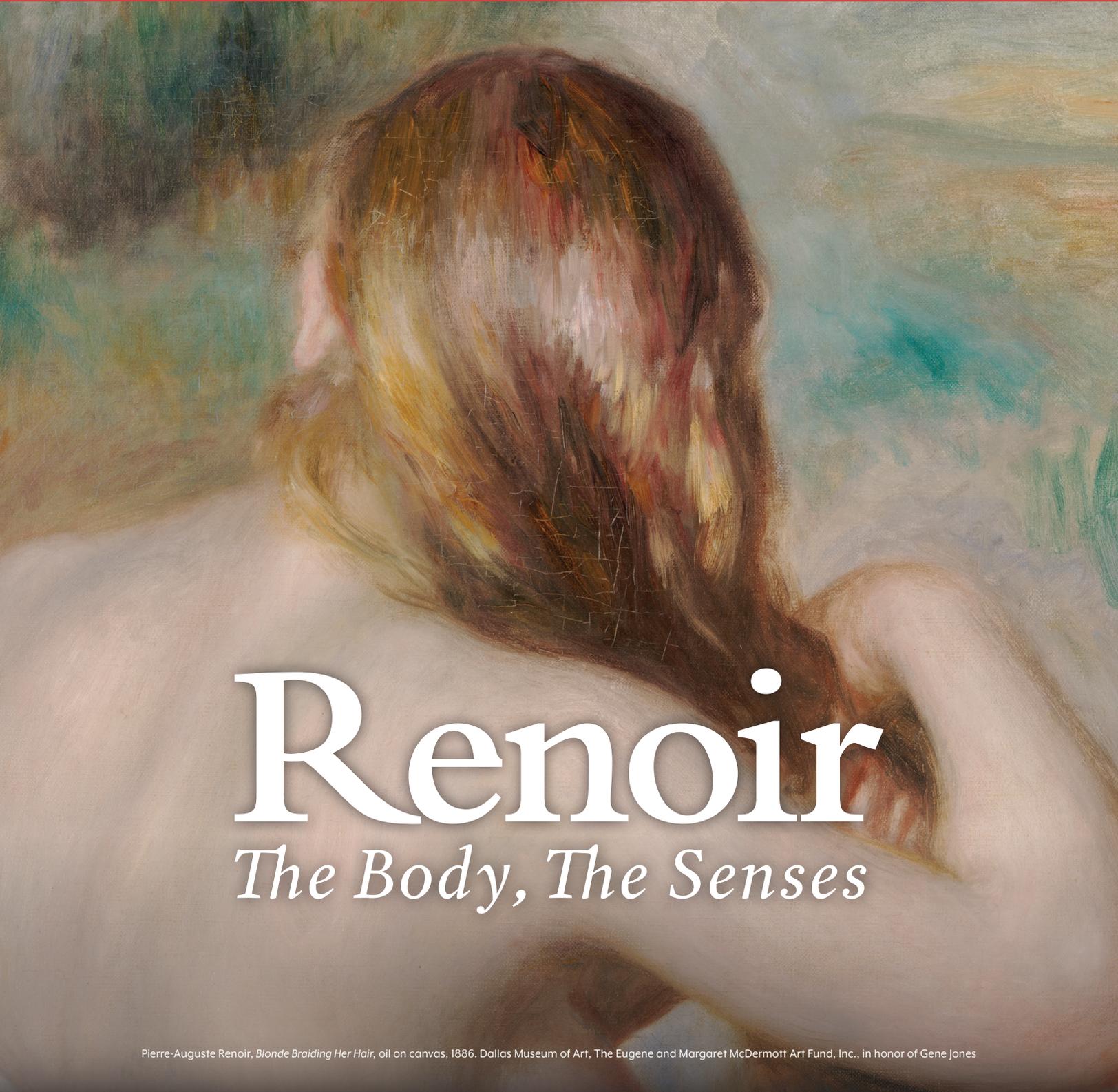


Kimbell Educator Packet



Renoir

The Body, The Senses

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Blonde Braiding Her Hair*, oil on canvas, 1886. Dallas Museum of Art, The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., in honor of Gene Jones

Kimbell Art Museum

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Preparing Students in Advance

We look forward to welcoming your school group to the museum. Here are a few suggestions for teachers to help to ensure a successful, productive learning experience at the museum.

LOOK, DISCUSS, CREATE

Use this resource to lead classroom discussions and related activities prior to the visit.

REVIEW MUSEUM GUIDELINES

For students:

- Touch the works of art only with your eyes, never with your hands.
- Walk in the museum—do not run.
- Use a quiet voice when sharing your ideas.
- No flash photography is permitted in the permanent collection. We request that students refrain from taking pictures during docent-guided tours.
- Write and draw only with pencils—no pens or markers please.

Additional information for teachers:

- Backpacks, umbrellas, or other bulky items are not allowed in the galleries. Free parcel check is available.
- Seeing-eye dogs and other service animals assisting people with disabilities are the only animals allowed in the museum.
- Sketching is allowed in the galleries as long as it is in pencil and does not obstruct or interfere with other visitors.
- Unscheduled lecturing to groups is not permitted.
- No food, drinks, or water bottles are allowed in any galleries.
- Cell phones should be turned to silent mode while in the museum.
- Tobacco use, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, electronic cigarettes, snuff, and chewing tobacco, is not permitted in the museum or anywhere on the museum's grounds.

Renoir: The Body, The Senses

From the late 1860s and early 1870s, when he first attempted to find official recognition, through his early Impressionist phase and the development of his classical style, until his final years working steadfastly in the South of France, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) returned repeatedly, almost obsessively, to the subject of the body—clothed, certainly, but especially nude. “He told me,” noted his friend and fellow painter Berthe Morisot, “that for him the nude was one of the indispensable forms of art.”

Although Renoir captured bustling scenes of the urban cityscape, members of fashionable society, and fleeting atmospheric effects in the landscape, his enduring preoccupation was the nude. His concentration was, at least in part, rooted in his desire to be considered alongside the great artists he so admired. Renoir’s unique approach to figure painting was a vital influence on the art of his time, and his many paintings, pastels, drawings, and sculptures were championed by generations that followed.

Renoir’s son Jean said that the artist “regretted not having painted the same picture—he meant the same subject—all his life. In that way, he would have been able to devote himself entirely to what constituted ‘creation’ in painting: the relations between form and color.” On the centenary of Renoir’s death, by focusing on the theme of the body, this exhibition provides new perspectives on Renoir’s creative trajectory.

Renoir and Tradition

By 1845, Renoir’s family had moved from Limoges to Paris in search of work. They eventually found a home so close to the Louvre Museum that Renoir would later recall that it was practically “included within the wings of the Louvre.” The greatest impetus to Renoir’s early engagement with fine art was provided by the museum, which was free and open to the public. In these hallowed galleries, Renoir encountered innumerable examples of historical and mythological works of art featuring the nude. He frequented the Greek and Roman sculpture in the ground-floor antiquities galleries and then became enthralled by the great colorists: François Boucher, Eugène Delacroix, and Peter Paul Rubens, among others. These painters’ lush palettes and command of the human form held lifelong sway over Renoir’s own practice. At the end of his life, he claimed, “I never thought of myself being a revolutionary painter; I just wanted to continue in the tradition of the Louvre.”

Renoir and Realism

Renoir struggled to make his way in the French academic system, where the goal was to have one’s works accepted by the jury of the Paris Salon. This annual public exhibition was populated with large-scale nude figure paintings, considered among the most elevated works of art within the academy’s hierarchy of genres. In 1861, Renoir had enrolled in the renowned studio of Charles Gleyre, who primed students for admission to the École des Beaux-Arts, teaching methods of composition with particular focus on the skills necessary to draw the human body.

In Gleyre’s studio, Renoir formed significant friendships with fellow students Frédéric Bazille, Claude Monet, and Alfred Sisley, all of whom venerated Gustave Courbet, the leader of the

Realist school. Courbet had radically transformed figure painting in the 1850s by representing real men and women from all walks of life. Renoir and his circle experimented with a similar Realist approach. He made repeated efforts to have his monumental Courbet-inspired paintings of the nude accepted to the Salon, which held the possibility of fame and financial security.

Impressionism and the Body

Renoir was a central figure in the Impressionist circle, a group that included Mary Cassatt, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, and Alfred Sisley, among others. The Impressionists often focused on landscapes or scenes of modern life—and rejected the official Salon. Despite Renoir’s interest in painting “flesh pollen,” as poet Stéphane Mallarmé phrased it, of the more than seventy works he submitted to the Impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1882, only one was a nude, *Study. Torso of a Woman in the Sunlight*.

Most of Renoir’s models were shown clothed; their bodies can only be sensed beneath the texture of their garments. In the same years, however, he produced several paintings of half-dressed or nude women in which his primary challenge was to capture, in his own words, “skin that caught the light well.” For Renoir, the nude—the sanctioned academic subject—could be adapted to meet the Impressionists’ call for experimentation with color and light. Critics such as Edmond Duranty embraced this anti-classical approach to painting, bidding “farewell to the uniform monotony of bone structure, to the anatomical model beneath the nude.”

Renoir and the Decorative Tradition

From his earliest activity as a porcelain painter to the first decade of the twentieth century, Renoir produced decorative art—including ceramics, tapestries, furniture, sculptures, frames, carvings, and even paintings. His forays into decorative painting coincided with the diverse efforts of such artists as Mary Cassatt, Paul Gauguin, and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, as well as the younger artists Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard.

In the academic hierarchy, the term “decorative” was associated with non-naturalistic images; it often employed bright color and repeated patterns. Following this definition, paintings such as Renoir’s *Little Blue Nude*, with summarized bodies that dissolve into feathered, abstracted landscapes, can be seen as decorative figure paintings. The act of seeming “not to work after nature” is what, for Renoir, qualified one of his favorite paintings—François Boucher’s *Diana Leaving Her Bath*—as “decorative.” He proclaimed it to be “the first painting that grabbed hold of me . . . although people never hesitate to tell me that this is not what one should love, that Boucher is ‘only a decorator.’ As if being a decorator is a defect! Boucher is one of the painters who best understood the body of a woman.”

Figure and Landscape: Renoir, Cézanne, Degas

Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, and Renoir were the greatest exponents of the nude within the Impressionist circle, though each would interpret the subject through his own particular approach. All three studied life drawing as part of their early academic training—even if Cézanne, at the Académie Suisse, “made nudes that prompted laughter,” as Camille Pissarro later recalled.

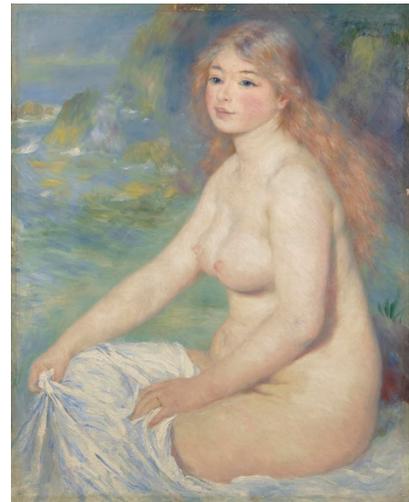
Cézanne's interest in equilibrium, weight, and form dominated his canvases, with light and color also playing prominent roles. Degas's commitment to Naturalism and concern for pose and gesture permeate his approach. And Renoir was fascinated by the body as the origin of sensory experiences.

In the 1890s, the interests of all three artists converged on the challenge of taking the nude and placing complex groups of figures in the landscape. Starting with the balanced compositions of the French classical tradition—the heritage of Nicolas Poussin in the seventeenth century—each artist searched for a way to reengage the problem, a way to agitate, even disrupt, that tradition to create something new and modern.

Renoir's Classicism

Renoir went to Italy for the first time in 1881. Raphael's frescoes in Rome made a particularly strong impression, and he wrote enthusiastically to his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel: "I have seen the Raphaels. I should have seen them earlier. [They] are admirable in their simplicity and grandeur." Renoir's style transformed as he emerged from a self-proclaimed "crisis of Impressionism" following this trip.

Renoir's stylistic "crisis"—resulting in the use of stronger lines and structure beneath his vivid Impressionist palette—set him at odds with his dealer and many of his peers and threatened his economic well-being. It resulted in [The Great Bathers](#), first shown in 1887 and now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which cannot lend it. Claude Monet lauded his friend's "superb picture," but Camille Pissarro found the finished painting "incoherent."



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Blonde Bather*, c. 1881. Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

Preparing for the painting, Renoir created at least twenty drawings and figure studies in various formats and media, many of which were ambitious, heavily worked, and large in scale. Berthe Morisot admired these sheets during a visit to Renoir's studio in January 1886. She wrote in her diary: "It would be interesting to show all these preparatory studies for a painting to the public, which generally imagines that the Impressionists work in a very casual way."

Renoir's Sculpture

After moving to Les Collettes in the South of France in 1909, and in spite of almost insurmountable physical frailties, Renoir continued to experiment with form. Encouraged by his art dealer and friend Ambroise Vollard, Renoir turned to sculpture, first making small medallions before later conceiving larger works. Modeling by directing the hands and fingers of his able-bodied assistants, Renoir was able to transform the monumentality of his paintings into three dimensions.

Between 1913 and 1918, Renoir employed the Catalan artist Richard Guino (who had previously worked for Aristide Maillol), and the two embarked on Renoir's first large-scale bronze, *Venus*

Victorious. Assisting Renoir required Guino to suppress his independent stylistic impulses. In the case of *Venus Victorious*, Renoir first made a clay statuette, which Guino turned into a wax model under Renoir's supervision. A Parisian foundry then cast the model in bronze. After their collaboration ended in 1918, Guino exhibited his original works and attempted to break free of associations with Renoir; he eventually reversed course, however, fighting for acknowledgement as Renoir's sculptural "coauthor."

The Late Years

From around the time Renoir turned fifty, his stylistic approach to painting would take a radical turn: his bodies became even softer and more liquid—an effect he achieved through the application of thinned-down paint that allowed each layer to remain visible. This late period has been the most stylistically controversial of his career—from the time the work was first shown until today. According to one witness, during the exhibition of the recently deceased artist's last works at the 1920 Salon d'Automne, there was "the most preposterous fight": a gang of influential art critics were "running down the large nudes. . . . Poor Jean Renoir wanted to beat up the people who were guffawing in front of his father's works on the day of the private viewing."

Though the enlarged and vividly colored bodies of his nudes engendered heated debate, they were also revered and coveted by collectors and a group of avant-garde artists who looked to Renoir as the father of modernism.

Renoir's Legacy

Throughout his long career, and particularly in his later years, Renoir used paint to challenge the viewer's understanding of volume and space. The next generation of modern artists championed Renoir for this more abstract approach to the time-honored subject of figure painting. Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, among others, revered him.

Picasso was a particularly ardent admirer; from his figurative paintings to his monumental and Neo-Cubist treatments of the nude, his work recalls Renoir's bathers, which he knew intimately and venerated greatly. In 1917, he entered a "Renoirian crisis," during which he attempted to meet the artist, purchase his work, and copy his paintings. He eventually owned seven works by Renoir, keeping them close forever after.

In the famous collection of Gertrude and Leo Stein, Matisse and Picasso found their works hanging beside modern masterpieces, not only by Cézanne, but also by Renoir; for the Steins the older and younger artists were the "big four." Picasso's friend Guillaume Apollinaire believed that Renoir was "the greatest painter of our time." And Matisse proclaimed, with emotion in his voice, "I've always felt that recorded time holds no nobler story, no more heroic, no more magnificent achievement than that of Renoir."



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Bather with a Griffon Dog—Lise on the Bank of the Seine
Oil on canvas, 1870



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Boy with a Cat
Oil on canvas, 1868

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Bather with a Griffon Dog—Lise on the Bank of the Seine

Oil on canvas, 1870

Collection of Museu de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand

Lise Tréhot, who met Renoir in 1865 and was his preferred model until 1872, posed for this monumental painting, which was exhibited in the Salon of 1870. The juxtaposition of the nude figure with her dressed companion is indebted to Gustave Courbet's controversial [Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine](#) of 1857—a painting that blatantly references prostitution.

The pose of Renoir's model also quotes Praxiteles's famous [Cnidian Aphrodite](#), a copy of which had entered the Musée du Louvre in 1861. Caricaturists could not resist ridicule, one writing that “this bather is obviously shown before the bath, of which she is in great need.” The association of dirt with Renoir's pristine figure indicated the critics' unease with the realism of her portrayal.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Boy with a Cat

Oil on canvas, 1868

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Boy with a Cat likely features Armand Felix Tréhot, the brother of Renoir's lover and frequent model, Lise. The boy's thin, pale body is juxtaposed against rich textures of cloth and fur. His unusual pose may have been based on [Sleeping Hermaphrodite](#), an ancient sculpture in the Louvre. Renoir makes the reclining figure stand, in a clever reworking of the androgynous prototype.

Prompts for Comparison

Compare the pose of the models and the direction of their gaze. Which stance is more active? Who engages the viewer more? What's hidden from our sight?

Describe the differences in the color schemes. How does Renoir experiment with light effects? Compare the models' skin tones and the environment that surrounds them.

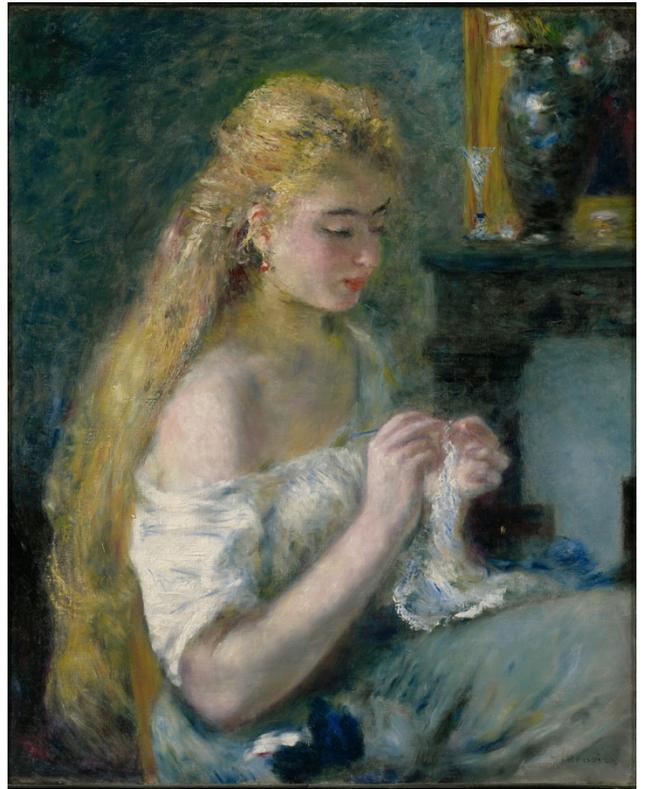
How does Renoir suggest textures in each image? How do you think the fabrics feel? In what other ways does Renoir suggest a sense of touch?

Describe the environment that surrounds the figures. What details provide context?

Compare the animals in each image. What role do you think they play in these works?



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Study. Torso of a Woman in the Sunlight
Oil on canvas, 1875–76



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Woman Crocheting
Oil on canvas, 1875

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Study. Torso of a Woman in the Sunlight

Oil on canvas, 1875–76

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Renoir submitted this vibrant and daring painting to the second Impressionist exhibition in 1876. The work incited praise: “a superbly colored study of a nude” and “the work of a true colorist.” But some critics were appalled. The influential Albert Wolff wrote, “Would someone kindly explain to M. Renoir that a woman's torso is not a mass of decomposing flesh with the green and purplish blotches that indicate a state of complete putrefaction in a corpse?” Renoir signed the canvas prominently at lower right and acknowledged his experimental handling by giving it the one-word title *Study*. The painting was acquired by artist Gustave Caillebotte, likely soon after the 1876 exhibition.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Woman Crocheting

Oil on canvas, 1875

Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA

Images of women sewing were common in eighteenth-century French painting, notably in the genre scenes of Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Jean-Baptiste Greuze—artists very much in vogue during Renoir's lifetime. The model is likely Nini Lopez, who sat for Renoir frequently in the mid-1870s. Her skin is painted with full impastos of yellows, blues, pinks, and reds. The complex and modulated color is comparable to *Study. Torso of a Woman in the Sunlight* from 1875–76.

Prompts for Comparison

Describe the setting for each figure. In what ways does the figure interact with her surroundings?

How does Renoir make us aware of light effects in each painting? What different types of light do you notice?

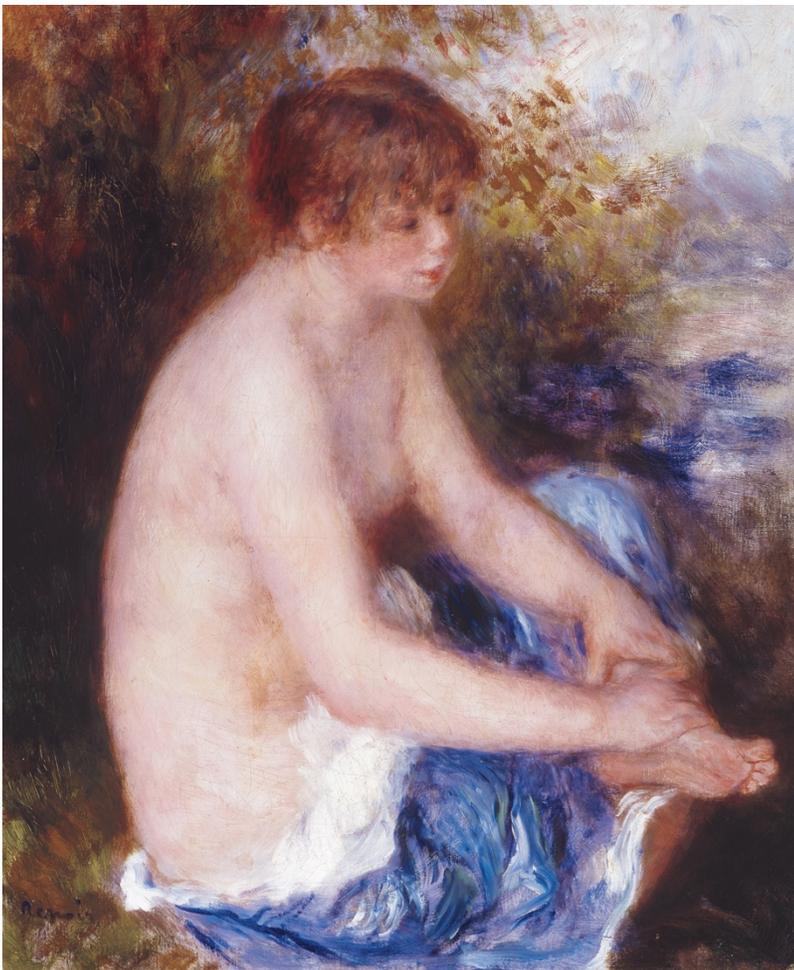
How does Renoir experiment with color? Where do you see certain colors repeated?

What role does texture or the sense of touch play in each painting? Where is texture especially important?

Describe their expressions and poses. What is the mood of each scene?



François Boucher
Diana Leaving Her Bath
Oil on canvas, 1742



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Little Blue Nude
Oil on canvas, c. 1878–79

François Boucher (French, 1703–1770)

Diana Leaving Her Bath

Oil on canvas, 1742

Musée du Louvre, Paris

The Musée du Louvre purchased François Boucher's *Diana Leaving Her Bath* in 1852. It soon became one of the most celebrated paintings by an eighteenth-century French artist. Édouard Manet, Henri Fantin-Latour, James McNeill Whistler, and others registered to copy it. The mythological scene also appealed to a young Renoir, who reproduced it on a piece of porcelain when he was an apprentice at the Lévy-Frères manufactory. Renoir reminisced in 1919 that “Boucher’s *Diana Leaving Her Bath* was the first painting that grabbed hold of me, and I have continued to love it all my life, as one does his first love.”

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Little Blue Nude

Oil on canvas, c. 1878–79

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Painted at the height of Renoir's Impressionist period, *Little Blue Nude* exemplifies the artist's interest in decorative figure painting, particularly that of the eighteenth century. The sitter might be Alma-Henriette “Margot” Leboeuf, a young woman who modeled for him several times during the 1870s. Her pose recalls that of Diana in François Boucher's *Diana Leaving Her Bath*, the celebrated painting acquired by the Musée du Louvre in 1852.

Prompts for Comparison

Compare the poses of the figures. Where do these women go from here? If you had to tell a story about either figure, what would it be?

Describe the brushwork in each image. How does it affect the way you interpret the figures' relationship to their environment? Which figure is more one with nature?

Compare the blue and white drapery in each image. How does it direct your eye? What does it highlight or conceal? Whose drapery is fancier?

How does the absence of other figures and objects in the *Little Blue Nude* affect the image?



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Bathers Playing with a Crab
Oil on fabric, c. 1897



Edgar Degas
The Bathers
Pastel and charcoal on tracing paper,
1885/95

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Bathers Playing with a Crab

Oil on fabric, c. 1897

The Cleveland Museum of Art

Following the exhibition of his painting *The Great Bathers* at Galerie Georges Petit in 1887, Renoir did not produce another group bathing scene for almost a decade. *Bathers Playing with a Crab* marks his return to the subject, and it hearkens back to his earlier work in its celebration of play and pleasure in a scenic landscape. The painting is an exploration of the sense of touch, as the body encounters foliage, flesh, water, or the pinching crab.

Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917)

The Bathers

Pastel and charcoal on tracing paper, 1885/95

The Art Institute of Chicago, IL

Edgar Degas, like Renoir, saw his art as part of a long tradition. Here, he combines bathers in a monumental group that references the celebrated nudes in landscapes of such artists as Nicolas Poussin. Picturing four figures in different moments of bathing, Degas used layers of pastel and fixative on translucent tracing paper, which he pieced together and mounted on cardboard. This technically complex and enigmatic work was halted before more color might have been applied.

Prompts for Comparison

What do you see happening in each image? How are the figures interacting? Which figures invite your focus? How would you describe their relationship to one another?

Compare the sense of space in each image. How close are we to the figures? How close are they to one another? What's concealed and revealed by their arrangement?

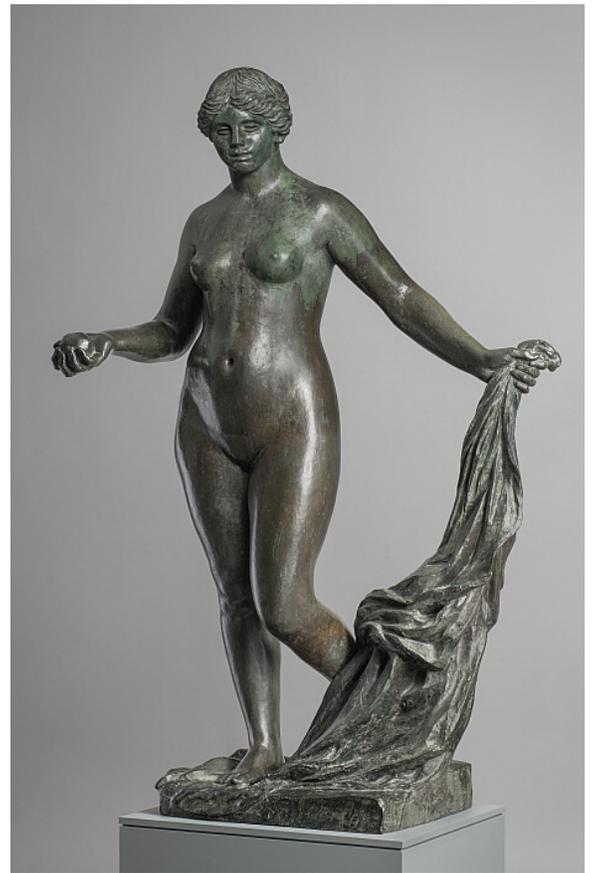
Describe the individual gestures/poses of the figures. What are the major differences?

What does each artist's choice in materials add to the conversation?

What is the overall mood of each image?



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Bather Seated in a Landscape, Called Eurydice
Oil on canvas, 1902–4



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Venus Victorious
Bronze, 1914

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

Bather Seated in a Landscape, Called Eurydice

Oil on canvas, 1902–4

Musée national Picasso-Paris

Bather Seated in a Landscape, Called Eurydice is one of Renoir's quietest, most classically inspired bathers. Though the sitter's companions joyously decorate a herm in the background, she is wholly within herself, unaware of the activity. The nude inhabits a world entirely unconcerned with the trappings of modern life.

This painting was one of seven by Renoir in Pablo Picasso's personal collection. When Picasso purchased the painting from art dealer Paul Rosenberg in 1919 or 1920, he was struggling with a tension between modernist and classical styles in his own work. Renoir's painting inspired Picasso's monumental treatment of a seated nude, his *Seated Bather Drying Her Feet* of 1921.



Pablo Picasso, *Seated Bather Drying Her Feet*, oil on canvas, 1921. Berggruen Collection, Berlin

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

With Richard Guino (Spanish, 1890–1973)

Venus Victorious

Bronze, 1914

Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA

Venus Victorious is widely recognized as Renoir's most important sculpture—the one to which he devoted the greatest time and effort and his most precisely finished work. It embodies the classical conception of the female form that he had been developing in his paintings for decades. Renoir began a clay statue of Venus measuring twenty-four inches high in 1913, and his dealer, Ambroise Vollard, subsequently commissioned the larger version. Renoir intended this work to be installed in a garden temple—never completed—dedicated to the theme of love.

Prompts for Comparison

What surprises you about seeing one of Renoir's figures rendered three-dimensionally? What's similar and what's different about these two figures?

What stories do these poses tell? How does a seated versus a standing pose affect your interpretation of the figures?

What other details help to tell the story of these women? Does either artwork suggest her mood or thoughts? If so, what might they be?



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
The Bathers
Oil on canvas, 1918–19



Pablo Picasso
The Bathers
Oil on canvas, 1920–21

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

The Bathers

Oil on canvas, 1918–19

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Completed in the final year of Renoir's life, *The Bathers* is a manifesto painting—a summation of the artist's decades-long preoccupation with the subject of the nude. Featuring Renoir's favorite models of his late period, Madeleine Bruno and Catherine (Dédée) Hessling, the work is emblematic of Renoir's late style, with oversized, rippling figures placed in a pulsating and iridescent landscape.

The Bathers has incited strong critical reactions since its first public display at the Salon d'Automne in 1920. At that exhibition, Jean Renoir reportedly wanted to “beat up the people who were guffawing in front of his father's works on the day of the private viewing.” Henri Matisse, on the other hand, regarded *The Bathers* as Renoir's masterpiece.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

The Bathers

Oil on canvas, 1920–21

Nahmad Collection

Painting in the years after Renoir's death, Picasso places a single male figure between two seated women, whose curvaceous bodies seem to be based on the late master's prototypes. It is possible that the juxtaposition refers to Picasso's own preoccupation with Renoir's example—he was not only imitating Renoir's art, but also purchasing major paintings and drawings by his idol.

Prompts for Comparison

What do you see happening in these paintings? How would you describe the relationship between the figures? What stories might you tell about them?

Compare the figures' poses. How do they relate to one another? Who seems most relaxed?

Compare the environment that surrounds the figures. Where is the light coming from? What's the weather like? How does color contribute to the overall mood?

Compare the different forms that you see and the brushstrokes used to describe them. What's clear and well-defined? What's left open for interpretation?

What lessons do you think Picasso learned from Renoir?