

**RENOIR AMONG WOMEN: FROM THE MODERN TO THE CLASSICAL IDEAL.  
COLLECTIONS OF THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY AND THE MUSÉE DE L'ORANGERIE**

**17 SEPTEMBER 2016 TO 8 JANUARY 2017**

INAUGURATION 15 September 2016 at 7.30 pm  
PRESS CONFERENCE 15 September 2016 at 11.30 pm  
DATES 17 September 2016 to 8 January 2017

Fundación MAPFRE Casa Garriga i Nogués (Calle Diputació, 250, Barcelona)

GENERAL CURATORS Guy Cogeval and Pablo Jiménez Burillo

SCIENTIFIC CURATOR Paul Perrin

This exhibition has been devised and organised with the scientific collaboration of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie and with exceptional loans from both institutions.

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From 17 September 2016 to 8 January 2017 Fundació MAPFRE will be presenting *Renoir among Women: from the modern to the classical ideal. Collections of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie*. On display at the Fundació MAPFRE's exhibition space, Casa Garriga i Nogués (calle Diputació, 250), the exhibition will include around 70 works with the aim of presenting Renoir's artistic evolution from a new viewpoint based on the different interpretations of the female image that are present in his work.

This exhibition will reveal how the depiction of the female figure evolved in a manner parallel to Renoir's career as a whole, with the result that the works on display offer a complete vision of his female imagery. Renoir's women range from the modern Parisians to be seen in his Impressionist canvases to his more domestic vision of women as mothers and the timeless beauty of the nude in a natural setting which is so characteristic of his final years.

With the organisation of the present exhibition, Fundació MAPFRE is aiming to emphasise the importance of Renoir's work as whole, presenting a survey of his entire career, also accompanied by paintings by some of his contemporaries. The artist was surrounded by women throughout his life and used his brush to convey the delicacy, sensitivity and voluptuousness of their forms. As many critics noted at the time, when Renoir's oeuvre is seen in its entirety, it is evident that he became the preeminent painter of women.

The exhibition also involves a particular Catalan significance: almost one hundred years ago, on 23 April 1917, the Palace of Fine Arts in Barcelona was inaugurated with an exhibition organised by Ramón Casas, Santiago Rusiñol and other Catalan artists. Entitled *Exhibition of French Art*, it included almost 1,500 works by the great French painters of the day such as Cézanne, Degas, Manet, Monet, Morisot, Pissarro, Puvis de Chavannes, Renoir and Sisley, with the aim of emphasising the importance of French art in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Notable among the works by Renoir – “possibly the best represented of the Impressionists” – was “the marvellous *Moulin de la Galette*, which one cannot contemplate without experiencing shudders of almost painful delight”, as the journalist José Francés wrote in his review of the exhibition in *La Esfera*.

In a gesture of gratitude for organising the exhibition, Casas, Rusiñol and the other artists responsible were decorated by the French government.

One hundred years later, *Renoir among Women* offers Barcelona another opportunity to see this icon of Impressionism and of modern art in general.

In conjunction with this new opportunity to see *Bal du Moulin de la Galette*, the exhibition also pays tribute to the Catalan artists who lived and worked in Paris in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, who also depicted that mythical corner of Montmartre and whose works above all represented a key contribution to the new, more modern approach that emerged in Spanish art during this period. Visitors will thus be able to see paintings by Santiago Rusiñol, Ramón Casas, Carles Casagemas and Manuel Feliú de Lemus, which have been lent by other collectors and institutions with the generous intention of taking part in this project specifically devised for Barcelona.

## THE EXHIBITION

Throughout the course of his lengthy career, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Limoges, 1841 – Cagnes-sur-Mer, 1919) painted his wife, his lovers and his female friends. He also painted professional models, street girls, actresses and women from the upper ranks of the bourgeoisie. From the start of his career to the years of Impressionism in the 1870s, the return to tradition and to Ingres in the 1880s, and the late years with their inspiration of Rubens, women were always the artist's principal source of inspiration, an eternal object of seduction and the living incarnation of art.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Bal du Moulin de la Galette* [Dance at the Moulin de la Galette], 1876  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris. ©RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski

One of the key figures of Impressionism, Renoir took part in its early exhibitions from the first one of 1874. Around 1880 an artistic crisis led him to question and finally abandon Impressionist postulates. In his own words: "I had gone to the extreme of Impressionism and I reached the conclusion that I neither knew how to paint nor to draw." The artist's trip to Italy from 1881 to 1882 marked a turning point in his career. Contemplating the works of the great Italian masters, particularly Raphael and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian painters, in addition to the influence of Ingres, had a profound effect on Renoir's art, which evolved through his continuous quest for what he considered authentic painting, as well as through the ongoing conflict between the pre-eminence of line or colour and of painting outdoors or in the studio.

In his major early compositions, such as *Bal du Moulin de la Galette*, Renoir depicted his contemporaries engaged in light-hearted seduction, updating Watteau's *fêtes galantes*, although the male figures lose importance in this new, exclusively female world. Renoir devised an original and recognisable image that established and reinvented the ideal of late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century woman.

The exhibition is organised into nine sections which focus on Renoir's different female types: from his depictions of Parisians of the 1870s, which brought him a degree of

success as a portraitist, to the young women having fun in the *Bal du Moulin de la Galette* (1876), some of them friends of Renoir's and painted in Montmartre. In his portraits of this period Renoir moved away from academic canons to forge the image of the modern Parisian woman.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Femme nue dans un paysage* [Nude Woman in a Landscape], 1883. Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris.  
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée de l'Orangerie) / Franck Raux

In the 1880s Renoir began to focus on the theme of the female nude and his paintings reflect his admiration for the work of Ingres, Raphael, Titian and Veronese. As with all of Renoir's work, his female nudes are imbued with a sensuality that continued to be present during this return to classicism. A key work of this period is *Femme nue dans un paysage* (1883), painted the year after his return from Italy. The firm line with which the forms are defined and the classical approach to the nude, contrasting with the sketchy treatment of the landscape in which the figure is set, already show Renoir moving on from the Impressionist technique. The fusion of the figure and the landscape to be found in this work became one of the artist's preferred themes. Despite being known as a figure painter, Renoir focused on the landscape throughout his career, using this genre to express his pictorial

investigations and concerns with regard to *plein air* painting.

From 1885, the year his son Pierre was born, Renoir's depiction of women acquired a particular character in scenes relating to motherhood and childhood. The artist's approach to women changed in these works, giving rise to more intimate, domestic and timeless scenes that were undoubtedly influenced by the birth of his own children. A clear example is *Motherhood* (1885), in which the artist's wife Aline is shown as remote from the bustle of city life, tenderly holding their son Pierre as she breastfeeds him.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Maternité, L'enfant au sein ou Madame Renoir et son fils Pierre* [Motherhood, Breastfeeding the Child or Madame Renoir and her Son Pierre], 1885. Musée d'Orsay, Paris  
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski

Throughout the 1890s Renoir's taste for private, domestic scenes, of the type particularly in vogue in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting, is also reflected in works on the theme of the female *toilette* or washing, such as *Femme nue couchée (Gabrielle)*. In the works in this section the viewer plays the role of voyeur, intruding on a moment of female privacy in which the nude is again the principal element.

In his final years Renoir depicted a timeless Arcadia in which bathers and nymphs are the principal figures in his compositions and in which classicism and modernity coexist in a type of tension. The female nude outdoors is a

theme with a long tradition in western art and a classical subject revived by Renoir and other late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century painters, who transformed that gaze onto the past into a defining aspect of their artistic modernity. Renoir was seventy-eight when he painted *Les baigneuses* (1918), a key work in this section. During his long career he had been a major representative of *plein air* Impressionism, had taken part in exhibitions alongside Monet, Degas, Sisley and Pissarro, had been awarded the



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Les Baigneuses* [The Bathers], 1918-1919. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.  
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée de l'Orangerie) / Hervé Lewandowski

Légion d'Honneur, had exhibited at the Official Salon and had taken part in the 9<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial with his master Courbet. In his painting, in which the female figure remained the principal motif, Renoir moved from reflecting the events and circumstances of modern life to representing a timeless female who blends with nature in an expression of classicism.

In order to better understand the particular nature of Renoir's work and how it influenced the work of his contemporaries and the following generation, the exhibition also includes paintings by artists such as Van Gogh, Maurice Denis, Degas, Bonnard, Maillol, Cross and Picasso, also loaned from the collections of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie.

## **THE CATALOGUE**

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue which features various essays by the exhibition curator and other scholars that reflect the exhibition's different perspectives. The catalogue also includes a selection of texts on Renoir and his vision of women, as well as a chronology centred on this subject.