

Leaving Cert Art History | Artist Summary

Sample Answer

Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

Background:

Pierre Auguste Renoir was born in 1841, and grew up in Paris in the working class. From the age of 15, he worked in a porcelain factory as a painter. Renoir copied old masters in the Louvre to improve his artistic skills, and in 1860 went to the studio of the academic painter, Charles Gleyre, where he befriended Monet & Sisley. His friendship with Monet was crucial and influenced his adoption of en plein air painting, his use of brighter colours and his freer handling of paint. However, as a young artist in the 1860's, Renoir did not have paintings accepted for the annual Salon exhibition, but his early impressionist paintings were rejected and Renoir struggled to support his family. Renoir played a major role in the 'Birth of Impressionism' and the impressionist style which was founded in the Summer of 1869 when he, Monet and Sisley painted scenes along the river Seine. Renoir also helped to organise the first impressionist exhibition and showed his work in the first three (1874-1877) and again in 1882.

Style, Technique & Subject Matter:

After painting in the impressionist style for more than 10 years, Renoir began to question its emphasis on visual effects, causing his style to change throughout his career. From 1872-82 Renoir painted mostly impressionistic (e.g. Bal at Le Moulin de la Galette) and from 1882 onwards he painted what is known as his Ingres period 'dry'. In this period he went to study Renaissance Art in Italy, developing a harder, more realistic style which softened again in the 1890s, (e.g. The Umbrellas). Up until the 1880s, Renoir portrayed people relaxing in the gardens, the countryside, opera, dances and along the Seine. He later focused on family scenes and female bathers. He chose light-hearted, happy scenes throughout his life, despite his financial matters. Many of his subject matters were portraits, nudes, joyful scenes of Parisian life and some landscapes he worked on with Monet *en plein air*.

Role in Impression:

Light-hearted air of delight and gaiety that is a characteristic of impressionist painting in Renoir's influence. One of the chief organisers of the 1874 exhibition.

Developments of *plein air* techniques in Summer of '69 with Monet e.g. colour of shadows is not brown or black but reflected colours of objects surrounding them.