

Pierre Auguste Renoir "Oarsmen at Chatou"



Mary Cassatt "The Boating Party"



Artwork Overview:

People, boats and water are the subjects of Renoir's painting "Oarsmen at Chatou". By using fresh, bright colors Renoir has painted a moment frozen in time. The technique here is very sketchy with short brush strokes. The painting is dominated by two strong colors - blue and orange - which help the main boat stand out from the water. The boats and oars lead our eyes into the canvas, where we find bright, light infused water. The figures comprise repeated verticals which provide balance with the repeated horizontals found in the foreground, boats and background and horizon.

"The Boating Party" features one of Mary Cassatt's favorite subjects - a mother and child. Notice how many parts of the painting direct our glance to the face of the child. The man's arm and the boat's oar form a "V" that points to her face. The tilt of the mother's hat and even the curved edge of the boat also bring our eyes there. In this painting, Mary Cassatt has played a trick on our eyes. Notice how easy it is to imagine you are sitting in the boat beside the man. By painting the boat right off the lower edge of the canvas, Mary Cassatt made it seem almost as though we are part of this cheerful "boating party".

Topics for Discussion:

1. When we look at Mary Cassatt's "The Boating Party" and Renoir's "Oarsmen at Chatou" we see the similarities. What are these similarities?
2. Can you find elements which are the same in each painting?
3. Where do you think you would be standing or sitting if you were looking onto this scene in real life?
4. In which painting can you find the most water and sky?
5. In which painting do you feel very close to the people in the boat?
6. Can you draw a picture of people at a lake or river with boats? Think about where you would like to be in these paintings.

Hands on Art Activity - Draw and Paint a Boating Scene

Materials: 11 x 15 Halifax Watercolor paper
Water color paints
Water color brushes (small to medium)
Water tubs
Newspapers
Paper towels
Smocks
Pencil, crayons (kids supply)

Directions:

1. Discuss the shapes of the people, boats and buildings in Renoir's "Oarsmen at the Chatou" and Cassatt's "The Boating Party". Using crayons have the children draw the figures boats in their boating party. Make sure to use pressure on the crayons so that the wax will be thick.
2. Have children paint the figures and boats, water and sky.
3. Starting with light colors of paint apply dashes of color to show the water and sky. The sky can be reflected in the water. Paint should also be applied to the figures and boats.
4. Some of the paint will resist the crayon colored areas. This will give you a sparking effect. Enjoy looking at each child's impression of their "boating party."
5. Sign the front of the painting.

About the Artists:

Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

Pierre Auguste Renoir was a French impressionist painter. He is famous for paintings of young girls and children, and intimate portraits of French middle-class life at during the 19th century. He painted lively groups in outdoor, colorful surroundings, and often used his friends as models. He frequently painted his wife and children.

Renoir was born in Limoges, France. At the age of 13 he was hired as an apprentice at the porcelain factory. Later, he also painted window shades and fans in Paris. But it is for his great masterpieces of impressionist painting that he is remembered today. In Paris, Renoir studied at the same studio as Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, and Frederic Bazille. Together, these four friends traveled the French countryside, painting outdoor scenes in the style that came to be called "Impressionism".

In 1874, Renoir and several other artists exhibited some of their works at a public auction. But the paintings were ridiculed and savaged by critics and the public. One early supporter of the Impressionists, the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, remarked: "The public saw these great artists but ignorant and presumptuous men trying to attract attention by their eccentricities."

Renoir continued to paint in the impressionist style. Soon he sold a few of his works and began to acquire a reputation as a talented portrait artist. Unlike Monet and Pissarro, who painted mostly landscapes, Renoir preferred to paint figures. He often used his friends as models, capturing them in moments of relaxed conversation or at festive occasions. He usually painted outdoors in natural light and used bright, pure colors. In his later years Renoir was crippled by severe arthritis. But he tied paintbrushes to his hands and continued to paint until his death in 1919.

Mary Cassatt (1845-1926)

Mary Cassatt was born on May 22, 1844, in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, which is now a part of Pittsburgh. She was raised in a wealthy family that traveled to Europe when Cassatt was a child. She was fortunate to live in Paris, Heidelberg and Darmstadt as a young child. She learned to speak French and German during the four years spent in Europe.

Cassatt's exposure to the rich culture and art heritage made an impact on her decision to pursue a career as an artist. At the age of 16 she was enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. She was frustrated by the domineering attitude of the male instructors. She decided that she must study in Europe to become an artist, so moved to Paris in 1866. This was the Victorian era, a time when young women did not do such things. Cassatt moved despite the disapproval of her friends and family. While in the early years in Paris she mainly copied old master works at the Louvre. She left Paris to take private lessons in Italy and Spain and in 1871 she came to Chicago to try and sell some of her paintings. She also studied the paintings that were exhibited at the Paris World's Fair of 1867.

In the spring of 1872, she submitted a painting to the Paris Salon, and was accepted. The acceptance of her painting at the Paris Salon was the beginning of a long and successful career for Cassatt. She became a protégé of Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, and Gustave Courbet. This was the core of artist whose "Impressionist" art changed forever the way that the world views art and artists.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed many profound changes in the art world. The early developments in photography made the artists turn toward art for reasons other than to record history in strictly, "approved" realistic portrayal of subjects. Mary Cassatt had a major influence on the way that women were viewed as both artists and professionals.

Cassatt concentrated on scenes from everyday life. She worked in oil paints, pastels and prints. She is most famous for her depictions of mothers and children going about the day to day activities that were strictly the world of women. The stages of women's lives from birth, to raising children to old age are portrayed with great sensitivity by Cassatt. She never married and thus never had children, but seemed to understand the mother and child connection.