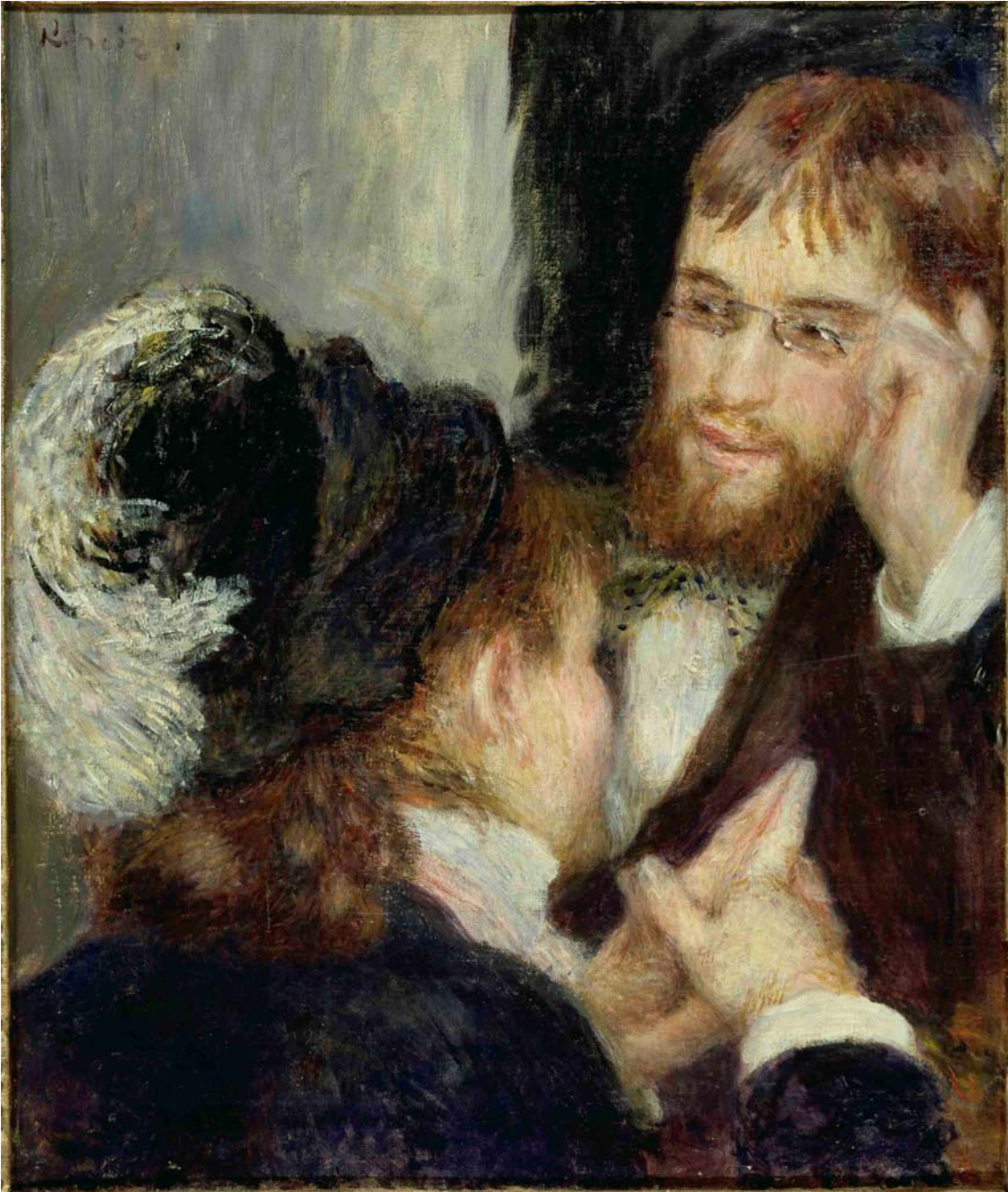


French Impressionists

Renoir • Monet • Degas • Rodin

Lady Lever Art Gallery, 20 February to 31 May 2009

Teachers' Notes



Pierre-

Auguste Renoir, *Conversation* © Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

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French Impressionists: Renoir, Monet, Degas, Rodin

Introduction to the exhibition

'French Impressionists' will give you and your students a rare opportunity to see works usually only on display in Stockholm. Works by Renoir, Monet, Degas and Rodin will be amongst some of the artists featured in this exhibition of thirteen treasured works. This small but exceptional exhibition is made up of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist pieces from the Walker Art Gallery and Nationalmuseum Stockholm collections.

Included are paintings depicting the atmospheric landscapes, 19th century Parisian women at work, and personalities that inspired so many of the masters of the period. Also in the exhibition is a selection of bronze sculptures, including two pieces by Rodin from the Walker Art Gallery and two examples of Degas' ballet dancer sculptures from Stockholm's collection. The exhibition will be an intimate study of the artists' abilities to capture colour, light and movement in a style that is still much admired amongst today's audiences.

Visiting the exhibition

All school groups bookings must be made in advance by calling the Art Galleries Group Bookings Administrator on **0151 478 4178**.

Due to the size of the exhibition, the number of students in the exhibition rooms at any one time will be restricted to 15. However, learning resources will be available to enable larger groups to be divided in order to explore the Lady Lever Art Gallery's permanent collection during their visit. A suggested risk assessment for the gallery is available and will be posted to you with your booking confirmation.

We recommend the following ratio of adults to students:

- 1:4 for children seven years and under
- 1:7 for children eight years and above

Additional resources

In addition to these teachers' notes, which will provide you with possible activities and discussion points for your visit, there are the following resources available:

- Schools resource poster with key messages and themes from the movement
- *Impressionism Interpreted* resource area including bronze to touch, a sample easel and paints, images of the Gallery over the period of a day looped to show how the Impressionists used the effects of light, and a variety of books and catalogues
- Further information sheets on the movement as well as methods and materials in the exhibition rooms
- On-line exhibition pages with tools to zoom in on paintings from the Walker collection to explore their texture, colour and brushwork at www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

To support exploration of the permanent collection we can provide additional teachers' notes or activity sheets so students can explore in smaller groups. Please call us to discuss your requirements on **0151 478 4178**.

Key exhibition themes

Landscape

The Impressionists changed the way landscapes were painted. Traditionally it was a studio activity; quick studies were made outdoors at the scene, but the actual painting was done indoors. The Impressionist painters, inspired by earlier artists such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875), recognised the value of working directly from nature.

The Impressionists painted *en plein air* (outdoors) to study the effects of light, weather and atmosphere on a scene. The development of portable equipment, such as the light-weight easel, ready-made canvases and tubed paints, made this easier.

It did have its challenges though; the stories of Claude Monet working in freezing temperatures, wind and rain are now legendary. The Impressionists tended to avoid painting under the harsh midday sun. They were particularly fascinated by diffused light, for example light broken by clouds or dappled shade. They favoured scenes with water, fog and snow for their soft light and reflective surfaces.

People

The Impressionists recorded contemporary life in their work. They moved away from the historical, literary and religious subjects advocated by the academic teaching establishments to depict instead the many aspects of urban life. People at work, in cafes, theatres, city streets, railway stations, riverside resorts, as well as informal studies of family and friends provided the Impressionists with a wealth of stimulating subjects.

Just as in their landscape painting, the Impressionists challenged the accepted traditions for painting people and scenes. They created daring compositions with unusual perspective. The influence of Japanese prints is evident in many works where figures are shown with their backs to the viewer or cut off by the picture's edge. Faces were painted in close-up, like intimate photographs. There is an air of informality about many of their paintings; a feel for the randomly captured moment, which sets them apart from the formal work of their conventional contemporaries.

Sculpture

Degas and Renoir used sculpture in their later careers to study movement and form. Renoir was interested in finding ways of modelling the figure without using colour. Degas used sculpture to better understand movement. He often claimed that it was a way of improving his paintings.

Auguste Rodin is often considered to be the father of modern sculpture. His work, like that of the Impressionist painters, experimented with new subjects and concentrated on a new realism. Rather than following conventional, classical poses, his sculptures emphasised the individuality, emotion and physical attributes of the figure. He encouraged models to walk around his studio in a natural way so that he could capture in clay a realistic interpretation of their movement. He was the only sculptor to exhibit with the Impressionists.

Curriculum Links

Art and Design

A variety of curriculum outcomes will be met for Art and Design students:

- Learn about visual and tactile elements through exploring colour, pattern and texture
- The roles and aims of artists at the time, what the French Impressionists were rebelling against and why
- Students will also be able to investigate art *in situ*, work from first-hand observation and study a range of processes and materials
- They can experiment with ideas and concepts by learning about the French Impressionist movement and what inspired its artists
- Throughout their visit they will continually investigate, analyse, design, reflect and evaluate their learning

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

Cross-curricular links can be made with Art and Design, but there is great potential to explore the exhibition using language skills:

- Ask and answer questions in French describing works in the exhibition
- Improve cultural understanding by learning about French culture through art
- Use their imagination to express thoughts or ideas about the works in French
- Recognise French phrases and words in labels and titles of works

Wirral schools can contact their MFL Advisory Teacher for further support on 0151 346 6666

English and literacy

Every painting tells a story and with the moody landscapes and impressive portraits *French Impressionists* presents a perfect opportunity to explore narratives.

- Lead a creative writing activity and ask students to create their own dialogue, poem or short story
- Develop speaking skills by having students share their thoughts, ideas and opinions
- Develop listening skills encouraging students to ask questions or recall information
- Connect with ideas, themes and issues that they learn about before their visit, exploring the exhibition and through follow-up material in the classroom

Citizenship

The exhibition will help students gain a wider understanding of themselves and their place in the world:

- Think about the lives of people living in other times and places with different values and customs
- Develop intercultural understanding
- Consider the interconnections between the UK and Europe by exploring the art of the French Impressionists and British artists in the permanent collection

Claude Monet (1840-1926)

Break-up of the Ice on the Seine near Bennecourt, about 1892-93

Oil on canvas, purchased in 1962, Walker Art Gallery, purchased in 1962 with the help of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund



In the 1890s Monet became fascinated with working in series. He recorded the same view at different times of day, in different seasons or in different weather conditions. Here he shows the River Seine near his house at Giverny during a particularly severe winter.

Overall the colours are muted to reflect the suppressed atmosphere of a winter's day. Brushstrokes of thick paint are left visible instead of being smoothed out so that we see Monet's physical and artistic approach to

painting very clearly. The swift brushwork hints at the extreme cold in which Monet worked.

Visit www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk and follow the links to 'French Impressionists.' You will be able to zoom in on this painting

Points for discussion

- Look closely at the river pictured. How does Monet use colour and texture to represent the break up of ice?
- What season do you think it is? How can you tell?
- Monet completed this work *en plein air* (outdoors). How would it feel to paint outdoors in this weather?
- What words would you use to describe this scene (in English and French)?
- Monet was famous for painting landscapes with water, fog and mist often painting the same viewpoint several times over the course of a day. How do you think this scene may have changed throughout the course of a day?

Activities

- Compare and contrast this painting with Sisley's *On the Shores of the Loing*. Students could create a similar scene for either the summer or winter seasons in the style of the French Impressionists. This could be done with a variety of media including collage to represent the texture in both paintings.
- Use the painting as inspiration for creative writing. Ask students to make notes of their ideas during group discussion in the exhibition to be worked into poems or short stories in the classroom.

Alfred Sisley (1839-1899)

On the Shores of the Loing, 1896

Oil on canvas, lent by Nationalmuseum Stockholm



Sisley's painting life was devoted to landscape. Of all the Impressionists, he was the one who remained most faithful to the style throughout his career. From the late 1880s, Sisley, like Monet, became interested in working in series. He painted many scenes in and around the small town of Moret where he lived.

This picture shows the Canal du Loing running parallel to the River Loing. The strong horizontal lines created by the riverbank and towpaths are broken up by the lines of tall poplar trees. Like Monet's work, the use of colour is limited.

Sisley was born to wealthy English parents and spent most of his life in France. He returned to London to study business when he was 18 years old, but returned to Paris to study art.

Points for discussion

- This painting is similar to Monet's work. What similarities can you see? What differences?
- What season do you think it is? How can you tell?
- This painting would have also been completed *en plein air*. What sort of day do you think it was when Sisley was painting this scene?
- If you look closely at the texture in this painting, can you spot the texture of the canvas anywhere?
- At first glance, the dominant colours appear to be blues and browns. What other colours can you see when you take a closer look?

Activities

- Compare and contrast this painting with Monet's *Ice breaking up on the Seine near Bennecourt*. Students could create a similar summer or winter scene in the style of the French Impressionists. This could be done with a variety of media including collage to represent the texture in both paintings.
- Ask students to imagine how Sisley's life would have been different had he grown up in England. What would his experiences have been? What British painters would he have known?

Georges Seurat (1859-1891)

White Houses, Ville d'Avray, 1882-83

Oil on canvas, Walker Art Gallery, purchased in 1961 with the help of The Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund



This oil sketch was painted early in Seurat's short career. Its simple composition and flattened geometric quality contrasts with a complex use of colour.

Although initially inspired by the Impressionist use of colour, Seurat developed a growing interest in scientific colour theory, particularly the use of flecks of complementary colours to create optical effects.

This is most evident here in the foliage on the right. Seurat later developed this 'divisionist'

technique more scientifically, using dots of pure colour, which became known as 'pointillism.' As a result, his work eventually lost the spontaneity of the Impressionist style.

Visit www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk and follow the links to 'French Impressionists.' You will be able to zoom in on this painting

Points for discussion

- This landscape is very different from those of Monet and Sisley. What differences can you see? What similarities?
- Think about the weather and seasons of the other two landscapes. Can you tell which season it is in Seurat's?
- The way Seurat applies his paint is unique. What effect do you think this creates?
- Look at the houses in the distance. Who do you think might live there? How do you think they used the field in the foreground of this painting? What might be behind the garden wall?
- Can you mimic the stroke Seurat would have used to achieve the texture in this painting? Would it have been delicate or rough?

Activities

- Ask students to research and find out more about Seurat's later paintings and share their ideas with classmates. This could be creating a display board or art in the same style.
- Based on ideas about who lives in the houses, what the field is used for or what might be in the walled garden, ask students to create poems, plays or short stories.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

Young Parisian Lady, about 1875

Oil on canvas, lent by Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



Renoir became well-known for his portrait studies. Here the artist uses his characteristic rapid, parallel brushstrokes and vibrant colour to depict an unknown woman. The sitter seems uninterested in the portrait being made of her, which adds to the informal look of the work.

The same model wearing the same costume appears in the painting *Young Lady Sitting in a Garden* (Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, USA). The backgrounds of the two pictures are also similar suggesting they were painted at the same time.

The Impressionists rarely used pure black pigment in their paintings and this is particularly noticeable in the two Renoirs in the exhibition.

The influence of both photography and Japanese prints is also apparent.

Points for discussion

- Who do you think this woman is? Where do you think she is? What do you think she is watching?
- What sort of clothes is she wearing? How do they differ from what we wear today?
- The composition and candid nature of photographs influenced painters like Renoir. Can you see any evidence of this influence in the painting?
- What colours does Renoir use instead of pure black to represent shadows?
- Look carefully at the brushstrokes that make up the young woman's face. Can you see the small strokes of colour Renoir has painted next to one another? What effect does this create?

Activities

- Speak to students about Parisian café culture and ask them to see this young woman as a character living at the time. What about her life would be different to modern times? Students could write stories to compare and contrast.
- Ask students to paint a partner to this picture. It could be what she is looking at, who she is speaking to, or what the rest of her dress looks like!

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

Conversation, about 1878

Oil on canvas, lent by Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



Renoir painted a number of pictures depicting couples or small groups in conversation. Despite the fact that little of their surroundings can be seen, there is a strong sense that the couple are in a café or restaurant.

Typically for his portrait groups, the figures are positioned very close to each other. The viewer is made to feel part of the intimate scene.

The sitters have been identified as Marguerite Legrand, known as Margot, a favourite model of Renoir, and the painter Frédéric Cordey.

Renoir has avoided the use of black paint in this painting, which was typical of the Impressionists. The dark tones in this work are for the most part dark blue, even the man's glasses.

Points for discussion

- Where do you think they are? What do you think they are speaking about? Can you tell how they are feeling?
- This is a good example of Impressionists using a limited colour palette. What colours make up the colour of the man's hair on the crown of his head? What colours are mixed with white in the painting to make up the lighter areas?
- What technique does Renoir use to show the texture of the plume in the woman's hat?
- What does this scene tell us about French life and culture?
- Compare this painting to *Young Parisian Lady*. How do you think Renoir's painting style has changed or developed?

Activities

- Ask students to write a short play involving the two characters in the painting and then have them stage their own 'conversation'
- Experiment with photography to try and capture the candid poses of the Impressionist paintings.

Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940)

Madame Hessel on the Sofa, about 1900

Oil on cardboard mounted on hardboard, Walker Art Gallery, purchased in 1964 with the help of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund



© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009

Vuillard, once claimed 'I don't paint portraits, I paint people in their homes.'

Lucie Hessel was a great friend of Vuillard. She was also the wife of the artist's picture dealer. Here she poses relaxed and smiling in her apartment.

The walls are adorned with paintings. Her face, though cast in shadow, captures her mood.

Vuillard's dry brushstrokes and apparent scratching down to the cardboard surface add to the physical modelling of the figure.

Vuillard, a Post-impressionist, was influenced by the Impressionists' interest in colour harmonies.

Points for discussion

- This portrait of Madame Hessel was painted in her home. What effect do you think that has had on the pose? Would this make her more comfortable?
- One of the influences of Japanese prints on the French Impressionists was the use of flat areas of colour. Can you spot areas of this painting that were influenced by this?
- Vuillard used different materials in this painting. For example he painted this picture on cardboard. Is there evidence of this anywhere in the painting?
- Picture the artist painting this picture. What do you think he and Madame Vuillard were talking about when it was painted? How did he capture her expression?
- What differences can you see between Vuillard and Renoir's painting styles?

Activities

- Take inspiration of the painting's setting. Ask students to paint or draw a portrait of someone in their house. This could be a friend or family member. Alternatively, they could write a short piece of creative writing in English or French.
- Experiment with textures and materials and create work inspired by the French Impressionists using different surfaces.

Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947)

Nude with Pink Fabric, 1905

Oil on panel, lent by Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



Like Vuillard, the Post-Impressionist artist Bonnard specialised in interior scenes. Many of them include a solitary nude figure. His wife, Marthe, often modelled for him but here the sitter is a professional model.

Bonnard carried on the Impressionists' interest in colour and in depicting the personal environment of the artist. However, he did not work directly from a subject as they did; instead he made sketches, notes and photographs before moving into the studio to paint what he could remember.

Bonnard knew many of the Impressionists and witnessed their working methods first-hand.

Points for discussion

Looking at nude artworks with students can be a challenge! To get over the giggles you can explain that artists liked to study the body. You can also remind them that this is the way they came into the world!

- This is another interior scene. Can you compare and contrast the Bonnard and Vuillard paintings? What is similar or different?
- Be brave! Why do you think artists painted nude figures?
- Bonnard did not paint directly from the subject matter as the other Impressionists did. What effect do you think this would have had on his work?
- It looks as though someone may have been sitting on the chair covered with pink fabric. Who do you think it may have been?

Activities

- Set up a still life with lots of fabric in the classroom. Practice drawing and painting the still life from different angles to capture how the Impressionists would have tried to show the same scene at different times of day.
- If your students are older, consider taking them to the local college or university, which will likely have life drawing classes.

Edgar Degas (1834-1917)

Woman Ironing, early 1890s

Oil on canvas, Walker Art Gallery, purchased in 1968 with the help of The Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund



Degas painted many images of women at work. This picture is one of a series of Parisian laundresses he began in the 1870s.

Laundresses were poorly paid and often associated with alcoholism and casual prostitution. Degas, however, was more interested in capturing a sense of their movement as they worked rather than making a social comment on the subject.

The woman is shown in profile, backlit by the window with her face in shadow. Harsh black outlines emphasise and strengthen her arms and back.

The painting's double viewpoint looks both directly at her face and down to her board. The strong outlines and cropped figure reveal how Degas' was influenced by Japanese prints and photography.

Points for discussion

- Look at the shirt the laundress is wearing. How does Degas show light and shadow?
- If you look at the iron she is holding in her hand, you'll see that it is different from ones that we use today. What other things that we use to do laundry have changed since this picture was painted in the 1890s?
- Look at the Japanese prints on display in the exhibition. Can you see any similarities or differences between them and Degas' painting?
- What do you think is through the doorway at the back of the painting?

Activities

- Ask students to research the working class in Paris in the 1890s. What sort of houses did they live in? What type of work did they do? Findings could be displayed on a board or shared with the class during a presentation. Smaller groups could research different aspects.
- Try and replicate some of the Japanese prints by using heavy black lines and flat areas of colour in their work. Look at other examples of Japanese prints on the internet to inspire students.

The influence of graphic art – Japanese prints and photography

‘Japanese art conveys the real appearance of nature by bold new methods of colouring. It cannot fail to interest inquiring artists.’ Théodore Duret in *Les Peintres Impressionistes*, 1878

A craze for Japanese art swept Paris in the 1860s. The work of artists such as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858) became popular, particularly with the Impressionists. They were inspired by the way the oriental artists organised space in a picture, such as leaving large areas blank, cutting off objects at the edge and letting figures face away from the viewer. The strong lines and bold colours were also novel.

Photography too influenced the Impressionists. They were interested in the way it captured the unusual angle or random moment. In addition, it helped them see for the first time the many positions held by a figure performing a consecutive movement such as a dancer’s arabesque or a horse running. The Impressionists were also well aware of what their art could do but early photography could not; their art could record the colour of nature.

Sculpture – Degas and Renoir

Degas and Renoir used sculpture in their later careers to study movement and form. Renoir was interested in finding ways of modelling the figure without using colour. At first he experimented with lithographs but then moved on to sculpture. Degas used sculpture to better understand movement. He often claimed that it was a way of improving his paintings. François Thiébauld-Sisson, who published his recollections of Degas and his work in 1921, described the painter as saying:

‘I modelled animals and people in wax for my own satisfaction, not to take a rest from painting or drawing, but to give more expression, more spirit, and more life to my paintings and drawings. They are exercises to get me started.’

Despite working on sculpture for twenty years, Degas only ever exhibited one work, the famous *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen Years*, currently on display at Tate Liverpool. He thought of his sculptures as private experiments and only showed them to his friends and studio visitors. Many of them commented on the energy Degas applied to this aspect of his work. They also noted that there were numerous wax and clay models falling into disrepair around his studio. Certainly, Degas was untrained as a sculptor and had little technical knowledge. It seems that the process of producing the work was more important to him than the quality of the finished piece.

Sculpture - Degas and Renoir



Edgar Degas (1834-1917)
Grande Arabesque, Third Time, about 1885-1890
Bronze, lent by Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Degas modelled a large group of works studying the Grande Arabesque. When seen together they depict the individual phases of a continuous ballet movement. It is not clear if this approach to the sculptures was intentional or accidental, but we do know that Degas was interested in how sequential action might be recorded. He greatly admired the high-speed photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, which famously recorded the running movements of horses. Above all, Degas' studies of dancers reveal a deep felt admiration for their physical discipline and elegance.



Edgar Degas (1834-1917)
Dancer Looking at the Sole of Her Right Foot, about 1895-1900
Bronze, lent by Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Degas often chose to depict awkward poses. His model Pauline described the difficulty she had balancing on her left leg, while struggling to hold her right foot with her right hand. Like many of Degas' sculptures the work seems to capture the figure mid-movement at a moment of considerable physical strain. The sculpture has a wonderful tactile surface reminiscent of the textured surfaces of the Impressionist paintings.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) *The Little Blacksmith*, cast about 1953-4 from model of 1916
Bronze, presented to the Walker Art Gallery by Morton Oliphant in 1955

Renoir had a life-long interest in sculpture, but only began sculpting in his later years when crippled by arthritis. He used assistants to execute many of his pieces and often chose figures from his paintings as a starting point to work from. Renoir originally intended *The Little Blacksmith* and a partner piece *Washerwoman*, to be a pair of large figures representing fire and water. The full-scale version of this sculpture was never made

Sculpture - Auguste Rodin

Both sculptures bequeathed to the Walker Art Gallery by James Smith in 1923

Auguste Rodin is often considered to be the father of modern sculpture. His work, like that of the Impressionist painters, experimented with new subjects and concentrated on a new realism. He was a superb technician, achieving such a sense of realism that he was sometimes accused of making casts directly from the human figure. Rather than following conventional, classical poses, his sculptures emphasised the individuality, emotion and physical attributes of the figure.

Rodin frequently used amateur models, street performers and dancers as inspiration. He encouraged them to walk around his studio in a natural way so that he could capture in clay a realistic interpretation of their movement. He was the only sculptor to exhibit with the Impressionists.



Eve, cast by 1902 from 1883 version

This sculpture depicts a recoiling Eve as she hides her face in shame. Rodin avoids idealisation, portraying her as natural and life-like. He studied his model in great detail, using light to capture every contour of her body. A much larger version of this work accompanied its pair *Adam* and his famous *Gates of Hell*. Although left unfinished, it was later cast in bronze, retaining Rodin's textured and expressive marks. It is now recognised as one of his greatest works. A number of highly finished, smaller versions like this one were subsequently made in marble and bronze.



Danaid, cast 1901-2 from an original marble of 1885

The Danaids were the fifty daughters of the ancient Greek King Danaus, forty-nine of whom were condemned to eternally fill leaking jugs with water for killing their husbands on their wedding night. Here one is portrayed slumped over in despair, her face half-buried in the ground beneath. The sculpture demonstrates Rodin's interest in naturalistic form and surface texture. His carefully selected, sharp green patina intensifies the emotional aspect of the work. With no single viewpoint, the viewer is encouraged to explore it from all angles. This was an innovative characteristic of Rodin's work.

Sculpture

Points for discussion

- Compare and contrast the sculptures of Rodin, Degas and Renoir. What is similar or different?
- The sculptures have various textures. Feel both the samples of bronze in the resource area to get a sense of what bronze feels like. Is it rough or smooth? Cold or warm?
- How does Degas achieve a sense of movement with his sculptures of dancers? How do you think they would look if there were a greater number?
- Rodin used stories and myths for these two sculptures, unlike the other French Impressionists who are on display. They were influenced by everyday life. How does this make Rodin's works different?
- Look at *Snowdrift* in the main hall by the English sculptor Edward Onslow Ford. Can you see any similarities between Ford and Rodin's sculpting style?
- There are other French sculptures in the gallery, which combine different materials. What effect does this have on the work?

Activities

- Provide students with small bits of plasticine, play dough or modelling clay. Ask one student to try and pose like a dancer for the other students. Have the class and the model think about the difficulties they encountered in both modelling and sculpting in such a short space of time.
- Research the stories of Danaids and Eve to learn more about why they may have inspired Rodin. Read about some of Rodin's later and more famous works to see how his style developed. A version of *The Kiss* is currently on display at Tate Liverpool. Other examples include *The Thinker*, *The Age of Bronze* and *The Gates of Hell*.
- Ask students to find out how bronze sculptures were made. What materials would be needed? What is the process?
- Look at the realism of Rodin's sculptures, both subject matter and methods. How did they differ from traditional approaches to sculpture?

Impressionism interpreted

Modern methods and materials

The Impressionists used unconventional painting techniques and experimented with modern materials often with striking results. Their love of painting direct from nature *en plein air* (outdoors) presented them with great technical and physical challenges, while new art materials and equipment enabled them to continue this practice with great success.

A *boîte de campagne*, a complete outdoor painting kit (one is on display in the exhibition), kept all the materials packed together as the artist travelled from one viewpoint to the next. While painting outdoors, artists also used a parasol to shield themselves and their canvas from sunlight and often wore dull-coloured clothing. This stopped strong colours, bright lights and dark shadows from affecting their paintings.

A number of colour merchants in Paris sold painters' materials and their name can often be seen imprinted on the back of Impressionist canvases. These canvases could be purchased already stretched on standard sized frames. Many Impressionist canvases are small because they had to be easily transported.

A major advance in the production of art materials was the tube of paint sold from 1840. These collapsible metal tubes improved storage life, but more importantly for the Impressionists, portability.

The Impressionist's palette

"Oil colours are found so well prepared today, that no artist would dream of preparing them himself." Karl Robert, 1878

Prior to 1840 artists had to make their own paints by grinding natural pigments and then mixing them with oil. Technological advances not only meant that paint was produced for sale in metal tubes, but also led to changes in colours. The new pigments were more vivid and used synthetic as well as natural materials.

The Impressionists tended to work with a limited colour palette. Earth tones were rarely used and many paintings have no black pigment at all. They used the principle of complementary and contrasting colours to create the vibrancy of light and colour synonymous with the Impressionist style.

Further information on the methods and techniques used by the French Impressionists is available in the resource area within the exhibition.