

THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet

La Place Clichy by Pierre-Auguste Renoir



Title:	La Place Clichy
Maker:	Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)
Medium:	Oil on canvas
Date:	1880
Dimensions:	h. 65 x w. 54 cm
Museum No:	PD.44-1986
Gallery:	5

Key Dates for Renoir

1841	Born in Limoges
1844	Family moves to Paris
1845	Begins work as a painter in porcelain factory
1862	Enters studio of Gleyre and meets Monet, Sisley and Bazille
1863	Paints with above artists in Barbizon area
1864	Moves into Sisley's studio, goes sailing on the River Seine
1865	Meets Lise Trehot – dark-haired model of more than 20 paintings until 1872
1870	Franco-Prussian War, Renoir called up, Bazille killed
1874	Takes part in first Impressionist exhibition
Late 1870s	Begins to achieve success as a portraitist
1880	meets Aline Charigot, future wife
1880	PAINTS LA PLACE CLICHY in Paris
1880-1881	Paints <i>Luncheon of the Boating Party</i>
1881-1882	Travels to Algeria, Spain and Italy – inspired to seek greater solidarity in his work but retains the luminosity of Impressionist palette
1881-1886	Paints <i>The Umbrellas</i>
1887	Completes series of nude female figures called <i>The Bathers</i>
1890s	Begins to suffer from rheumatism
1903	Moves to south of France
1912	Confined to wheelchair – continues to paint with brushes tied to hands and creates sculptures dictating to assistant who worked the clay
1919	Dies in Cagnes

Renoir is well known for his pictures of the inhabitants of Paris at play and also for his pictures of women, and in this painting we can see the two themes combined. We are familiar with his pictures of women at the theatre, relaxing in boating parties and dancing at café concerts. However it is unusual to find him painting the city itself and this painting shows the bustle of life in one of the 'grands boulevards' of the new Paris which had been designed by Baron Haussman in the 1870s. It is also unusual to find a picture of Parisian street life at ground level. Both Monet and Pissarro painted crowded scenes of Parisian streets, but usually from the viewpoint of an upper floor within a building.

The painting is striking because of the contrast between the more sharply focussed figure in the foreground and the blurred crowd scene behind. This is a device that Renoir had used in a painting of 1876-77 called *The Café-Concert* which is in the National Gallery in London, and the bluish tone of the background is also familiar from paintings of that period in Renoir's art. The figure in the foreground bears the feathery directional brushstrokes that were typical of his Impressionist paintings.

In terms of composition it has been suggested that the bold cropping of the principal figure and the steep recession of the street show the influence of Japanese ukiyo-e (images of the floating world) woodblock prints on Renoir's work, in particular those by Hokusai. An enthusiasm for all things Japanese came after the Universal Exposition of 1867 and many Japanese artefacts invaded the European market. The cropping of the focused figure in the foreground and the way it contrasts with the blurred backdrop of the street is also reminiscent of the immediacy of the (then) emerging art of photography.