

“A must-see gathering of the French master’s late works—hazy studies of the naked body that seem to radiate heat and color.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*, 2019

For Immediate Release:

**New Exhibition at the Kimbell, *Renoir: The Body, The Senses*,
Reveals the Artist’s Mastery of the Human Form**



Renoir: The Body, The Senses

October 27, 2019–January 26, 2020

FORT WORTH, Texas (October 23, 2019) *Renoir: The Body, The Senses* is the first major exhibition ever to focus on the artist’s lifelong treatment of the nude. The exhibition, debuting on the centenary of the artist’s death, provides new perspectives about Renoir’s stylistic trajectory through the lens of the singular subject. Over the course of his career, Renoir rendered bustling cityscapes, captured portraits and impressions of fashionable society, and recorded fleeting atmospheric effects upon landscape, but his overarching preoccupation was the nude—the subject that he felt would put him alongside the great artists of the past. Renoir’s

unique approach to figure painting was a vital influence on the art of his time, and his many paintings, pastels, drawings and sculptures were championed by generations that followed.

Renoir: The Body, The Senses opens at the Kimbell on October 27, 2019, following a critically acclaimed presentation at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. It is co-organized by George T. M. Shackelford, deputy director at the Kimbell, and Esther Bell, the Robert and Martha Berman Lipp Chief Curator at the Clark.

“The response to this exhibition in Massachusetts has been extraordinary, and I look forward to its installation in Fort Worth,” commented Eric M. Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum. “Our curators’ concerted scholarship and enthusiasm for this never-explored topic has resulted in an important gathering of some of the artist’s most noted masterpieces, along with works by the famed artists who were Renoir’s forebears, contemporaries and followers. These are among the most prized possessions in the national and international collections they come from, and I am grateful to all our lenders for their generous contributions. I am especially grateful to the Clark Art Institute for their ongoing partnership and collaboration.”



Featuring approximately 60 paintings, drawings, pastels and sculptures by Renoir as well as works by his predecessors, contemporaries and followers, the exhibition’s roster is exceptional. Highlights include five paintings from the Musée d’Orsay and Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris: *Boy with a Cat*, 1868; *Study: Torso, Effect of Sun*, c. 1876; the full-length *Reclining Nude* and *Large Nude on Cushions*, 1906 and 1907; and *The Bathers*, 1918–19. These join paintings and sculpture from such institutions as the National Gallery, London, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Dallas Museum of Art, as well as from the Clark’s renowned collection of the artist’s work, to survey the breadth of Renoir’s career. This exhibition redefines Renoir as a brilliant, radical and influential artist of the modern age, reconsidering him as a constantly evolving artist who participated in myriad movements, including Realism, Impressionism and Modernism.

Renoir: The Body, The Senses seeks to place Renoir’s preoccupation with the nude in a rich historical context. “We decided to look at Renoir both across the span of his lifetime and against the background of history,” said George Shackelford. “By showing Renoir’s works alongside those of artists as diverse as Boucher, Degas and Picasso, we’re hoping to demonstrate the ways in which his achievements grow out of the past, react to his present and exert a profound influence on the future. We think these juxtapositions will surprise and delight exhibition visitors.”

“Our exhibition will survey Renoir’s long career through the lens of the single subject that defines his legacy,” said Esther Bell. “It’s the subject that most compellingly demonstrates how truly radical—and so often brilliant—he was.”

EARLY INFLUENCES

Renoir grew up just steps away from the Louvre Museum and was deeply inspired by the grand tradition of art history he encountered there—particularly the great colorists Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640), François Boucher (French, 1703–1770) and Eugène Delacroix (French, 1798–1863). After gaining permission to make copies of works in the Louvre’s galleries, Renoir skillfully replicated Rubens’s monumental Marie de’ Medici cycle of 1622–25 at a much smaller scale. *Copy after “The Council of the Gods”* (1861, The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo) helped Renoir to internalize the poses of the nude deities as perfect types. Paintings such as Boucher’s *Pan and Syrinx* (1759, The National Gallery, London) and Delacroix’s *Andromeda* (1852, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) exemplify the lush palettes and command of idealized anatomy that would have a lasting impact on Renoir’s own artistic practice. Renoir particularly admired Boucher’s *Diana Leaving Her Bath* (1742, Musée du Louvre, Paris), referring to it as “. . . the first painting that grabbed me, and I have continued to love it all my life, as one does his first love.” Renoir’s appreciation for Boucher’s *Diana* is evident in *Little Blue Nude* (c. 1878–79, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo), in which the sitter’s pose directly recalls that of the Rococo goddess.

RENOIR AND REALISM

In the studio of Swiss painter Charles Gleyre (1806–1874), Renoir learned to draw from both plaster casts and live models, focusing his concentration on the body as a subject of continuing interest. The artist’s earliest paintings from the 1860s reveal a debt to this formal training, as well as to the challenges to the artistic establishment posed by Realists such as Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877). Renoir was determined to succeed within the French academic system, where the goal was to have one’s works accepted at the Paris Salon—the public exhibition to which entrance was determined by a jury. The Salon was populated with large-scale figure paintings—typically setting the nude within a historical or mythological context. Such works were considered to be the most elevated within the academy’s hierarchy of genres.

Like Courbet, Renoir understood the importance of exhibiting a monumental nude at the Salon as a means of earning the type of critical acclaim that could successfully launch his career.

His *Bather with a Griffon Dog—Lise on the Bank of the Seine* (1870, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand), featuring his preferred model of the time, Lise Tréhot, was accepted for exhibition in 1870. Renoir’s nude bather recalls such realist masterworks as Gustave Courbet’s *Bather Sleeping by a Brook* (c. 1845, Detroit Institute of Arts) or *The Repose* by Camille Corot (French, 1796–1870; 1860, reworked 1865–70, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Corcoran Collection).

IMPRESSIONIST FIGURE PAINTING

Renoir was a central figure in the Impressionist circle—a group of artists who sought to challenge the conservatism of the Salon and who vowed to stage their own public exhibitions. Renoir submitted works to the first three of these—in 1874, 1876 and 1877—but sent only one nude, *Study. Torso of a Woman in the Sunlight*. The second Impressionist exhibition of 1876 featured this experimental painting, in which Renoir depicts a woman in a shaded, verdant landscape. The vibrant composition represents a stylistic breakthrough in Renoir’s treatment of the subject, striking a balance between tradition and modernity, between academic painting and avant-garde innovation. While some critics praised the work as “a superbly colored study of a nude” and “the work of a true colorist,” others subjected it to scorn. Albert Wolff, a noted writer of the time, venomously wrote: “Would someone kindly explain to M. Renoir that a woman’s torso is not a mass of decomposing flesh with the green and purplish blotches that indicate a state of complete putrefaction in a corpse?” Such divergent critical debate would follow Renoir throughout his career.

At the height of the Impressionist movement, Renoir produced several half-dressed and nude figure paintings in which he strove to capture the interplay of light on skin. Perhaps more than any of his other contemporaries, Renoir believed the nude could be adapted to meet the Impressionists’ call for experimentation with color and light. *Blonde Braiding Her Hair* (1886, Dallas Museum of Art) is one of Renoir’s crowning achievements of the 1880s, a period marked by his great stylistic maturation. With her face turned completely away, the enigmatic figure draws the viewer into the abstracted landscape.

Alongside Renoir, Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917) and Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906) were the greatest painters of the nude figure within the Impressionist circle, though each would interpret the subject with a unique approach. Degas was committed to Naturalism, and his concern for the body’s pose and gesture permeate his practice—notably in *Woman Brushing her Hair* (c. 1884, The Kreeger Museum, Washington, D.C.), a piquant complement to *Blonde Braiding Her Hair*. Cézanne, on the other hand, was preoccupied by the geometric volumes created by his nude figures, as demonstrated by his *Three Bathers* (1879–82, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris), which once belonged to Matisse.

Like Renoir, Degas and Cézanne understood that through the depiction of the nude, their work could be considered alongside that of the most highly regarded artists of the past. Degas demonstrates his mastery of composition in *After the Bath, Three Nude Women* (c. 1895, private collection) and in the highly worked pastel *The Bathers* (1895–1900, Art Institute of Chicago), a complex and enigmatic work showing nude women in an indeterminate landscape, referencing the art of the great masters, from Titian to Poussin to Ingres. While Cézanne’s bathing scenes were solemn and interested in geometric abstraction, Renoir’s compositions enjoyed a more sybaritic mood. Referencing Arcadian landscapes infused with gaiety and frolic, works like *Bathers Playing with a Crab* (1897, Cleveland Museum of Art) stand in contrast to Cézanne’s aggressive *The Battle of Love* (c. 1880, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)—a painting

once owned by Renoir—underscoring their varying treatments of the time-honored subject.

CLASSICAL IMPRESSIONISM

By the early 1880s, Renoir felt he had, in his words, “wrung Impressionism dry.” This stylistic “crisis”—his attempt to reconcile rigorous lines and structure with the vibrancy of his Impressionist palette—resulted in a period of Classical Impressionism in which he mixed luminous brushstrokes and coloristic modeling with well-defined, studied forms. He was particularly inspired by an 1881 trip to Italy during which he admired the works of Renaissance artists.

Renoir recalled working on *Blonde Bather* (1881, Clark Art Institute) “in full sunlight” on a boat in the Bay of Naples. Aline Charigot, his future wife, accompanied him on his Italian journey and was the model for this painting. *Blonde Bather* dates to a period of transition in Renoir’s practice as he struggled to balance Impressionism with more classical models from the history of art, particularly the frescoes by Raphael that he had recently encountered at the Villa Farnesina. In place of the variegated color patches of his earlier nudes, here the figure stands out boldly from the background with her body clearly demarcated from the darker, cooler colors behind her.

Renoir’s work on *The Great Bathers* (Philadelphia Museum of Art), an ambitious painting executed between 1884 and 1887 and first exhibited at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris, stands as a seeming contradiction to popular beliefs about the Impressionists’ rapid and *en plein air* practice. Renoir created at least 20 preparatory drawings and figure studies in various formats and media for the painting, many of which were ambitious and large in scale. Although *The Great Bathers* cannot travel due to conditions of its bequest, a group of three related compositional drawings included in the exhibition attest to the painting’s importance. In *Bathers (Study for The Great Bathers)* (c. 1884–87, Morgan Library and Museum), he established the nudes’ contours with red chalk then applied white chalk to emphasize their radiant skin. A sheet of the rightmost bather in the painting, *Splashing Figure (Study for The Great Bathers)* (c. 1884–87, Art Institute of Chicago), depicts a more finished stage, when Renoir carefully blended still more colored pigments to create a voluminous single form. A version of this same figure on tracing paper (private collection) was likely used to transfer the design to the canvas. *The Great Bathers* project was Renoir’s attempt to rival the grand nudes of Rubens or Boucher.

THE LATE YEARS

Over the course of the 1890s, Renoir’s artistic style took a distinct turn towards a kind of delicate monumentality that was at once romantic in its appeal to the senses and radical in its willful deformation of convention. His bodies, growing ever larger, also became softer and more glistening—an effect he regularly achieved through his application of diluted paint. In *Seated Bather* (1914, Art Institute of Chicago), he used thin layers of color throughout the composition, the paint appearing almost translucent. The pigments that compose the body were blended when still liquid, and the resulting surface demonstrates a variety of texture and tone. Late in life, Renoir also engaged with sculpture, creating, with the help of a sculptor friend, Richard

Guino, such examples as *Venus Victorious* (1914, Clark Art Institute), giving his figure the proportions of a Greco-Roman goddess, with narrow shoulders and swelling hips. The weight and volume that he had long sought to achieve in paint had now materialized in three dimensions.

Between 1903 and 1907, Renoir completed three large-scale paintings in horizontal format that depict the reclining nude. Two of these works, *Large Nude on Cushions* (1907, Musée d'Orsay) and *Reclining Female Nude* (1906, Musée de l'Orangerie) are included in the exhibition. The monumentality of these works demonstrates the artist's attempt to align himself with the mythological paintings of the old masters, such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, while calling to mind the more recent history of the type in the art of Ingres, Courbet, Manet and hosts of Salon practitioners.

Completed in the final year of Renoir's life, *The Bathers* (1918–19, Musée d'Orsay) is a manifesto painting—a summation of the artist's decades-long preoccupation with the subject of the nude. In recognition of the painting's emblematic status, Renoir's sons presented the work as a gift to the French state following their father's death. With oversized, rippling figures placed in a pulsating and iridescent landscape, *The Bathers* is exemplary of Renoir's late work.

This period remains the most stylistically controversial of Renoir's career. Though his molten, often abstract figures caused heated debate in his day (and still do today), they were also revered and coveted by collectors and a group of avant-garde artists who looked to Renoir as the father of Modernism. This group included Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), who, upon returning from Italy in April 1917, entered a "Renoirian crisis," during which he attempted to meet the artist, purchase his work and copy his paintings. Among the paintings Picasso eventually acquired are Renoir's *Bather Seated in a Landscape, Called Eurydice* (1902–4, Musée national Picasso, Paris) and *Bust of a Model* (1916, Musée national Picasso, Paris), both of which are included in the exhibition.

THE LEGACY

Picasso thought of himself as an heir to Renoir's genius, which is evident in his bold treatment of *Nude Combing Her Hair* (Kimbell Art Museum)—one of numerous paintings of the same subject he executed in 1906. Inspired by and reacting to the curving forms of Renoir's bathers, Picasso used his own flat planes of color to create an abstracted sculptural body. This painting looks forward to Cubism, but the figure's exaggerated proportions and its placement in an indeterminate pictorial space reference Renoir, who, like Picasso, was simultaneously a revolutionary and a traditionalist.

At the turn of the 20th century, the nude was Pierre Bonnard's (French, 1867–1947) preferred subject. Among his contemporaries, Bonnard admired Renoir's treatment of the nude above all others. The artists frequented one another's homes and studios from the end of the 1890s until Renoir's death in 1919. In Bonnard's *Reclining Nude* (1927, private collection), the model lies on

a bright chartreuse carpet, her neck disappears into her shoulders and her face is shown in profile. Her powerful form and the manner in which the sculptural body fills the picture plane call to mind Renoir's late paintings.

Renoir was a mentor to many of the modern artists who painted on the French Riviera in the first decades of the 20th century, including not only Bonnard, but also Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954). Matisse befriended the aging Renoir over numerous visits to the artist's home at Les Collettes, and he continued to travel there after Renoir's death. Matisse painted the languid, rose-colored, abstracted *Nude with Crossed Legs* (1936, Nahmad Collection) after touring the Barnes Foundation in 1930 and 1933, where he encountered the largest collection of Renoir's works—particularly of the late period—in North America. Matisse once exclaimed of Renoir, "his nudes . . . the loveliest nudes ever painted: no one has done better—no one."

CATALOGUE

A companion catalogue (Yale University Press) features essays from leading scholars of 19th-century painting. In addition to curators Esther Bell and George T. M. Shackelford, catalogue authors include Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum; Nicole Myers, the Lillian and James H. Clark Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Dallas Museum of Art; Martha Lucy, deputy director of research, interpretation and education at the Barnes Foundation; and Sylvie Patry, deputy director of the Musée d'Orsay. A lively discussion of Renoir's work between artist Lisa Yuskavage and Alison de Lima Greene, the Isabel Brown Wilson Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, explores the depiction of the body in relation to 21st-century feminist dialogue.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

Renoir: The Body, The Senses is organized by the Kimbell Art Museum and the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. This exhibition is co-organized by Esther Bell, Martha and Robert Lipp Chief Curator at the Clark, and George T. M. Shackelford, deputy director at the Kimbell. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support is provided by grants from the Texas Commission on the Arts and the Fort Worth Tourism Public Improvement District. Promotional support is provided by American Airlines, PaperCity and NBC5.

SPECIAL EXHIBITION ADMISSION

Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$16 for seniors and students, \$14 for children ages 6–11 and free for children under 6. Admission is half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays. Tickets are available at the Museum Box Office and on the museum's website, kimbellart.org.

REDUCED SPECIAL EXHIBITION ADMISSION

Tickets are \$14 for K–12 teachers and active-duty military and half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays. Tickets are \$3 for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients and all family members present with a valid Snap Card. Additional discounts do not apply. Reduced admission tickets are available with valid ID exclusively at the Museum Box Office.

KIMBELL PERMANENT COLLECTION ADMISSION

Admission is always free to view the Kimbell's collection.

ABOUT THE KIMBELL

The Kimbell Art Museum, owned and operated by the Kimbell Art Foundation, is internationally renowned for both its collections and its architecture. The Kimbell's collections range in period from antiquity to the 20th century and include European masterpieces by artists such as Fra Angelico, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Poussin, Velázquez, Monet, Picasso and Matisse; important collections of Egyptian and classical antiquities; and the art of Asia, Africa and the Ancient Americas.

The museum's 1972 building, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn, is widely regarded as one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the modern era. A second building, designed by world-renowned Italian architect Renzo Piano, opened in 2013 and now provides space for special exhibitions, dedicated classrooms and a 289-seat auditorium with excellent acoustics for music.

The museum is open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Tuesdays–Thursdays and Saturdays; noon–8 p.m. Fridays; and noon–5 p.m. Sundays. Closed Mondays. For more information, visit kimbellart.org/visit.

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Image captions (from top to bottom):

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Bathers*, 1918–19. Oil on canvas, 43 5/16 x 63 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo by Hervé Lewandowski © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Blonde Bather*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 25 3/4 in. The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1926