



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

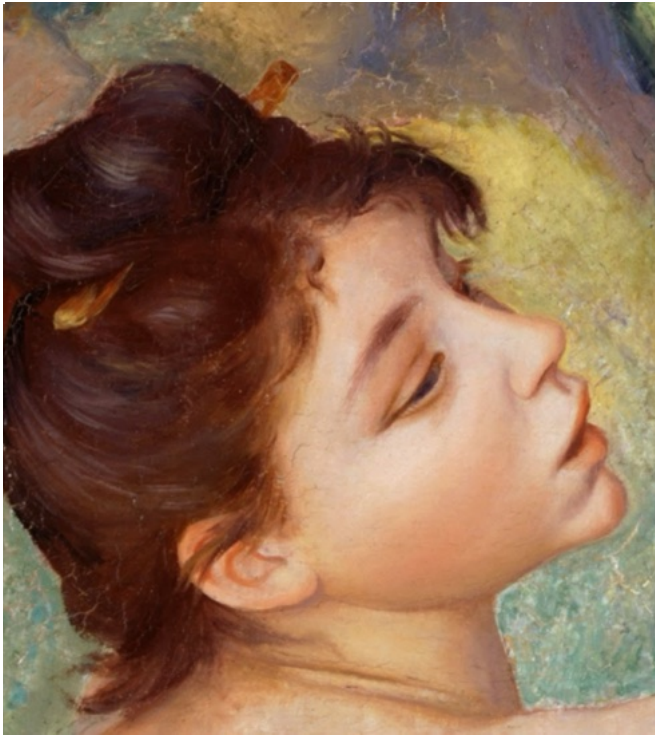
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27-06 AUGUSTE RENOIR

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir
The Large Bathers,
detail, 1887,
Philadelphia Museum
of Art

- This is Section 27 on Impressionism and this is talk 6 on Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). In 2015 there was a demonstration outside the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The protesters were complaining about Renoir, not because he was anti-semitic or misogynistic both well documented. They were complaining about his inability to paint. I hope I can help to address that point which is why I am showing this close-up of one of his paintings we shall examine later.

AUGUSTE RENOIR BRIEF LIFE AND CAREER

- **Early Life:** Born in Limoges, France, in 1841, Renoir moved with his family to Paris at a young age. He began his artistic career at age 13 as an apprentice at a porcelain factory, where he learned to decorate china with floral designs, gaining early experience with colour.
- **Impressionism:** In the early 1860s, he enrolled in art school in Paris and met fellow students Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, and Frédéric Bazille. Together, they formed the core of the Impressionist movement, focusing on capturing the light and movement of modern life using broken brushstrokes and pure colours. Renoir participated in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 and had his first one-man exhibition in 1879.
- **Evolution of Style:** After a trip to Italy in 1881, where he admired the works of Renaissance masters like Raphael, his style changed. He moved away from the more spontaneous Impressionist technique towards a more disciplined, linear, and classical approach, focusing on form and outline in his figure paintings.
- **Later Years:** Despite being severely crippled by arthritis in his final years, he continued painting, sometimes with a brush tied to his wrists, until his death in

1919. Shortly before his death, he visited the Louvre to see his portrait of Madame Georges Charpentier hanging on the wall, a sign of his immense success.

RENOIR'S FAMILY

- Pierre-Auguste Renoir was married to **Aline Victorine Charigot** (1859–1915), who was **twenty years his junior** and had been a model for several of his paintings, most famously the woman on the left playing with a dog in ***Luncheon of the Boating Party***. They married in 1890, though their first son was born in 1885.
- They had three sons, all of whom went on to have notable careers in the arts:
 - **Pierre Renoir** (1885–1952): The eldest son became a respected **stage and film actor**. He had a son named Claude Renoir who became a renowned cinematographer.
 - **Jean Renoir** (1894–1979): The second son became a **highly acclaimed and influential filmmaker** and director, known for classics such as *La Grande Illusion*. He won a Lifetime Achievement Academy Award in 1975 and wrote a biography of his father called *Renoir, My Father*.
 - **Claude Renoir** (1901–1969): The youngest son became a **ceramic artist**, an artistic pursuit his father encouraged in his later years. He was often painted by his father in his youth and was nicknamed "Coco".
- Renoir's family life provided him with many subjects for his paintings, capturing intimate, daily scenes of his wife, children, and their nurse, Aline's cousin **Gabrielle Renard**. Gabrielle also served as one of his most frequent models in his later years.
- The family lived in Paris for a time before moving to the warmer climate of **Cagnes-sur-Mer in southern France** in 1907 due to Renoir's worsening **rheumatoid arthritis**. Aline died in 1915, reportedly weakened by the stress and severe injuries sustained by Pierre and Jean during World War I. Renoir survived her by four years, continuing to paint until shortly before his death in 1919.

FIVE LITTLE KNOWN FACTS

- He was considered a more **talented singer** than painter as a boy. As a

child, Renoir had a beautiful singing voice and took lessons with the composer Charles Gounod, the choirmaster at the Church of St Roch. Gounod even suggested a scholarship for formal music education, but due to his family's financial situation, Renoir had to leave school at 13 and begin work at a porcelain factory instead.

- He was nearly thrown into the Seine River as a **suspected spy**. During the radical period of the Paris Commune in 1871, Renoir was sketching by the banks of the Seine when he was accused by Communard officials of being a spy. He was nearly thrown into the river, but a leader of the Commune, Raoul Rigault, recognized Renoir as a man who had saved his life on an earlier occasion and intervened to spare him.
- He painted a **portrait of Richard Wagner in just 35 minutes**. Renoir was known for his speed and efficiency as a painter, especially when compared to artists who spent months on a single work. When he met the famous composer Richard Wagner in Italy in 1882, he painted his portrait in a mere 35 minutes.
- **He didn't use black or brown for shadows**. Renoir and Monet, while working side-by-side early in their careers, developed a unique color theory: shadows are not just black or brown, but rather the reflected colors of the objects surrounding them (an effect known as diffuse reflection). This use of colorful shadows became a major characteristic of the Impressionist style.
- **He had a brush strapped to his hand** in his final years. In his later life, Renoir suffered from severe rheumatoid arthritis which eventually confined him to a wheelchair and severely limited the use of his hands and shoulder. His passion for painting was so strong that he continued working, sometimes by having a paintbrush placed and wrapped with bandages in his clenched, deformed hand to prevent skin irritation.

QUOTES BY RENOIR

- "Art is about emotion; if art needs to be explained it is no longer art,"
- "The most important element in a picture cannot be defined."
- "I have no rules and no methods... no secrets."
- "One can thus state, without fear of being wrong, that every truly artistic production has been conceived and executed according to the principle of irregularity."
- "To my mind, a picture should be something pleasant, cheerful, and pretty,

yes pretty! There are too many unpleasant things in life as it is without creating still more of them."

- Despite his fame, he maintained a deep humility, reportedly saying on his deathbed, "I am just now learning to paint".

RENOIR'S ANTI-SEMITISM

- Many artists and intellectuals took sides: Monet, Pissarro, and Signac defended Dreyfus; Degas, Cézanne (cautiously), and Renoir did not.
- In conversation, he dismissed Zola's famous "J'Accuse...!" (1898) as "idiocy," saying Zola should "stick to writing novels."
- His son Jean Renoir later recalled that his father had a "visceral dislike of Jews" and of intellectuals who, he believed, undermined traditional French values.
- Renoir is known to have referred disparagingly to Jewish art dealers such as Paul Durand-Ruel and Ambroise Vollard, despite depending on them professionally.

RENOIR'S ATTITUDE TO WOMEN

- Renoir's letters and conversations contain numerous comments that today we would regard as overtly misogynistic:
- He said women had "no talent" and that "painting is not for women."
- He dismissed women artists—he told Berthe Morisot she painted "too well for a woman."
- He believed women's purpose was domestic and sexual, declaring that "a woman should stay at home and make children."
- He rejected what he saw as intellectual or emancipated women, calling them "monsters."
- These views were not exceptional for his time but were particularly entrenched in Renoir, who saw femininity as a fixed, decorative ideal rather than an autonomous identity.

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Self-Portrait*, 1876, 73.3 x 57.3 cm, Harvard Art Museums, Boston

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Self-Portrait*, 1876, 73.3 x 57.3 cm, Harvard Art Museums, Boston

- This self-portrait was painted in 1876 when he was 35, the year of the Second Impressionist Exhibition and three years before his first one-man exhibition. He was beginning to achieve critical and commercial success after years of struggle. The picture therefore marks a transitional moment—between youthful bohemianism and the professional assurance of a recognised painter.
- Renoir's expression is calm and unpretentious. He shows himself not as a romantic genius but as a professional craftsman. There is an air of modest confidence—the look of a man secure in his vocation yet still close to the world of the petit-bourgeois Parisian milieu from which he came.
- He was born in Limoges, France, in 1841, to a poor tailor and the family moved to Paris three years later to try to improve the family's prospects. He was naturally good at drawing as a child but better at singing. However, he had to discontinue his music lessons and leave school at the age of thirteen to earn money as an apprenticeship in a porcelain factory. He learned to decorate china with floral designs, gaining early experience with colour. He frequently sought refuge in the Louvre. The factory where he worked recognised his talent but in 1858 the factory switched to mechanical reproduction and he was out of a job.
- In 1862, he began studying art under the famous artist Charles Gleyre in Paris. There he met Alfred Sisley, Frédéric Bazille, and Claude Monet. He was very poor — at times, during the 1860s, he did not even have enough money to

buy paint.

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Lise with a Parasol*, 1867, 184 × 115 cm, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Lise with a Parasol*, 1867, 184 × 115 cm, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany

- This was his first success. *Lise with a Parasol* was accepted by the Salon of 1868. It was regarded as safe as it was seen to be following in the style of Gustave Courbet although several critics ridiculed Renoir for hiding her face in shadow.
- Renoir was desperate for money and tried to sell it for 100 francs but no one wanted to buy it. Then Edgar Degas praised Renoir's work to Théodore Duret "**one of the earliest and most ardent defender of the Impressionists**". Duret sought out Renoir who told him he couldn't pay the rent and was desperate. Duret bought it on the spot for 1,200 francs despite the fact that the canvas was rolled up on the floor as Renoir had sold the stretcher bar to raise money. "Nobody wanted the canvas" he wrote later.
- It shows Lise Tréhot (1848-1922, pronounced "tray-oh"), his model for more than twenty paintings. And his lover at the time.

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *La Grenouillère*, 1869, 66.5 x 81 cm, National Museum, Stockholm

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *La Grenouillère*, 1869, 66.5 x 81 cm, National Museum, Stockholm

- *La Grenouillère* (pronounced "grun-we-air") captures the fashionable weekend resort near Bougival known as "the Frog Pond," a floating café and bathing platform on the Seine, accessible by train from Paris. The name had a double meaning: "grenouille" meant both "frog" and, in Parisian slang, a carefree, vivacious, coquettish, somewhat risqué young woman, often of modest. As Renoir's son later joked, the place attracted "actresses, society women, and unattached girls—'frogs' of easy virtue but good humour." The little island seen in the painting was nicknamed "Camembert" or "the flowerpot," a favourite spot for mingling before crossing the gangplank to the barge café.[1][7][8]
- In the summer of 1869, Renoir and Claude Monet, both penniless, worked side by side painting this cheerful scene. Renoir was supported by his parents; Monet's family survived on credit. The restaurant's owner, Monsieur Fournaise, often accepted a canvas in exchange for a meal, allowing the two artists to stay and paint. They competed amiably to capture the fleeting reflections of water and light, painting so rapidly that, according to anecdote, Monet sometimes ran out of paint mid-session and sketched until he could borrow more.[7][10]
- (CLICK) It is painted with quick, broken brushstrokes and bright, unmixed pigments. He focuses on people—figures chatting and boating in dappled sunlight. Monet's was more concerned with the play of light across the river. Renoir's fresh, "unfinished" style scandalised conservative critics when shown later, who thought it looked like a study rather than a finished painting. Yet it

became a defining image of early Impressionism, celebrating modern leisure and life by the Seine. So this style of loose brushstrokes was a carefully considered technique that aimed to capture the vivacity, energy and spontaneity of the people and the play of sunlight. [2][8][7] (CLICK)

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *La Loge (The Theatre Box)*, 1874, 80 x 63.5 cm, Courtauld Gallery, London

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *La Loge (The Theatre Box)*, 1874, 80 x 63.5 cm, Courtauld Gallery, London

- I should mention briefly the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. Renoir was conscripted but his rheumatism and fragile lungs meant his service was short and he returned to civilian life after the war. It was a very hard time and he painted little and never painted any military subjects.
- A few years after the war life was returning to normal. Here in *La Loge, The Theatre Box* we see a fashionable couple attending the Paris theatre at a time when going out was as much about being seen as about seeing the performance. The woman, Nini Lopez — Renoir's favourite model of the early 1870s, known in Montmartre by the teasing nickname "Fish-face" — sits in the front, lowering her opera glasses to display herself to the audience. Behind her, Renoir's brother Edmond, a journalist and art critic, peers across the auditorium through his own opera glasses. This play of gazes — she seen, he seeing — amused observers and symbolised the gender conventions of the day. Theatre boxes had become a stage for the bourgeois spectacle of display and flirtation.
- Renoir painted it in his studio rather than in an actual theatre and it was carefully staged to appear spontaneous. Nini's boldly striped gown was painted in luminous whites and deep blues mixed with black. A technical tour de force — a "symphony in black and white," as one critic later called it. Close inspection reveals quick, confident brushstrokes that dissolve into tactile illusions: the shimmer of silk, the whiteness of ermine, the sparkle of pearls.
- The dress, a **robe à la polonaise**, reflects a fashion that was based on an

imagined revival of 18th century costume, a reimagining of pre-Revolutionary elegance.

- The painting was exhibited at the first Impressionist Exhibition in 1874 at Nadar's studio, and it divided critics. Some praised Renoir's **colour and observation**; others thought Nini **vulgar or overly painted** — more a courtesan than a lady. The painting nonetheless **helped establish Renoir's reputation** and became a defining symbol of modern Parisian life, bringing together fashion, elegance, and social ambition.

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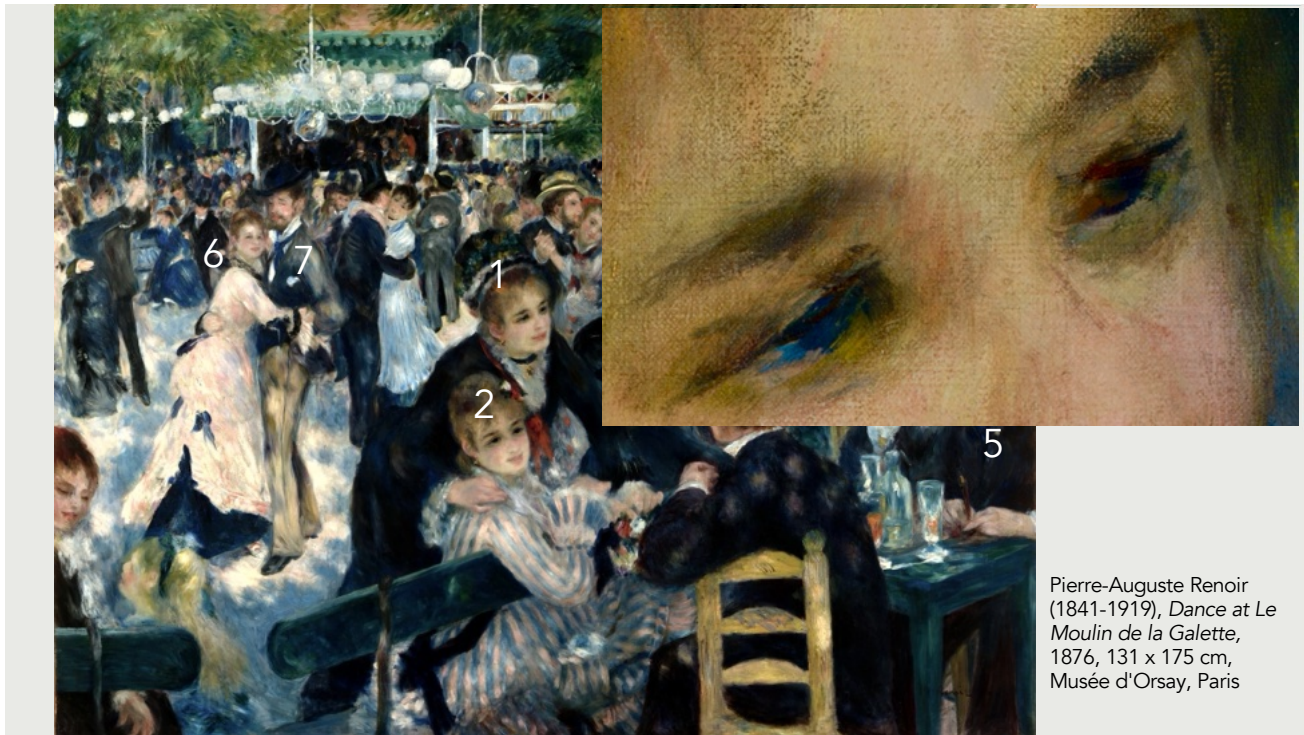
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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette*, 1876, 131 x 175 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette*, 1876, 131 x 175 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette* shows a lively Sunday afternoon dance at the Moulin de la Galette in Montmartre, where Paris's working people and bohemians gathered **to eat galettes, drink wine, and dance** under the acacia trees.
- Renoir painted it during the summer of 1876 when he was living at 12 rue Cortot (pronounced "core-tow") and sharing a garden studio with painter Frédéric Cordey. His friend Georges Rivière described how Renoir carried this huge canvas through the narrow streets and painted it partly on site, helped by friends who modelled for the figures and occasionally fetched wine to keep their spirits up.[1][2][3][5]
- (CLICK) Many faces in the crowd are identifiable. The three men at the right are Georges Rivière [5] and the painters Pierre-Franc Lamy [3] and Norbert Goeneutte [4] (pronounced "nor-bair gwah-nuht") . The two young women beside them are the Samary sisters — Estelle [2] and her more famous sibling Jeanne [1], Renoir's regular model and an actress. In the central background, the exuberant dancer Margot [6] (Marguerite Legrand), Renoir's lover, turns with the Cuban painter Pedro Vidal de Solares y Cardenas [7] (Spanish, pronounced "Don PEH-droh vee-DAHL deh so-LAH-res ee kar-DEH-nahs"); two years later Renoir nursed Margot through typhoid until her death in 1878.[2][5][1] (CLICK)
- He painted the scene with short, fragmented brushstrokes and brilliant flickers

of pink, blue, and gold light filtering through trees, it captured the shifting luminosity of a carefree urban crowd.

- (CLICK) I am here showing you how he captured the eyes of Jeanne Samary with a few deft flicks of the brush and a mixture of different pigments. There is no room for error and overworking the paint surface would destroy the effect of spontaneity.(CLICK)
- Critics at the 1877 Impressionist Exhibition dismissed it as **blurred and unfinished**, yet others admired its **atmosphere and vitality**. Purchased by Renoir's friend Gustave Caillebotte (pronounced "kah-yuh-boht") and later bequeathed to the French state, it came to be seen as the quintessential vision of Parisian leisure during the Impressionist age.[3][5][1]

NOTES

The key people present are:

1. Jeanne Samary a French actress who performed at the Comédie-Française, Paris' premiere theatre. She also served as a muse and model for Renoir, appearing in *Le déjeuner des canotiers*, or *Luncheon of the Boating Party*.
 2. Estelle Samary her sister.
 3. Pierre-Franc Lamy a French painter and engraver who exhibited his work in the third Impressionist exhibition.
 4. Norbert Goeneutte (pronounced "nor-bair gwah-nuht") a French artist known for his illustrations. Goeneutte also features in Renoir's *La balançoire*, or "The Swing," a piece set in the moulin's gardens.
 5. Georges Rivière an art critic. Rivière founded the newspaper, *L'Impressionniste* ("The Impressionist"), and penned *Renoir et ses amis* ("Renoir and His Friends"), a book about the artist's sitters.
 6. Marguerite Legrand a model known professionally as Margot.
 7. Don Pedro Vidal de Solares y Cardenas (Spanish, pronounced "Don PEH-droh vee-DAHL deh so-LAH-res ee kar-DEH-nahs")
- Renoir painted a smaller version now in private ownership but it is not known which was the original or which was displayed at the Salon of 1877. The smaller version was sold at Sotheby's in 1990 for \$78 million to a collector who said he would burn it when he died. Luckily he ran into financial problems and the sold it to an unknown private collector.
 - The outdoor dance hall was named after the windmill ("moulin") on the site

which milled flour to make galettes, a type of brown bread.

- Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and, of course, Pierre-Auguste Renoir frequented the dance hall.

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Girl with a Watering Can*, 1876, 61 x 50.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

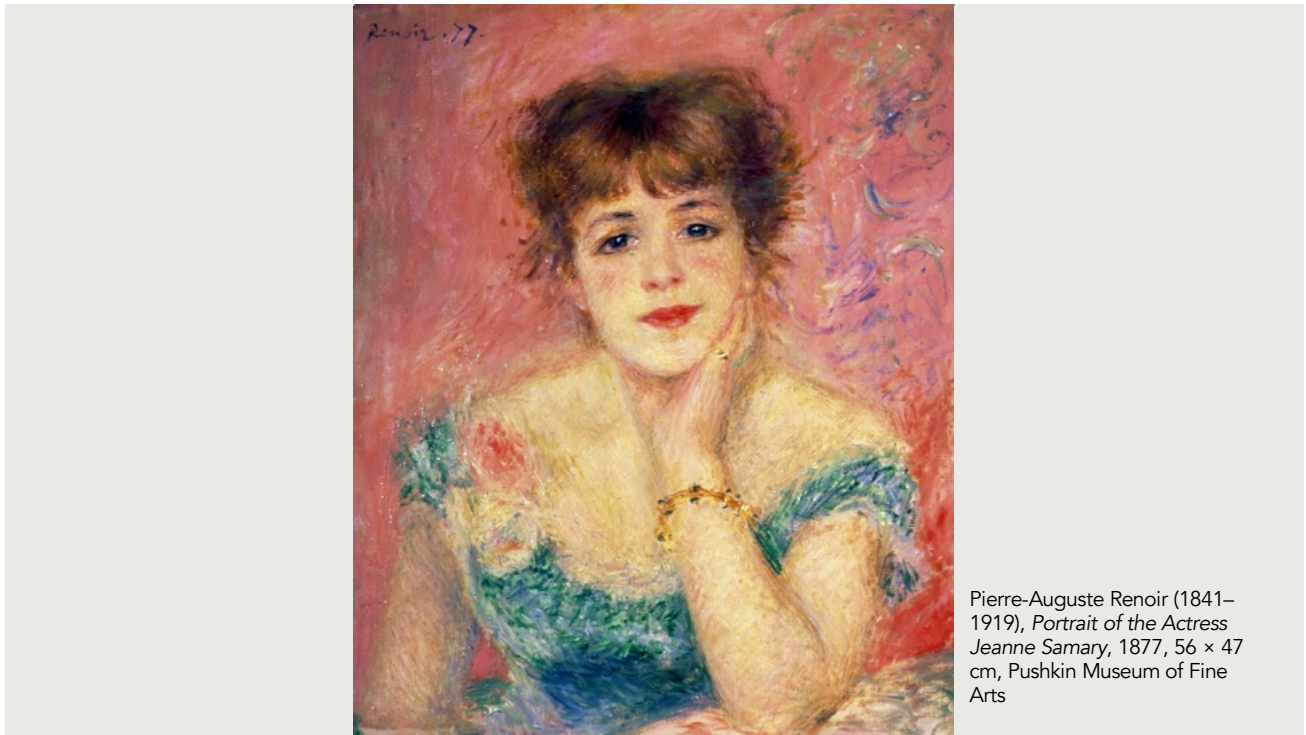
Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Girl with a Watering Can*, 1876, 61 x 50.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

- *Girl with a Watering Can* is an 1876 painting in his **mature style**. It shows a young girl, possibly a girl from the neighbourhood or **Mademoiselle Leclerc**, the daughter of a family friend, in a blue dress holding a watering can, possibly in **Claude Monet's garden in Argenteuil**. Renoir did stay with Monet at Argenteuil around 1874-76. The painting is a classic example of Impressionism, known for its vibrant colours, focus on light, and fresh, candid portrayal of childhood.
- Renoir painted this work during a fruitful period when he was focusing on **women and children**, using warm light and prismatic colours. His **brushwork is more controlled**, with delicate strokes emphasising the **softness of the child's face** and creating a gentle radiance that seems to envelop her. The garden setting and the girl's **slightly shy pose** reflect a harmony between youth and nature.
- The painting was **well-received for its charm and grace**, though some critics sometimes found it **too sentimental**. Anecdotes about the painting often mention how viewers are drawn to the warmth and light that seem to emanate from the canvas, capturing an ephemeral moment of childhood wonder and freshness. The work is part of the National Gallery's permanent collection and continues to be admired as a quintessential Impressionist portrayal of youth.[1][2][5][8]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Portrait of the Actress Jeanne Samary*, 1877, 56 × 47 cm, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

- This is Jeanne Samary (1857–1890) who we saw just now in *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette*. She was one of the most celebrated actresses of the Comédie-Française in Paris's theatrical world during the late 19th century. She came from a prominent theatrical family; her maternal grandmother Suzanne Brohan and two aunts were famous actresses. She trained at the Paris Conservatoire, debuting at the Comédie-Française in 1874 and quickly became known for her charm and wit, especially in comic roles.
- Renoir and Samary met in salon circles connected to the influential publisher **Georges Charpentier and his wife Marguerite**, who were **key patrons** promoting Renoir's career. Over a few years, Renoir **painted Samary multiple times**, with this 1877 portrait among the **most famous**. Although Renoir was **not an admirer of acting**, he was **fond of Samary personally and artistically**. The two likely had a close relationship during the period, with rumours suggesting a brief romance. Sadly, she **died of tuberculosis** three years later in 1890 aged just thirty-four.
- Critically, the portrait was met with **mixed reception**; some praised its **charm and energy**, while others criticized Renoir's **loose brushwork**. Contemporary **critics often struggled with Renoir's impressionistic style** that captured **fleeting light rather than precise detail**. Yet, Renoir regarded these portraits as some of his **most satisfying work**. Her early death adds poignancy to the many portraits Renoir painted of her, making these paintings a lasting tributes

to her talent and beauty.[1][2][4]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children*, 1878, 153 x 189 cm, Petit Palais, Paris

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children*, 1878, 153 x 189 cm, Petit Palais, Paris

- *Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children* was a **commissioned portrait** set in a **chic, Parisian townhouse** showing off the **elegant home and dress** of this well-connected Parisian family.
- Marguerite Charpentier was a **prominent Parisian salon hostess** and **early patron of the Impressionists**, seated with her children **Georgette and Paul** in the intimate setting of their elegant rue de Grenelle townhouse. At **age three**, **Paul's locks are still uncut** and, in keeping with current fashion, he is **dressed identically** to his sister Georgette, perched on the family dog.
- Georges Charpentier, Marguerite's husband, was a **wealthy publisher** known for supporting naturalist writers such as **Émile Zola** and for his discerning art collecting, including **early acquisitions of Renoir** and other Impressionists.
- Renoir's relationship with the Charpentier family was **crucial in establishing his reputation** and financial stability. They hosted renowned Friday salons attended by the artistic and literary elite, including **Renoir, Monet, and Sisley**. The Charpentiers commissioned several portraits from Renoir between 1876 and 1879, with this large, detailed painting marking a highlight. Renoir captured Marguerite's poise and warmth, dressing her in a stylish black lace gown, while her children wear matching blue outfits seated beside the family's Newfoundland dog, Porthos.
- The painting was **exhibited prominently at the 1879 Salon**, where it received favourable reviews and **significantly boosted Renoir's status**. Marguerite

Charpentier's influence helped ensure the work was hung in a place of honour, facilitating **further commissions** for Renoir. Anecdotally, Renoir himself acknowledged the Charpentiers' support as pivotal to his success, stating he owed much to Madame Charpentier's patronage. The work remains a testament to the intertwining of art, society, and patronage in late 19th-century Paris.[1][2][6]

NOTES

Madame Georges Charpentier (Margu  rite-Louise Lemonnier, 1848–1904) and her children, Georgette-Berthe (1872–1945) and Paul-  mile-Charles (1875–1895)

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919),
The Umbrellas, 1881-1886, 180.3 x
 114.9 cm, National Gallery, London

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *The Umbrellas*, 1881-1886, 180.3 x 114.9 cm, National Gallery, London

- *The Umbrellas* is a **large, complex and ambitious painting** capturing a bustling Parisian street scene under a canopy of umbrellas during a **spring shower**. The work depicts a **busy crowd** with richly dressed women, children, and men under open umbrellas, capturing **everyday urban life**. Renoir's relationship with the people in the painting reflected his close ties to Parisian society, as many figures represent types from various social classes. The mother and her two daughters on the right **exemplify bourgeois fashion** of the 1880s, while the **milliner's assistant** on the left, modelled by **Renoir's lover Suzanne Valadon**, represents the working class.
- The painting was executed in **two phases**: the first in 1881, in Renoir's signature Impressionist style with **loose brushwork** and bright tones; the second around 1885, when Renoir's art **shifted toward a more classical, linear style** influenced by Ingres and Cézanne. This shift is **especially notable** in the figure of the **young woman on the left**, whose style and clothing were altered to depict a more modest social status.
- Critically, *The Umbrellas* was initially **difficult to sell**, perhaps due to its **mixture of styles** and social classes, but it is **now celebrated** for its **dynamic composition and social complexity**. Renoir did not exhibit it immediately and it was **sold to dealer Paul Durand-Ruel** before entering the British collection through Sir Hugh Lane's bequest. It is alternately displayed in London and Dublin reflecting its importance across national boundaries.[1][2][8]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, 1881, 130.2 x 175.6 cm, Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.

- *Luncheon of the Boating Party* is a **vibrant celebration of friendship, leisure, and social life** among Renoir's **circle of friends and acquaintances**. The painting shows a group relaxing on the **balcony of the Maison Fournaise**, a popular riverside restaurant along the Seine in **Chatou**. Many of the figures are identifiable: **Aline Charigot**, Renoir's future wife, is seated in the foreground playing with her **small dog**; **Gustave Caillebotte**, fellow painter and patron, **sits** looking across the table; **Jeanne Samary**, the famous actress and Renoir's frequent model, appears **flirting with friends**; the restaurant owner's daughter **Alphonsine Fournaise leans on the balcony** railing; and journalist **Adrien Maggiolo** (pronounced "maj-ah-low") and painter **Paul Lhote** (pronounced "lot") chat nearby.
- Renoir had close personal and professional relationships with many of the people depicted, blending his social circle and artistic contacts. The painting reflects the **joyful summer atmosphere** and the Parisian joie de vivre while capturing nuanced relationships, such as Caillebotte's apparent admiration for Aline Charigot.
- Critically, the **painting was highly praised** when shown at the 1882 Impressionist Exhibition. It was **commissioned by art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel** and later acquired by industrialist Duncan Phillips, who considered it the collection's crown jewel.
- (CLICK) This is Jeanne Samary, we see Renoir's combination of loose and

controlled brushwork, subtle skin tones and detailed individual characterisation made the painting an Impressionist masterpiece, much loved for its warmth and social commentary.[1][2][3][8] (CLICK)

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919),
Two Sisters (On the Terrace), 1881,
 100 x 80 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Two Sisters (On the Terrace)*, 1881, 100 x 80 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

- *Two Sisters (On the Terrace)* shows two young women set against a softly painted terrace landscape in **Chatou**, a Parisian suburb where Renoir often worked. Although titled as sisters, **the models were not related**. The elder girl, often identified as **Jeanne Darlot**, a young actress aged 18 at the time, sits poised in the centre, wearing a blue flannel dress and vivid red hat. The younger girl, with a flowery hat, contrasts her sister's contemplative expression with lively innocence.
- Renoir worked on the painting during a **period of transition around 1881**, when his style blended Impressionism's characteristic light and colour effects with a move toward more classical, structured compositions.
- (CLICK) The technique contrasts smooth modelling in the faces and figures with looser brush strokes in the background and here in the bouquet of flowers the older sister is wearing. This makes the sisters appear almost as solid, life-size presences set against a dreamlike garden scene. The basket of wool in the foreground subtly evokes the artist's palette, symbolising his use of colour and brushwork.(CLICK)
- The painting was purchased by dealer Paul Durand-Ruel shortly after completion and exhibited at the seventh Impressionist exhibition in 1882, quickly gaining acclaim as a significant work of the movement. Renoir's ability to imbue the scene with warmth, charm, and vibrancy helped establish this painting as a beloved masterpiece, respected for its balance of spontaneity and

refinement. Anecdotes from the time reflect admiration for its beauty and harmonious depiction of youthful femininity.[1][2][5][6]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Dance in the Country*, 1883, 180 x 90 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Dance in the Country*, 1883, 180 x 90 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *Dance in the Country* shows the artist's friend **Paul Lhôte** and **Renoir's future wife, Aline Charigot**, dancing under a chestnut tree. It was commissioned by art dealer **Paul Durand-Ruel** as a companion to two other dancing paintings, *Dance in the City* and *Dance at Bougival*.
- The work marks a shift in Renoir's technique, with **more precise drawing and a simplified palette**, partly influenced by his **1881 trip to Italy** and his viewing of **Renaissance masters like Raphael**. The bright and cheerful atmosphere is also a key element.
- He had met and fallen in love with Aline Charigot, who was 18 years younger than him and worked as a seamstress. They had already started their family before the marriage; their first son, Pierre Renoir, was born in 1885. Aline, a dressmaker from a farming family, became Renoir's primary model during the early 1880s and appeared in many of his key works. They married in 1890 and had three children
 - Pierre Renoir (1885–1952) – became a notable actor.
 - Jean Renoir (1894–1979) – became a celebrated film director.
 - Claude Renoir (1901–1969) – became a cinematographer.
- Renoir's **finances were improving** due to growing recognition and patronage, notably from dealers like Paul Durand-Ruel. Artistically, Renoir was moving away from radical Impressionism toward a style that integrated classical drafting

influenced by a recent trip to Italy where he studied Raphael. This is reflected in the painting's more precise contours and controlled palette, though it maintains the warmth and liveliness of his earlier works.

- Renoir was particularly fond of the subject, his future wife Aline, and that the couple's joyous movement alongside the discarded hat in the foreground hinted at the artist's interest in capturing **candid, playful moments**. *Dance in the Country* is **part of a trio** of complementary works exploring the theme of dance in urban and rural settings.[1][4][8]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *The Large Bathers*, 1887, 180 x 120 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *The Large Bathers*, 1887, 180 x 120 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

- *The Large Bathers* is a **monumental oil painting** in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, depicting a scene of nude women by the water. The work is known for **Renoir's attempt to reconcile the structure and rigour of Old Masters like Raphael and Ingres with the Impressionist style**, and he **spent three years creating it**, even making **numerous preparatory drawings** for it.
- It marked a **pivotal moment** in his career. Created during a period when Renoir sought to move beyond Impressionism toward a **more classical and structured style**, the painting depicts a group of nude women bathing in a lush landscape. The models included two of his favourites: his future wife, **Aline Charigot**, posing as the seated **blonde woman**, and **Suzanne Valadon**, a **fellow artist and mother of Maurice Utrillo**.
- Renoir's personal circumstances at this time were **marked by increasing success** but also artistic transition. After he married Aline in 1890 he settled into family life, he was focused on grander compositions, inspired partly by his 1881-82 trip to Italy, where he studied Renaissance frescoes. Through his life Renoir was known to have numerous flirtations and affairs, particularly with women in artistic and social circles. However, after Aline became his lifelong companion and especially after their marriage, he seems to have been largely faithful, though anecdotes suggest he retained a playful, flirtatious personality.
- (CLICK) If we examine the work closely we see the cultural modelling of the

faces and figures, especially the two large bathers in the foreground, rendered with precise lines and smooth surfaces, contrasting with the more loosely applied Impressionist brushstrokes seen in the background. Note the smooth brushwork of the face, the brushstrokes can be seen in the hair but the skin is smoothly graduated in tones and hues. (CLICK)

- Despite his hopes that the work would astonish viewers, *The Large Bathers* received **mixed reviews**. Many critics found the combination of **Rococo sensuality and Impressionist technique jarring**, while some admired its beauty and innovative style. **Monet praised Renoir's achievement**, and the **painting influenced Paul Cézanne's** later series of bathing scenes. The work remains one of **Renoir's major masterpieces**, encapsulating his artistic evolution and enduring fascination with the female form.[1][3][6]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919),
Woman with a Hat, 1891, National
Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Woman with a Hat*, 1891, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

- *Woman with a Hat* marks the beginning of what is often called Renoir's "**pearl period**," characterised by a **soft touch style with luminous colour blending**. This elegant portrait captures a woman wearing a large hat, rendered with delicate, shimmering brushstrokes where colours are subtly mixed with white to produce a **radiant surface effect**.
- The identity of the woman is generally not specifically documented, suggesting she was likely a model or acquaintance rather than a prominent figure in Renoir's life. However, the painting reflects Renoir's renewed artistic vision **after his "Ingresque" or "dry period"** of the 1880s, in which he **briefly distanced himself from Impressionism to revisit classical forms**. By 1891, Renoir embraced a **synthesis of both traditions**, producing works like this with tender realism married to vibrant impressionistic colour.
- Created in Paris during a time of **increasing recognition** and improving personal circumstances, Renoir was establishing a mature style that would **define his last decades**. Around this time, he was **married to Aline Charigot** and beginning to **solidify his social standing and financial security**.
- Critically, *Woman with a Hat* received **positive attention for its refined technique** and glowing surface, embodying a new, pearly softness that influenced many of Renoir's subsequent portraits. Critics described the painting's intimate charm and radiant use of colour, qualities that continue to captivate.[1][3][8]

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Young Girls at the Piano*, 1892, 116 x 90 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Young Girls at the Piano*, 1892, 116 x 90 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *Young Girls at the Piano* represents a **tender and refined moment of bourgeois domesticity**. The painting depicts two young girls engaged in music study, one seated at the piano and playing while the other stands beside her, pointing to sheet music. Their elegant dresses and the comfortable interior setting convey a sense of middle-class privilege and leisure.
- Renoir was **captivated by the theme of childhood** and domestic scenes throughout his career and especially in his **later years** when he favoured more classical form and technique. Painted in Paris during a period when Renoir was **moving away from pure Impressionism**, the work combines his mastery of light and colour with a renewed emphasis on line and structure. The brushstrokes are soft and fluid, lending warmth and spontaneity, while the composition is carefully balanced.
- The painting was **commissioned by the French government** for the Musée du Luxembourg, marking one of the **first official recognitions of Impressionism**. Renoir produced several versions of the composition, each exploring subtle variations in pose and setting, showing his dedication to perfecting the theme. The work reflects Renoir's personal circumstances at a time of maturing style, domestic stability with his wife Aline, and growing artistic acclaim.
- Critically, *Young Girls at the Piano* was celebrated for its **lyricism and grace**. The painting continues to be admired for its depiction of youthful innocence, the joys of music, and Renoir's ability to harmonise detail and impression in a

domestic scene full of life.[1][2][5][6]

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Pierre-Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *The Bathers*, 1918–19, 110 × 160 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre-Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *The Bathers*, 1918–19, 110 × 160 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *The Bathers* was painted during the **last years of his life** while he was **severely afflicted by rheumatoid arthritis**. Starting around age 50, that is in the **1890s**, Renoir's arthritis **gradually deformed his hands, fingers, and shoulders**. By his seventies, he was **wheelchair-bound**, with stiff, gnarled fingers that made holding a brush and palette **extremely painful**. Despite his intense physical suffering, Renoir **continued to paint**, adapting his technique and employing larger brushes to ease his movements. sometimes he had a paintbrush placed and **wrapped with bandages** in his clenched, deformed hand to prevent skin irritation. His assistants helped prepare canvases and mix paints, while special easels allowed him to work seated with minimal arm movement.
- In his last twenty years, Renoir was **revered not only for his artistic genius** but also for his extraordinary perseverance in the face of debilitating illness. His late works—rich in colour and vibrancy—display a **radiant warmth**, with Henri Matisse famously saying, "**The pain passes, but the beauty endures.**"
- One of the models of this painting is **Andrée Hessling**, who became the first wife of Renoir's son, Jean. The natural setting displayed in the painting was the large garden of the house he bought in 1907 in Cagnes-sur-Mer (pronounced "kahn-sur-mehr") on the French Riviera between Nice and Antibes. The location offered sunlight, warm climate, and natural beauty, which were easier on his health and allowed him to continue painting even in extreme physical pain.

Today, the house is a museum and cultural site known as the Renoir Museum (Musée Renoir).

- In the painting, Renoir removed any reference to the contemporary world and showed "a timeless nature". The theme of the bather is predominant in the final season of Renoir's paintings: the women portrayed by the painter are free and uninhibited. These bathers are "melted in the nature and the forms merge with the trees, flowers and the shades of red water".[2]
- The painting received criticism because of "**the enormousness of the legs and arms, the weakness of flesh, and the pinkish colour of the models**" Mary Cassatt had a critical opinion of Renoir's later work, famously stating in a 1913 letter that he was painting "**horrific pictures of enormously fat red women with very small heads**". I believe his life's work should not be judged on what he painted when he suffered from **rheumatoid arthritis**.
- Shortly before his death, he visited the Louvre to see his portrait of Madame Georges Charpentier hanging on the wall, a sign of his immense success.
[1][2][4][6]
- He died in December 1919 from complications related to his arthritis, including pneumonia and gangrene. His funeral was attended by many leading lights from the art world, mourning the passing of one of Impressionism's masters.

NOTES

The house was called Les Colletes (pronounced "lay koh-LET").

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27-06 AUGUSTE RENOIR

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Pierre-Auguste
Renoir], *La Loge*
1874, Courtauld
Gallery, London

- We have seen his skill as a painter, his innovation, and his indomitable spirit. It is said that on the day he died, he had spent several hours painting a still life, telling his assistant he felt he was “**beginning to know something about painting.**”
- His legacy endures as a testament to artistic passion overcoming physical adversity, with over 4,000 paintings reflecting his life-long joy in colour, light, and humanity.
- He helped define a new visual language and was one of the few Impressionists to be widely appreciated during his lifetime, eventually seeing his paintings displayed alongside the Old Masters. He recognised and grappled with Impressionism's limitations, integrating elements of classical structure and outline, influencing later modern movements such as Fauvism and Cubism. He portrayed the beauty in everyday moments and the dignity of ordinary people, especially women and children.
- That brings me to the end and thank you once again for your time and attention.



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