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Renoir: Impressionism and Full-Length Painting

Colin B. Bailey

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Throughout his long working life, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) produced large-format portraits and subject pictures. From the mid-1870s to the mid-1880s—the decade of Impressionism—his vertical, grand-scale canvases were among the artist's most daring and ambitious presentations of contemporary life and fashion. Today they rank among the masterpieces of Impressionism. This stunning book offers fresh insights into Renoir's complex ambitions as a young artist, when he submitted works to both the avant-garde impressionist exhibitions and the official Salon. While painting in the new impressionist style, Renoir remained committed to the full-length format, which was eschewed by most of his fellow impressionists as too traditional. This format afforded Renoir the opportunity to devote himself to the heroic painting of everyday life, and also to linger on the finest details of his figures' fashionable costumes and accessories. Ten iconic canvases display the rich variety of this artist's painterly technique. They reveal the sheer virtuosity of his brushwork in creating silk, lace, mink, and taffeta for shimmering ball gowns, sumptuous furs, chic Parisian day dresses, and glamorous theatrical costumes. These paintings capture the faces and fashions of Renoir's Paris.

Extensively illustrated, the book draws upon contemporary criticism, literature, and archival documents to explore the motivation behind Renoir's full-length figure paintings, and technical studies of the canvases shed new light on the artist's working methods.

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