

## Visitor information

# Renoir unplugged

6th March to 4th September 2022

What do Impressionist paintings look like without their frames? Is it ever acceptable to display them like this? What impression do they create in different frames – silver, black, or contemporary? *Renoir unplugged* sees the Museum Langmatt attempt a daring and exceptional exhibition: pictures by Pierre-Auguste Renoir – the largest group of Impressionist works in the collection – will be presented without their frames or in new frames, some with their previous frames for purposes of comparison. The result is surprising: the pictures create a completely different impression depending on the frame – if any – used.

The public often ask us about the frames of the Impressionist artworks. The frames, most of which are baroque, do not always meet with approval. These questions have prompted the Museum Langmatt to demonstrate the unexpected degree to which frames affect how we perceive pictures. In the case of French Impressionist artworks, this is contributed to by habits of viewing formed over 120 to 150 years of these pictures being presented almost exclusively in golden frames from the baroque era. This is an astonishing paradox given that the Impressionists are considered the pioneers of modernism. Baroque, gleaming gold opulence and the sensual colours of Impressionist artworks have become inextricably linked.

The exhibition begins in the corridor, with the empty frame of Renoir's *La Lecture* (The Reading). A look into exhibition room 1 offers the first, surprising opportunity for comparison: in this room, the picture can be seen in a new, silver frame. *The Harbour Entrance of La Rochelle* is even more transformed; it is displayed on the opposite wall in a narrow white frame. The radical alteration in the impression created by the pictures is almost unbelievable.

In the central exhibition space, *The Boat* can be seen in its previous frame. Its close proximity to the unframed *Anemones and Roses* suddenly makes it appear disconcertingly massive. *Anemones and Roses*, however, appears positively frail. If one looks more closely, one has a unique opportunity to see the original nails with which the canvas was secured

to the stretcher frame – as with all the other unframed Renoirs. Without frames, the prized masterpieces step off their “pedestals”, appearing vulnerable and surprisingly grounded. We see the pictures the way the artists saw them when they took the canvases from the easel. This exhibition thus playfully disrupts our habits of seeing and questions our mechanisms for ascribing value, derived from these conventions for 150 years, that unconsciously influence – not to say cement – our perception.

In the display case in Exhibition Room 3, a selection of archive materials illuminate the origins of the frames: letters attest to the efforts of the prominent Paris art dealer Ambroise Vollard to provide opulent frames, in line with the tastes of the times. However, Sidney and Jenny Brown would also sometimes give their personal attention to the subject of frames, as is shown by a number of invoices. Comparisons with historic views of the Langmatt's interior also show that the Browns would have some of their artworks reframed years after acquiring them. For instance, in the background of a photo of the “Ars Rediviva” ensemble, we see the painting *Anemones and Roses* in a classicist frame that now adorns *The Braid*. Once again, there is the possibility for direct comparison: this important portrait is hanging in the light-blue exhibition space on the left.

A digital element offers a refreshing new way of accessing *Renoir unplugged*: an augmented reality app allows visitors to use the museum's own tablets to try out different frames on certain selected pictures or compare them with reference works from all over the world. A painting from the Barnes Foundation (USA) reveals the identity of the model from *The Reading*: the woman depicted here is Andrée Catherine Hessling, who later married Renoir's son, Jean. There is also a direct connection to an artwork from the Metropolitan Museum in New York: it shows the father of “Paul Meunier”, whose portrait is included in the Langmatt collection. The rental equipment in the corridor is at your disposal, and can be used free of charge.

# LANGMATT

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