

Pierre-auguste renoir

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir was a French painter, printmaker, and sculptor. He is one of the most prominent founders and leading exponents of the Impressionist style of painting from the late 1860s. “ Renoir’s art is a celebration of the beauty of women and nature; his images both of modern Parisian life and of idealized figures in a timeless landscape suggest an enchanted and radiant world”. (Langdon) In 1878, Renoir broke away from the Impressionist exhibitions to return to the official Salon, where he achieved great success for his work, *Madame Charpentier and her Children*. Renoir is the modern painter of femininity. In *Madame Charpentier and Her Children*, he reflects an expression of beauty that is not easy to understand at first glance. He has gone beneath the surface of life and depicts in the characters some “ unexpected, elemental and ineradicable instincts which link us, in spite of all our sophistication, with wild nature. In *Madame Charpentier and Her Children*, we can see that motherhood is something more than respectable. (Fry) Renoir adds an element of interest in human beings which distinguishes him from the rest of his Impressionist practitioners. Renoir was greatly influenced by Monet in such works as *La Grenouillere* (1869). His use of large broken brushstrokes and delicately applied flecks of paint suggest atmosphere, and shows his fascination of the true effect and importance of light on the surface of things without restraint. “ Renoir is not like the majority, but a revolutionary. He is not analytical, scientific and destructive.

He is a purely poetical and constructive genius. He has followed a certain inspiration with naive directness and simplicity of spirit. ” (Fry) Renoir sympathizes with the human element between himself and his models which

is visible in *Madame Charpentier and Her Children*. Madame Charpentier was Renoir's most influential friend and commissioner. She was the wife of Georges Charpentier, who was a famous publisher of the works of the best young authors of the time. It is through Madame Charpentier that Renoir was able to meet all the important figures in art, literature, music, and politics. Renoir's son, Jean, wrote " Her salon was celebrated and deservedly so, for she was indeed a great lady and had succeeded in reviving the atmosphere of the famous salons of the past. Every one of note in the literary world attended those Friday gatherings. Charpentier was definitely on the side of the young painters, even before they came to be known as Impressionists. " (Renoir) The scale of *Madame Charpentier and Her Children* is grande, measuring at 157. 7 X 190. 2 centimeters.

One historian claimed that Renoir worked, " slowly and patiently... and required a great many sittings. " (Bailey) In this painting, the thirty-year-old, Madame Charpentier is seated on a sofa covered in floral tapestry, the train of her black dress spread out full length to one side with traditionally designed white lace. Her corsage is decorated by a brooch in the form of a daisy or chrysanthemum, and in her left hand she clasps a small golden ornamental ladies case or bag. She rests a protective arm above the head of her three-year-old son, Paul Emile Charles.

Like his eldest sister, Georgette Berthe, he wears the same blue and white frilly dress, which was in accordance with the fashion at the time. " Her daughter Georgette sits atop Porthos, the indulgent Newfoundland that accompanied the family on its lengthy holidays. " (Bailey) Colin B. Bailey

explicitly describes the background of Madame Charpentier and Her Children in his book, Renoir's Portraits: Impressions of an Age; " Renoir filled in the background with a Japanese screen and an arrangement of fruit and flowers on a small table. The room itself appears to be spacious, but somewhat furnished for the time.

In the background to the right, in front of the curtains through which one enters and beyond which can be glimpsed the well-polished floorboards of an adjoining salon, is placed a bamboo tea table and a single bamboo-and-wicker chair. The table is set with a bowl of grapes and a service of desert wineglasses that rest on a red lacquer tray. On the red walls behind Madame Charpentier and her children hang what would appear to be three sections of a dismembered Japanese screen, possibly of the Rimpa School, although only the central panel is shown in its entirety and the panes have vertical lines running through them and wavy edges. Reading from the left, we see a pair of peacocks looking down from a branch onto water below; the middle section (less easy to make out) shows branches and foliage; and on the right a splendid crane, with white plumage, swoops to the ground. Next to the screen, attached to a panel of red lacquer at right angles to the wall, is a hanging scroll that shows a single figure in bright and green robes. " Renoir places the characters in an upward right-diagonal position with Madame Charpentier in the center of the canvas.

There is a deep sense of humanity seen as her daughter looks lovingly at Madame Charpentier. The children have a soft innocence, sweetness and vulnerability in their faces, further alluding that Madame Charpentier is their

protector and keeper. " In this group portrait, the chic of the sitter's dress and the fashionable furnishings are secondary to the romance of mother and children " at home". An essentially bourgeois, Parisian romance, admittedly, but so well crafted by Renoir's " poetical and constructive genius"". Bailey)

Renoir uses his creative technique handling the vivid colors of paint by taking the Impressionist approach and uses large but soft brushstrokes. There are no definite and precise lines separating one color or object from the next. The somewhat sketchiness of the painting allows the colors to become even more vibrant. The setting has been said to have taken place in a smoking area within the Charpentier house, therefore Renoir concentrated on the effects of the artificial light and shadow on the models and background to make the scene appear more genuine to the viewer.

Renoir shared with his son these words, " " Madame Charpentier reminded me of my early love, the women Fragonard painted. The little girls had charming dimples in their cheeks. " (Renoir) He deliberately set out to paint this family portrait in order to please the conventional taste of the Salon, but without sacrificing or lowering his standards for the Impressionist style. The Charpentier family was well known by the time of Renoir's commission for the large-scale portrait. Their dress and Madame Charpentier's jewelry, hairstyle, and the background automatically suggest that the Charpentiers are a modern and wealthy family.

The bamboo table, wicker chair, and Japanese screens suggest modernity as well, but not in the material sense of the word. Modernity here can be meant to be the passage of one place to another, one city to another, one culture to

another. Renoir must have studied, been familiar, or at least been exposed to Japanese art in order to paint it with such exact quality. The loose brush-stroke also suggest movement. The colors are not flat, but alive, as seen by looking at the dog's hairs, the folds of the train of Mme Charpentier's dress, and the tussled-look hair of the children.

This new visuality into humanity was a great success. With her influence, Madame Charpentier forced the jury of the Salon to admit Renoir's piece, after a decade of being excluded from acceptance because of his rejected Impressionist style. " The picture was a great success, and Mme Charpentier used all her influence to force the jury to admit it into the Salon of 1879. After an absence of almost a decade Renoir was again included in the Salon. " (Fry) It was cleverly placed in an open and favorably position in the Salon, across from only one other major artwork. The richness of Renoir's palette, the liveliness of his touch, the freshness of luminosity of the canvas, the harmoniousness of the composition was all mentioned approvingly. Both Burty and Chesneau analyzed Renoir's manner of modeling through color and light, without the assistance of lines. " (Benidite) Madame Charpentier and Her Children may be one of Renoir's finest if not his best work complimenting both contemporary and Impressionist tastes and style. As with other Impressionist artwork of the time, Madame Charpentier and Her Children was paid with a rather feeble commission.

The Charpentier's claimed to have paid a mere 1, 500 francs for the portrait. However, art historian Anne Distel writes, " Renoir mentioned an even lower figure to Vollard, " around 1, 000 francs. " The Metropolitan Museum of Art

acquired the painting thirty years later for 84, 000 francs. Still today, Renoir's work touches the hearts of its viewers and calls for a more sensual and human view towards Impressionist styled work. The idea of motherhood and family is something all people can relate to and appreciate, besides being wrapped up with the alluring techniques, and Renoir's use of color and effect of light on the canvas.