

RENOIR



AU BORD DE L'EAU, 1885





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PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841 – 1919)
AU BORD DE L'EAU, 1885

Signed lower right *Renoir*

oil on canvas

54.6 x 65.7 cm. (21 ¹/₂ x 25 ⁴/₅ in.)

PROVENANCE

Ambroise Vollard, Paris, deposited on 26 Nov. 1920.

Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris (inv. no. 11.871, photo no. 9303), bought from Vollard on 21 Dec. 1920.

Frank and Alice Osborn, Dobbs Ferry, New York, acquired from the above on 21 Dec. 1920 (for \$10,000).

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, bequeathed by Alice Osborn in 1966.

Private Collection, U.S.A., acquired from the above through William Beadleston, Inc., New York, in 1993..

LITERATURE

A. Vollard, *Tableaux, Pastels et Dessins de Pierre-Auguste Renoir*, Paris, 1918, vol. II, p. 83, no. 1134.

F. Daulte, *Auguste Renoir*, Munich, 1973, p. 79.

E. Fezzi, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Renoir, période impressionniste 1869 – 1883*, Paris, 1985 (trans. from Italian, Milan, 1972), p. 12, no. 550.

S. Monneret, *Renoir*, trans. E. Read, London, 1990, p. 150, no. 11.

G.-P. and M. Dauberville, *Renoir*, Paris, 2007, vol. I, p. 175 (illus. no. 103, dated 1874).

EXHIBITED

Paris, Durand-Ruel, *Tableaux, pastels et dessins par Renoir*, 29 Nov. – 18 Dec. 1920, no. 56.

Nagoya, City Art Museum, *Renoir Retrospective*, 15 Oct. – 11 Dec. 1988, no. 29; this exhibition later travelled to Hiroshima, Museum of Art, 17 Dec. – 12 Feb. 1989; and Nara, Prefectural Museum of Art, 18 Feb. – 9 April 1989.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, *The Great Bathers*, 9 Sept. – 25 Nov. 1990.

Sapporo, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, *European Painting and Sculpture from the Philadelphia Museum of Art: Towards the Twentieth Century*, 18 July – 23 Aug. 1992, no. 27; this exhibition later travelled to Kofu, Museum of Art, 5 Sept. – 4 Oct. 1992; and Nagoya, Museum of Art, 10 Oct. – 23 Nov. 1992.

Tübingen, Kunsthalle, *Renoir*, 20 Jan. – 27 May 1996, no. 51.



INTRODUCTION

Au Bord de l'Eau is a striking example of Renoir's mastery of technique in the mid-1880s as his style evolved from the Impressionist facture of the 1870s. With its rich and luxuriant brushwork, the picture reflects his admiration for the Italian Masters and the artists of the French Rococo. *Au Bord de l'Eau* was initially owned by Renoir's two greatest French dealers and supporters, Ambroise Vollard and Paul Durand-Ruel. Subsequently purchased by the American artist Frank Osborn, it was then bequeathed by his widow to The Philadelphia Museum of Art where it was on display for 25 years before being de-accessioned in 1990, when funds were sought by the Museum for acquisitions. It now comes to the market for the first time since the current owner purchased it in 1993.





EN PLEIN AIR: RENOIR AND MONET ALONG THE BANKS OF THE SEINE

In *Au Bord de l'Eau*, Renoir explores a classic Impressionist *plein air* scene, of the type he had first developed while painting alongside Monet in the environs of Paris in the 1870s. A day in the country – boating, eating, walking, reading, or just sitting – was a profoundly social experience for Renoir and his companions. Their ideal was to paint ‘before nature’, but they felt no need to seek out a landscape untainted by any human presence; rather, they simply wished to paint the easily accessible, bucolic rural landscapes around Paris and along the banks of the Seine. Observing the leisure scenes of the Parisian bourgeoisie, Monet and Renoir painted together at La Grenouillère in 1869, a resort located on the Seine near Bougival and often described as ‘Trouville-sur-Seine’ (fig. 1). In 1872 Monet settled in Argenteuil, a bustling town some 15 kilometres from Paris which hosted a great variety



FIG. 1: Claude Monet,
Sailboats on the Seine, Argenteuil,
1874, oil on canvas, 54 x 65.4
cm., Fine Arts Museum of San
Francisco



FIG. 2: Renoir, *Oarsmen at Chatou*, 1879, 81.3 x 100.3 cm., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

of events including sailing, steamboat races, water jousts and recreational boating (fig. 2). While in residence here until 1876, Monet played host to the leading Impressionist painters, including Renoir as well as Manet and Sisley. Together, painting boating scenes *en plein air*, Renoir and Monet engaged in what Colin Bailey describes as ‘bold experiments in colour and painterly touch [...] at a vital and highly creative moment in the development of [Impressionism]’ (C. Bailey, in *Renoir Landscapes: 1865 – 1883*, exh. cat., National Gallery, London, 2007, p. 142). The present work, conceived in 1885, is a powerful evocation of the tranquil rural surroundings of Paris.



SENSUOUS RIVERSCAPES: THE 1880s

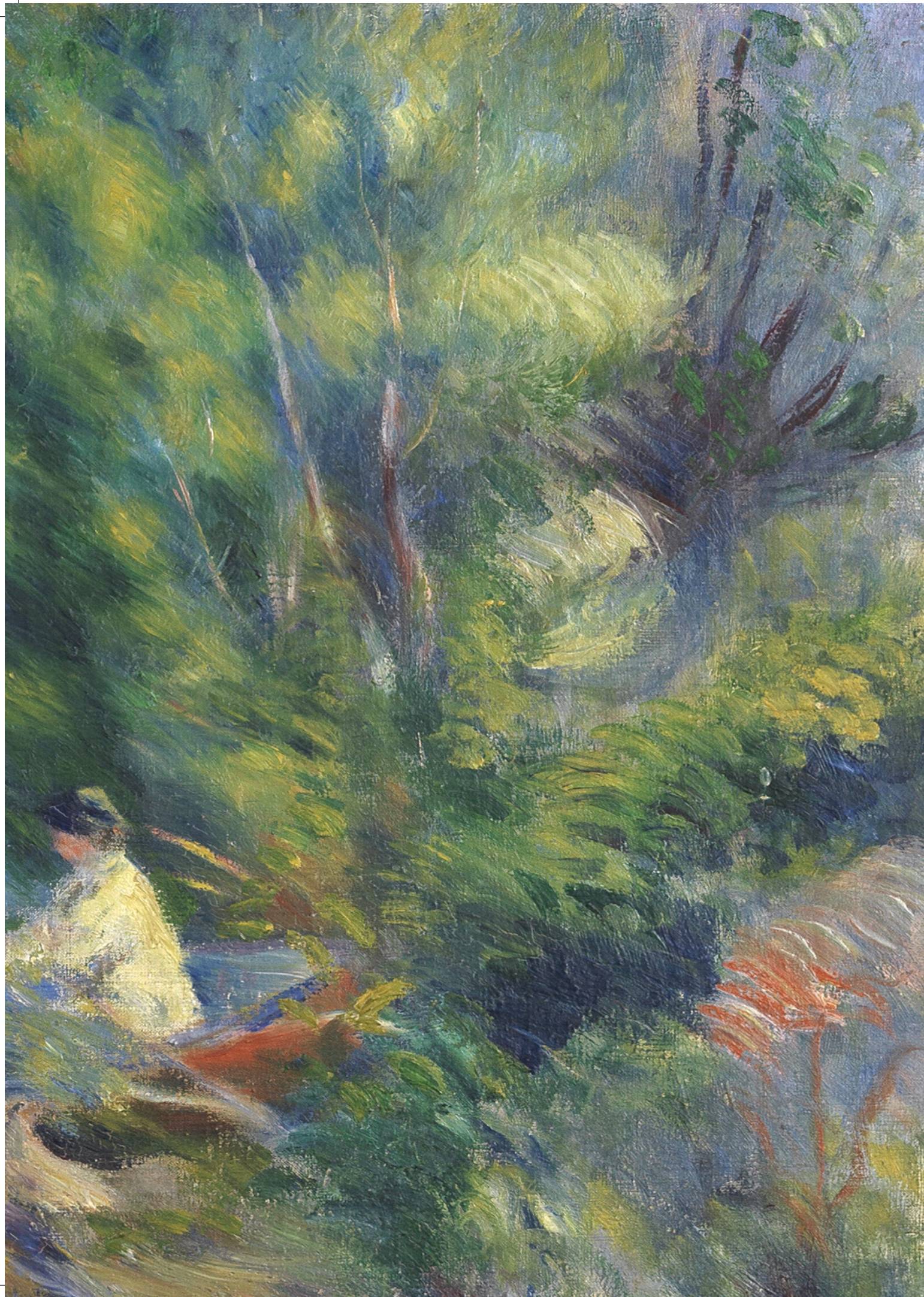
In December 1884 Renoir journeyed with Monet along the French coast of the Mediterranean, to visit Cézanne in the fishing village of l'Estaque (fig. 3). Renoir and Monet painted together during their sojourn, and the richness of palette and touch that one sees in Monet's painting in this period (fig. 4; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach) can be compared to the luxuriant style of *Au Bord de l'Eau*. 1885 was a year of personal significance for Renoir, whose first son, Pierre, was born on 21st March. In June, Cézanne arrived for a short visit, settling into Renoir's rooms on the Grande Rue in La Roche-Guyon (fig. 5). The village was situated on the Seine some 10 kilometres from Giverny, where Monet had relocated in 1883. As Renoir wrote to Durand-Ruel whilst in La Roche-Guyon: 'I have taken up again, for good, the old painting soft and gracious [...] it is a continuation of the pictures of the eighteenth century' (quoted in J. Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, New York, 1961, p. 490). Renoir's artistic vision had been transformed by his trip to Italy in the autumn and winter of 1881, during which he had encountered new visual stimuli in the paintings

FIG. 3: Paul Cézanne,
L'Estaque, 1883–1885, 65 x 81
cm., Private Collection

FIG. 4: Claude Monet,
Moreno's Collection at Bordighera,
1884, oil on canvas, 73 x 93 cm.,
Norton Museum of Art, West
Palm Beach

FIG. 5: View of the Seine at
La Roche-Guyon





*‘Any individual wishing to make art must be inspired
solely by works of nature. He must love her more than the
most beautiful mistress and feast his spirit and eyes upon
her like a glutton’*

(Opening of the manuscript for *Grammar of Art*, 1882-84).

of Raphael and the Pompeian frescoes. Equally, Renoir’s celebration of eighteenth-century French genre painting, namely the Rococo fantasies by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, is also reflected in the rich lyricism of *Au Bord de l’Eau*. As John House has written of Renoir’s style in the 1880s: ‘the softly brushed paint-handling gives the whole canvas a sense of movement and energy [...] reminiscent of Fragonard’s *Bathers* (fig. 6; ‘Renoir and the Art of the Past’, in *Renoir in the 20th Century*, exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010, p. 36). It was during this period of ripe artistic development that Renoir formulated a theory of painting, an unpublished tract entitled *Grammar of Art*. Informed by Renoir’s aesthetic advances in the 1880s, the treatise is a powerful vision of nature as embodied desire.



FIG. 6: Jean-Honoré
Fragonard, *The Bathers*, c. 1765,
80 x 64 cm., Musée du Louvre,
Paris

The manner in which Renoir handles his subject in *Au Bord de l'Eau* can be compared to the rich and sensuous style of Renoir's most celebrated boating scenes in the 1880s, *Le Déjeuner des Canotiers*, painted in the summer of 1880 at Chatou (fig. 7; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.) and *La Seine à Argenteuil* from 1888 (fig. 8; The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia). In comparison with the earlier depictions of boating scenes, such as *La Yole* (fig. 9; The National Gallery, London), which are distinguished by studied, careful brushstrokes, the present work displays the fluid, intense tonalities which characterise Renoir's painting in the 1880s; paint is thickly applied in the yellows of the figure's dress, the bright orange of the boat and the modulating greens of the trees on the bank. House notes the complex interweaving of colour: 'the canvas is dominated by the varied greens of the foliage and the blues of water, sky and shadows, but the whole picture is threaded through with warm hues, orange-reds and pinks, which constantly enliven the scene' (J. House, *Landscapes of France: Impressionism and its Rivals*, exh. cat., Hayward Gallery, London, 1995, p. 260). In the 1880s Renoir's timelessness and permanence, and his simplification and generalisation of form, are the antithesis of the original Impressionist conception of the immediacy of sensation.



FIG. 7: Renoir, *Le Déjeuner des Canotiers*, 1880-81, oil on canvas, 129.9 x 172.7 cm., The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

FIG. 8: Renoir, *La Seine à Argenteuil*, 1888, oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm., Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia

FIG. 9: Renoir, *La Yole* (*The Skiff*), 1875, oil on canvas, 71 x 92 cm., The National Gallery, London



RENOIR, VOLLARD AND DURAND-RUEL

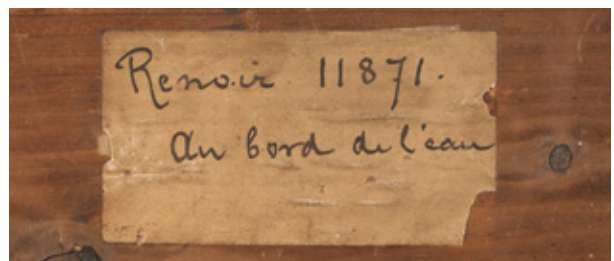
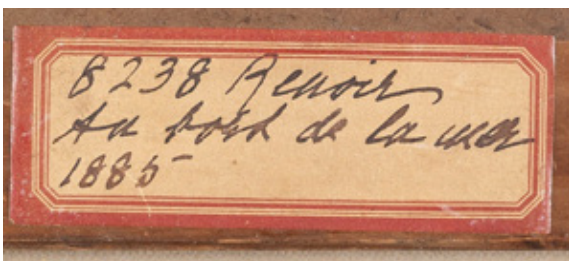
Au Bord de l'Eau was owned, in turn, by the two foremost dealers in Impressionism: Ambroise Vollard and Paul Durand-Ruel (figs. 10-11). Vollard's first gallery in the Rue Laffitte, which opened in September 1893, served as a meeting-point for emerging artists in Paris and remained a focal point of the Parisian art world into the first two decades of the twentieth century. As Vollard described it, 'The rue Laffitte was a sort of pilgrims' resort for all the young painters' (A. Vollard, *Recollections of a Picture Dealer*, trans. V.M. McDonald, New York, 2002, p. 71). Anne Distel has singled out the significance of the relationship which emerged between Renoir and Vollard: 'Of all the Impressionists, Auguste Renoir was the one who would forge the most lasting bond with Vollard' (A. Distel, 'Vollard and the Impressionists: The Case of Renoir', in *Cézanne to Picasso*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007, p. 144).

The present work was deposited by Vollard on 26 November 1920 at the Paris gallery of Durand-Ruel, whose centrality in the narrative of Impressionism and its international impact has recently been explored in the exhibition *Inventing Impressionism* (National Gallery of Art, London and Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2015). 'Painting was his religion', Renoir said of Durand-Ruel (quoted in *Faces of Impressionism*, exh. cat., Baltimore Museum of Art, 1999, p. 150), and a label on the *verso* of this painting displays Durand-Ruel's original inventory number (fig. 13). *Au Bord de l'Eau* was acquired from Vollard by Durand-Ruel on 21 December 1920, and sold on the same day to Frank C. Osborn, one of the leading American collectors of Impressionism and a self-taught artist. This purchase occurred shortly after Durand Ruel's exhibition, *Tableaux, pastels, dessins par Renoir*, held from November 29th to December 18th in the Paris gallery, which was to be one of the final large-scale shows staged during the dealer's lifetime. The present work can be seen hanging on the gallery wall in an installation shot of the Durand-Ruel showroom in Paris, alongside other masterpieces by Renoir (fig. 17).

FIG. 10: Renoir, *Ambroise Vollard*, 1908, oil on canvas, 81.6 x 65.2 cm., The Courtauld Gallery, London

FIG. 11: Renoir, *Paul Durand-Ruel*, 1910, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm., Private Collection

FIGS. 12-13: Labels on the *verso* of *Au Bord de l'Eau*



FRANK AND ALICE OSBORN: AMERICAN
COLLECTORS OF IMPRESSIONISM

Au Bord de l'Eau belonged to Frank (1887 – 1948) and Alice Newton Osborn (1888 – 1965), self-taught artists as well as patrons and collectors who lived first in New York and then in Manchester, Vermont. Frank and Alice's collection comprised over 270 paintings including significant works by Cézanne, Bonnard and Renoir, and upon Frank's death, Alice (née Alice M. Newton) left the collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A label on the *verso* bears witness to the bequest, which was made in 1966 (fig. 14). *Au Bord de l'Eau* remained in the museum's collection until it was deaccessioned in 1990 and acquired by the present owner from Beadleston Gallery in 1993. The proceeds from this sale went towards the development of the Museum's collection in other fields. Before its sale in 1990, *Au Bord de l'Eau* was shown at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in an exhibition entitled *The Great Bathers* (9 Sept. – 25 Nov. 1990), curated by Christopher Riopelle (fig. 16).

FIG. 14: Label on the *verso*
of *Au Bord de l'Eau*

FIG. 15: F. Osborn, *Reclining
Nude*, 1930, 40.6 x 50.8 cm.

FIG. 16: Philadelphia
Museum of Art, *Renoir: The
Great Bathers*, 9 Sept. – 25 Nov.
1990



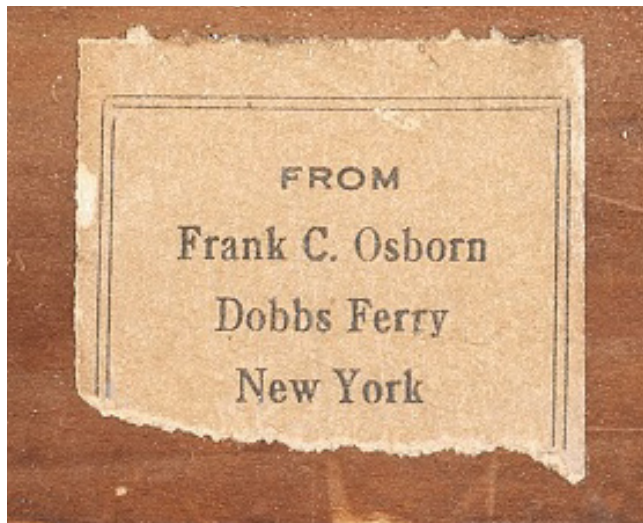






FIG. 17: Paris, Galerie
Durand-Ruel, *Tableaux, pastels et
dessins par Renoir*, 29 Nov. – 18
Dec. 1920

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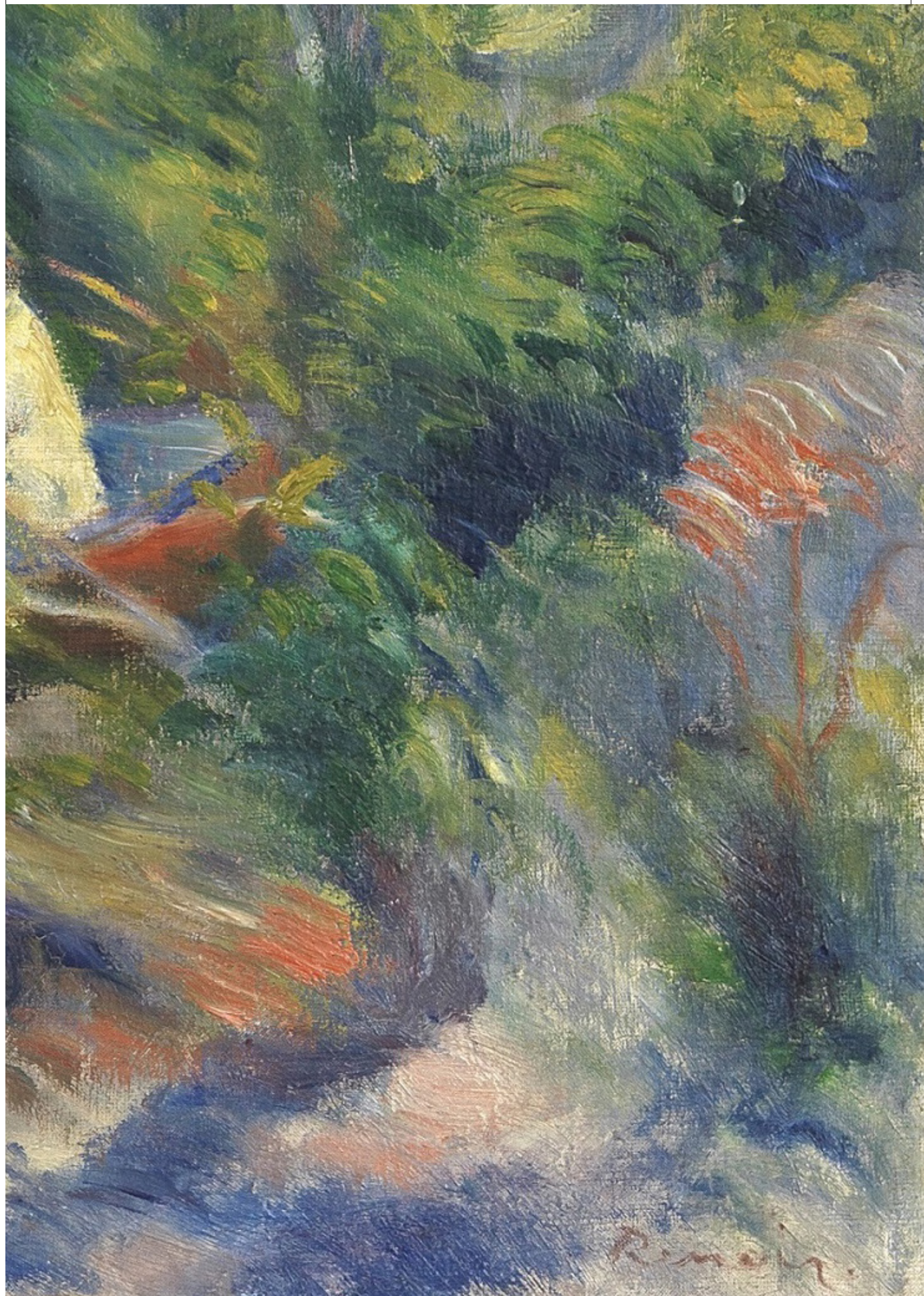
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