

# RENOIR AND FRIENDS Audio Guide Transcript



# RENOIR AND FRIENDS : LUNCHEON OF THE BOATING PARTY

## Audio Guide Transcript

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**STOP 1 |** Exhibition curator and The Phillips Collection Curator Emerita Eliza Rathbone introduces *Renoir and Friends: Luncheon of the Boating Party*.

This is an exhibition about a great genre painting by Renoir for which specific individuals posed. Looking into who those individuals were turns out to reveal a lot about the artist and himself and the circumstances in which the painting was made. Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*—an exceptionally large and complex work—was mostly created at the Fournaise Restaurant on the banks of the Seine at Chatou. In the painting, which you will come to in the last gallery of the exhibition—you see this beautiful landscape and a still life of glasses, bottles, and fruit on the table and



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Seine at Argenteuil (La Seine a Argenteuil)*, 1874, Oil on canvas, 19 3/4 × 25 3/4 in. Portland Art Museum, Bequest of Winslow B. Ayer

a host of convivial people who occupy most of the scene. But first, we start nearly a decade earlier investigating how Renoir prepared himself to attempt this ambitious project. During the 1870s, he often left Paris to travel west to small towns and villages on the Seine—sometimes visiting his mother in Louveciennes, sometimes joining his friend Claude Monet to paint outdoor landscapes.

In the early to mid-1870s, Renoir had a hard time selling his work for any money at all. His style, which we find so alive and full of light—was considered loose and unfinished by many established critics. Fortunately, however, Renoir was not alone. In the course of this exhibition you will find out who were his models and friends—fascinating people—many whom came from quite different backgrounds from his own. In addition to myself, you will hear from Edmund de Waal, whose forebear, Charles Ephrussi, was an important friend of Renoir, and in the final gallery, from the Director of The Phillips Collection, Dorothy Kosinski. Please step into the gallery on your left and meet some of the women in Renoir's life.

**STOP 2 | Eliza Rathbone discusses Aline Charigot and the importance she held in Renoir's work.**

Aline Charigot, who would eventually become Renoir's wife, appears as the model in most of the works in this gallery. Renoir's enchantment with her when he first met her in 1879 is quite obvious in some of them. Several, like this one, have a disarming informality and suggest their close relationship. In all of these paintings, you can sense the straightforward, unaffected woman that Aline was. If you look to your right in this gallery you will see a charming informal painting of Charigot by Renoir's good friend Gustave Caillebotte painted in the garden of his house on the Seine. At the other end of this gallery you see a portrait of Caillebotte's lady friend Charlotte Berthier by Renoir. For Caillebotte, Renoir painted a poised formal portrait of Berthier. Although Caillebotte never married, Charlotte Berthier seems to have been a significant person in his life and he included her in his will. Even before both Caillebotte and Charigot posed for *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, Renoir put the two of them together in a painting of an oarsman inviting them to board his skiff, which you see on the end wall of this gallery. Aline was a constant model for portraits and genre scenes and not surprisingly she became the model for one of the most endearing figures in *Luncheon of the Boating Party*.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Young Woman Sewing*, c. 1879, Oil on canvas, 24 3/16 × 19 7/8 in. The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection

**STOP 3 | Eliza Rathbone discusses the importance of Charles Ephrussi, the famous collector and critic of Impressionist works, and Gustave Caillebotte, the collector, artist, and friend of the Impressionists.**

This gallery focuses on Gustave Caillebotte and Charles Ephrussi—two men who came from backgrounds dramatically different from Renoir's. Both Ephrussi and Caillebotte were apt to be seen in a top hat in Paris (not unlike the one in a case in this gallery) and both were born into families with significant wealth. Caillebotte, the only one of Renoir's artist friends who posed for *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, was often near Chatou as he frequently escaped Paris to country retreats by the Seine. He loved being by or on the water, designed and built boats, and competed in



Léon Bonnat, *Portrait of Charles Ephrussi*, 1906, Oil on canvas, 18 × 15 in. Private collection

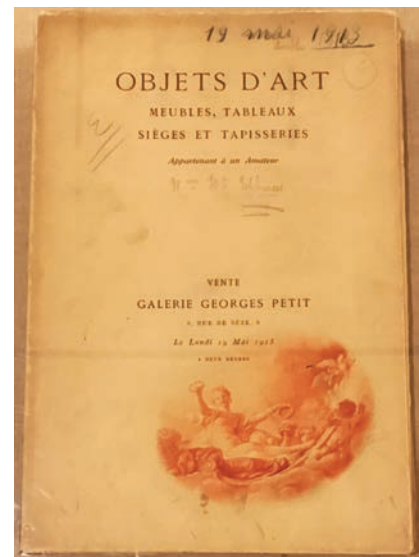
sailing regattas. As you see in this gallery, boating quite often figured as a subject in his painting.

Charles Ephrussi used his good fortune to edify himself on countless subjects. Prolific as a writer, he was also avid as a collector. In Paris, he was quite the man about town, attended chic salons and kept company with aristocrats, counts, countesses, the Princesse de Polignac, and Princesse Mathilde, niece of Napoleon I. Like Caillebotte, he never married, although he seems to have been intimately involved with Louise Cahen d'Anvers. He lived with his brother in a grand house near the Parc Monceau and later in a house on the avenue d'Iena, both in the elegant 8th arrondissement of Paris. To try to convey this man of enormous erudition, we have included in the exhibition books and articles that he wrote, as well as a few special treasures from his personal collection, including Manet's *Asparagus*, reunited possibly

for the first time with the single asparagus that Manet gave to the collector as a thank you. Ephrussi became a mentor to Marcel Proust and was one of the models for Proust's character, Charles Swann. His significance for Renoir at this moment in his career can hardly be overstated.

**STOP 4 | Edmund de Waal, artist, author of *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*, and family descendant of Charles Ephrussi, discusses how important Ephrussi was during this time period.**

Charles Ephrussi, at the very back of this wonderful scene of sociability [*Luncheon of the Boating Party*], is there in his top hat and his black coat, his head turned away from us, we see the slight glint of his red bear. He is there as the great collector figure, the person who makes things happen in Renoir's great gathering of friends. He was a collector, he collected extraordinary quantities of the work of the Impressionist, 45 amazing paintings in just 10 years. But he was also a critic, a friend, someone who wrote and championed these young and unknown artists. And because Charles was in an extraordinary milieu of extremely rich people in Paris, he made things happen for Renoir. He persuaded all his Jewish cousins to be painted by Renoir, there is an amazing series of Renoir portraits of



*Works of Art, Furniture, Paintings, Chairs, and Tapestries*, Sale catalogue of Charles Ephrussi collection, May 19, 1913, Galerie Georges Petit, Collection of Edmund de Waal

my family. But above all, he was a great converser; there are great records of him at his dinner parties where there was a mixture of musicians, and artists, writers, all muddled up together his beautiful apartment. I think when see this picture, you get a feeling of the complexity of the social engagement of this group of people that he was part of. Up that staircase [of his home in Paris], in the room at the very top of this beautiful golden house hung with pictures by Degas, Monet, and of course Renoir, comes the young Marcel Proust to sit at this collector/critic's, feet. And Proust learns about society, he learns about conversation, he learns about passion, and slowly Charles Ephrussi becomes the figure of Charles Swan, the figure in Proust's writing.

**STOP 5 | The Phillips Collection Director, Dorothy Kosinski, discusses the importance of *Luncheon of the Boating Party*.**

Hello, I'm Dorothy Kosinski, Director of The Phillips Collection. I hope you have enjoyed the exhibition learning about Pierre-Auguste Renoir and his fascinating circle of friends. As many of you probably are aware, *Luncheon of the Boating Party* has been in the collection since 1923, when the founder of the museum, Duncan Phillips, purchased the painting. Since 1923, it has served, just as Phillips himself envisioned, as the cornerstone of the collection. The painting captures the vitality of Renoir's time: the excitement of art, literature, music, boating, and fine dining in the Parisian capital in the 19th century. That appeals to our enthusiasm and excitement about our times, our contemporary celebrities, artists, designers, athletes, and intellectuals.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, 1880–81. Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 69 1/8 in. The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1923

Repeat visitors often say that they enjoy this painting because they can identify with Renoir's circle of friends. Renoir was able to capture a casual, intimate scene that visitors can relate to—enjoying a lovely lunch with friends on a beautiful afternoon. Throughout this exhibition, you've been able to see various other portraits of these people and learn a little bit more about each of them. My favorite figure is surely Charles Ephrussi, the man in the top hat in the painting. A collector, writer, publisher, aesthete, and socialite, he was made famous most recently in Edmund de Waal's book *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*. If you haven't read that book I highly recommend it.

Meanwhile I hope you've enjoyed the exhibition *Renoir and Friends* as much as we do and I hope we see you again very soon.