

Cultural Daily

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Renoir's Biggest Gamble Lands at Musée d'Orsay

Our Friends · Friday, April 10th, 2026

Forty-one years between retrospectives is an absurd amount of time for any painter, let alone one whose work hangs in half the museums on the planet. Plenty of spring visitors to Paris care more about a [1xbet app download](#) than a museum queue, but the Musée d'Orsay appears determined to change that ratio.

“Renoir and Love” opened on March 17 with roughly fifty canvases from 1865 to 1885, and no, Paris hasn't hosted a Renoir show this ambitious since the Grand Palais one in 1985. The subtitle, “A Joyful Modernity,” does a lot of heavy lifting for what's really just a flex by three museums who managed to pry loans out of six cities.

The Musée d'Orsay, the National Gallery in London, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston co-organized, which goes some way toward explaining how the loan list got this ridiculous.

Six Paintings That Almost Never Share a Room

The real draw here is not quantity. Fifty paintings sounds generous, sure, but the exhibition's weight comes from a handful of canvases that almost never leave their home institutions. You can read about them all day or you can just look at the table below and feel mildly annoyed that these have been scattered across continents for decades.

Painting	Year	On Loan From
La Grenouillère	1869	Nationalmuseum, Stockholm
La Promenade	1870	J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
Bal du moulin de la Galette	1876	Musée d'Orsay, Paris (permanent)
Luncheon of the Boating Party	1880-81	Phillips Collection, Washington
Dance at Bougival	1883	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
The Umbrellas	1881-85	National Gallery, London

Luncheon of the Boating Party is the headline loan, and getting it to Paris required something close to a hostage negotiation. The Phillips Collection in Washington bought it in 1923. Duncan Phillips, their founder, was not subtle about what he'd acquired. He wrote that this single painting would “do more good in arousing interest and support than all the rest of our collection put together.” A hundred years later, you don't let something like that leave the building without getting something back. The reciprocal arrangement is simple enough. The Orsay sends Bal du moulin de la Galette to Washington in summer 2027. So if you want both canvases under one roof, this spring. That's it.

Why Renoir Staked Everything on Joy

Something critics routinely get wrong about Renoir is the assumption that painting happiness must have come easy to him. It didn't. The 1870s art establishment expected modern painting to grapple with social misery, alienation, or at minimum some tasteful irony. Degas painted laundresses and absinthe drinkers. Manet courted scandal. And there was Renoir, staking his entire reputation on couples dancing at outdoor cafés and friends sharing lunch on a riverboat.

That gamble shaped his career and nearly killed it, more than once. Effortless-looking paintings make collectors suspicious. Always have. Renoir's surfaces are so warm, so fluid, that a hundred and fifty years later people still confuse technique with lack of depth. The curators clearly know this is a problem, because they've hung early figure studies right next to the finished canvases. You see the scaffolding underneath the shimmer. Renoir's own take on it, with typical defiance, was that he knew perfectly well "it is difficult to accept that a painting can be great art and still remain cheerful."

The Drawings Nobody Expected

Here's what might end up stealing the show from the paintings. "Renoir Drawings," running through July 5, is a separate exhibition stuffed with sketches, watercolors, pastels, sanguines. Sixty years' worth. Renoir drew constantly, obsessively, but almost nobody associates him with line work because the color in his paintings is so loud it drowns out everything else. The curators have been pretty blunt about wanting to wreck that misconception.

And then there's the ARTE documentary. "Renoir in Love" aired March 22, got decent press, and you can still stream it until the exhibition closes. Not a bad pregame if you're planning a visit and want to show up knowing more than the person next to you in the ticket queue.

Where It Goes After Paris

London gets the show starting October 3, 2026. Boston picks it up February 20, 2027. But here's the catch that nobody puts in the headline. Not every loaned work travels to every venue. The Paris leg is the fullest version. If Luncheon of the Boating Party is the reason you'd book a flight, don't wait for London.

Tickets run €16 full price, €13 reduced, free under 18. Thursday nights they keep the doors open until 9:45 PM, which is genuinely the move if you hate crowds. Weekends? Book a time slot online beforehand. The Left Bank queue at 10 AM on a Saturday is nobody's idea of a good time.

Photo: Harry Shum via Pexels

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