



Looking at the World through Art

In early 2025, an exhibition entitled *'Cézanne and Renoir Looking at the World — Masterpieces from the Musée de l'Orangerie and the Musée d'Orsay'* was held at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. This exhibition featured 52 paintings by the French Impressionists, Paul Cézanne and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, along with works by others including Pablo Picasso, which had travelled all the way from Paris to Hong Kong. It was a rare opportunity to view these masterpieces locally. My son and I visited the exhibition three times, and I would like to share some thoughts.

First of all, it is definitely not too early to bring kindergarten students to an art exhibition. In fact, admission for those under four years old is free, and visiting an art gallery or museum makes an excellent family activity. Although art and art history may be regarded by some as sophisticated disciplines, one would be surprised at how easily and naturally children can appreciate and learn from the masterpieces. My son enjoyed the exhibition very much and showed great interest in the paintings with some guidance, he was able to identify the different subject, such as fruits, flowers, a piano and portraits of the artists' family members.

It is never too early to cultivate a love of art and



beauty, and to develop an understanding of the history behind art movements, such as Impressionism, which was the focus of this exhibition. The French Impressionists were, perhaps like many children, 'rebels' – they rejected the traditional styles and created their own way of painting. They worked outdoors (rather than in studios) and depicted scenes from modern life instead of religious or mythical figures. Although critics of the day looked down on the Impressionists, they laid the foundations of modern art and started a new chapter in art history. Today, they are regarded as masters, and their works are treasured around the world. As parents, we should allow our children to be creative and to look at

the world through their own lens.

I found the time spent visiting an art exhibition with my son both precious and intimate– a time when the phone could be put away and we could talk quietly about the artworks. Bringing children to an art exhibition helps to develop their power of observation, attention to detail, patience and discipline, as one cannot run or shout in a gallery. For example, one can point out that a seemingly white tablecloth was actually painted in different shades of colour. Some artists even 'hide' their signatures in their paintings–for example, on a wine bottle. In some **paintings**,

there is a 'painting within a painting' :



Figure 1 - A painting by Renoir that contains two paintings by Degas, another French Impressionist

After visiting an art exhibition, when your child draws at home, you can remind them of some of the names, things and techniques they have seen. As children grow up, parents can guide them to recognise the different styles of different painters.

Interestingly, although Cézanne and Renoir were good friends and both regarded as Impressionists, their works exhibit contrasting styles and techniques— in their use of colours, brushstrokes, light and shadow, composition and perspective. As an illustration, the same fruit can be depicted in completely different ways by the two masters. This is an example of something that we can guide our children to appreciate.



Figure 2 - Still life fruits by Renoir



Figure 3 - Still life fruits by Cézanne

The exhibition also offered an opportunity to teach my son some geography – about France and Europe. There was an interactive map display showing the different places in France that played a relevant part in the careers of Cézanne and Renoir.

Children at such a young age probably have not travelled to many places around the world, so this was a good way to introduce my son to the world beyond his own.

Of course, there are challenges in bringing a very young child to an art exhibition, but they can certainly be overcome. Children generally have short attention span and may lack the patience to view all the paintings in a single visit. Multiple visits will allow your child to remember what they have seen. I would point out the subject matter of the paintings to my son, still life, outdoor scenes or household scenes such as playing the piano, and today he still remembers the names Cézanne and Renoir, as well as France and Impressionism.



My advice would be to visit during off-peak hours with smaller crowds. It also helps to visit the washroom before entering the exhibition!

When Hong Kong is once again blessed with another exhibition of masterpieces, I will not hesitate to bring my son to the exhibition. This can open his eyes and let him look at the world out there.



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