



Fig. 1 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette*, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 131x176 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Below: Compositional diagram.

Renoir painted *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette* in 1876 and showed it at the Third Impressionist Exhibition the following year. Here we see a scene of modern life as it takes place in the popular Montmartre garden. Although some of Renoir's friends are seen conversing in the background, the artist uses this crowd of young dancing figures to reproduce the festive and free atmosphere of the period's fashionable meeting place.

Pictorial technique

The image seems to be **observed first-hand**. This can be seen in the figures' natural behaviour, each one captured in a different pose and a specific psychological moment, such as the courting, the approaches of daring young men, the friendly conversation, the kisses, the couples' different ways of dancing, etc.. Nonetheless Renoir shows that his primary **fascination is with light**; it filters through the tree leaves causing a vibration of colourful effects, which the painter records very freely employing **many touches of colour**.

Renoir calibrated the relationship between cold and warm colours, light and dark tones, and among different complementary colours, eliminating every trace of black from the shadows. In this way he uses colour to build the figures by re-conferring a



sense of movement. The light brushwork is executed by parallel dabs of paint which blur outlines, giving the figures the very grace which became the hallmark of the painter's style.

The Composition

The scene's "**casual**" framing interrupts some figures depicted at the margins of the canvas, thus involving the viewer; in fact the painting's edges appear to correspond to the observer's field of vision, thus setting up the impression that the scene continues beyond the painted surface. The artwork was executed partially on site and partially in the artist's studio; this can best be understood by noticing the complex compositional construction that shows Renoir's knowledge of classical painting. For instance, notice how the effect of depth is given by two oblique lines: one runs through the bench in the foreground while the other, on the left, passes through the dancing couple. The two figures are, moreover, isolated in an empty space, around which a rotating motion is set up, emphasising the festive goings-on. Similarly to the *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, the movement into recessed space is highlighted by a rhythmical scansion of vertical lines provided by the street light poles, by the architectural columns of the industrial building, by the trees, the chairs and the table's legs.



Exercises

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette*

Read and Recognise

1 Complete the text by choosing the most suitable words.

- Starting in the second half of the nineteenth ☐ year ☐ century ☐ decade, Paris was an important centre for ☐ catered food ☐ art and commerce ☐ human studies. Some ☐ painters ☐ printers ☐ sculptors like ☐ Renoir ☐ Maillot ☐ Hayez chose to show city residents enjoying a new invention: ☐ leisure time ☐ graphic novels ☐ jazz music.
- A popular meeting place in the ☐ Montmartre ☐ Chaillot ☐ Montparnasse quarter was the ☐ Chat noir ☐ Moulin de la Galette ☐ Moulin Blanc where people met to dance in the ☐ ballroom ☐ square ☐ garden. The atmosphere was ☐ heavy ☐ care-free ☐ polluted and Renoir depicted the many kinds of ☐ hats ☐ garden furniture ☐ behaviour.
- Renoir emphasises people's enjoyment of the ☐ luncheon ☐ classical painting ☐ the current moment as seen by ☐ someone in the crowd ☐ grandparents ☐ boaters. By making the painting's confines coincide with the observer's ☐ bench ☐ field of vision ☐ impressionable character, the scene seems captured in mid-movement, as if in a ☐ hieroglyph ☐ photograph ☐ coffin.

Vocabulary

2 Match each architectural term below with its definition.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Courting | a. A long, slender support for wires, flags, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Hallmark | b. A large number of people in one place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Pole | c. A distinctive feature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Nonetheless | d. An act attempting to win favour or affection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Crowd | e. All the same, despite that |

3 Match each adjective with its noun and write your Italian translation of the term.

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Primary | a. outlines | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Blurred | b. dabs of colour | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Cold and warm | c. fascination with light | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Parallel | d. tones | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Light and dark | e. colours | _____ |