

AMBROISE VOLLARD

La Vie & L'Œuvre de PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR



Self-Portrait at Thirty-Five (1876)
Oil on canvas, 70.8 x 54.61cm
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University
Art Museums, Bequest of Maurice
Wertheim, Class of 1906

Ambroise Vollard published this work on December 15, 1919, just 12 days after the master had died in his villa at Cagnes-sur-Mer in the south of France, at the age of 78. Vollard's recounts his many conversations with Renoir over a 25 year period. These are especially valuable since the author was the preeminent art dealer and publisher of the period. His working friendship with Renoir began in 1895, when the dealer held his first exhibition of the artist's works. At that time Vollard was 29 years old and Renoir was 54. During the following 25 years, the dealer and artist often dined together and visited one another and engaged in numerous transactions. Renoir painted and drew a number of portraits of Vollard. Vollard published the major graphic works by the artist and the two most important contemporaneous monographs on Renoir. As well as the subject life and work of the artist (*La Vie & L'Œuvre de Pierre-Auguste Renoir*), Vollard also wrote and published a monumental compilation of works by Renoir in 1918, entitled *Tableaux, Pastels et Dessins de Pierre-Auguste Renoir* (published in a revised edition in 1989 by Alan Wofsy Fine Arts). In addition to the verbatim conversations on art and commerce between Renoir and Vollard, this work also includes more than 400 illustrations, many of which have not been reproduced elsewhere.

Following are some examples of Renoir's views on art and the business of art:

"The most important thing is for an artist is to know which are the colors that last, as it is for the mason to know which is the best mortar. The truth is that in painting as in the other arts there isn't a single method to put in a formula! Listen, I tried to measure once and for all the oil I add to my colors: I couldn't do it. Each time, I have to add my oil by guess-work. We think we know it all when we learn from 'scientists' that the contrasts of blue and yellow give violet shadows, but when you know that, you know nothing. There is, something more in painting, something that you can't explain but which is the essential. You face Nature with theories, and Nature tramples on them..."

"Nothing 'bothers' Renoir more than selling a painting. It's not so much that he wants to keep it: but he must review the painting, fill the blank spaces, sign... When Renoir decides to give the last stroke to his paintings, and the dealer thinks he finally will get them, then the artist will be bothered by the collectors..."

'Go on, take it away.' "

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir.
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