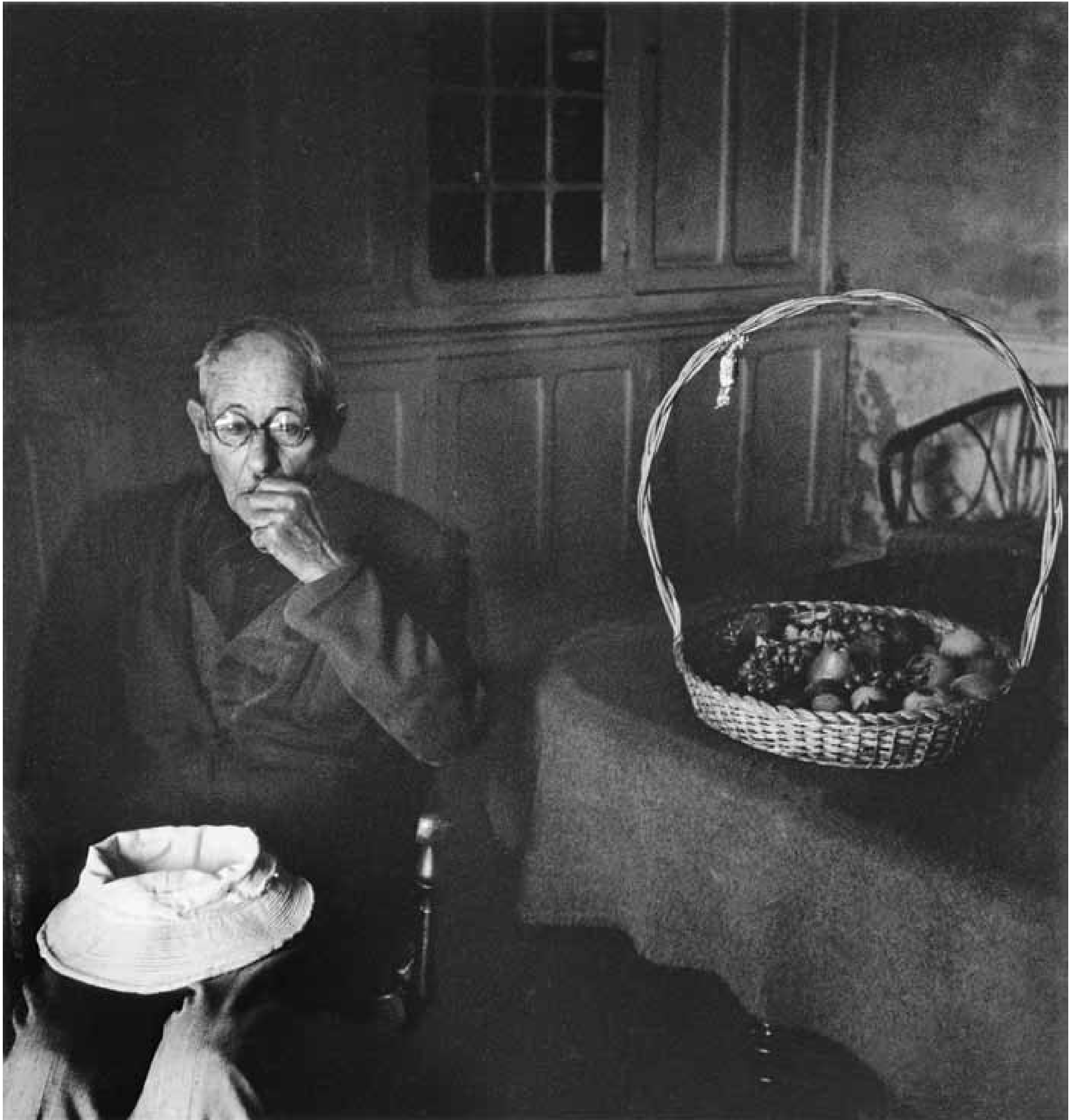
Pierre Bonnard

The Late Still Lifes and Interiors

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Pierre Bonnard: The Late Still Lifes and Interiors



Pierre Bonnard
The Late Still Lifes and Interiors

Edited by
DITA AMORY

With essays by
Dita Amory, Rika Burnham, Jack Flam,
Rémi Labrusse, and Jacqueline Munck

and contributions from
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Director's Foreword

As I inaugurate my tenure as director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, it is a particular pleasure to introduce this exhibition of the late still lifes and interiors of Pierre Bonnard. Presenting more than seventy-five paintings, drawings, and works on paper selected from a range of public and private collections throughout the United States and Europe, the present exhibition brings fresh critical perspectives to the ongoing reappraisal of Bonnard's reputation. It also makes a renewed case for his significance as a modernist in the narrative of early-twentieth-century art. Although Bonnard's legacy may be removed from the succession of trends that today we consider the foundation of modernism, his contribution to French art in the early decades of the twentieth century is far more profound than history has generally acknowledged.

Pierre Bonnard: The Late Still Lifes and Interiors follows the artist's trajectory in the last decades of his life, spent at a small house in the Mediterranean village of Le Cannet, now a sprawling suburb of Cannes. Many of the complex interiors and related still lifes that anchor this exhibition were painted in its modest upstairs studio. Bonnard took the rooms surrounding him and their contents as his subjects. And yet his late paintings, far from simple interiors imparting some prosaic narrative, are often disquieting in their use of color as a metaphor for a spectrum of sensations. Taken together, these paintings reaffirm the artist's constant search for compelling imagery and his deep engagement with the mysteries of optical phenomena.

The planning and execution of this exhibition took place under my predecessor, Philippe de Montebello, whom we thank for his guidance on this and so many other endeavors, now that his decades of peerless leadership have come to a close. The exhibition was organized at the Metropolitan Museum by Dita Amory, associate curator, Robert Lehman Collection, whom I thank for her vision and hard work in bringing this exhibition to fruition. We are grateful to the many collections and collectors who have generously agreed to lend their paintings and drawings. I thank especially those private collectors whose loans mean temporarily parting with prized pictures usually displayed in their own interiors. Their invaluable commitment has given access to works of art rarely seen in public and, in some cases, little known. We are also deeply grateful to The Florence Gould Foundation for its early and enthusiastic support for the exhibition, a reflection of Mrs. Gould's abiding appreciation of Bonnard. We can only imagine her delight in this exhibition, and we thank her trustees for honoring us in her memory.

Thomas P. Campbell
Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Acknowledgments

A small and highly focused endeavor such as this exhibition relies on the generosity of a great many people over the course of several years. Without that generosity, realizing this finely tuned selection of paintings and drawings would have been impossible. It is thus a privilege to honor those friends and colleagues who contributed in ways both tangible and immeasurable to the presentation of the exhibition and its accompanying publication.

We owe the greatest debt of gratitude to the private and public collections, both here and abroad, that lent works of art, almost all of which permanently grace the walls of residences and museums. That these lenders are willing to part with them for several months is indeed a gesture of immense goodwill. Many colleagues assisted in the search for works of art, some by negotiating loans on the Museum's behalf, others by sharing knowledge and expertise in myriad ways. In particular, I thank Jill Newhouse, Graham Nickson, and Margret Stuffmann, who deserve special mention. Among the many others to whom I am deeply grateful are: Frances Beatty Adler, Sarah Andersen, Sofie Andersen, Nathalie Angles, Abigail Asher, Charly Bailly, Pam Bingham, Michael Brenson, Dr. Benedetta Calzavara, Jean Clair, Alexander Djordjevic, Jean Edmondson, Jeremiah Evarts, Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, David Georgiades, Franck Giraud, Izabela Grocholski, Elizabeth Gorayeb, Claudine Grammont, Charlotte Gutzwiller, Karin Hellandsjø, Jeffrey Hoffeld, Svein Olav Hoff, Waring Hopkins, Ay-Whang Hsia, Milan Hughston, Jennifer Jones, Beatrice Kernan, Lorna Kettaneh, Alain Kirili, Emma Kronman, Diana L. Kunkel, Patrick Legant, Christophe Leribault, Ariane Lopezhuici, Dominique Lobstein, Christina Mamakos, Charles Moffett, Eric Munos, Christian Neffe, Joyce O'Reardon, Robert Peirce, Ursula Perucchi-Petri, Ariel Phillips, Cynthia Polsky, Maxime Préaud, Aude Raimbault, Eliza Rathbone, Jock Reynolds, Neville Rowley, Marie-Pierre Salé, Bertha Saunders, Christa Savino, David T. Schiff, Manuel Schmit, Dieter Schwarz, Susan Shillito, Cassandra Smith, Elsa Smithgall, Verena Steiner-Jaeggli, Sachiko Tanaka, Vérane Tasseau, Anaïs Tastevin, Anne Terrasse, Jennifer Tobias, Guy Tosatto, Rachel Trudeau, Walter Tschopp, Elizabeth Hutton Turner, Peter van Beveron, Isabelle Varloteaux, Jean-Philippe Vecin, Audrey Vernon, Jayne Warman, Jeffrey Weiss, Tony Willis, and Alan Wintermute. Without their invaluable assistance, this exhibition would be lacking in richness and breadth.

It has been a great pleasure to work on this publication with my coauthors, Rika Burnham, Jack Flam, Rémi Labrusse, and Jacqueline Munck, all of whom have written evocatively on Bonnard in the past. To this enterprise they brought not only reserves of knowledge but perspectives on the artist's late work that distinguish their writings and mark a well-deserved reassessment of Bonnard's place in modernism.

At The Metropolitan Museum of Art, three members of the staff of the Robert Lehman Collection worked closely on the project for different periods of time over the past few years, each contributing vital assistance. Lesley Schorpp, former associate administrator,

ably handled many aspects of the planning of the exhibition. Allison Stielau, former research assistant, worked tirelessly to secure loans and amass documentation; part of the project from the beginning, she also contributed a thoughtful chronology to the catalogue. Nicole Myers, research assistant, coordinated many aspects of both the exhibition and the publication and fielded queries with efficiency and good cheer; I am also grateful to her for her insightful contributions to the catalogue. I thank Laurence Kanter for endorsing the exhibition at its inception. I give my heartfelt thanks to the directors of the Robert Lehman Foundation, especially Philip Isles, for the privilege of organizing the exhibition. To my remaining colleagues in the Robert Lehman Collection, I am appreciative as ever of their support and encouragement, particularly Margaret Black, assistant museum librarian, who nimbly tracked down elusive publications, and Manus Gallagher, principal departmental technician, who lent his expertise to the installation of the exhibition.

The catalogue was produced in the Editorial Department under the direction of John P. O'Neill, publisher and editor in chief. Dale Tucker, senior editor, brought his extraordinary eye, not to mention his good humor and patience, to every aspect of the volume. Gwen Roginsky, general manager of publications, and Christopher Zichello, production manager, guided the book into print. Tony Drobinski created the elegant design, Penny Jones edited the bibliography, and Jane Tai researched photographs. Mark Polizzotti ably translated the essays of our French colleagues. Isabelle Duvernois, assistant conservator, has been an eager participant in this project from the start, and I am extremely grateful for her revelatory thoughts on Bonnard's technical idiosyncrasies. Many other Metropolitan Museum colleagues contributed generously, and I would like to thank in particular: Michael Batista, Lisa Cain, Cindy Caplan, Margaret Chace, Aileen Chuk, Ute Collinet, Willa Cox, Martha Deese, Nina McN. Diefenbach, Aimee Dixon, Kathryn Calley Galitz, Rebecca Herman, Kirstie Howard, Cynthia Iavarone, Marilyn Jensen, Andrea Kann, Sue Koch, Alisa LaGamma, Joseph Loh, Nina Maruca, Asher Miller, Nykia Omphroy, Rebecca L. Murray, Christopher Noey, Diana Pitt, Rebecca Rabinow, Thomas Reynolds, Robin Schwalb, Ken Soehner, Glenna Stewart, Linda Sylling, Mahrukh Tarapor, Dorie Taylor, Gary Tinterow, Elyse Topalian, Emily Vanderpool, Emily Walter, Vivian Wick, Florica Zaharia, and Mary Zuber.

This exhibition is one of the last to have taken flight during Philippe de Montebello's extraordinary tenure as director, and I remain ever grateful for his commitment and support. It also represents the first exhibition mounted in the Lehman Wing galleries under the administration of our new director, Tom Campbell, and it is an honor to share the stage with him. I also thank the Museum's president, Emily Rafferty, for the opportunity to undertake this project.

Last but by no means least, I want to give particular thanks to the families of Pierre Bonnard and his wife, Marthe. Antoine Terrasse, Bonnard's grand-nephew, was a gracious colleague in the course of organizing the exhibition, and he gave it his blessing in the first days of planning. No less supportive were members of the Vernon family, Marthe's descendants, who opened their doors and welcomed my inquiries. Thanks to the invitation of Jacques Terrasse, Bonnard's great-great-nephew, I had the privilege several summers ago of visiting Le Bosquet, Bonnard's house, where his presence is still felt in every room, where his upstairs studio still bears the tack holes of his paintings, and where some seventy-five years ago he initiated many of the masterpieces that constitute this exhibition.

Dita Amory

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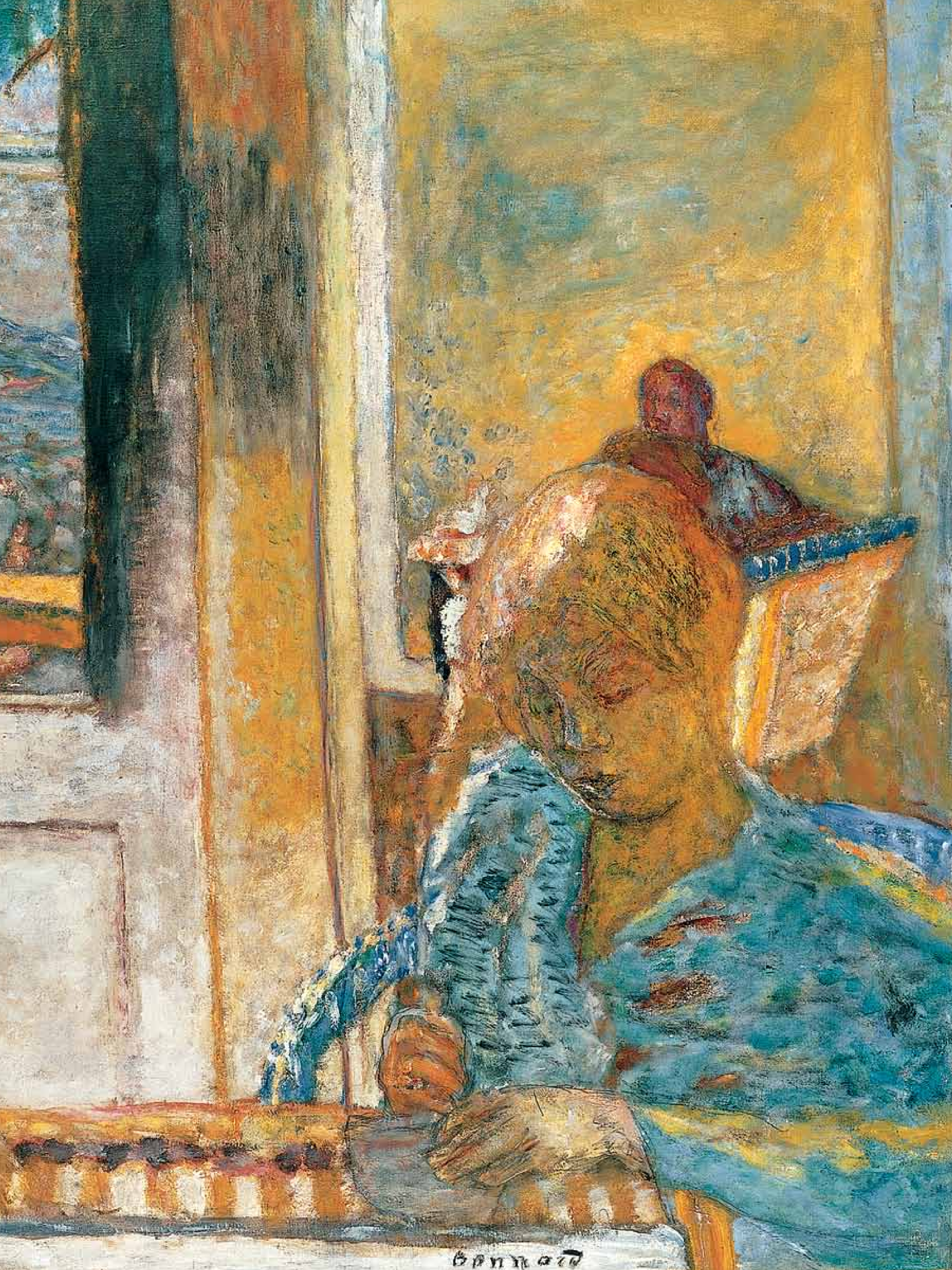
Note to the Reader

In catalogue entries, references to Jean and Henry Dauberville's catalogue raisonné of Bonnard's oil paintings are indicated with the initial "D." The titles of Bonnard's works generally follow either those provided in Dauberville or those that have otherwise been established by common scholarly usage. Exhibitions for which no catalogue was published are indicated with an asterisk (*). Bibliographic citations are abbreviated in the essays and catalogue entries and provided in full in the bibliography. Dimensions are given in inches followed by centimeters; height precedes width.

For the sake of consistency, some English translations of Bonnard's writings and published remarks have been standardized using previously published translations, which are cited in the notes. The original French quotations are provided where possible.

Pierre Bonnard: The Late Still Lifes and Interiors


Bonnard

The Presence of Objects: Still Life in Bonnard's Late Paintings

DITA AMORY

"Pierre Bonnard is a great painter today and assuredly in the future."—Henri Matisse

"That's not painting, what he does."—Pablo Picasso

As one considers the art and life of Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), it is remarkable to find that an artist of such quiet modesty should have been the subject of so much controversy following his death. As fate would have it, Bonnard's estate was held in escrow for sixteen years pending the outcome of a tangled legal contest between the Bonnard family heirs and those of his inscrutable wife and muse, Marthe de Méligny.[1] This protracted litigation effectively removed from public and commercial circles every work of art found in the artist's studio. Even the future of his house, Le Bosquet, nestled in the hills above Cannes (see fig. 65), lay in question. Bonnard had difficulty bringing paintings to a close. At his death his small split-level studio was crowded with works from all periods of his career, nearly six decades of uninterrupted art making.

The misfortune that befell Bonnard's paintings at Le Bosquet hardly favored his critical standing. Writers in contemporary French publications dismissed him as a latter-day Impressionist out of touch with modern trends.[2] The most declamatory among them not only questioned Bonnard's reputation as a painter, they impugned any contemporary appreciation of him as philistinism.[3] Picasso, by that time solidly enthroned in the modernist pantheon, leveled a famously unforgiving blow:

> *That's not painting, what he does. He never goes beyond his own sensibility. He doesn't know how to choose. When Bonnard paints a sky, perhaps he first paints it blue, more or less the way it looks. Then he looks a little longer and sees some mauve in it, so he adds a touch or two of mauve, just to hedge. Then he decides that maybe it's a little pink too, so there's no reason not to add some pink. The result is a potpourri of indecision. If he looks long enough, he winds up adding a little yellow, instead of making up his mind what color the sky really ought to be. Painting can't be done that way. Painting isn't a question of sensibility; it's a matter of seizing the power, taking over from nature, not expecting her to supply you with information and good advice.*[4]

The vehemence of Picasso's repudiation would suggest that the "indecisive" Bonnard was in fact a presence to be reckoned with.[5] Indeed, Bonnard's critical stature and recognition would only grow as art historians took a fresh look (particularly in a seminal retrospective of 1984) at a body of work far more modern than had previously been acknowledged.[6]

Fig. 1. Detail, *The French Window (Morning at Le Cannet)*, 1932 (cat. no. 42)

It should come as no surprise that in the artistic climate of the early twentieth century Bonnard was often misaligned with the Impressionists. His long working life as a painter veered from the symbolism of the Nabis in the shadow of Gauguin to a wholly different impulse in his later years, one guided by light and color (light as it affects color, color as it translates light) and by the transmutation of pigment in the sunlight of the Midi. If Bonnard's trajectory was far removed from the avant-garde circles of Fauvism, Cubism, and Surrealism, his color was nonetheless more radical at times than that of the Fauves, his imagery more complex and mysterious than that of either Cubism or Surrealism. More important, his process of looking always remained highly original. Bonnard's life beyond the fray might suggest an unwillingness to join the debate, a refusal to separate himself from what others saw as an outmoded way of thinking or seeing. Yet he did not consider his place in art relative to modernism, nor was he negatively touched by those critics who labeled him an Impressionist manqué. Once he even described himself to Matisse as "the last of the Impressionists."[7] Perhaps he saw himself as the last painter in the French *grande tradition*, a successor to the legacy of Chardin, Watteau, Delacroix, and Cézanne.

In the 1940s Bonnard's radiant Mediterranean paintings, saturated with ravishing color and the appearance of domestic bliss, were thought by some to have had a salutary effect in a war-ravaged Europe. Writing in 1953, Charles Terrasse, the artist's nephew, described the consoling value of his uncle's paintings[8] as a visual salve amid the widespread destruction. Of course it was just this kind of vocabulary—of hope and happiness, of joie de vivre and the pleasures of bourgeois pastimes—that was so out of sync with the prevailing critical appetite for an intellectually charged aesthetic.

Labeling Bonnard's paintings "impressionistic" may have had circumstantial merit given his early friendship with Monet and his later association with Renoir, but doing so generally belied a misinformed opinion. Bonnard was not by habit a plein air painter. Although he often recorded weather patterns and nuances of light on his daily walks in the village of Le Cannet—capturing the effects of atmospheric change on the colors of his garden in quick pencil notations—these curious jottings in his pocket diaries (or daybooks) were visual cues for his studio practice. Bonnard's approach to light, moreover, differed in basic ways from that of the Impressionists. Of his friend Monet's decidedly plein air working method, Bonnard once remarked, "[He] always took up many canvases on the same motif, which led him to work several moments on each canvas, as the weather, the light changed."[9] Bonnard, too, may have worked on many canvases at once, but never in such a deliberate, sequential order, and never subject to patterns of rapidly changing light. Instead, he tacked unstretched canvases directly to the warm white walls of his modest studio, where at any given moment a haphazard combination of interiors, landscapes, bathers, or still lifes was in process. Today the studio wall at Le Bosquet still bears the imprints of hundreds of tiny tack holes. This idiosyncratic method allowed Bonnard to determine the dimensions of his paintings without being limited to standard-size stretched canvases.[10] It also gave him the freedom to make fine adjustments to their final cropping, resulting in a sense of geometry and proportion with the specificity and precision of a Vermeer. "To tell the truth," he once said, "I have trouble with painting. . . . I work so slowly that I must use paints that can be revised or added to continually. . . . It would bother me if my canvases were stretched onto a frame. I never know in advance what dimensions I am going to choose."[11] As the painter Andrew Forge said, "He lets the painting grow, then he decides where its end is."[12]

Where the Impressionists and indeed the Post-Impressionists worked *sur le motif*, Bonnard famously resisted the temptations of working from direct observation. That

encounter was left to his drawings, watercolors, and small oils, all of which, like the day-book sketches, were key source material for his studio practice. In an oft-quoted admission, Bonnard laid out his feelings of frailty in the presence of the object, a distraction, he said, that led to the loss of the initial idea:

> *I tried to paint [a bouquet of roses] directly, scrupulously, I was absorbed by the details. . . . Then I realized that I was floundering, I wasn't getting anywhere. I had lost my original thought and couldn't get it back again; I couldn't find what it was that had captivated me, my starting point. I thought I might regain it, if only I could recapture that initial charm. . . . Through captivation or an initial inspiration, a painter achieves universality. It's captivation that tells him which subject to choose and precisely how a picture should be. Take away that captivation or initial concept, and all that's left is a particular subject that overwhelms the painter. From that moment on, he is no longer painting his own picture. For some painters—Titian, for instance—that captivation is so powerful that they never lose it, even if they remain in direct contact with their subject for a very long time. I, however, am very weak. I find it difficult to control myself when my subject is right in front of me.*[13]

Bonnard's studio was his refuge from such contact, from the obsessive force of direct observation. "One always talks of surrendering to nature," he said, but "there is also such a thing as surrendering to the picture."[14] These famous remarks carry lasting import. On the one hand, Bonnard feared that the overwhelming force of nature might sublimate his initial "idea." On the other, he sought to resist the corruption of artifice. If the painting became too much about art making, he risked losing the connection with the true experience.

Bonnard almost invariably removed himself, physically and temporally, from the appearance of his subjects, a distance and delay that engaged his memory in the equation of the painting. Just as the artist deferred to memory—the memory of perception—in the slow process of recovering his initial seductive vision, so might he expect the viewer to lose himself in the unraveling of that imagery. Only through prolonged looking does the beholder draw closer to Bonnard's first, fleeting perceptions. In the words of Andrew Forge, to stand and look at a painting by Bonnard, perhaps more so than with most artists, "reminds us that when we are looking at a painting we are making a reading; and a reading is not a definitive interpretation, a reading is absorbing and formulating what we understand by it, and then claiming it for ourselves."[15]

If we consider Bonnard's oeuvre as part of the *grande tradition* of French painting, we easily recognize the links between Watteau's *fêtes galantes* and Bonnard's open-air picnics (fig. 2); between Manet's asparagus and Bonnard's cherries; between Gauguin's *Still Life with Three Puppies* (fig. 3) and Bonnard's *Woman with Basket of Fruit* (cat. no. 16), notably in the tilted picture plane, highly compressed space, and emphatic shapes of both works. Looking more narrowly at the history of the still life, Bonnard may be viewed, somewhat surprisingly, in relationship to Jean Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), an artist whose quiet, unorthodox voice in the tumult of eighteenth-century French painting is oddly analogous to Bonnard's ill fit among twentieth-century French modernists. Neither painter conformed to the expectations of his culture. Their respective techniques and approaches to painting likewise confounded interpretation.

Until the late eighteenth century, the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture ranked artists according to the subjects they pursued: history, portraiture, genre, and

Fig. 2. Pierre Bonnard, *The Cherry Tart*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 45¼ x 48⅜ in. (115 x 123 cm). Private collection, courtesy Nathan Fine Art, Berlin/Zurich

still life.[16] Artists were keenly aware of their place in this hierarchy, and Chardin was no exception. Yet his original take on what was considered the minor genre of still life reinvigorated the practice and called into question the criteria used to uphold those hierarchical classifications. As Pierre Rosenberg has observed, this decision proved a critical turning point in French art, beginning "a process of destruction that was eventually to demolish an edifice that had been slowly and patiently constructed over two centuries. . . . Without realising he was doing it, [Chardin] rejected his own time and opened the door to modernity."[17] Where Chardin's still lifes challenged the rigid structure of the vaunted French Academy, Bonnard ignored those critics who derided what they misunderstood as his conservatism.

Bonnard's anxiety over "surrendering to nature" no doubt made Chardin a useful model. Chardin, who painted from nature, was known to position his still-life props on a stone ledge, a marvelously archaic surface, and then spend days searching for an "innocent" encounter in order to capture their true mass. The artist's biographer, Charles-Nicolas Cochin, attributed these words to him: "In order to concentrate on reproducing [an object] faithfully I must forget everything I have seen, and even forget the way such objects have been treated by others. I must place it at such a distance that I cannot see the details. I must work at representing the general mass as accurately as possible, the shades and colours, the contours, the effects of light and shade."[18] By "forget[ting] everything I have seen" Chardin meant that he needed to cleanse his mind of the influences of other artists, past and present.[19] He rid his memory of the still life in French art history, whereas Bonnard, resisting renewed contact with his initial visual experience, removed from his field of vision the very still-life objects themselves.

Fig. 3. Paul Gauguin, *Still Life with Three Puppies*, 1888. Oil on wood, 36⅛ x 24⅝ in. (91.8 x 62.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund

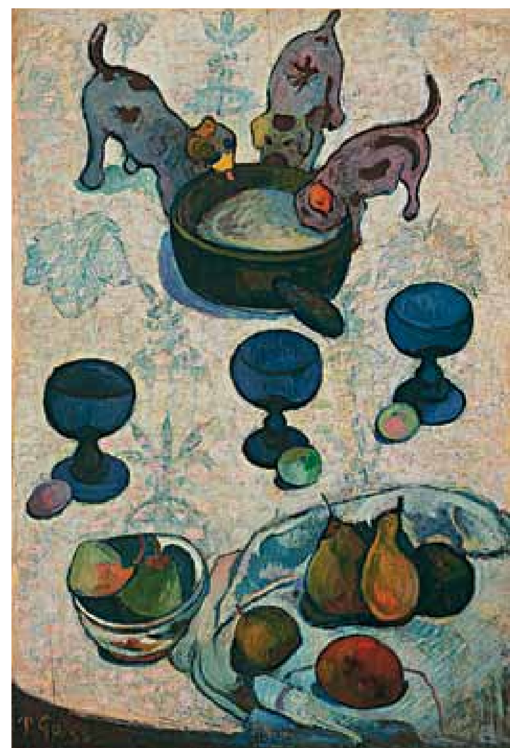


Fig. 4. Jean Siméon Chardin, *A Bowl of Plums*, 1728. Oil on canvas, 17½ x 22⅛ in. (44.5 x 56.2 cm). The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

What makes Chardin so compelling a comparison to Bonnard is how he carefully ordered humble objects, his so-called kitchen fare, and thereby transformed them into majestic objects. He elevated their spirituality and status. The plums in *A Bowl of Plums* (fig. 4) are heavy and full of form, static and monumental. In this regard, Chardin's long-considered objects—whether a copper kettle, a terracotta jug, a dead rabbit, or a bowl of plums—are truly *still*, in that they are effectively timeless, one might even say "intransient." It is the weight of things in a Chardin still life, the gravity and emotion unique to his work, that becomes in some ways a quest for humanity. In the late masterpiece *Basket of Wild Strawberries* (fig. 5), the artist stacked and then composed a heaping mound of lush red berries into the solid, geometric form of a pyramid. He thus movingly contrasted the containing form, the pyramid, long associated with permanence or immortality, with the fragile, ephemeral fruit within. Bonnard was acutely aware of the capacity of large geometric forms to become vessels: to contain or hold in space even the most complex objects or arrangements of objects. His numerous evocations of the basket and its contents, as in *Corner of the Dining Room at Le Cannet* (cat. no. 35), can be likened to how Chardin's strawberry pyramid is itself made up of smaller geometric groupings.

The connection between Chardin and Bonnard is manifest not only in their still lifes, but also in their kindred approach to the understated presence of the figure. There are distinct affinities, for instance, between the seemingly ordinary qualities of Chardin's woman stirring tea (fig. 6) and Bonnard's women at breakfast; between the young boys in Chardin's *House of Cards* (ca. 1736–37, National Gallery, London) and *Soap Bubbles* (ca. 1734, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and Bonnard's cropped figures imposing their presence at the margins of the canvas. For both artists, the mysterious self-possession or self-containment of a figure totally immersed in a ritualized task or daily ritual lent a profound ambiguity, an "otherness," to the scene. Even the dog in Chardin's *The Buffet* (see fig. 60) eases its snout into the space of the table above, piled with fruits and pies, in a way familiar from many of Bonnard's like-minded works, such as *Still Life with Greyhound* (cat. no. 1) or *Woman with Basket of Fruit* (cat. no. 16).

Chardin fell from favor following his death only to reemerge decades later as a model for the Impressionists. By the opening of the Salon des Refusés in 1863, the still lifes of Manet, Monet, Fantin-Latour, and Renoir were both critically acclaimed and admired among the elite.[20] In the decades that followed, Cézanne reset the bar, as it were, inventing a new language of still life in masterpieces of surpassing force. These artists willingly inherited Chardin's canonical still life—objects arranged at the center of the picture plane and painted in appropriate, true-to-life hues in an otherwise uninterrupted horizontal field. Bonnard, by comparison, was less inclined to dwell on the literalness of an object as object (a still life) than on how diverse objects interrelate and interact within a pictorial field (an interior). For him, the still life as an assemblage of discrete parts, artfully and artificially arranged in a harmonious construct, was less interesting in isolation than as part of an active tableau in which some objects are recognizable, defined by raking light or dense shadow, while other passages remain amorphous, recede from view, or vanish almost completely off the canvas plane. That Bonnard relied largely

Fig. 5. Jean Siméon Chardin, *Basket of Wild Strawberries*, 1761. Oil on canvas, 15 x 18⅛ in. (38 x 46 cm). Private collection

on memory and, to a lesser extent, on perceptual analysis set him farther apart from the orthodoxy.

There is an unusual democracy of means in Bonnard's works in which equal attention is paid to every component of a painting. Negative spaces are as important as positive forms, table edges are as significant as plates; each part gives expression to the whole. The transformative qualities of color and light that took hold in Bonnard's late paintings rendered even the voids, the often mysterious spaces in between, as engaging as a squat teapot or one of his "bristled" baskets of bread.[21] The repertory of subject matter in the still lifes and interiors painted in Le Cannet was also unusually modest. We see the same household objects, some inert, some perishable, again and again. Toward the end of his life Bonnard acknowledged that for fifty years he had painted the same themes, confessing that "I find it very difficult even to introduce a new object into my still lifes."[22] Cast in different guises, in variable light and palette, his dining table props convey a comforting familiarity gained from years of looking. The habits of his daily life and its decorative trappings—picturesque as well as functional—that surrounded Bonnard in his Mediterranean villa surround us, once removed, in the sum total of the late interiors.

Where Chardin set the stage for still life in the first half of the nineteenth century, profoundly influencing the Realist salon painters Bonvin and Courbet, among others, Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) became the paradigm for early modernists. Virtually every vanguard painter of the first quarter of the last century felt obliged to grapple with his example not only in still life, but in figure, genre, and landscape as well. Such was his reputation as a still-life painter that Maurice Denis saw fit to paint a now iconic group portrait, *Homage to Cézanne*, showing a gathering of Nabis admiring the master's *Still Life with Compotier* resting on an easel (fig. 7). While at face value the canvas anoints Cézanne as the preeminent artist for a younger generation, in less obvious ways it carries special resonance for our study of Bonnard and his investigations of

Fig. 6. Jean Siméon Chardin, *A Lady Taking Tea*, 1735. Oil on canvas, 31⅞ x 39 in. (81 x 99 cm). Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow (43512)

Fig. 7. Maurice Denis, *Homage to Cézanne*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 70⅞ x 94½ in. (180 x 240 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

the still life. Denis positioned Bonnard at right, a shadowy, isolated figure lacking corporeality, lost in thought. Decidedly younger than his fellow artists, Bonnard is the only one actually looking at the painting—he alone pays true homage.

In 1870–71, at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Cézanne abandoned Paris for Aix-en-Provence, where he had spent his childhood. This flight to the south of France freed Cézanne from the expectations of Parisian culture. It also gave him distance from the bourgeois celebrations of Impressionism and from the naysayers who had no patience for his painting. Cézanne's life in the Midi during his final decades was one of solitude, and while he spent much of his time outside painting the local landscape, his studio practice took on increasing importance. By the time he moved that practice from his house in Aix to a studio in Les Lauves, on the outskirts of town, he was painting still lifes as landscapes of form, and landscapes as still lifes. Today the Les Lauves studio still houses the Provençal bric-a-brac that populates Cézanne's still lifes, the plaster Cupid and human skulls, the ceramic jars, tin pots, and milk jugs: all the familiar objects that in his paintings took on extraordinary value (fig. 8).

Cézanne famously championed the geometry of forms, exhorting a young admirer, the artist Émile Bernard, to "treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, with everything put in perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed toward a central point" (fig. 9).[23] Yet Cézanne was by no means self-circumscribed as a painter of plastic geometry or abstract theory. Rather, geometry provided him with the "intellectual scaffolding"[24] with which to adumbrate nature, or what John Rewald described as the means "to express his consciousness of structure beneath the colored surface presented by nature."[25] His justly renowned apples and onions were not emblems of domesticity, nor did they evoke the "kitchen" still lifes of Chardin. One would be hard pressed to imagine Cézanne's vegetables in a casserole or his apples in a fruit salad.[26] They brought nature into the studio, where Cézanne painted them rigorously, in full manipulation of their role in space. Their relational volumes alluded to the vast natural landscape outdoors.[27]

Fig. 8. *Cézanne's Studio at Les Lauves*. Photograph by Christophe Duranti

Cézanne turned his custom-built studio at Les Lauves into a laboratory for the investigation of still-life painting, a venue removed from domesticity and distraction where he could reconfigure an inventory of familiar shapes and surfaces into what are arguably some of the most complex works in French art. Bonnard's resources in Le Cannet were far less accommodating (fig. 10). It takes only a brief visit to the villa to appreciate his inventive powers as a painter. The studio, a small room on the second floor, was clearly an improvised space, possibly a bedroom at one time, and a surprisingly meager environment in which to pursue paintings of ambitious spatial constructs. (Bonnard tacked his canvases to its only large wall.) This quiet refuge of art making, the place where Bonnard kept his paints and canvases, was the only room in Le Bosquet where the artist actually painted, and yet many other interiors were just as integral to his work. Certainly the tesserae-tiled bathroom housing Marthe's iconic claw-foot tub is a space that engendered, one might say, some of the most important paintings in the artist's oeuvre.

Fig. 9. Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Plaster Cast*, ca. 1894. Oil on paper on board, 27¾ x 22½ in. (70.6 x 57.3 cm). The Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Gallery, London

Only after looking at Bonnard's late interiors for a long period of time does one slowly recognize their uncanny relatedness: that all of these unique canvases nonetheless originated from the same few rooms; that collectively they show many of the same architectural appointments. It was from these modest, even cramped domestic beginnings that Bonnard made such extraordinary pictures. *The French Window (Morning at Le Cannet)* (cat. no. 42), *The Breakfast Table* (cat. no. 55), and *White Interior* (cat. no. 36) seem to have little in common apart from appearing to represent some domestic environment, and yet they indeed describe the same pictorial field. In room after room, Bonnard manipulated spatial parameters, skewed perspectives, and amplified or truncated interior architecture; color values and spatial configurations shift and rotate, and motifs appear and disappear.

Fig. 10. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Pierre Bonnard in His Studio*, 1944. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy Magnum Photos

In these well-trodden but evanescent interiors Bonnard discovered infinite possibilities, much as Cézanne, in his own late period, had found with Mont Sainte-Victoire. Of his most famous landscape subject, Cézanne wrote, "the motifs multiply, the same subject seen from a different angle offers subject for study of the most powerful interest and so varied that I think I could occupy myself for months without changing place by turning now more to the right, now more to the left."[28] And yet the net effect of reading a late Cézanne versus a late Bonnard yields two very different practices. Even Cézanne's most ambitious pictures, with their spatial complexity and overlapping planes, concentrate the eye on carefully orchestrated tableaux: apples and pears, ceramics and tapestries, fully articulated forms in subtle transitions of temperature and color. Cézanne went to great lengths arranging his still lifes, setting up visual problems in terms of the placement of objects and the artifices of support, wedging coins under certain props to tilt back or pull forward the planes or forms (fig. 11). Contrary to classical perspectival practice, he sometimes placed large objects in the background and smaller ones in the foreground, creating visual conundrums.[29] He first conceptualized a potential pictorial problem before painting, perceptually, his experience before the motif.

For Cézanne, to "realize" a painting meant finding the right metaphor for his sensations. For Bonnard, it meant finding the right metaphor for his *memory* of an observed experience. As Bonnard painted his memory of the still life in the other room, he edited out extraneous information, uncluttering the composition. What he rendered permanent was the experience of passing through, say, the dining room set for breakfast. Bonnard said he wanted "to show what one sees when one enters a room all of a sudden."[30] It is important to remember that by the time he came to paint them, the objects in his paintings—some identifiable, some amorphous or vague, many seemingly arranged at random—had been filtered through his memory, images that had gestated over time. The ambiguity of Bonnard's motifs, some of which have never been decoded, reminds us not only of the natural continuum of clarity that confronts the optic nerve at any given moment, but of the relativity of the mind's eye as well.[31] Bonnard's dialogue with his own sensibility was anathema to the avant-garde, who had little patience for an artist whose works "come true" only after a long period of looking. To read the space in a late Bonnard, especially in the landscapes, often requires sustained scrutiny before objects fall into their intended spaces. Yet unlike the image in a lens slowly being brought into focus, the space in a late Bonnard, even when ostensibly resolved, pulsates restively back and forth across the picture surface.

Although much has been written on Cézanne's influence on Picasso and Matisse, and on his centrality to modernism in general, his influence on Bonnard is less well

Fig. 11. Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with a Ginger Jar and Eggplants*, 1893–94. Oil on canvas, 28½ x 36 in. (72.4 x 91.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960 (61.101.4)

known and yet just as potent. Contrary to what Picasso's famous put-down might imply, it was not an impressionistic or haphazard "naturalism" that most profoundly affected Bonnard's later years,[32] it was the organized surface geometry—the spatial back-and-forth, the impact of the diagonal on composition—that Bonnard took from looking at Cézanne. By 1913 Bonnard was moving toward a more conscious attitude to describing form, and by the 1920s he had realized that Gauguin's flat, decorative color could be made more powerful through Cézanne's nuanced modulation. For Bonnard, once the most Japoniste of the Nabi fraternity, it must have been difficult at first to accept Cézanne's injunction to modulate, to break from the way the adherents of Japonisme "brutally outline their figures . . . and fill in with flat colors all the way to the edges."[33] That kind of flatness, Gauguin's flatness, was no longer useful to Bonnard; he needed a more complex procedure. He needed color modulation and transition, elements that emerged in his later works and demonstrate his thorough assimilation of what Cézanne meant when he proclaimed, "When color is at its richest, form is at its fullest."[34] "The objects closer to us rise towards the eyes," Bonnard wrote; "distant objects look almost linear, without volume or depth"; "the foreground . . . gives us our concept of the world as seen through human eyes, of a world of undulations, convex or concave"; ". . . planes through color."[35] These remarks, all clearly indebted to Cézanne, affirm Bonnard's shift from his earlier Nabi preoccupations.

The uncertainty of Cézanne's watercolors, with their multiple contours and accrued decisions both clear and ambiguous, proved a major influence on Cubist imagery. Picasso and Braque, in their Cubist compositions, adopted Cézanne's volumetric, lumpy, and densely packed forms—his warm and cool, positive and negative spaces—and cast this proto-Cubist space in cool, tonal grays and warm browns, reassembling it into an alternative realism.[36] Picasso saw in painting a universe parallel to nature, not at one with nature.[37] Cubism took to the still life in particular for its neutrality; the traditional objects of the genre served Picasso and Braque as anchor points for the fragmentary planes and spatial torsions they cultivated.[38] Braque, after his Cubist period had ended, went on to make a powerful body of large still lifes, many of which show the interior of his studio or a billiard table. In a sense he, like Bonnard, took up the challenge of the interior as a still life, seeing the room, the table, and its contents as one (fig. 12).

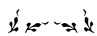
Instilled with a gift for plainspoken color, tonal and earthen, from his early years as a house painter, Braque revisited the *jolie-laide* power of Cézanne's early work, with its thick, troweled surfaces. In a similar vein, Bonnard's early knowledge of lithography and printmaking informed his use of color in his own late work. He often applied transparent oils color over color to gain richness without losing density.

Ironically, Picasso's perhaps willful misreading lays out much of what Bonnard took from Cézanne. Seeing several colors and changing them, what Picasso mocked as a "potpourri of indecision," was for Bonnard "the logic of color," something he derived directly from Cézanne's brushmarks. Following this logic, Bonnard searched for color echoes throughout the rectangle of the canvas, relating the pink of the rocks to the pink of the sky, the yellow of the houses to the yellow of the clouds, the purple of the trees to the purple of the mountains. Particularly in the late paintings, Bonnard's democratic application of brushmarks, and the way they are held together by a loose net of negative spaces and positive forms, recalls the unique quality of Cézanne's structure and its particular kind of "overallness." But where in Cézanne we have the feeling that the marks respond to each other steadily, as in a high-stakes chess game, move against countermove, in Bonnard the overallness is faster, more like checkers, with brisk offensives and "rapid deployment." The entire surface of a Bonnard painting is animated with these multiple color relationships. "When one covers a surface with colors," Bonnard wrote in his daybook, "one should always be able to try any number of new approaches, find a never-ending supply of new combinations of forms and colors which satisfy emotional needs."[39] This overallness brings Bonnard closer to Abstract Expressionism than to Picasso, who, inclined toward the linear, drew his painted planes using a relatively limited tonal palette. Bonnard relied on blobs of color held together in a mesh or grid inherent to the rectangle of the canvas. The effect can be likened to the way a spider's web holds raindrops.[40] This irregular grid, which makes circular forms appear more square while rounding off rectangular ones, could be viewed as the common ancestry of all the marks in Bonnard's late work.

Fig. 12. Georges Braque, *Large Interior with Palette,* 1942. Oil on canvas, 55⅝ x 77 in. (141.3 x 195.6 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston

Fig. 13. Detail, Bonnard's daybook, August 1932. Pencil on paper, overall 5⅛ x 3⅛ in. (13 x 8 cm). Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

Fig. 14. Detail, Bonnard's daybook, January 1933. Pencil on paper, overall 5⅛ x 3⅛ in. (13 x 8 cm). Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris



Because Bonnard was long considered a mediocre draftsman, his drawings have often been misunderstood. While at Le Cannet Bonnard drew daily in small ruled diaries (or daybooks) with a tiny, stubby pencil (figs. 13 and 14). The idiosyncratic dots and dashes and the seemingly casual manner of these drawings no doubt contributed to their underestimation. Some no bigger than scraps, the daybook drawings were nonetheless essential to Bonnard's major paintings.[41] Their vivid notations constituted a complex personal lexicon, and the drawings themselves became the surprising medium for Bonnard's explorations of color.

Bonnard believed that "a painting is a series of marks that join together to form an object or work over which one's eyes may freely roam."[42] The dilemma for him was how to reconcile the black and white pencil and charcoal marks of his daybook notations and other drawings with the color marks, the brushstrokes, of his paintings. He did so by having his marks imply color typologically. The zigs and zags, the fast flecks and slow scribbles, became for Bonnard red and green, orange and blue, yellow and violet (figs. 15 and 16). In other words, he read his marks as color equivalents. He could also use them to denote local and perceptual color, and color temperature, as well as density and changes in tone and plane, light intensity, and contrast.[43] All were conveyed using his shorthand of dots and flecks, both staccato and languid; diagonal, vertical, and horizontal hatching, nearly always traveling across the forms (as in Cézanne) rather than parallel to the form (as in

Fig. 15. Probably study for *Nude in Front of a Mirror,* 1931. Pencil on paper. Private collection

Fig. 16. Detail, *Bouquet of Flowers*, ca. 1940 (cat. no. 61)

Fig. 17. Pierre Bonnard, *Basket of Fruit with Hand,* ca. 1935. Pencil on paper, 4¾ x 7 in. (12.1 x 17.8 cm). Private collection

Manet); curved and rounded curlicues, spirals, loops, and waves; various zig and zag marks (e.g., continuous Z-shapes), both sharp and soft, coming from all directions and planes; and T-shapes and L-shapes. Through the confluence of these horizontal and vertical marks we are always made aware of the drawing's orientation and its relationship to the overall rectangular format: that is, to the invisible grid of the canvas, much as in Piet Mondrian's Pier and Ocean drawings (fig. 18). In addition to placing marks, Bonnard used his counterforce, the eraser, to break the surface flatness, giving it a jolt of space, and to elucidate atmosphere, turn forms, and adjust planes. One is reminded again of Cézanne, who believed that "pure drawing is an abstraction. Drawing and color cannot be separated, since all things in nature are colored." "The better the color harmonies," he added, "the clearer the drawing becomes."[44]

Drawing was sensation for Bonnard, who, almost echoing Cézanne, wrote in his daybook, "Sensation leads you to color tones. Tones, in return, bring about a revelation of sensation."[45] Drawing was Bonnard's first response to experience. It gave him the means to recognize his potential pictorial subject and the language with which to translate his experience of that subject into color. The final color image became the true meaning, both phenomenological and spiritual, of the revelation of the original experience. Bonnard's quest was thus a struggle between "the model you have before your eyes, and the model you have in your head."[46] Abstract in process but figural in the final result, his paintings and drawings had to work on both terms, without compromise. Bonnard kept his drawings with him throughout his life. For him the drawing was the embodiment of the idea, the one constant in the equation of the making of the painting. Everything else was transient. Often he conflated the information from two or three drawings in a single painting, extrapolating from their particular data—a nose, a ring of water meeting the neck, the apex of an orange, the pressure of space between two peaches (fig. 17)—in order to build tension. Also, because he painted from the drawings,

the major part of his editorial process had already taken place. The local color was more distant, though never lost, and the painting's internal "logic of color" could take over.

The small format of the daybook drawings facilitated the quick conception of a complete pictorial idea. Unencumbered by the artist's usual paraphernalia, Bonnard could easily squeeze into the tightest spots in Le Bosquet, pencil and daybook in hand, and make himself virtually one with a room. With the tiny pencil grasped in his exceptionally large hand, he could almost instantaneously cover the small drawing surface to register an experience. The pencil could act as his eye. "You must see things once, or see them a thousand times,"[47] he wrote, and if we think of Bonnard's drawings as for the most part "seen once" and his paintings as "seen a thousand times," then we can understand the distinction. Only in that first moment can the artist truly *see* the experience of an image—the pictorial rather than the narrative subject, or that which makes him want to paint. A drawing captured that brief moment for Bonnard, made it permanent, and thereafter became the evidence from which he worked.

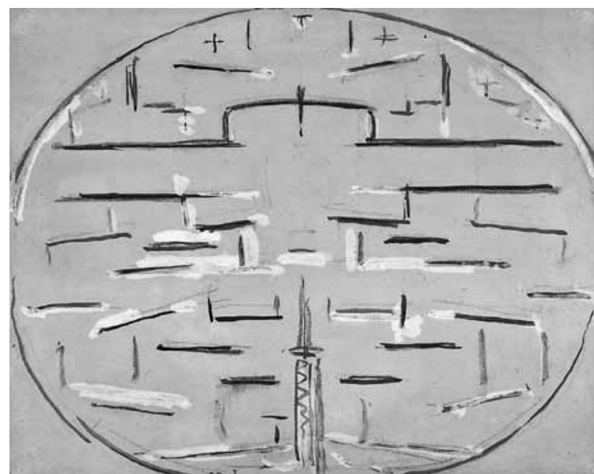


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Fig. 18. Piet Mondrian, *Pier and Ocean 2, 1914*, 1914. Charcoal, ink, and gouache on paper, 19⅝ x 24⅜ in. (50 x 62.6 cm). Collection of Donna and Carroll Janis, New York

Bonnard's delight in his first sensations did not translate well into watercolor, whose transparency proved a stumbling block. There was little capacity for correction, and no equivalent to his eraser. "Manet could do it," he said, "I just don't have the gift."[48] He preferred instead the opacity of gouache, which allowed him to paint color over color, as seen, for example, in *Still Life on a Red Checkered Tablecloth* (cat. no. 54). To adjust, to edit, to add, to revise: that was Bonnard's process. A photograph of him in 1944 at work on an oil painting shows him with the brush in one hand, putting on color, and the rag in the other, taking it out (fig. 19). The well-known story of Bonnard asking his friend Édouard Vuillard to distract a guard at the Palais de Luxembourg while he modified a small section of his own painting in the collection is the ultimate expression of Bonnard's belief that

Fig. 19. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Bonnard in His Studio with Brush and Rag in Hand*, 1944. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy Magnum Photos

Fig. 20. Henri Matisse, *Odalisque with a Turkish Chair*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 23⅝ x 28¾ in. (60 x 73 cm). Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

his work was finished only when, as he put it, "I can't see what more to do with it."

In 1939 Bonnard wrote in his diary, "The minute one says one is happy, one isn't any more,"[49] a seeming truism that takes on deeper meaning in the shadow of war. Even as he worked on some of his finest paintings, Bonnard made it abundantly clear that he rejected the easy reading of his work as purely joyful. He wrote in his daybook that "the man who sings is not always happy,"[50] and agreed with Delacroix that "one never paints violently enough."[51] If Bonnard's words at times hint at the psychology underlying his work, unquestionably his mature paintings reveal an appreciable complexity of feeling. As Giacometti is reputed to have said, "Bonnard, more fierce than Pollock." And yet Bonnard's "fierceness" was lost on Picasso: "Another thing I hold against Bonnard is the way he fills up the whole picture surface, to form a continuous field, with a kind of imperceptible quivering, touch by touch, centimeter by centimeter, but with a total absence of contrast. There's never a juxtaposition of black and white, of square and circle, sharp point and curve. It's an extremely orchestrated surface developed like an organic whole, but you never once get the big clash of cymbals which that kind of strong contrast provides."[52] Perhaps Picasso's rejection of the overallness of Bonnard's paintings was in keeping with his prejudice against Pollock.[53] No doubt it was that very quality that attracted many of the Abstract Expressionists to Bonnard's camp. For Rothko, it was also Bonnard's color—the big passages of abutting bands and rectangles of color—that proved a major influence. Rothko's oceanic swaths, his engulfing rich maroons and red-browns as well as his sumptuous oblongs of blue, give meaning to Bonnard's words "One can swim in chocolate or in blue sky."[54] Cézanne may have credited Monet for discovering "that the sky isn't blue," but it would take Bonnard to convince us of chocolate skies and yellow oceans.

If we turn our attention to the selection of interior subject matter—to the choice of motifs and their arrangement—we recognize in the work of Picasso and Matisse the obvious contrivance of artifice, where in Bonnard there is much less metaphoric distance. Consider the theme of the odalisque. Matisse exploited her loaded subject matter, her exoticism, by working in a measured and detached way rather than in an expressionistic or emotional one (fig. 20). Similarly, he chose his still-life objects for their thematic associations, often charged connections to past art—from Ingres and Delacroix to Persian or Indian miniatures—and painted the lot in a cool, detached manner. The theatrical nature of Matisse's studio environment (see fig. 66) and props is strongly evident in his still lifes from the 1920s. The studio was a stage for Matisse's painterly investigations. In terms of the odalisque, it was a place where the artifice of the seraglio provided a catalyst. We are expected not to believe that the odalisque is real but to see the model posing,

and allow the spectacle of perceptual activity to unfold upon the canvas.

For Picasso the odalisque had a fixed referentiality to art history; the Painter was his true subject, the ego of the artist. Amplifying this, he often cast the tools of painting as surrogates, from palettes, paints, brushes, canvases, stretchers, frames, and easels to the painter's stool or chair, symbols of light (a lamp or candle), or the model's armchair (fig. 21). These iconic objects drew connections to other art—the rich and robust Spanish still-life tradition, for example, or the making of sculptural busts, often Picasso's own works. As John Richardson has noted, he saw his still lifes as parables. "Whereas Matisse's models have the air of still-life objects," writes Richardson, "Picasso's still-life objects have the air of women."[55]

Fig. 21. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Palette, Candlestick, and Head of Minotaur,* 1938. Oil on canvas, 29 x 35¼ in. (73.7 x 89.5 cm) . The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

Bonnard's alignment to his subject matter was notably different. That is not to say that metaphor is absent from his canvases, but rather that Bonnard painted with an almost startling lack of theatricality relative to Matisse and Picasso. The quotidian props that found their way into his field of vision were chosen precisely for their close associations with day-to-day, even banal activities: eating, washing, talking, and reflecting. Looking at them recalls Vuillard's touching small narratives of the 1890s and their poetic visions of an inward life routinely spent. Just as Madame Vuillard's corset workshop is now familiar ground to us so, too, are Bonnard's modest rooms at Le Bosquet. Yet this commonality of appearance should in no way suggest that Bonnard's late interiors are explications of the rituals of a quiet life in the Midi. Just as the paintings of Marthe at her bath are not pictures about bathing,[56] Bonnard's isolated figures seemingly lost in thought are not narratives about idle reflection.

In one of the artist's last self-portraits (cat. no. 76), where his frail likeness is reflected in the bathroom mirror, we see an old brush that resembles a Goya-esque set of blackened dentures, expressly evocative of old age and decrepitude. In *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)* (cat. no. 41), an indecipherable rounded structure disappears off the right side of the canvas, teasing the eye from its comfortable assimilation of breakfast props neatly laid on the table's striped cloth. Is it Marthe's head or a chair? Bonnard's bathers are similarly tinged with irresolution. In *Nude by the Bathtub* (fig. 22), the mosaic of floor tiles merges in planarity with the luminous fabrics draped on the chair. The watery dissolution of textures and colors, of overlapping swaths and disappearing tactility, endows the lower-right quadrant of the picture with an energetic abstraction: a still life, perhaps, but an illusion that is anything but still.

To look at the interiors from Bonnard's last decades is to confront contradiction: that the mundane is not conventional; that inanimate objects are not entirely inert; that absent humans are very much present. The suggestion of a world in flux, of presence and absence, is ubiquitous—from a door (a portal of ingress or egress) left half open or a dog awaiting his meal, to tea steeping in a porcelain pot. There is also a concomitant feeling of glimpsing forbidden sights or trespassing among private or intimate settings, perhaps nowhere more explicit than in *The French Window (Morning at Le Cannet)* (cat.

no. 42), where Bonnard is easily recognized as the smaller figure, apparently behind Marthe, in the upper-right corner. Marthe appears oblivious to his presence; she takes him for granted, almost as if he were not there at all. We sense the spatial and emotional distance between them—Bonnard looks as if he is in an adjoining room—yet we also feel their closeness. Note how Marthe's self-engaged stance—her torso is slightly oblique but essentially positioned toward the viewer, looking inward—is in marked contrast to that of Bonnard, who looks out toward both Marthe and the viewer. He is literally distant and detached, objective and analytical: the unobtrusive observer par excellence. (One is reminded of Monet painting his wife, Camille, on her deathbed.) Between the heads of the two figures (as we see them) is a small, oblong cushioning form or shape that holds them together in the picture and, seemingly, in life as well. Slowly we realize that the shape is the back of Marthe's head reflected in a mirror, and that Bonnard, also seen reflected, is in an altogether separate physical space, outside our field of vision. Marthe's reflected head thus seems to be facing Bonnard's own reflected image, and thus only through the device of the mirror, through the fictional forms of the painted image, are the two joined together. We are witnessing the memorable moment of Marthe's transition, in Bonnard's eyes, into an idea, image, and paint. We the viewer, standing in the artist's place, see simultaneously the depiction of Marthe and the

Fig. 22. Pierre Bonnard, *Nude by the Bathtub,* 1931. Oil on canvas, 47¼ x 43¼ in. (120 x 110 cm). Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

artist in the act of depicting her: conception, process, subject, and result, conflated in a single image.

As we know, Bonnard resisted verisimilitude in his interiors. He skewed sight lines in order to intensify the relationships among objects and people alike. In *Flowers on the Mantelpiece at Le Cannet* (cat. no. 12), he sliced through his *personnages* much as Degas routinely did in his pictures of dancers at the bar, a deliberate asymmetry that is more pronounced at the peripheries. We have mentioned the indefinable subjects that occasionally disappear off the canvas (see, e.g., cat. no. 41), but we have yet to look broadly at the phenomenon of peripheral imagery in the late interiors. Among these works is hardly a single example that encompasses all of the constituent parts of its crowded repertory of furniture, objects, and people. The green chair in *The White Tablecloth* (cat. no. 6), the cocoa dachshund in *Woman with Basket of Fruit* (cat. no. 16), the barely readable, spectral presence of a woman in profile tending the dining table in *Table in Front of the Window* (cat. no. 37)—all are in the process of vanishing from sight. The tension and torsion of

Fig. 23. Brassaï, *Pierre Bonnard Painting Four Canvases*, 1946. Gelatin silver print. Private collection

Fig. 24. Pierre Bonnard, *The Provençal Jug*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 29¾ x 24½ in. (75.6 x 62.2 cm). Private collection, Bern

Bonnard's peripheries create a kind of cinematic vision of a world in motion.[57] Working as he did from one large length of canvas, he was able to alter the dimensions of his paintings almost until the moment he closed them. Especially in his later work, Bonnard arrived at a final size, scale, and edge through trial and error, expanding here, taking away there, making a long horizontal into a square or, conversely, adding height until he found just the right cropping. Notably, the reverse held true for Cézanne and Matisse, who saw the rectangle of the canvas as inviolate. They changed everything *inside* the rectangle to secure the proper image and structure. This was too restrictive for Bonnard. He needed the freedom to adjust the rectangle, especially its periphery, and only afterward was the painting given custom stretchers. The strategy was particularly important in the late still lifes, where the passages around the edges are intensified by the implied distance of the objects from the viewer, and a critical dialogue emerges between focus and ambiguity.[58] Because Bonnard's stretches of canvas were big enough so that he could extend his images at will, he often started, developed, and finished several subjects on one length. In some instances subjects or scenes were packed together, often with their edges abutting; in other cases Bonnard placed separate canvases alongside one another (fig. 23). It is highly probable that the proximity of one painted image so close to another affected both the psychology and the color harmonies of these works. A still life, in other words, had an increased figural presence having been painted next to a bathroom nude.

Bonnard crafted understated peripheries to evoke the haphazard, the uncontrollable, the evanescent in daily life. When asked why he introduced a left arm into an

Fig. 25. Henri Matisse, *Asia*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 45¾ x 32 in. (116.2 x 81.3 cm). Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

Fig. 26. Henri Matisse, *Woman in White*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 38 x 23¾ in. (96.5 x 60.3 cm). Des Moines Art Center; Gift of John and Elizabeth Bates Cowles (1959.40)

otherwise quiet interior, Bonnard was predictably taciturn, saying only that "he needed something in that spot."[59] Yet such an intrusion brings to an otherwise quiet subject a human presence, one that blurs distinctions between stilled objects and those in motion, between presence and absence, between arriving and leaving. The arm that suddenly and oddly interrupts *The Provençal Jug* (fig. 24) on the right leaves the viewer expecting either entry or exit, whereas in the gouache *Marthe Entering the Room* (cat. no. 73) this ambiguity is made explicit (see the essay by Rika Burnham in this volume).

If the transitory reality of Bonnard's interiors catches his still-life subjects in often indecipherable poses, his Mediterranean palette and dazzling light added further abstraction to a corpus of paintings that became less obviously descriptive and more metaphoric over time. Bonnard may have been reluctant to answer for the errant arm in *The Provençal Jug*, but he was forthcoming on matters of color and light. As noted above, it was through color, not line, that pictures took hold in his imagination.[60] The first revelation of color sparked his impulse to begin a painting. Bonnard often linked his color observations to weather patterns, noting in his daybook, for example, "Vermilion in the orange shadows, on a cold, fine day."[61] The light always felt true to him, no matter what liberties he might take on canvas.

In the late spring of 1946, after Matisse had lent Bonnard two of his own Midi paintings, *Asia* (fig. 25) and *Woman in White* (fig. 26), Bonnard wrote to him praising their shifting colors in the changing light of day: "Your two pictures decorate (that's the word) my dining room, against an ocher background that becomes them. Especially the woman with the necklace—the red there is wonderful late in the afternoon. By day it is the blue that takes the lead. What an intense life the colors have, and how they vary with the light! I make discoveries every day."[62] The letter is particularly instructive given Bonnard's own preoccupation with light transitions, whose nuances he evidently studied by pinning small pieces of reflective foil wrappers to his studio wall and watching their scintillations shimmer back and forth.[63] In return, Bonnard lent Matisse one of his own still lifes, *Basket of Fruit* (ca. 1946, private collection), prompting the following short approbation: "I'm still cohabiting with your mysterious and alluring canvas."[64]

Bonnard may not have painted outdoors, but clearly he was sensitive to the effects of natural light as it penetrated the large window to the right of the wall where he tacked

his canvases. Like Cézanne, who preferred to paint outdoors early in the morning, Bonnard sought the clarity of light when shadows are long and clearly defined, be it at dawn or dusk. Compared to one of his earlier nocturnal paintings, such as *The Bowl of Milk* (fig. 27)—which captures evening light in a dark, tonal interior where the implacable Marthe is seen feeding her cat—Bonnard's later interiors radiate luminosity, whether natural or electric.[65]

In his late work Bonnard was also far more inventive as a colorist. He had truly transformed himself from a Japoniste Nabi with a palette of grays, browns, and ochers into a veritable mystic whose colors recall the Persian riddle about saffron: "What is purple in the earth, red in the market and yellow on the table?"[66] Bonnard's colors came to embody the emerging, meeting, and passing of forms in the transient world, whose components he turned into shapes and planes of saffron red, gold light, and violet shadows. The yellows of his Naples yellow walls are infused with saffron; the gray wainscoting becomes violet. The very color of light for Bonnard was yellow, one that describes light, gives off light, *is* light. Significantly, yellow was also the color that Bonnard associated with his former mistress, Renée Monchaty, a flaxen-haired young woman who was also his model. (When Marthe learned that Bonnard had proposed marriage to Renée, she protested and prevailed, causing the devastated Renée to commit suicide.[67]) This tangled association is vividly illustrated by *Young Women in the Garden (Renée Monchaty and Marthe Bonnard)* (cat. no. 72), a painting Bonnard began in 1922–23, soon before Renée's death, and reworked in 1945–46, after Marthe died. Renée, radiantly golden in a white shirt turned violet, stares at the viewer—unusual for Bonnard—while looking inward as well. To her left is an ominous, dark vertical shape set against the light, perhaps a foreboding of the dark exit to her short-lived beauty. Behind her, a golden, orange, red, and magenta plate (basket?) of fruit is touched by a smaller plate of three fruits, analogous to the overlapping lives of Bonnard, Marthe, and Renée. Foregrounding this gilded vision is the dark barrier of the chair back, its arc held together by clawlike spindles that separate Renée from the darker, cropped Marthe, whose presence here is a formal, as well as a psychological, intrusion. In the lower-left corner a pet dog looks on at both women, almost as if choosing between them. In this painting, one of Bonnard's last, yellow is clearly the color of the sun, of optimism, of life. We know that in Bonnard's final days, when he was too weak even to pick up a brush, he asked his nephew, Charles Terrasse, to add some yellow over a patch of green in *Almond Tree in Blossom*, his last painting (fig. 28). "One cannot have too much yellow," Bonnard said.[68] For him, yellow was not just a color.

White was another key color for Bonnard. He told his Swiss patrons, Arthur and Hedy Hahnloser, that he had been trying to understand the secret of white all his life.[69] Many colorists dreamed of using white as a color, Matisse included, but white poses two basic problems. First, it is the ground color of most modernist paintings; placing white pigment on a white ground has thus been seen by many artists as a formidable challenge, sometimes famously so, as in the white-on-white works by Kazimir Malevich or Robert Ryman. Second, white can infiltrate other colors and make them appear chalky or bleached. Rembrandt, Hals, and Goya, among others, made white powerful by using it in conjunction with high tonal contrast, as Courbet did memorably in *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Bonnard made notes in his daybook to surround rich color with black or white,[70] and indeed he frequently used a rich black in his late paintings as a counterpoint to strong colors. Bonnard gave white a distinct density and presence, transforming it from an indefinite field of space into either a strong planar reality, as in *The Table* (cat. no. 15), or a substance that establishes weight, such as the

Fig. 27. Pierre Bonnard, *The Bowl of Milk*, ca. 1919. Oil on canvas, 45¾ x 47⅝ in. (116.2 x 121 cm). Tate, London; Bequeathed by Edward Le Bas 1967 (T00936)

jug in *Dining Room on the Garden* (cat. no. 49). The white tablecloth in the exceptional painting of that title (cat. no. 6) is a metaphor for, or a microcosm of, the canvas itself, primed but unpainted, on which the arrangement of objects mirrors the organization of the painter's rectangle. Here the subjects of Bonnard's obsession (his still-life objects) overlay an allegory of his lifelong preoccupation with the genre.

Honoré de Balzac, in his 1831 novel *La Peau de chagrin*, describes a "tablecloth white as a layer of newly-fallen snow, upon which the place-settings rise symmetrically, crowned with blond rolls." The metaphor famously touched Cézanne, who reportedly confessed, "All through my youth . . . I wanted to paint that, that tablecloth of new snow."[71] It is this iridescent white, the freshly fallen snow of Cézanne's imagination, that holds so many of Bonnard's plates, compotiers, and cake stands in place. Yet in nearly all of Bonnard's paintings in which white is a major element, he also employed yellow and violet to heighten its impact. In *White Interior* (cat. no. 36) it is represented mostly by pale violets; where white itself is present, we see it vary widely in density as it travels across the surface of the canvas, intruded upon here and there by yellow. Describing a still life with peaches Bonnard painted in 1942, the journalist André Giverny noted how "the peaches, heaped one upon the other, are like a sky at the very end of sunset, when only the golds and one or two spots of white remain. Surrounding this silent symphony is the tablecloth, whose white is varicolored gray and pink."[72] The same smoldering colors placed on a multicolored "white" tablecloth can be seen in another painting of peaches from 1942 (private collection), a year when, according to Antoine Terrasse, Bonnard remarked that the "peaches are astonishing. This year I was much struck by them."[73]

Given that Bonnard's house was in many ways his studio, the color and shape of his dining table, and of his walls and chairs for that matter, are important to our understanding of his work. Time and again he brought together a white linen tablecloth with an intense red undercloth, a pairing that evidently triggered his imagination, possibly in connection with Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon* (fig. 29), a favorite painting.[74] Onto this playing field of red and white Bonnard placed his objects, masterfully initiating conversation among the yellows, violets, reds, blacks, and whites that animate such works as *Still Life with Greyhound* (cat. no. 1), *Before Dinner* (cat. no. 2), *Corner of the Dining Room at Le Cannet* (cat. no. 35), and *Still Life with Bottle of Red Wine* (cat. no. 65). The rich colors respond almost as if they were painted on gold, like a Byzantine icon. Matisse sometimes overpainted dense white on a black ground, as in *The Moroccans* (1915–16, The Museum of Modern Art, New York), which in a similar way gives greater presence to the white as a color, not as an area of tone.

Often in the late paintings the viewer can discern silver-gray or black pencil marks, final touches to the canvas that help articulate details, clarify forms, or push back space. More than a quirk of Bonnard's process, these marks constitute an almost metaphysical statement by the artist on the origins of the work. Conceived in pencil, he seems to

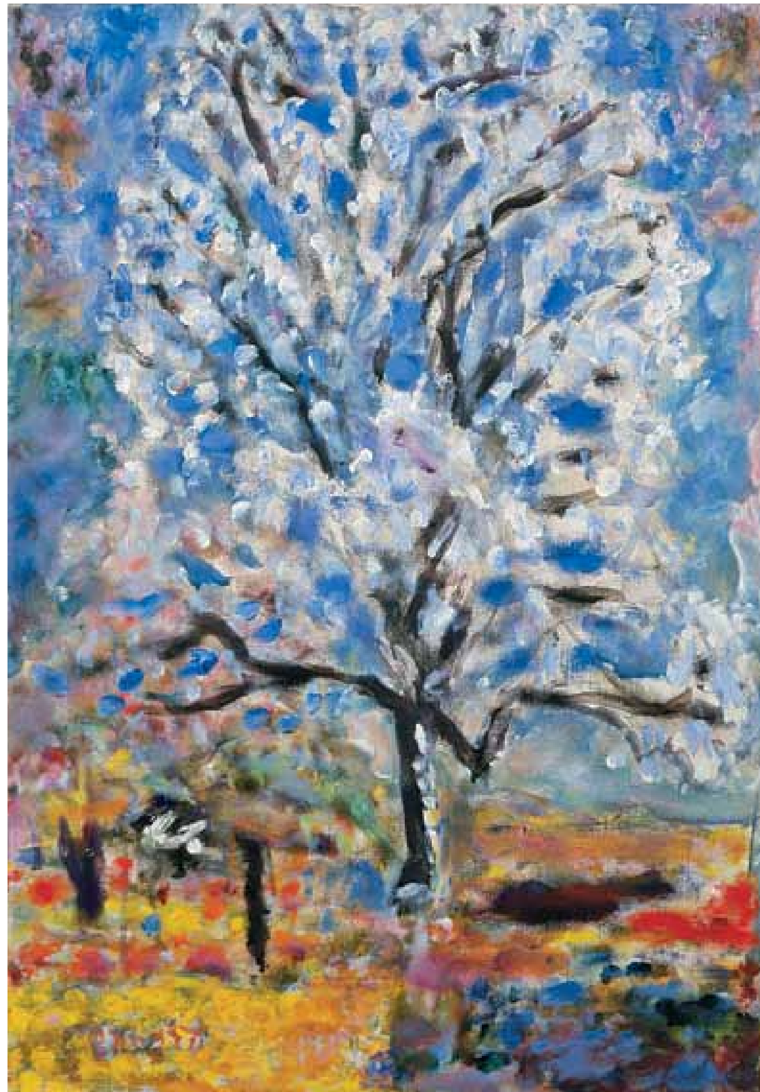


Fig. 28. Pierre Bonnard, *Almond Tree in Blossom*, 1946–47. Oil on canvas, 21⅝ x 14¾ in. (55 x 37.5 cm). Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Zadok, 1964 (Inv. AM 4230 P)

Fig. 29. Paul Gauguin, *Vision after the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 28⅜ x 35⅞ in. (72.2 x 91 cm). National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh; Purchased 1925 (NG 1643)

be saying, they are concluded by the touch of the same. This small act not only reinforced the ties between Bonnard's drawings and his paintings, it demonstrated the lasting importance to him of the drawings, particularly as they informed color.

We can read and interpret Bonnard's still lifes in much the same way we do his figures, as not still at all, but quietly transient. A master of presence, Bonnard transformed discrete, often mundane moments of time—the act of pouring tea, bending over, walking through a doorway, getting out of a bathtub—into timeless images. A toweling Marthe will always look young; the golden-haired Renée will never lose her radiance. And yet Bonnard was also a master of absence. We glean from many of the inanimate objects in his interiors a sense of those who have laid the table, moved a plate, or taken a fruit. The possibility of reentry—that someone who is absent will once again intrude onto our field of vision, or into our mind's eye—is always left open.

In all his waking moments Bonnard was searching for the *shock* of an image, for its potential to become a painting. In that sense he was not a voyeur but a silent witness, someone simultaneously inside and outside of any given moment. His discreet presence in the room where he worked gave him status equal to that of the objects he painted; he was one with the chair, the sugar bowl, the teapot, the saltcellar. In order to paint an object he needed to be familiar with it, to see it sympathetically, or as having its own personality. Once, when asked to consider some charming ensemble as a potential still life, he responded simply, "I haven't lived with that long enough to paint it." Bonnard's sometimes long journey to complete his paintings—from the initial image, surreptitiously stolen from his personal life and then encoded in quick scribbles, to its resplendent, final expression in oil—was an undertaking at once humble and heroic.

1. Born Maria Boursin, she adopted this name later in life.
2. See, e.g., Laprade 1944 and Fargue 1947.
3. Zervos 1947, p. 6.
4. Gilot and Lake 1964, pp. 271–72.
5. In a summary and critique of critical evaluations of Bonnard from 1943 to 1986, Philippe Le Leyzour (1986, pp. 30–31) registers his own dismay toward intolerant critics: "Ce qui est très frappant dans tous ces articles cités jusqu'à présent, c'est la manière très perverse par laquelle Bonnard est célébré ou condamné. Chez les uns, il est le peintre qui nous repose des extravagances cubistes ou abstraites; chez les autres, il est le représentant d'une peinture de délectation totalement dépassée ou qu'on tente abusivement de réhabiliter. Dans presque tous les cas, l'œuvre n'est pas analysée pour elle-même mais par rapport à une évolution que l'on condamne ou que l'on prône. Bonnard n'est jugé que comme un pion sur l'échiquier de l'art moderne et contemporain, il n'est perçu qu'en fonction d'autres peintres, dans une sorte de rapport de forces dont il sort dans tous les cas vaincu, soit par la célébration maladroite et intellectuellement courte de certains de ses admirateurs, soit par l'éreintement jubilatoire de critiques souvent plus avertis mais injustes."
6. The 1984 retrospective "Bonnard" was organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, and traveled (as "Bonnard: The Late Paintings") to The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., and the Dallas Museum of Art; see Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, b. Other exhibitions that contributed to his critical rehabilitation include London and New York 1998 and Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3.
7. Wheeler 1964–65, p. 18.
8. Charles Terrasse, in Rotterdam 1953, unpaged.
9. As quoted in Bernard 1953, p. 9.
10. See, e.g., London 1990–91, p. 46; Callen 2000, p. 15.
11. Rydbeck 1937. Translated into English and reprinted in Terrasse, A. 2000b, pp. 124, 123. For an examination of Bonnard's methodology as regards the dimensions of his canvases, see Hollevoet 1998.
12. Forge, Benci, and Stucky 1985, p. 33.
13. Lamotte and Bonnard 1947. Translation by I. Mark Paris, in Anthonioz 1988, pp. 170, 178.
14. "On parle toujours de la soumission devant la nature. Il y a aussi la soumission devant le tableau." Daybook, February 8, 1939. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 198; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
15. Forge, Benci, and Stucky 1985, p. 33.
16. See, e.g., McTighe 1998, p. 23: "the explicit ranking of subjects that were 'lesser' than history painting was first set out in Félibien's Preface to the *Conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* that he published in 1669."
17. Rosenberg 1999–2000, pp. 34, 35.
18. Ibid., pp. 28–29.
19. Although the still life as a type of life study was not well regarded in the seventeenth century, it was considered an appropriate enterprise in the training of artists since it brought them closer to nature.
20. A number of the Impressionists "retreated" to still life as a haven from critical mockery. Manet, for example, focused on still life in 1866–67 in response to his negative reception at the 1865 Salon. Przyblyski 2001–2, p. 29.
21. See Bryson 1990, p. 92, where he discusses Chardin's evenness of regard: "He gives everything the same degree of attention—or inattention; so that the details, as they merge, are striking only because of the gentle pressures bearing down on them from the rest of the painting."
22. "Depuis cinquante ans je reviens toujours aux mêmes sujets. Il m'est très difficile même d'introduire un nouvel objet dans mes natures mortes." Terechkovitch 1947, quoted in Whitfield 1998, pp. 20, 31 n. 84.
23. To Émile Bernard, Aix-en-Provence, April 15, 1904, quoted in Paris, London, and Philadelphia 1995–96, p. 18.
24. The phrase is Roger Fry's. See Fry 1927, p. 53.
25. See Rewald 1986, p. 226, where he continues: "But nowhere in his canvases did Cézanne pursue this abstract concept at the expense of his direct sensations. He always found his forms in nature and never in geometry."
26. In this regard, one earlier artist who comes to mind is the Spaniard Juan Sánchez Cotán (1560–1627), whose vertiginous subjects show even less regard for the qualities of sustenance.
27. See Sylvester 1962, p. 95.
28. Paul Cézanne, letter to his son Paul, September 8, 1906, in Cézanne 1995, p. 327.
29. For example, in *Still Life with Plaster Cast* (fig. 9), is the plaster cast of the crouching figure at top right an object in *this* painting or a cast in *another* painting that itself is a prop? Similarly, is the still life behind the onion part of a painting leaning against the wall, or does it represent part of the arrangement of objects in this work? Bonnard makes use of comparable conundrums in many of his paintings.
30. To "montrer ce qu'on voit quand on pénètre soudain dans une pièce d'un seul coup." Quoted in Clair 1984a, p. 19, translation from Clair 1984b, p. 32.
31. See Elderfield 1998.
32. As Bonnard himself noted, "When I and my friends adopted the Impressionist colour programme in order to build on it, we wanted to go

beyond naturalistic colour impressions. Art after all is not nature. We wanted a more rigorous composition. There is also so much more to extract from colour as a means of expression." Interview with Ingrid Rydbeck (1937). Quoted in Mann 1994, p. 38.

33. Cézanne to Joachim Gasquet, in Doran 2001, p. 134.
34. Cézanne to Maurice Denis, in ibid., p. 176.
35. For these remarks in context, see n. 58 below.
36. For Picasso on Cubism, especially with regard to Braque, see Gilot and Lake 1964, pp. 75–77.
37. Richardson 1996, pp. 103, 105.
38. Bryson 1990, p. 84.
39. "Quand on couvre une surface avec les couleurs, il faut pouvoir renouveler indéfiniment son jeu, trouver sans cesse de nouvelles combinaisons de formes et de couleurs qui répondent aux exigences de l'émotion." Daybook, 1945. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 202; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
40. Patrick Heron conceived of this abstract structure as a "large scale fish-net drawn over the surface of the canvas." Heron 1998, p. 23.
41. We are still discovering remarkable correspondences between the daybook drawings and the paintings they informed.
42. Bonnard 1947, unpaged. Translation by I. Mark Paris, in Anthonioz 1988, p. 174.
43. It should be noted that Bonnard usually avoided straightforward tonal drawing (i.e., using a range of grays, scaling from black to white, to denote tone).
44. As remarked to Léo Larguier, in Doran 2001, p. 17, nos. XXVIII, XXIX.
45. "La sensation amène aux tons. Dans les tons, il y a en retour une révélation sur la sensation." Daybook, April 27, 1937. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 195; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
46. "Le modèle qu'on a sous les yeux, et le modèle qu'on a dans la tête." Daybook, July 3, 1935. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 190; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 69.
47. "Il faut voir les choses une fois, ou les voir mille." Daybook, October 25, 1931. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 183; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 69.
48. Vaillant et al. 1965, p. 184.
49. "A l'instant où l'on dit qu'on est heureux, on ne l'est plus." Daybook, February 12, 1939. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 198; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
50. "Celui qui chante n'est pas toujours heureux." Daybook, January 17, 1944. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 199; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
51. "Delacroix l'a écrit dans son Journal: 'on ne peint jamais assez violent.'" Daybook, 1946. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 203; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
52. Gilot and Lake 1964, p. 272.
53. Ibid., pp. 268–69.
54. "On peut nager dans le chocolat ou dans l'azur." Daybook, May 2, 1936. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 194; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70. For a discussion of Bonnard and Rothko, see New York 1997a.
55. Richardson 2007, pp. 74, 467.
56. The famously delicate Marthe suffered most of her life from an indeterminate illness or, perhaps, from what could be described as pathological malaise. Bathing (or hydrotherapy) was a fashionable regimen in Marthe's day, one she looked to as a panacea.
57. Bryson (1990, pp. 92–93) cites the same phenomena in Chardin, suggesting that "Chardin's most significant innovation" may have been the deliberate blurring of forms, "as though he were trying to paint peripheral rather than central vision." In "Chardin's fiction of how the eye moves," the eye "conveys the idea of vision moving in unhurried fashion over a familiar scene; not tensely vigilant ([like] Cotán, Zurbarán, [or] Caravaggio) but with a sense of having enough time to take the scene in without strain."
58. Bonnard's interest in conundrums of visual perception is reflected in comments such as these, made to Charles Terrasse in 1927: "I am standing in the corner of the room, next to this table bathed in light. The eye perceives the masses that are far away, under an almost linear aspect, without relief or depth. But the objects closer to us rise towards the eye. The sides slip away. These escapes are sometimes rectilinear—at least those that are far away—but curved, in the case of those that are closer. Perception of that which is far away is a flat vision. It is those things close at hand that give an idea of the universe as the human eye sees it, a universe which can be undulated, convex or concave." Author's translation; quoted in Winterthur 1999–2000, p. 100.
59. In conversation with Hedy Hahnloser, Bonnard replied: "Rien du tout. Il m'a fallu quelque chose à cet endroit. On pourrait aussi bien accrocher un fétiche au mur. J'y ai mis ce bras, voilà tout." Quoted in ibid., p. 70.
60. In a wonderful and often-told story, an old blue jacket worn by Hedy Hahnloser became the inspiration for the marine portrait of the Hahnloser family, *Sailing* (1924, private collection, Switzerland). See ibid., p. 101.
61. "Vermillon dans les ombres orangées, par un jour froid de beau temps." Daybook, February 7, 1927.

Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 182; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 69.

62. Pierre Bonnard to Henri Matisse, May 1946, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 126.
63. For a concise discussion of these, see Elderfield 1998, p. 51 n. 101.
64. Henri Matisse to Pierre Bonnard, May 7, 1946, quoted in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 130.
65. Cézanne's comment "One doesn't *make* light, one *reproduces* it" (Doran 2001, p. 87) comes to mind.
66. Finlay 2003, p. 202.
67. Marthe asked Bonnard to destroy many paintings for which Renée had modeled.
68. Vaillant et al. 1965, p. 150.
69. See Whitfield 1998, pp. 24, 31 n. 110, and Winterthur 1999–2000, p. 100.
70. Daybook, May 4, 1927: "Rendre possibles des couleurs fortes dans la lumière par le noir et le blanc voisins" (Make possible strong colors in the light through the proximity of black and white). He made a similar notation on April 16: "Voisinage du blanc rendant lumineuses des taches très colorées" (Proximity of white, lending a luminosity to some bright colored spots). Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 182; both translations from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 69. When the gallerist Aimée Maeght asked Bonnard to tone down a sharp black diagonal brushmark slicing through a saucepan lid in the late still life *Cooking Utensils* (cat. no. 75), the artist resolutely refused to modify the image, and Maeght reluctantly accepted the picture for sale. Some years later, Maeght assembled an exhibition of "black" paintings, including Bonnard's utensils. Sylvie Baltazart-Eon, conversation with the author, Paris, March 2008.
71. Balzac and Cézanne quoted in Merleau-Ponty 2004, p. 280.
72. Terrasse, A. 2000a, p. 107.
73. Ibid.
74. A postcard of *Vision after the Sermon* was tacked to Bonnard's studio wall in Le Cannet along with postcards of paintings by Seurat, Cézanne, and Vermeer, a Greco-Roman sculpture, and a large reproduction of a Picasso Cubist painting; all were side by side with postcard photographs of landscapes and marine views. Only one of Bonnard's own pictures appears in the mix: the 1925 interior *Window at Le Cannet* (Tate, London).

A Desire for Dispossession: Portrait of the Artist as a Reader of Mallarmé

RÉMI LABRUSSE

[1]

On January 27, 1896, just days after the death of Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé was elected "prince of poets," an honorific coined several years earlier by the Symbolist coterie.[1] There was little about the man to inspire such a following. He led a quiet bourgeois existence, teaching English in a Paris *lycée* and spending most of his leisure time boating on the Seine from his small summer home in the Paris suburb of Valvins. Nonetheless, in this final period of his life (he died in 1898 at the age of fifty-six), Mallarmé had become the object of a veritable cult that had spread beyond French literary circles and into the worlds of music and visual art. Indeed, one of the things his devotees most admired in him was this very subordination of personal life to the painstaking construction of an oeuvre that stood resolutely apart from any literature yet produced. The contrast between his writings and the banality of his daily life only heightened the aura surrounding his extraordinary creation: a poetic language beyond most people's grasp, radically emancipated, as the poet said, from "universal *reporting*."[2]

If Mallarmé's wish to "confer purer meaning on the words of the tribe"[3] was branded hermetic or obscure by some, among poets it had garnered the status of a philosophical doctrine with Neoplatonic overtones. By systematically doing away with linguistic conventions, Mallarmé had managed to restore and unveil a fundamental link between sign and meaning. More than this, he had revealed that "pure notion" and pure signifier were one and the same, and that an extreme kind of formalism was the truest path to an epiphany of essence. Mallarmé believed that once we "atone for the sins of languages," "imperfect insofar as they are many,"[4] poetry and ontology become one. The Word, refined by poetic use, reveals Being; in return, Being attains absolute fulfillment in the Word. Otherwise put, for many, Mallarmé was not so much a "prince" as a mystic, a magus who concealed the ultimate ontological meaning of his message behind a rampart of abstruseness, making it accessible only to an artistic elite.

Like certain of their elders—Paul Gauguin, for one, or Odilon Redon, who was probably Mallarmé's closest painter friend after Manet's death in 1883—the young Nabi painters professed an unconditional admiration for the poet. In 1891 Maurice Denis asked Mallarmé to "be sure to visit" the Nabi room at an exhibition in the château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which also included works by Bonnard.[5] Not long after that, Édouard Vuillard became a friend of the poet's, painting several views of the Valvins house (fig. 31) and winning his enthusiastic consent when in 1897 the dealer Ambroise Vollard commissioned him to illustrate "Hérodiade," the poem on which Mallarmé had worked for more than thirty years.[6] Bonnard, more retiring, kept his distance, even

Fig. 30. Detail, *Self-Portrait*, 1930 (fig. 41)

Fig. 31. Édouard Vuillard, *Mallarmé's House at Valvins (Winter)*, 1896.
Oil on wood, 5½ x 15¾ in. (14 x 40 cm).
Private collection

though he and the poet had much in common. Both men frequented the area around the Gare Saint-Lazare, one of the new bourgeois neighborhoods created by Georges-Eugène Haussmann's renovation of Paris in the 1860s, and both shared a love of nature and enjoyed lazy summer afternoon walks in the garden. Professionally, their main common ground was the office of *La Revue blanche*, published by the brothers Alexandre, Alfred, and Thadée Natanson, who had made the periodical a mainstay of the literary and artistic avant-garde in fin de siècle Paris. Bonnard first published a drawing in it in 1892, followed by many others throughout the decade; in 1894 he designed a well-known poster for the magazine. Mallarmé, for his part, contributed some of his "Variations on a Subject" in 1895 and 1896, prose texts in which he pushed his syntactical impermeability to the limit.

When the weather turned warm and vacation season arrived, Mallarmé and the Natansons were neighbors in Valvins. Bonnard stayed there with friends for a few weeks in the summer of 1896, and it is highly likely that he, like Vuillard, had many occasions to frequent the poet and amateur boatman. We know, in any event, that he attended Mallarmé's funeral, in September of 1898, from a rather melancholic photograph that shows him from the back in Villeneuve-sur-Yonne the day after the poet was buried (fig. 32). A single canvas by Bonnard from early 1899, taking up the theme of Mallarmé's celebrated eclogue "The Afternoon of a Faun," constitutes a clear homage to the deceased writer (fig. 33). A vacant, slightly futile, but moderately luxurious world of bourgeois quietude and comfort: for both men this kind of milieu seems to have been, if not the precondition, then at least the elective setting in which their metaphysical explorations could flourish. It was also what nourished their particular melancholy, one linked to a philosophy of the Void and leavened by a penchant for verbal or visual games.

There are many indications that Bonnard reflected seriously on the theoretical implications of Mallarmé's oeuvre, of which he was a well-informed reader. At least one of the painter's friends mentioned his early and abiding taste for philosophy—he was particularly well versed in the ancient Greeks[7]—which surely helped Bonnard navigate the ontological underpinnings of passages in Mallarmé such as this famous one from "Crisis of Verse": "What good is the marvel of transposing a fact of nature into its vibratory near-disappearance according to the play of language, however: if it is not, in the absence of the cumbersomeness of a near or concrete reminder, the pure notion. I say: a flower! And, out of the oblivion where my voice casts every contour, insofar as it is something other than the known bloom, there arises, musically, the very idea in its mellowness [*l'idée même et suave*]; in other words, what is absent from every bouquet."[8] The

musicality of the "pure notion" of the flower, the "very idea in its mellowness," which eludes us in the actual flower but blooms in the poetic enunciation of the word itself, was something the young Bonnard could easily relate to Plato's sunlight illuminating idealities, which are perceived only as shadows on the walls of the cave of reality. Such an intuition of absolute being can only be obtained by rejecting mainstream perceptions—something that language or drawing allows one to do on the condition that their purely mimetic function of denotation or depiction is stripped away. The gap between the latter state and easy intelligibility is the space through which one reaches the absolute; hermeticism of form (or obscurity) goes hand in hand with purity of being (or quintessence). Bonnard was already saying as much in 1895, when he complimented his friend Vuillard's drawing in *La Revue blanche* by comparing it to Mallarmé: "I saw two of your drawings in *La Revue blanche*. One . . . is like a Mallarmé in its initial obscurity and the purity of workmanship that becomes apparent afterward."[9] Several months later, the same periodical published Mallarmé's defense of the philosophical legitimacy of hermeticism, which the young Marcel Proust had recently mocked: "There must be something occult deep inside everyone, decidedly I believe in something opaque, a signification sealed and hidden, that inhabits common man."[10]

The Nabis' use of line, especially Bonnard's, suggests a direct affinity with Mallarmé's thinking, at least as it was understood by his disciples of the time. The contours of the drawings are so skillful they seem almost to act autonomously, and the viewer, through "an accumulation of opacities" (to use Yve-Alain Bois's expression),[11] must abandon ordinary ways of seeing and view the object as if it were a riddle. This tangle of

Fig. 33. Pierre Bonnard, *Faun*, early 1899. Oil on wood, 12⅝ x 8⅞ in. (32 x 22.5 cm). Private collection

Fig. 32. *Pierre Bonnard, Auguste Renoir, Ida and Cipa Natanson, and Misia and Thadée Natanson at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne*, September 11, 1898. Archives Annette Vaillant

snaking lines—weaving in and out, vanishing and then reappearing—is the marvelous space wherein the substance of things seems to decant into an evanescent yet paradoxically ineffable essence, assuming, of course, that one resists becoming discouraged and perseveres in decoding the initial obscurity. What the ideogrammatic, or hieroglyphic, character of Bonnard's Nabi drawings and, more concretely, his taste at the time for abecedaries (fig. 34) seem to say is that this essence is semiotic in nature: that the ultimate destiny of the real would be fulfilled in signs, and, consequently, that the artist's task was to display an ontology of the sign. The oft-made comparison between Bonnard's drawings and the Impressionist aesthetic ignores this aspect of the artist's connection to Mallarmé. By 1864 the young Mallarmé was already announcing to his friend Henri Cazalis that he had made a crucial discovery: "a very new poetics" that would, he stressed, "*paint, not the object, but the effect it produces*."[12] But this youthful insight, though daring at the time, had become commonplace by the end of the century, and it is not what Bonnard would have been seeking so avidly in the poet's writings. What he did find—which coincided with his philosophical readings—was a critical investigation of the power of the image at the boundary of perceived reality and pure form. Like many of Mallarmé's poems, a number of Bonnard's canvases explore the subtle point at which perception shifts, at which the reassuring and consistent activity of decoding forms referentially is suddenly shattered, forced to reconstruct itself, and then veers toward a different horizon. The question of where that leaves us is one both men posed, and which they hoped to answer by revealing the essence underlying the multiform aspects of reality, or of the "absolute." It is an investigation that goes to the heart of creation (poetic or visual) and that helps to explain Bonnard's lifelong predilection for mirror effects—see, for example, *Vase of Flowers on the Mantelpiece* (1930, private collection) or *Basket of Fruit Reflected in a Mirror* (cat. no. 56)—effects that echo many lines by Mallarmé, such as the following, which could almost caption many of Bonnard's "scintillating" but morbid nudes from the 1930s, among them *The Toilette (Nude at the Mirror)* (cat. no. 31):

Fig. 34. Pierre Bonnard, *A is for Amitié (Friendship)*, from *Sentimental Alphabet*, 1893. Pencil and watercolor on paper, 9⅝ x 11⅞ in. (24.5 x 30 cm). Private collection

Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor
Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe
De scintillations sitôt le septuor

[Though she in the oblivion that the mirror frames
Lies nude and defunct, there rains
The scintillations of the one-and-six.][13]

At the same time, there is a less evident but equally intense bond linking Bonnard and Mallarmé: a poetics of failure, and the disillusioned melancholy that goes with it. The Mallarméan utopia of the complete fulfillment of Being via poetry (which he called the Book) goes hand in hand with a fundamental awareness of its impossibility and, correlatively, of its constant devolvement into "resonant inanity," to use Mallarmé's phrase (you could also say they are like two sides of a coin).[14] In the papers found after his death,

next to the proposition "the book abolishes time," the poet wrote the word "ashes," as if to acknowledge that his highest aspirations were doomed or obliged to go up in flames.[15] He had already said as much to Verlaine; in a letter from 1885 he confessed that "the Book," of which he had "always dreamed" and that he intended as the "orphic explanation of the Earth," was ultimately no more than a "vice," one that his "bruised or weary" spirit had often tried to repudiate but that possessed him nonetheless.[16] We cannot help but sense a moment of self-reflection in a remark he made to Redon the same year, when he wrote that what he especially admired in his friend's recent lithograph (*In My Dream I Saw in the Heavens a FACE OF MYSTERY*, the first plate in the *Homage to Goya*) was the figure of "the great, inconsolable Magician, the obstinate seeker after a mystery he knows does not exist, and which he'll pursue, eternally, for that very reason, with the bereavement of his lucid despair, for that mystery *would have been* Truth!" Mallarmé added, "I know of no drawing which communicates so much intellectual fear and terrible sympathy as this grandiose countenance."[17]

If the "pure notion," like the idea of God, is but a "glorious lie";[18] if the "mystery in letters" goes no deeper than the "signifier," without incorporating the ultimate cipher of Being; if, in other words, the metaphysical perspective no longer acts as a spur to artistic creation, and if all hope of an "orphic explanation of the Earth" via the poem should vanish, then the devastated terrain left behind risks being overrun by specters, produced by a mind shut in on itself and subject to melancholy. Both Mallarmé and Bonnard struggled all their lives against such specters, which were engendered by their unconscious and fostered by the collective neurosis of bourgeois life and its trappings: claustrophobic interiors laden with furniture and "trinkets" (fig. 35), men and women bound by social position (fig. 36) and paralyzed by sexual and other taboos (cat. nos. 2 and 41). A number of Mallarmé's writings allude to this sense of repression: ". . . seeing the mirror horribly null, seeing himself surrounded by rarefaction, all atmosphere gone,

Fig. 35. Dornac (Paul François Arnold Cardon), *Stéphane Mallarmé in His Apartment on the Rue de Rome, Paris*, 1880–98. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

Fig. 36. Pierre Bonnard, *The Bourgeois Afternoon (The Terrasse Family)*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 54¾ x 83½ in. (139 x 212 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

and the furnishings twist their phantoms in the void, and the curtains tremble invisibly, uneasily. Then he throws open the cupboards that they might shed their mystery, their unknown, their memory, their silence: human faculties and impressions."[19] Bonnard's compositions often give off the same feeling: that were it not for the color that mysteriously lifts them from within, the figures and motifs would blur the boundaries between caricature and nightmare (fig. 37, especially the passage at bottom center). To ward off this phantasmal, threatening disharmony, the painter used color, but he also cultivated a kind of playfulness not unlike that adopted by Mallarmé in the many so-called circumstantial poems (*vers de circonstance*), some of which turned his friends' mailing addresses into eccentric puzzles ("postal amusements," he called them) or accompanied gifts of fruits, flowers, and fans:

Le Temps
nous y succombons
Sans l'amitié pour revivre
Ne glace que ces bonbons
A son plumage de givre

[Time
in which we're lost
Without friendship to revive it
Glazes only these sweets
With its plumage of frost][20]

Mallarmé's linguistic games found an echo in Bonnard's visual games, as the Japan-obsessed Nabi soon became famous for imbuing his line with a playful virtuosity analogous to that of a Japanese master printmaker. An unexpected stroke or two might suggest a

poodle chasing after a hoop, a baby climbing out of its crib (fig. 38), or champagne bubbles escaping from a bottle—simultaneously evoking and dismissing the strange, often disturbing potentialities lurking within these motifs. Having given up trying to unite Sign with Being, the image wittingly pursues a game of its own, with the Void as backdrop: a joyously nihilistic game in which line self-consciously mocks its ability to capture a motif and thereby recognizes its own inanity. This recognition results from the line's very acuity, and the derisory point of it all—these futile little scenes, sometimes so hard to make out—only underscores its vanity, with a disillusionment that paradoxically lends it more energy. For Bonnard's viewer (as for the reader of Mallarmé's circumstantial verse), solving the puzzle yields neither a mystical revelation of the absolute nor an obsessive metaphor of the unconscious, only a brief smile. The pride and anxiety of creation are replaced by a lighthearted admission that perception is dubious and that the ancient dreams of possessing Being are but an illusion, here recognized as such. Creatures, things, images, words: these are nothing but ephemeral flashes in the metaphysical void, momentary verbal or visual arabesques.

We see further proof of this in some of the photographs Bonnard took between 1897 (about the time of Mallarmé's death) and 1916. The bucolic allegory of Antiquity comes to life, but as a joke, in the diminutive theater of a bourgeois garden, and it often

Fig. 37. Pierre Bonnard, *Pleasure: Decorative Panel*, or *Games*, 1906–10. Oil on canvas, 96⅞ x 118⅛ in. (246 x 300 cm). Private collection

Fig. 38. Pierre Bonnard, *Family Scene*, 1892. Lithograph, 11 x 15⅝ in. (27.9 x 39.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Lillie P. Bliss Collection (by exchange) (570.1951)

verges on the grotesque, suggesting almost casually the death and nothingness lurking within these playful little skits (notably in how the nude bodies, so dazzlingly white that they appear flattened out, their heads sometimes cut off by shadows, seem pinned like insects to a background teeming with grasses and foliage [fig. 39]). Here again Bonnard is like Mallarmé, who considered that the advent of photography revealed our destiny as "empty forms of matter";[21] who observed it closely (in photographs by his friend Degas, for instance [fig. 40]) and made it resonate in his poems—as if, to quote Yves Bonnefoy, he "wanted to return via the photographic 'effect' to the mute appearance of things, performing an experiment in which the meaningless, hopeless absolute would then be absorbed in his self-consciousness, now penetrated by its own Void."[22] Which brings us to level two.

[II]

A different reading of Mallarmé, a second level, shows through in the works from the final period of Bonnard's life. But before getting to that, let us acknowledge the artist's lifelong fidelity to the poet, for even in Bonnard's way of living we can detect some of Mallarmé's delicate frailty (fig. 42) and taste for reclusion, which surface in a number of Bonnard's self-portraits (fig. 41). Both men seem to have retreated from life in order to delve more deeply into a task at once humble and regal, without being able to decide if it was an ideal or merely a dream.

Fig. 39. Pierre Bonnard, *Marthe Standing in the Sunlight in the Garden at Montval*, 1900–1901. Albumen silver print from film negative, 1½ x 1⅜ in. (3.8 x 3.5 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris; gift of the children of Charles Terrasse, with a life interest (inv. PHO 1987 31 34)

Fig. 40. Edgar Degas, *Mallarmé and Renoir*, 1895. Gelatin silver print, 15 x 11⅜ in. (38 x 29 cm). Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris

Bonnard was clearly aware of the parallel. In the fall of 1940 (which is to say, in exceptionally desperate historical circumstances), he explicitly likened his endeavor to Mallarmé's: first, on September 1, in his notebook ("Mallarmé. Searching for the absolute");[23] then, on November 6, in a letter to Matisse ("My work is not going too badly, and I dream of seeking the absolute.")[24] We should note that Bonnard was reading very little at the time, and that Mallarmé's work (at least according to Thadée Natanson) was practically all that still appealed to him. "Mallarmé is his one true companion, whom he meets up with every day and who gives him a pleasure equivalent to the one he gets from his walks. The rest of his time is devoted to painting."[25] In 1944, the painter asked his nephew, Charles Terrasse, to send him a volume by Mallarmé and another by Verlaine from his Paris apartment. The following year, when the first edition of Mallarmé's complete works was published, he read them avidly, including the texts that seemed the driest and least meaningful. "He wrote me last year," Thadée Natanson noted in 1946, "about how much he was enjoying it and how all of it enchanted him, even the English exercises" (*Les Mots anglais*, the philology textbook the poet had composed in 1875).[26] Despite this, and to the surprise of both Terrasse and Natanson, Bonnard never illustrated a work by Mallarmé with those "vague and whimsical figures" that had earned him success as an illustrator during his Nabi period.[27] To regret this means not understanding that the late Bonnard was no longer the young Nabi he once had been; it means not heeding the deep echoes of his thought when he confided that reading Mallarmé was for him the "equivalent" of walking in his Mediterranean garden.

What was the nature of this change? In 1911, Bonnard, writing to Maurice Denis to thank him for sending his collection of articles, *Théories*, confessed his "melancholy when I think of the days when theories had a certain importance for us." And he added: "The fact is, not only are those years long past, they no longer have any relation to us."[28] Alongside this, Bonnard's drawings had clearly lost the "purity of workmanship" he had once admired in his friend Vuillard; the quality of his line no longer expressed the desire to possess reality in a single stroke and play with it (either to celebrate its hidden essence or to reveal the Void within). Instead, the later drawings took on a muddled, fumbling quality, the oddity of which was not lost on his friends. From the confident, masterful renderings of his Nabi period the artist had moved on to an intentionally *weak*,[29] impoverished style, most often withdrawn in its own private sphere and ill suited for exhibition or publication. Bonnard was no longer taking firm graphic stances but, rather, shaping hesitation, imprecision, and indirection into a working method. From then on, he "avoided drawing with a sustained line, preferring to stumble rather than draw too fast or use embellishments," and he developed a "horror of calligraphy."[30] At the same time, his painting did not tip into Impressionism (which also eschewed firm contours). More than ever, in fact, he continued to paint at a remove from his subjects, facing the wall to which his unframed canvases were nailed, working on them for weeks or even months at a time, in a ponderous meditation and secluded atmosphere that ran counter to

Fig. 41. Pierre Bonnard, *Self-Portrait*, 1930. Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 25⅝ x 19⅝ in. (65 x 50 cm). Triton Foundation, The Netherlands

the Impressionists' haste and love of the outdoors. What we can glean from this creation by trial and error, in which Bonnard, enclosed in an interior space (both physical and mental), decanted the essence of his first impressions, is that his painting never stopped oscillating between an exaltation of the outdoors—the result of "constant contact with nature" (flowers and fruits, landscapes, nude bodies)—and an anxiety, a feeling of distance or separation manifested in the uncanny strangeness of the ghostly shapes that are latent in most of his compositions.[31] Indeed, his flowers and fruits often seem about to rot, his trees and bushes assume strangely clawlike shapes, grimaces appear unexpectedly on faces, and bodies strike often jarring postures of tragic struggle or huddled panic. The terrors of the unconscious appear constantly to be prowling on the fringes of reality, however graciously that reality might be transfigured by the use of color. We might say, then, that Bonnard's color, with its superimposed layers luminously blurring the distinctive outlines of the motifs, aimed to reveal (but not to resolve) the contradiction between the epiphany of nature as pure sensation and the constant contamination of that sensation by phantasms, in a place where unconscious fears and desires obscurely blend together.

It is hard not to see Mallarmé as an ally of Bonnard as he faced that contradiction: as encouraging the artist to look at nature with a gaze devoid of subjectivity (and to develop his aesthetic accordingly), and to equate this gaze with a kind of metaphysical salvation that Bonnard called the "absolute." The term is distinctly Mallarmé's; the poet even used it in his private correspondence, as when he wrote to J.-K. Huysmans in May 1884: "And those flowers! It's an absolute vision of everything which can reveal . . . the paradise of pure sensation."[32] For this reason, it is imperative to recognize that in reading Mallarmé, Bonnard might well have understood "the search for the absolute" as something other than a Neoplatonic quest for the "pure notion." He might intuitively have grasped what Yves Bonnefoy, bucking the usual interpretations, has been saying repeatedly for the past fifteen years: that Mallarmé's poetics, rather than passing through appearances

Fig. 42. Paul Nadar, *Stéphane Mallarmé in a Shawl*, 1880–98. Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris

to extract the ideal structure of Being via language, instead consists of an effort to reach "pure perception, the perception of nothing but pure sensory data, of an appearance so pure that it remains completely untouched by the reckonings of language."[33] According to Bonnefoy, Mallarmé suddenly came to this realization about 1866 following a "uniquely radical" crisis, which left him convinced that every religious or metaphysical proposition—indeed, the very principle of signification by means of language—was misleading and vain.[34] The resultant, dizzying experience of the Void, eroding any horizon of meaning, laid the foundation for Mallarmé's poetics: "an approach to Beauty (what he will name Beauty) through a philosophy of the Void"—so long as we recognize that this beauty, which the poet stripped of any conceptual dimension, remains at a strictly sensory level. "So radical is the erasure of any conceptualization or verbalization that intellect might impose on objects," says Bonnefoy, "that these objects, now liberated, appear to him in their fullest, most immediate sensory aspect."[35] Mallarmé's discovery of the Mediterranean in the spring of 1866 allowed him to complete his path from the ordeal of the Void to a celebration of the beauty of appearances, independent of metaphysics. In a letter to his friend Henri Cazalis on his return from Cannes, he first admits that "we are merely empty forms of matter," but then exclaims, "Oh, my friend, how divine that earthly sky is!"[36]

We must underscore this new poetic duty of Mallarmé's, which consisted of "trying to be only his gaze"[37] and, by bringing language to a point of extreme tension, of revealing the external world as "absolute strangeness emanating from appearance."[38] As such, Mallarmé's work takes on a different cast: either one reads it as the collapse of all meaning, or one discerns (but only fleetingly, like a horizon glimpsed and then concealed anew) the "glory of the obvious that appears when phantoms dissipate,"[39] when words seem, paradoxically, to evoke the "silent obviousness" of "relations of beauty," even if there is "nothing to say" about them.[40] Although Bonnard's interpretation of Mallarmé, more intuitive than logical, was probably not conceived in precisely these terms, we can

assume that many texts by his favorite poet caught his attention precisely for this reason: for their glorification of the purely visual, their ability to untie the knots of dreams and thus to block the proliferation of meanings rising from the unconscious. As it is with the eponymous hero of "The Afternoon of a Faun"—who having "sucked the brightness out of grapes" and lifted "the empty cluster to the sky" blows "in laughter through the luminous skins," looking through them "till evening has drawn nigh"[41]—so it is with the "pure poet" of the "Funereal Toast," who "with large and humble gesture . . . must stand guard against the dream as enemy to his trust," preserving "those true groves" from it.[42] Hence these lines, in which Bonnard might have heard echoes of the same victory he sought in painting:

Oui, dans une île que l'air charge
De vue et non de visions
Toute fleur s'étalait plus large
Sans que nous en devisions.

Telles, immenses, que chacune
Ordinairement se para
D'un lucide contour, lacune
Qui des jardins la sépara.

[Yes, on an isle the air had charged
Not with visions but with sight,
The flowers displayed themselves enlarged
Without our ever mentioning it;

And so immense, each burgeoning shape,
It was habitually adorned
In such clear outline that a gap
Between it and the gardens formed.][43]

Appealing to simple "sight" rather than to mental "visions" means undermining the very integrity of creative subjectivity. It means that one could "drown" in the impersonality of nature—but conversely, for both poet and painter, it could also mean surpassing the "glorious lies" of ordinary language or academic depiction, to attain what Mallarmé called "authenticity"[44] and Bonnard, in a 1940 letter to Matisse, called being alive, or life itself: "I see things differently every day, the sky, objects, everything changes continually; you can drown in it. But that's what brings life."[45] By the same token, it means hoping for the unadorned manifestation of a form of beauty independent of all knowledge, bathing objects in an *inexpressible* strangeness that (as Mallarmé wrote) adorns them in a "clear outline" and forms "a gap" between them and their surroundings. We see the same phenomenon in the secular haloes shimmering around the subjects of certain Bonnard canvases, such as *The Table* of 1925 (cat. no. 15). To quote David Sylvester: "Each plate or dish or basket is an ellipse, a self-contained form, a form that is, so to speak, wrapped up in itself. . . . And this emphasis on their self-containment is reinforced by the fact that the brushstrokes of the tablecloth at the periphery of some of the ellipses also follow their form, making a sort of aura round them."[46] We see it yet again when Mallarmé describes the ability of Manet and the Impressionists "to make us understand when looking on the

most accustomed objects the delight that we should experience could we but see them for the first time,"[47] or when Bonnard expresses his desire "to show what one sees when one enters a room all of a sudden."[48]

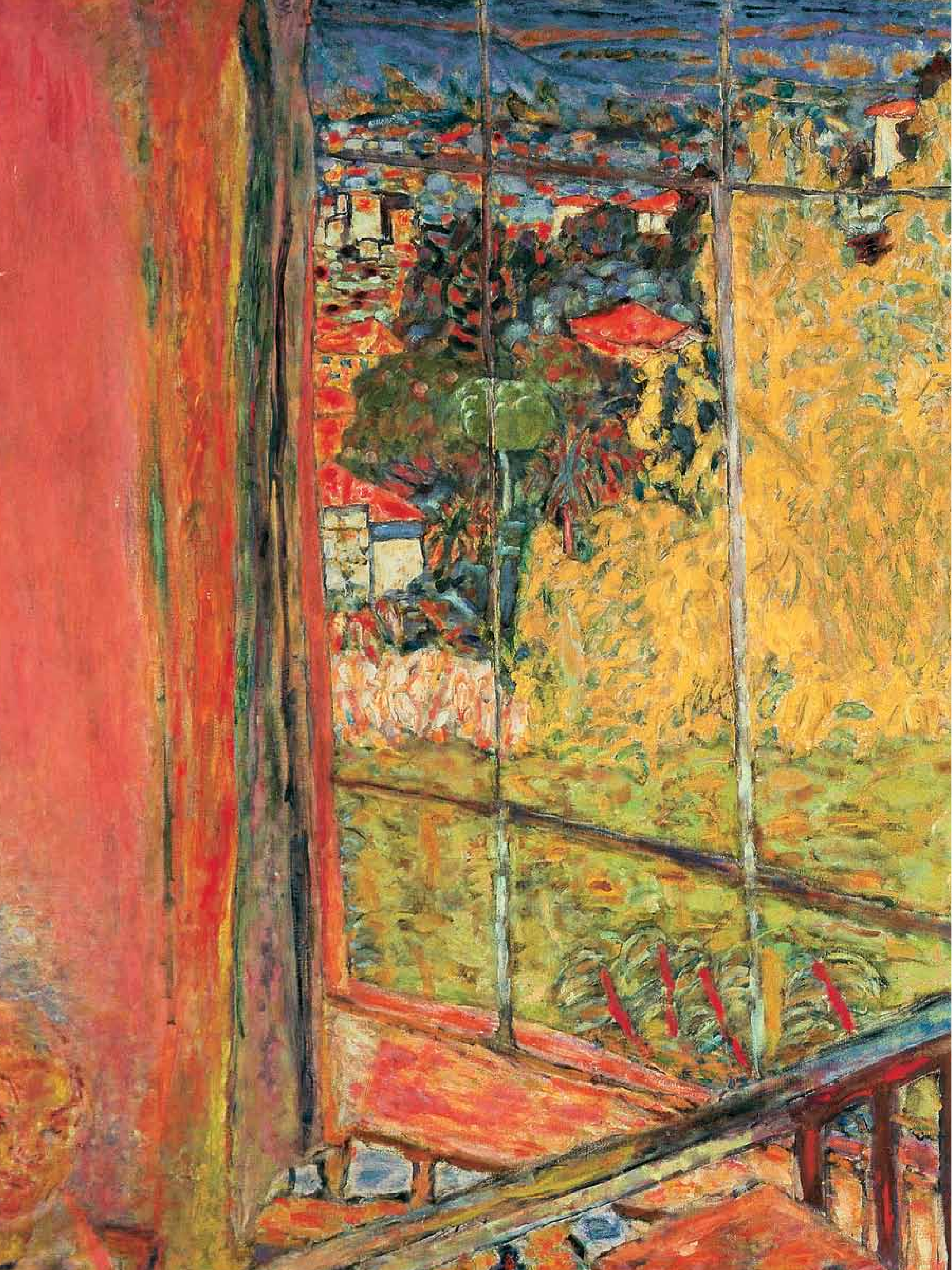
The point here is not to ascribe the similarity between Mallarmé and the late-period Bonnard merely to a mutual inclination for Impressionist aesthetics, but rather to delve farther back and locate its origin in a shared philosophical intuition that predated any aesthetic preference. Late in his life, the "pure notion" of the flower in "Crisis of Verse," the "very idea in its mellowness," interested Bonnard not for its Neoplatonic virtuality (as it had in his youth) but because Mallarmé placed it outside of all knowledge ("insofar as it is something other than the known bloom") even if designating this pure appearance meant risking verbal aporia.[49] In Bonnard's canvases a visual aporia often manifests itself in the difficulty (or impossibility) the viewer encounters when trying to relate a given motif to a precise referent, even though the areas in question are not intentionally abstract: nothing too problematic, at first blush; just small, indistinct areas that keep one from identifying the layers of rumpled clothes over the back of a chair (*Nude by the Bathtub*, 1931; see fig. 22); or that make a chair stand out where one least expects it to, awkwardly and at a disproportionate scale (*Still Life*, ca. 1935, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris); or that cause the fruits in a basket (*Basket of Fruit*, 1936, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge) or the trees and buildings seen through a window (*Window Overlooking the Garden at Le Cannet*, ca. 1944, private collection) to blend together. Nonetheless, as most commentators have pointed out,[50] this is enough to slow our gaze, subtly yet durably, to the point where we can no longer be sure of perceiving a clearly articulated series of objects in space. This latent, unstable referentiality, which interferes with our instinctive mimetic reading of images, is not so different from Mallarmé's hermeticism, particularly at those moments when "his labyrinthine phrasings discourage intellection and approach silence."[51] But in that case we must interpret Bonnard's pictorial hermeticism in terms different from the Nabis' love of "obscurity." We could say that the enigmatic forms in Bonnard's late work do not ask to be decoded, unlike his ironic and melancholic rebuses from forty or fifty years before. Their indecipherable strangeness results from the painter's attempt to suppress anything that might contaminate the exercise of a pure gaze devoid of conceptualization. It is an experience of willful impoverishment vis-à-vis the real; a desire for dispossession that diametrically opposes five centuries of capturing appearance by mimetic depiction, with all its techniques (perspective *more geometrico* first and foremost); the emergence of a presence so overwhelmingly intense that it could defeat any impetus forms might offer to help us read our world.

That said, Bonnard's painting is not utopian. It does not aim, like "the Book" Mallarmé never wrote, to "abolish time," but rather to mark a discreet pause: "the work of art, a moment in time," the painter noted in 1936.[52] If reading Mallarmé helped convince Bonnard that a certain obscurity in expression was equivalent to the celebration of immediate appearance, it was ultimately because he sought to excavate the contradiction inherent in the process of creating a painted image—just as, before him, the poet had endeavored to "quarry out the lines" of verse.[53] His chronic difficulty finishing canvases—not unlike Mallarmé's meticulous and endless reworking of his major poems[54]—is explained by his deepening awareness of the unbridgeable gap between the interiority of immediate sensation and the exteriority of the image. Bonnard's paintings, particularly the later ones, mark a "moment in time" in the sense that slowly, obstinately, they were developed on a stage that hosts an eternal conflict: between the nocturnal density of unconscious representation, where monsters prowl, and the transparency of a sensory being drowning in light.

1. Verlaine had been elected in 1894. Upon his death, Léon Deschamps, editor of the Symbolist periodical *La Plume*, organized a vote. Mallarmé was elected with a plurality of 27 votes out of 167. See Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 2, p. 1742.
2. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse" [*Divagations*, 1897], in Mallarmé 2007, p. 210.
3. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe" [*E. Allan Poe: A Memorial Volume* (Baltimore, 1877)], in Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 1, pp. 38, 1456.
4. Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse," in Mallarmé 2007, p. 205.
5. Maurice Denis, letter to Stéphane Mallarmé, July 27, 1891, in Mallarmé 1981, p. 372.
6. See in particular Mallarmé's letter of September 15, 1897, to Ambroise Vollard: "Yes, I would be delighted to have Vuillard illustrate that poem ["Hérodiade"]; why don't you suggest it and just maybe he'll give in to temptation, since *he can do everything*." Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 1, p. 817.
7. Thadée Natanson, notably, mentions learning "only much later that in school he had been passionate about philosophy, especially Greek." Natanson 1951, p. 20.
8. Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse," in Mallarmé 2007, p. 210.
9. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Édouard Vuillard, September 17, 1895, in Bonnard and Vuillard 2001, p. 34.
10. Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Mystery in Letters" [*La Revue blanche*, September 1, 1896], in Mallarmé 2007, p. 231. In the July 15, 1896, issue of *La Revue blanche*, Marcel Proust had published an article titled "Against Obscurity" ["Contre obscurité"], which poked fun at Mallarmé's Symbolist disciples.
11. Bois 2006, p. 63.
12. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis, October 30, 1864, in Mallarmé 1988, p. 39.
13. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Her pure nails on high displaying their onyx . . ." ["Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx . . ."], in Mallarmé 1994, p. 69. See also the famous lines from "Hérodiade": "Ô miroir! / Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée / Que de fois et pendant des heures, désolée / Des songes et cherchant mes souvenirs qui sont / Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond, / Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine, / Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine, / J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!" ["Mirror, cold water frozen in your frame / Through ennui, how many times I came, / Desolate from dreams and seeking memories / Like leaves beneath your chill profundities, / A far-off shadow to appear in you: / But, oh! Some evenings in your austere pool, / I've glimpsed the Ideal in all its nakedness!"]. Mallarmé 1994, pp. 30–31.
14. Mallarmé, "Her pure nails on high . . . ," in Mallarmé 1994, p. 69 [translation revised].
15. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Notes en vue du 'Livre'" [unfinished work], in Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 1, p. 563.
16. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Paul Verlaine, November 16, 1885, in Mallarmé 1988, pp. 143–44.
17. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Odilon Redon, February 2, 1885, in Mallarmé 1988, p. 140.
18. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis, April 28, 1866, in Mallarmé 1988, p. 60: "I want to gaze upon matter, fully conscious that it exists, and yet launching itself madly into Dream, despite its knowledge that Dream has no existence, extolling the Soul and all the divine impressions of that kind which have collected within us from the beginning of time and proclaiming, in the face of the Void which is truth, these glorious lies!"
19. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Igitur* [unfinished work], in Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 1, pp. 498–99.
20. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Dons de fruits glacés au nouvel an," in Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 1, pp. 294–95.
21. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis, April 28, 1866, in Mallarmé 1988, p. 60.
22. Yves Bonnefoy, "Igitur et le photographe" [1998], in Bonnefoy 2002, p. 236.
23. "Mallarmé / La recherche de l'absolu." Pierre Bonnard, September 1, 1940, in Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 199; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70. We can also attribute Bonnard's rediscovery of Mallarmé to the death of Vuillard on June 21, 1940.
24. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, November 6, 1940, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 73.
25. Natanson 1951, p. 91.
26. Ibid., p. 169. Mallarmé's complete works, edited by Henri Mondor and Georges Jean-Aubry, were published by Gallimard in 1945.
27. Charles Terrasse, letter to Pierre Bonnard, February 19, 1944, quoted in Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 297: "I'm amazed you never thought of illustrating Mallarmé's poems with your vague and whimsical figures. But maybe I'm mistaken . . . " See also Thadée Natanson: "Nor, to date [1946], has Bonnard interpreted either the complete works or even a single sonnet by Mallarmé. At least, not to my knowledge. Still, he has devoted not inconsiderable time to the writer, even though, when the poet was still alive, he saw him much less than Vuillard did." Natanson 1951, p. 169.
28. Pierre Bonnard, undated letter to Maurice Denis [1911], quoted in Munck 2006, p. 85 n. 5.
29. See this remark by Bonnard from 1943: "I, however, am very weak. I find it difficult to control myself when my subject is right in front of me." Lamotte and Bonnard 1947, unpaged, translation from Anthonioz 1988, p. 178.
30. Natanson 1951, p. 200. Later (p. 202) Natanson again stresses: "From among the lines in which he conceals the disorder of his feelings, Bonnard

carefully chooses the most expressive, which are not the best rendered; moreover, he doesn't so much command them as he lets himself be led. He is ever on guard against fatal reminiscences and the dangerous example of so-called elegant penmanship."

31. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, end of February 1941, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, pp. 80–81. Bonnard states that contact with nature "constitutes the basis of [his] existence."
32. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Joris-Karl Huysmans, May 18, 1884 [regarding Huysmans's novel *À rebours*], in Mallarmé 1988, p. 135.
33. Yves Bonnefoy, "Igitur et le photographe," in Bonnefoy 2002, pp. 222–23.
34. Ibid., p. 211. On this crisis, see also Yves Bonnefoy, "L'unique et son interlocuteur" [1995], in Bonnefoy 2002, pp. 285–86.
35. Yves Bonnefoy, "Igitur et le photographe," in Bonnefoy 2002, p. 209.
36. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis, April 28, 1866, in Mallarmé 1988, pp. 60–61.
37. Yves Bonnefoy, "La clef de la dernière cassette" [1992], in Bonnefoy 2002, p. 202.
38. Yves Bonnefoy, "Igitur et le photographe," in Bonnefoy 2002, p. 216.
39. Ibid., p. 233.
40. Yves Bonnefoy, "L'or du futile" [1996], in Bonnefoy 2002, p. 251.
41. Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Afternoon of a Faun" ["L'Après-midi d'un faune"], in Mallarmé 1994, p. 40.
42. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Funereal Toast" ["Toast funèbre," in *Le Tombeau de Théophile Gautier*, 1873], in Mallarmé 1994, p. 45.
43. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Prose (for des Esseintes)" ["Prose (pour des Esseintes)," *La Revue indépendante*, January 1885], in Mallarmé 1994, pp. 46–47.
44. See his definition of poetry from 1886: "Poetry is the expression, by human language reduced to its essential rhythm, of the mysterious meaning of aspects of existence: as such, it endows our earthly sojourn with authenticity and constitutes the sole intellectual endeavor." Stéphane Mallarmé, reply to the survey "Définissez la poésie" [*La Vogue*, no. 3, April 18, 1886], in Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 2, p. 657.
45. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, early spring 1940, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 62. A parallel with Bonnard's feeling of drowning (in other words, of disintegration of the Self) can be found in Mallarmé, when, during his crisis of 1866–67, he told his friend Cazalis: "I am now impersonal and no longer the Stéphane that you knew—but a capacity possessed by the spiritual Universe to see itself and develop itself, through what was once me. My earthly being is so fragile that I can bear only those developments which are absolutely necessary if the Universe is to find, in me, its own identity." Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis, May 14, 1867, in Mallarmé 1988, pp. 74–75.
46. Sylvester 1962, p. 107. See also Bois 2006, p. 54.
47. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Les Impressionnistes et Édouard Manet" [*The Art Monthly Review* (September 30, 1876)]. The original French text was lost; the passage is quoted as it appeared in English translation in 1876; Mallarmé 1998–2003, vol. 2, p. 466.
48. Remark quoted in Clair 1984a, p. 19; translation from Clair 1984b, p. 32; see also Elderfield 1998, p. 49 n. 12.
49. I am basing these remarks on Yves Bonnefoy's analysis in "La clef de la dernière cassette," in Bonnefoy 2002, pp. 190–91.
50. See, especially, Bois 2006, p. 59, where he discusses *Basket of Fruit*.
51. Yves Bonnefoy, "Igitur et le photographe," in Bonnefoy 2002, p. 226.
52. "L'oeuvre d'art: un arrêt du temps." Pierre Bonnard, November 16, 1936, in Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 195; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
53. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis, April 28, 1866, in Mallarmé 1988, p. 60: "Unfortunately, in the course of quarrying out the lines to this extent, I've come across two abysses, which fill me with despair. One is the Void, which I've reached without any knowledge of Buddhism." The second abyss Mallarmé alludes to concerned his physical health.
54. Mallarmé worked sporadically on "Hérodiade" from 1865 until his death, and on "The Afternoon of a Faun" from 1865 to 1876. Most of the poems included in the 1887 *Poésies* had also undergone extensive revision, to which we can add countless unfinished drafts and posthumous works.



Bonnard in the History of Twentieth-Century Art

JACK FLAM

[I]

Although Pierre Bonnard is one of the most familiar names among modern painters, his place in the history of twentieth-century art remains uncertain. There are, as we shall see, a number of reasons for this—one of which was nicely suggested to me by Pierre Courthion, the author of numerous books and articles about both Bonnard and Henri Matisse. Courthion described an encounter with each of the two artists. The first was with Bonnard, whom he was supposed to meet in the lobby of a hotel. He took special pains to arrive on time, but when the hour of their appointment passed, Bonnard did not appear. Courthion, fearful that he had misunderstood the time or gone to the wrong place, began to walk around the lobby. And there, off in a corner, he came upon Bonnard, who had been quietly sitting and waiting for him, nearly invisible. Courthion's meeting with Matisse, in the lobby of the Hotel Regina in Nice, was a completely different affair. Prompt as ever, Courthion arrived early and seated himself in an armchair. At exactly the appointed hour, he caught sight of Matisse sweeping down the grand staircase with seigneurial self-assurance and remarkable presence, an elegant cape trailing in his wake. There was no way of missing or overlooking Henri Matisse, Courthion remarked, noting that it would be hard to imagine two men who made such different impressions.[1]

Something of the effect that the two artists had on Courthion is apparent in their works. The ways they present themselves in their self-portraits, for example, are so different in spirit that they appear almost to embody opposing attitudes to self-awareness and self-definition. Matisse's self-portraits, even the slightest pencil drawings, are full of self-assertion. Although he catches himself in different moods and is fascinated by the variety of ways in which his physical appearance and inner identity can be presented to the eye, our sense of his personality and presence remains firmly fixed. In Bonnard's images of himself, by contrast, the artist explores his physical appearance in the most tentative manner, and you come away from these images not quite sure of what he actually looks like. It is as if the "invisibility"of Bonnard is apparent even in his self-portraits, where we sense a strong human presence but do not see an easily recognizable or memorable visage. In some of them, such as *Self-Portrait* of about 1938–40 (cat. no. 74), the forms of his face take shape right before our eyes. In effect, he is questioning rather than declaring the nature of his identity, as if asking himself whether he really exists.

This, it seems to me, is directly related to another way in which Bonnard is invisible—from the history of twentieth-century art. He just does not fit into the master narrative, which was constructed by critics and historians who saw modern art largely in terms of a succession of movements that implied a progressive evolution. As a result,

Fig. 43. Detail, *The Studio with Mimosa*, 1939–46 (fig. 45)

although Bonnard is highly regarded by painters—and painters working in many different styles—his work is usually marginalized in written histories, where discussion of it is often limited to his early pictures and his association with the Nabis. He receives no better treatment in the academy, where many people who teach general courses in twentieth-century art simply leave him out.[2]

In terms of historical evaluation, there are some interesting parallels between the careers of Bonnard and Matisse. Perhaps this is because they stand apart from those progressive painters who expunged narrative subjects from painting early in the last century for having done so primarily with color, and for having made painting breathe in a new way: not in distinct, constructed sections, but organically, as if infused by a respiratory system. The skins of their paintings have lives of their own, almost independent of what is represented, creating a fluid, synergistic relationship among forms, objects, and empty spaces. Hence, although both painted many still lifes, the inanimate objects in their paintings do not remain "still." They breathe, they vibrate, they interact with each other and with the spaces around them; they seem at times to be livelier than the figures that cohabit the rooms in which they are placed.

Both Bonnard and Matisse were preoccupied with expressing themselves largely through the process of painting itself. So when we view their paintings, we have to pay close attention to technical details—to the subtleties of touch, to the body and texture and layering of the paint—as well as to the placement of the forms. We also have to be alert to the ways in which visual echoes and rhymes can modulate and enrich both the formal and psychological relationships among the various things represented. For Bonnard and Matisse, more than for most artists, the physical substance of the colored pigment, and the visible evidence of the resistance that the act of painting gives to representation, are integral parts of the "subject." The deeply pictorial qualities of their works have tended to blind viewers to their more than "merely visual" meanings and have had a deleterious effect on their critical reception.

Both artists had unfortunate critical myths built around them during their own lifetimes. In Matisse's case these myths began to be challenged seriously only during the 1970s, and in Bonnard's case they have survived more or less intact until the present. In the same way that Matisse was for many years thought of as the painter of "the good armchair," a mere decorator whose work was charming but in no way profound, Bonnard, too, was regarded as an "easy" painter, a lightweight. His painting, moreover, was seen as anachronistic—a blend of Impressionist brushwork and bland domestic subjects that seemed to reflect a quaint and compromised modernism outside the significant developments in the history of modern art. (In fact, as we shall see, he was anomalous rather than anachronistic, and it is this oddity that even now makes him so hard to place.)

"How to explain the growing reputation of Bonnard's work?" Christian Zervos wrote in *Cahiers d'art* shortly after Bonnard's death. "When carefully examined, it is obvious that this reverence is shared only by men who know nothing about the grave difficulties of art and cling above all to what is facile and agreeable."[3] In response to this statement, Matisse, who had been especially friendly with Bonnard during the war years, wrote an angry rebuttal; Pierre Matisse said that he had seldom seen his father so angry. And although Matisse's heated defense of Bonnard was surely motivated by friendship, respect for his work, and a sense of justice, it was probably also fueled by his memory of the many similar statements that had been made about his own art.

The mixed critical receptions accorded both Bonnard and Matisse, I believe, were related to the particular, often unexpected, demands that looking at their works make on the viewer, and to the way they both stood apart from the major "isms" of twentieth-

century art. To make matters worse, both were also saddled with clichéd stylistic designations based on their early work (Bonnard with the Nabis, Matisse with the Fauves) that followed them throughout their lives. At a time when so much critical and art historical thinking was framed in terms of movements, both artists were notably difficult to relate to the "major currents," and both appeared to have missed the boat with regard to Cubism, the most influential and most aggressively "modern" of all those movements. As a result, both were long associated with what appeared to be an ingrained conservatism. If, as Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger wrote in 1912, "at present Cubism is painting itself," then Matisse, and especially Bonnard, were clearly not practicing the current version of "painting itself."[4] In somewhat different ways, neither seemed to be completely modern.

Their reputations were also affected by the paradigm of Pablo Picasso as the "greatest artist of the century," as he was then widely acknowledged to be. Compared with the direct, narrative quality of so much of Picasso's work, the subject matter of both Matisse and Bonnard struck many observers as quite bland. While Picasso's work often employed overtly symbolic forms and subjects and was deeply engaged with the contemporary world, with history in the making, Bonnard and Matisse seemed to be content with representing the banal surface of everyday life, apparently as oblivious of symbolic form as of the political and social issues that troubled the world around them. And whereas Picasso's work inspired a great deal of varied and articulate commentary, the paintings of both Bonnard and Matisse were so intensely visual they were difficult to talk or write about; an adequate vocabulary for doing so had not yet been invented.

Clichés about the three men's personalities also played a significant role in the evaluations of their art. Picasso was hailed as the socially engaged philosopher, whose art faced up to the major spiritual conflicts of his time, while Bonnard and Matisse were considered solitary aesthetes who painted only life's pleasures. They were painters of "happiness," as was often said.

If Matisse was for a long time overshadowed by Picasso, Bonnard, in turn, was eclipsed by Matisse. Once again, judgments about the work were influenced by the differences in their personalities: Matisse apparently so sure of himself, Bonnard so excruciatingly timid and retiring. Such evaluations also involved the ways in which their work developed: Matisse inventing greatly varied pictorial languages, Bonnard working in a fairly narrow stylistic range; Matisse constantly renewing himself, constantly evolving (even at times, as during the 1920s, when he seemed to be evolving backward), Bonnard cautious and tending to repeat himself. In contrast to Matisse, whose artistic stature and historical importance have grown steadily during the past fifty years or so, Bonnard is generally still seen as a painter who somehow managed to produce good work despite his historical irrelevance, his timidity, and his Post-Impressionist style. In brief, a gifted minor artist.

Several factors lie behind this judgment. Some are art historical, some aesthetic, and some ideological.

[II]

The art historical situation is the one that is perhaps most easily described. Although Matisse was only two years younger than Bonnard, he came to his first artistic maturity several years later, about 1905, somewhat after what is often regarded as the "height" of Bonnard's career. Matisse, a late starter and slow developer, was literally still a student at the time Bonnard had his first one-artist show. (And around the turn of the century, Matisse was quite clearly influenced by the flat patterning, high viewpoint, and dense paint application of the pictures Bonnard had done during the 1890s.)

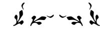
By 1905, however, about the time the two artists first met, their relative status began to change. While Bonnard was still associated with the painting of the fin de siècle, Matisse moved into a position of avant-garde prominence, especially after the 1905 Salon d'Automne, where he showed such radical works as *The Woman with the Hat* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) and *Open Window, Collioure* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). The rising of Matisse's star at this time, and the decline of Bonnard's, was related to the inventive way that Matisse reacted against the kind of late Impressionism that Bonnard was practicing, which was based on detailed rendering of the fleeting effects of light and on the evocation of a specific moment in time. By 1908, when Matisse published "Notes of a Painter," he had formulated a very different approach to painting, which involved rendering the "essential character" of things and representing them *out of time*: "Underlying this succession of moments which constitutes the superficial existence of beings and things," Matisse wrote, "and which is continually modifying and transforming them, one can search for a truer, more essential character, which the artist will seize so that he may give to reality a more lasting interpretation."[5] Matisse's dissatisfaction with Impressionism led him to distill the essential properties of things into abbreviated, abstracted images of them—what he called "that state of condensation of sensations which constitutes a picture."[6] He sought a kind of timeless absolute.

But since Matisse's pictorial imagination needed the stimulation of direct contact with objects, he continued to paint directly from nature, reconceiving the essential character of the objects he was painting in accordance with the pictorial dynamics and demands of each individual work. Hence the essentialized image of the same thing could be very different in different pictures. If the forms that he was inventing were in a sense absolutes, they were, paradoxically, "relative absolutes": shaped by the demands of each individual picture. Between 1907 and 1917, Matisse produced paintings of astonishing force, inventiveness, and variety. But that same period also witnessed the rise of Cubism and of the related, overtly conceptual styles that came to dominate avant-garde thought and practice. As a result, by 1912 Matisse's approach to painting was widely regarded as superseded, even though for the rest of his life he was periodically admitted back into the avant-garde orbit.

About the same time, in 1912, Bonnard started to take stock of the pictorial revolution that was taking place around him and began to seek a different balance between the color and compositional structure of his paintings. But he did so in such an idiosyncratic way that it escaped the attention of most observers. Although his compositions became more austerely structured, and his paint application more varied, he remained associated with a kind of bourgeois "drawing room" painting. To most observers, he seemed locked within the same historical bubble as Édouard Vuillard, Ker-Xavier Roussel, and other artists associated with *La Revue blanche*.

Despite the increased attention that has been given to Bonnard's work in recent years, this retrograde stature is still expressed in a number of different ways. In Paris, for example, several of his later works, from the 1910s or 1920s, are exhibited not at the Centre Pompidou but at the Musée d'Orsay, thus emphasizing his connection to the nineteenth century.[7] Exhibitions of his work often reinforce this impression. The retrospective exhibition "Bonnard: The Late Paintings," which was shown in Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas in 1984, and which was an implicit response to this state of affairs (that is, the need to affirm that there was a significant "late" Bonnard), nonetheless included works from as early as 1900, when, according to the catalogue, his "late" work was deemed to begin: that is, about the time that he began to be forgotten by history. Although the catalogue for that show made it clear that Bonnard's position

among twentieth-century artists needed to be reevaluated, after an initial flurry of activity he sank back to his ambivalent and rather middling position within the hierarchy of twentieth-century painters, despite the publication of important texts by Jean Clair and, later, by John Elderfield that reevaluated his position.[8] A similarly dispersed effect was created by the recent, thematically arranged Bonnard exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, where emphasis was given to his early decorative compositions, and which projected little sense of his artistic importance or chronological development. Although the catalogue contained an excellent text on the late work by Yve-Alain Bois, the exhibition itself did not make a compelling case for the paintings done after the mid-1920s, which are arguably Bonnard's greatest works.[9]



What we might call the aesthetic situation is somewhat more complicated. To begin with, we generally expect painting to *direct* our attention, but Bonnard *disperses* it. Moreover, he does so in a way that is especially difficult because the sense of dispersion and ambivalence in his paintings forces us to slow down our viewing and to regard his works in meticulous detail; they resist being taken in at a single glance. They seem to be not only delimited in space, but enveloped in time. This is one of the principal differences between Bonnard and Matisse. Matisse's paintings, despite their painterly complexity, make an immediate overall impression and can be taken in quickly as a whole. Bonnard's paintings can rarely be taken in so quickly; they force us to navigate painstakingly through their intricate spatial construction, their dense layerings of sometimes opaque, sometimes translucent marks, and through the complexity of their implied temporal constructs. This difference between the two artists has been nicely described by John Elderfield, who notes that our first impression of a Matisse painting goes on "resonating even as the beholder continues to contemplate the image; indeed, even after he has ceased to contemplate it. For Bonnard, the image is more important as a present experience than it is for Matisse, which is why his paintings are the more difficult to remember."[10] As a corollary to this, I find that when I look at Matisse's paintings, I want to see them from very close up and also from a distance. When I look at a Bonnard, even a large one, I find that I rarely want to back very far away from it; to do so would be to move outside the self-contained temporal envelope that the painting creates for itself and which extends outward only so far as to encompass the viewer. Bonnard's paintings either engulf us in their own world or leave us indifferent; casual viewing is not a very rewarding alternative.[11]

As may be imagined, the qualities that I am describing do not reproduce very well, either in black and white or in color. (Matisse, on the other hand, reproduces reasonably well even in black and white.) And since so much art writing is done from reproductions, the intricate nature of Bonnard's work puts him at a great disadvantage. Moreover, given the blandness of Bonnard's subjects—a bowl of fruit in front of an open window, a woman seated at a table, some people in a garden—on first viewing his pictures seem to be entirely predictable; as a result, many of them initially lull us into a feeling of complacency. Only after extended looking does it become apparent how strange and surprising they are. Only then does their effect of suspended resolution begin fully to resonate. Only then do you realize that the obsessive proliferation of brushstrokes that constitutes the picture will never achieve closure, that what appears at first to be an accumulation of meticulous detail is to an equal degree a deconstruction of detail, and that the carefully calibrated relationships between spaces and objects are meant to pull things apart as well as bring them together. Only after prolonged looking do you realize how complex, contradictory, and difficult Bonnard's paintings actually are.

Often, when you stand before one of Bonnard's paintings, the whole spatial structure seems to buckle; empty spaces can appear to bulge forward, while solid objects appear almost concave; space itself is virtually warped by the dense presence of time made visible in the throbbing presence of the paint film.[12] In *The Breakfast Table* of 1936 (cat. no. 55), for example, the window view, the adjoining wall, and the open door appear to undulate irregularly toward and away from the table and the picture plane. Only after a while do you realize that there are two figures in the painting, and that both of them—the woman seated next to the window and a spectral person who seems inseparable from the blazing luminosity of the picture plane—are at the same time disturbingly stiff and elusively ethereal. Here, as in so many of Bonnard's works, the world that he presents to us is oddly provisional, and in a curious way the tremulous facture both carries aloft and muffles the cri de coeur that it contains. His paintings have a dense, numinous quality that makes them seem to be evocations not only of the things we see, but also of the memories and specters of other presences, which we intuit but that are not clearly visible. In Bonnard's paintings, real time and memory are intermingled in such a way as to be nearly indistinguishable.

A sense of memory captured within ongoing time, as if caught in the process of formation, plays a capital role in Bonnard's later pictures.[13] Often, it seems as if the picture itself is an accumulation of fragments of evolving consciousness. It is this tension between our sense that we are looking at representations of real things and our feeling that we are also looking at the apparitions or memories of things that gives his paintings such a haunting quality and such a strong feeling of incertitude, both spatial and psychological. Bonnard's paintings are in a sense entropic constructions, where the constituent elements appear to be in constant flux, and in which the things of the world are represented as if they are continually coming into and fading from our conscious awareness.

The relationship between color and drawing in Bonnard's late paintings is a crucial part of his achievement, for he balanced them in a way that is unique among modern artists. In his late pictures especially, the limits of things abut each other in a pliant, contingent, somewhat approximate way. The forms ebb and flow at their edges so that the boundaries between things, and between things and emptiness, are constantly modulated and qualified. This makes it difficult to distinguish between the processes of painting and drawing per se, and it also calls into question the whole notion of finish, since drawing and color are often set in an unresolved—and indeed in a willfully unresolvable—tension. The linear descriptions of the objects are carried just so far, to the point where they verge on asserting themselves but are constantly held in check by the uneven way that pressures are exerted by the colored paint film. The graphic definition of the things depicted is reduced, but not quite effaced. It reasserts itself in an oddly irregular way, so that linear definition never entirely disappears, causing us constantly to wonder, *Where do things begin and end?*—and, frequently, to puzzle over exactly what is being represented. (Bonnard's pictures are full of mysteriously unidentifiable objects, often set in the foreground, right under our noses.) The "drawn" content of Bonnard's paintings is thus inextricable from the painted elements. The world so depicted seems caught up in a cyclical process of formation and disintegration, in which there is little place for the kinds of stable representations that lend themselves to purely graphic delineation.

It is no wonder that Matisse addressed his most elaborate complaint about the relationship between painting and drawing to Bonnard, in his now famous letter of January 13, 1940, in which he tells his friend that his drawing and his painting are separating:

> *My drawing suits me because it renders what I specifically feel. But my painting is hampered by the new conventions of flat areas of color, which I must use exclusively to express myself, with local tones only, no shadows or surface relief that might react on each other to suggest light and spiritual space. That hardly suits my spontaneity, which makes me discard a time-consuming work in a minute because I reconceive my picture several times as it's being painted without really knowing where I am going, relying on my instinct. I've found a way of drawing that, after preparatory work, has a spontaneity that releases just what I feel, but this method is exclusively for me, as artist and as viewer. A colorist's drawing is not a painting. One must produce an equivalent in color. And that's what I'm not managing to do.*[14]

The search for such an equilibrium was a problem that had vexed Matisse for decades. Throughout his career, he moved back and forth between two polarities: the first, a painterly, modeled procedure in which he painted and drew at the same time; the second, a planar approach where the color was applied in relation to already established linear boundaries. Bonnard's late paintings appeared to have resolved this issue in a seamless way, but one that was closed to Matisse, for whom drawing was always an incisive act rather than the tentative, somewhat digressive procedure it was for Bonnard.[15] Very likely, it was Bonnard's example that helped push Matisse toward the interiors of the late 1940s, which often contain their own kinds of spectral presences, as in *Large Interior in Red* (fig. 44), and which eventually led to the new kind of "cutting directly into color" that he achieved in the paper cutouts.[16] In return, a good deal of Matisse's boldness rubbed off on Bonnard during the 1940s, as seen in the expansive design and resonantly bright colors of paintings such as *Bouquet of Mimosas* (cat. no. 58) and, especially, *The Studio with Mimosa* (fig. 45).

Fig. 44. Henri Matisse, *Large Interior in Red*, 1948. Oil on canvas, 57½ x 38¼ in. (146 x 97 cm). Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

The suspensions of formal resolution in Bonnard's pictures help to create the subtle psychological shifts in consciousness that are unique to them. These suspensions also set the stage for one of their most striking features: the way that as you look at one of his paintings, you often suddenly become aware of the presence of a human figure (or of an animal) whom at first you did not see, and who appears to look back at you, quietly mirroring your own silent act of contemplation. (This unsettling effect is built right into the structure of the paintings; each time we regard such a picture, the same figure reappears, as if from nowhere, with the same surprising, catlike suddenness.) Such a tangible manifestation of the tension between what is consciously seen and what is unconsciously felt has the uncanny effect of making the world seem somehow to be inhabited by spectral presences who only intermittently show themselves. (I think again of Bonnard sitting quietly in the hotel lobby, initially lost to view.) The painter, we sense, is using his banal, everyday subject matter not so much to celebrate the commonplace as to show how strange it really is. Moreover, if we look carefully at the way people are drawn in Bonnard's paintings, we are often struck by the monstrousness of their faces—mouths awry, features nearly obliterated—and by the extreme awkwardness of the poses: bodies possessed by preternatural stiffness or made menacing by being darkly silhouetted.

Because Bonnard paid so much attention to specific details and to what appear to be the fleeting effects of light, his paintings

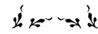
look as if they were painted from nature. He did not, however, work directly from life, but from a combination of memory, imagination, drawings, and photographs—with occasional sidelong glances at his motifs. (This is quite the opposite of Matisse, whose boldly brushed works, though painted from nature, often seem to be entirely made up.) Bonnard professed a real aversion to standing before the objects he was painting, and to ensure that he would not be distracted by the real world as he worked, he painted on pieces of unstretched canvas that were tacked to the wall.[17] This allowed him to adjust the sizes and proportions of his pictures as they developed, and to disassociate his canvases physically from the world they depicted by not being placed on an easel in the middle of it (see the essay by Dita Amory in this volume).

Fig. 45. Pierre Bonnard, *The Studio with Mimosa*, 1939–46. Oil on canvas, 50¼ x 50¼ in. (127.5 x 127.5 cm). Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Knowing that Bonnard's paintings are imaginative constructions, not transcriptions of things he was looking at directly, reinforces my conviction that in painting these unexpected combinations of things and presences, Bonnard was interested not so much in the fleeting, aleatory aspects of visual experience as in the interactions between conscious thought and unconscious perception. The more one looks at Bonnard's late paintings (and a number of the earlier ones, too), the more they seem like evocations of a dream state, or in any case of a kind of reverie, which wanders back and forth between—and inextricably mixes—conscious and unconscious thought. The way his paintings slow down our process of viewing, the perspectival and structural contradictions they contain, even the difficulty we have in identifying certain objects, suggest another level of consciousness, a mental world that imposes its own structure of time and memory upon the objects of everyday life.

Important aspects of the meaning and depth of Bonnard's work were for a long time overlooked precisely because they are so subtly expressed, and so evanescent. His indirectness, which is such an integral part of his means of expression, was often seen simply as evidence of his indecisiveness. Picasso, exemplar of a very different kind of painting, famously criticized Bonnard for such an approach, which he saw as weak and indecisive: "He doesn't know how to choose."[18] For Picasso, painting was a matter of making declarative statements, as firmly and as strongly as possible, and the indirectness of Bonnard's work was anathema: "That's not painting, what he does."[19] What Picasso and a number of like-minded critics found least tolerable in Bonnard's painting was in fact one of its greatest strengths: an openness to that which is undecipherable in the world, to the contingency not only of vision but of existence itself. It is this balance between the haltingly achieved illusion of light and atmosphere and the painstakingly digressive accretion of the paint substance that imbues Bonnard's depictions of commonplace scenes with their enduring mystery and existential disquiet.

Picasso himself, of course, was a master of ambiguity, and so presumably what annoyed him was not that Bonnard was being ambiguous, but that his ambiguity was—if one can put it this way—not clearly stated. That is, Bonnard's ambiguity was not graphic or semiotically evident; it did not announce itself, and was not clearly *definable*. While Picasso was a master of graphic ambiguity, the inventor of complex linear sign languages, to which color is often merely incidental, Bonnard was something like the opposite. In his paintings, the color field ebbs and flows against the graphic notations that delineate objects and, ultimately, holds them at bay. In a very real sense, Bonnard's paintings are purposely *not* resolved. If they look as if he could keep adding to them indefinitely, it is because their openness is an essential part of their meaning. (Matisse, by contrast, stopped work on a painting just before it was done, producing a very different kind of open effect.)[20]



If Bonnard's paintings propose a different kind of modernity from the main movements of the early twentieth century, they also created a rather different legacy: the art of Mark Rothko, color-field painting, and postpainterly abstraction all owe a good deal to him. (Perhaps not coincidentally, the latter two are also currently considered marginal to the history of late-twentieth-century art.) What might be called the ideological situation of Bonnard's art is in good measure related to this. His painting does not conform to the criteria that the history and criticism of modern art have found useful to further their own enterprise.

Bonnard's painting does not reproduce very well, and it does not easily lend itself to purely formal description, semiological analysis, or easily summarized ideas; Bonnard, moreover, was not an inventor of "signs." In effect, his painting fairly *defies* the whole notion of visual signs. A sign condenses into a single form complex elements of perceptual and conceptual experience; it synthesizes them into discrete, graspable forms, based on what Matisse called their "essential character, which the artist will seize so that he may give to reality a more lasting interpretation." But Bonnard's entire enterprise is based on something like the opposite: not on seizing things but on dispersing them; and on permanently delaying—even foiling—a unifying synthesis by keeping things fluid, by keeping contradictions actively unresolved, choices indefinitely postponed.[21]

A sense of the unexpected permeates Bonnard's oeuvre and keeps us constantly a bit off balance: not only the unexpected viewpoints or the unexpected presence of people or dogs or cats, but most especially the unexpected contrast between the blandness of what is being represented and the intense way the paint itself is applied. A great deal of the considerable intensity of Bonnard's late paintings is quite literally carried by the film of paint into which the images are embedded. The formal qualities of his pictures (such as paint texture, relative translucency, color, and surface pattern) are played against their descriptive elements in a finely balanced way. As a result, the specific figures and things represented in his pictures seem to be suspended in a kind of rarefied, incandescent single substance that is not quite light, not quite matter, nor anymore quite just paint.

[III]

When we judge recent art we implicitly face the question of what we see as the main direction or thrust of the art that has come before and after it, and thereby what we see as its place in what we call "history." Here, as we have seen, Bonnard occupies a somewhat curious position. For if history is seen as a progression forward along paths that have

already been charted—say, from Realism through Impressionism to Cubism, Futurism, and Surrealism—then Bonnard indeed appears to be outside the mainstream of history. But if the patterns of history are more complex than that—if what has lingered at the side of the flow, and which may seem idiosyncratic or obsessional, is also part of living history—then Bonnard's place needs to be reconsidered.

That Bonnard's work does not fit into the history of twentieth-century art as it is now written tells us something about the limitations inherent in the usual narrative of that history, which has not wanted to leave much room for accounts of modesty and deflected attention; or for art that insists on rendering the tangible world with great complexity, or that reproduces poorly, or that demands the kind of concentrated attention that comes only from prolonged viewing. The standard historical narrative, based on a succession of supposedly progressive formal developments, is hard pressed to make room for certain kinds of "mentalities." As a result, it keeps works such as Bonnard's self-contained and separated from the flow of the rest of "art history" by imposing rigidly defined preconceived boundaries.

It is now clear that both Bonnard and Matisse, so long characterized—one might better say caricatured—as painters of happiness, were preoccupied with something very different. Their works belie that easy characterization, projecting as they do such a strong feeling of melancholy, alienation, and disquiet that they seem to propose something more like a critique rather a simple affirmation of happiness. But, given the apparent neutrality of their subjects, realization of this among critics and historians has been slow in coming.[22]

The obsessive, private quality of Bonnard's paintings intensifies their deep sense of sadness, and of struggle—quite the opposite of the "discreet charm of the bourgeoisie" with which he is usually associated. The sonorous, muffled, claustrophobic feeling of many of his best pictures is quite startling if one comes to them expecting to find the received idea of what his work is supposed to be like. Some of his paintings, in fact, have a feeling of desolation that recalls the work of Edvard Munch. In others, such as *The Sun-Filled Terrace* (fig. 46), the spatial structure is full of bold inconsistencies and disorienting jumps in proportion. In this painting, the overbearing flat planes of the walls dwarf the people who move amid them and give the picture a remote, ironic, almost Surrealistic quality. In fact, the perspectival inconsistencies and shifts between different levels of consciousness in many of Bonnard's paintings reflect concerns that are usually associated with Surrealism, with which Bonnard had historical as well as psychological affinities.[23] Similarly, Bonnard's intense concern with the unconscious and the uncanny, as well as the strong and often disturbing kind of sexuality that runs through his work, suggest aspects of artistic expression, and of human awareness, that are usually placed in the domain of Surrealism, which often treats those phenomena in a rather schematic and distinctly literary way.

Bonnard's intuitive and unschematic approach to these aspects of human experience suggests a new field of exploration. One might say that the Unspeakable, which provided so much grist for the Surrealists—and about which they were so outspoken—remains obdurately unspoken in Bonnard's work. But the way in which Bonnard is able to evoke the Unspeakable, without making it overt, may actually provide a better mechanism for expressing it than does a good deal of Surrealist painting, which often only illustrates the unconscious and the uncanny. Bonnard, in contrast, builds these impenetrable aspects of human experience into the very fiber of his pictures.

Fig. 46. Pierre Bonnard, *The Sun-Filled Terrace*, 1939–46. Oil on canvas, 28 x 92⅞ in. (71 x 236 cm). Private collection

This brings us back to the question of whether or not Bonnard is a major artist, and to the issue of what this question actually means. Clearly, such a question is more easily answered in the positive for Matisse, who meets four of what might be considered the main criteria for such standing:[24] (1) we sense a sustained body of work, and a development within it; (2) the work conveys a strong sense of authenticity of experience; (3) we feel that when we look at a single work, we have to know the other work in order for the work that we are looking at to take on its full meaning; (4) the total body of work is part of a larger continuum.

If we apply these same criteria to Bonnard, the verdict is more uncertain, especially on the first and fourth points, which have to do with a certain lack of a sense of development, and with the difficulty of placing his work within the larger continuum, as discussed above. Perhaps we should frame the matter somewhat differently by saying that to see Bonnard as a major artist, you have to put him not into a history of styles but into a history of mentalities. This is meant not as an excuse but as a way of redirecting attention. In fact, a similar reevaluation of twentieth-century artists has already had some compelling precedents, most notably Marcel Duchamp. Largely marginalized until the 1960s, Duchamp's work subsequently underwent a radical reappraisal that was based not on a pictorial style but on a shift in mentality, which swept him from the outer margins to the very center.

Bonnard and Duchamp, in fact, have more in common than the historical repositioning they both seem to require. They share what might be described as a common desire to find a "strategy [with] which [to play] with the persistent mystery of matter," a phrase that has been used to describe Duchamp's notion of the "infra-thin" (*infra mince*), the ineffable illuminations that he cast against the mystery of existence.[25] Among the forty-six instances of the infra-thin published in Duchamp's *Notes*, perhaps the closest he himself came to defining, rather describing, his concept was the elusively expressed essence of the idea in the first instance: "Le possible est / un infra mince."[26]

Aside from the interesting literary parallels between the recondite quality of Duchamp's forty-six randomly scribbled notes on the infra-thin and their echoes in several of Bonnard's own randomly scribbled, enigmatic notes, it seems to me that the most profound and unique aspects of Bonnard's paintings have a distinctly and even willfully infra-thin quality. We might even say that, quite paradoxically, Bonnard's late paintings are deeply engaged with the same sort of ineffable play of sensory feeling and memory found in Duchamp's examples of the infra-thin, such as "the warmth of a seat (which has just / been left) is infra-thin."[27] (Bonnard's famous daily notations about the weather, which he used to trigger his memory and to connect with unconscious feelings, were for him, as they remain for us, infra-thin.)

Unlikely as this pairing may at first seem, the affinities are quite real and offer another kind of insight into the infra-thin complexity of Bonnard's paintings. This is just another illustration, perhaps, of Bonnard's dictum, "The unlikely is very often the truth itself."[28] The art of Bonnard reminds us that a great deal of art history is written in terms of our expectations about what constitutes acceptable sensibility and acceptable visual language at a given moment in time. This is why Matisse's reputation suffered for so long; he was, in effect, not yet expected. It is also why, in a different way, the full significance of Duchamp's achievement was not adequately recognized until the 1960s. Now, in accord with the endlessly fascinating ways in which our ideas about history regroup and revise and reorganize themselves, Matisse has been placed at the center of the mainstream of twentieth-century painting, and Duchamp dominates the current of contemporary artistic thought that is involved with non-painting. Perhaps sometime soon that mysterious personage named Pierre Bonnard—no longer invisible in quite the same way that he has been for more than a century—will come to occupy the place of the artist who was able to provide the equivalent in painting for a sensibility that has been thought to belong only to the realm of non-painting.

But is this, we might ask, really possible?

In 1942, during the height of his friendship with Bonnard, Matisse told Louis Aragon that "the importance of an artist is to be measured by the number of new signs he has introduced into the plastic language."[29] If this oft-repeated statement were to be taken literally, then Bonnard would continue to be judged as a minor artist.[30] But if an artist can be judged by other criteria—by how deeply, for example, he makes us reassess our relationship to the fabric of the world around us—then Bonnard must be reckoned as one of the major artists of the twentieth century. And the history of twentieth-century art, in turn, must be reckoned in a different way.

1. Pierre Courthion, conversation with the author, Paris, December 1979.
2. This remark is based on my conversations with several colleagues in the United States and France, most of whom said they rarely, if ever, discussed Bonnard in surveys of twentieth-century art. I should add that I myself have been guilty of a similar neglect.
3. "Comment s'expliquer alors la fortune de l'oeuvre de Bonnard, en honneur et en faveur auprès d'un nombre croissant de gens? À regarder de près, il est évident que cette révérence est partagée seulement par les hommes qui n'ont aucune information des graves difficultés de l'art et tiennent avant tout à la facilité et à l'agrément." Zervos 1947, p. 6.
4. ". . . dans le présent, le Cubisme est la peinture même." Gleizes and Metzinger 1912, p. 42.
5. "Sous cette succession de moments qui compose l'existence superficielle des êtres et des choses, et qui les revêt d'apparences changeantes, tôt disparues, on peut rechercher un caractère plus vrai, plus essentiel, auquel l'artiste s'attachera pour donner de la réalité une interprétation plus durable." Henri Matisse, "Notes d'un peintre," *La Grande Revue* 52, no. 24 (December 25, 1908); translated and reprinted in Flam 1995, pp. 39, 238.
6. "Je veux arriver à cet état de condensation des sensations qui fait le tableau." Ibid., pp. 38, 238.
7. In contrast, the latest painting by Matisse currently on view at the Musée d'Orsay is *Luxe, calme et volupté* (1904–5). Another curiosity is that in the standard slide cataloguing system used for university teaching, Bonnard (born in 1867) is classified among nineteenth-century artists. Some years ago, when I asked why, I was told that the rule of thumb was that the twentieth-century category began with artists whose year of birth was 1870 or later. While exceptions were made for artists such as Matisse (born on the last day of 1869) and Kandinsky (born in 1866), Bonnard remains stuck in the nineteenth century.
8. Clair 1984a; Clair 1984b; Elderfield 1998.
9. Bois 2006.
10. Elderfield 1998, p. 47.
11. Bois (2006, p. 58) makes the interesting observation that, contrary to expectation, when you back away from Bonnard's paintings the disparate elements tend to pull apart rather than come together, as they do in Impressionist paintings.
12. Clair (1984a, 1984b, *passim*) has described what he calls curvilinear perspective or "centrifugal vision," referring to the way that objects in Bonnard's paintings become enlarged toward the edges of the picture. Clair gives a masterly description of the effect; but my own experience has been that the warping of the space in

Bonnard's paintings is not nearly as systematic as Clair supposes. Clair appears to have modified his position somewhat in his recent book, *Bonnard* (Clair 2006).

13. See the interesting discussions of the role played by memory in Elderfield 1998, Bois 2006, and Clair 2006, from which I have benefited.

14. "Mon dessin et ma peinture se séparent. J'ai le dessin qui me convient car il rend ce que je sens de particulier. Mais j'ai une peinture bridée par des conventions nouvelles d'aplats par lesquels je dois m'exprimer entièrement, de tons locaux exclusivement sans ombres, sans modelés, qui doivent réagir les uns sur les autres pour suggérer la lumière, l'espace spirituel. Ça ne va guère avec ma spontanéité qui me fait balancer en une minute un long travail parce que je reconçois mon tableau plusieurs fois au cours de son exécution sans savoir réellement où je vais, m'en rapportant à mon instinct. J'ai trouvé un dessin qui, après des travaux d'approche, à la spontanéité qui me décharge entièrement de ce que je sens, mais ce moyen est exclusivement pour moi, artiste et spectateur. Mais un dessin de coloriste n'est pas une peinture. Il faudrait lui donner un équivalent en couleur. C'est ce à quoi je n'arrive pas." Henri Matisse, letter to Pierre Bonnard, January 13, 1940, in Bonnard and Matisse 1991, p. 66; Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 58.

15. One could say that Bonnard's drawings are the opposite of incisive, and that therein lies their greatest strength—the indefinite way that they explore a world bathed in ambiguity and deflect drawing away from what Rémi Labrusse has characterized as "the positive, dogmatic, and superb theology of academic drawing, with its neoplatonic ambition of distilling essences, by a gesture, through appearances" ("la théologie positive, dogmatique et superbe, du dessin académique, avec son ambition néo-platonicienne de dégagement des essences, par un geste, au travers des apparences"). See Labrusse 2006, p. 32.

16. In fact, Matisse's cutouts did not so much resolve the conflict between painting and drawing as lay it to rest for the final time. For while the cutouts may be seen as colored drawings—spontaneous, decisive, full of feeling, and suggestive of a spiritual space—they still remind us that "a colorist's drawing is not a painting" (Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 58); their silhouettelike forms lack the spatial complexity and the possibility of intangible expansiveness that had been so important in Matisse's paintings, where contours were almost never absolute, but breathed.

17. "La présence de l'objet, du motif, est très gênante pour le peintre au moment où il peint." Lamotte and Bonnard 1947, unpaged.

18. Gilot and Lake 1964, p. 271.

19. Ibid.

20. Picasso, in the same conversation with Gilot in which he so severely criticized Bonnard, expressed his admiration for the direct, expansive way that Matisse used color, concluding, "Matisse has such good lungs." Ibid.

21. As Bois (2006, p. 62) perceptively notes, "It is not all that easy to choose non-choice and to transform passivity into a virtue, to make of it not only the underlying force of one's art but also to want that art itself to produce the effect in the spectator of directly experiencing this non-choice, and of being aware of its danger" ("Il n'est pas si facile que ça de choisir le non-choix et de transformer dans sa peinture la passivité en vertu, d'en faire non seulement le ressort de son art mais de vouloir que cet art lui-même en produise l'effet, que le spectateur lui-même fasse l'expérience de ce non-choix, en mesure le danger").

22. As Elderfield (1998, p. 34) points out in an overview of attitudes toward Bonnard, "As for alienation, fragmentation and destabilisation, however, these qualities are the last to be found mentioned in the critical archive."

23. Although these shared concerns with the Surrealists exist, the connection is rarely made, and when it is, it is usually limited to Bonnard's incongruous use of figures that refer to antique statuary and to the way certain of his works appear to presage the Surrealists' interest in the ancient Mediterranean. See the discussion of common historical sources in Newman 1984.

24. These are adapted from T. S. Eliot, "What Is Minor Poetry?" (Eliot 1957).

25. The phrase is from Anne d'Harnoncourt's "Preface" to Duchamp 1983, p. xii.

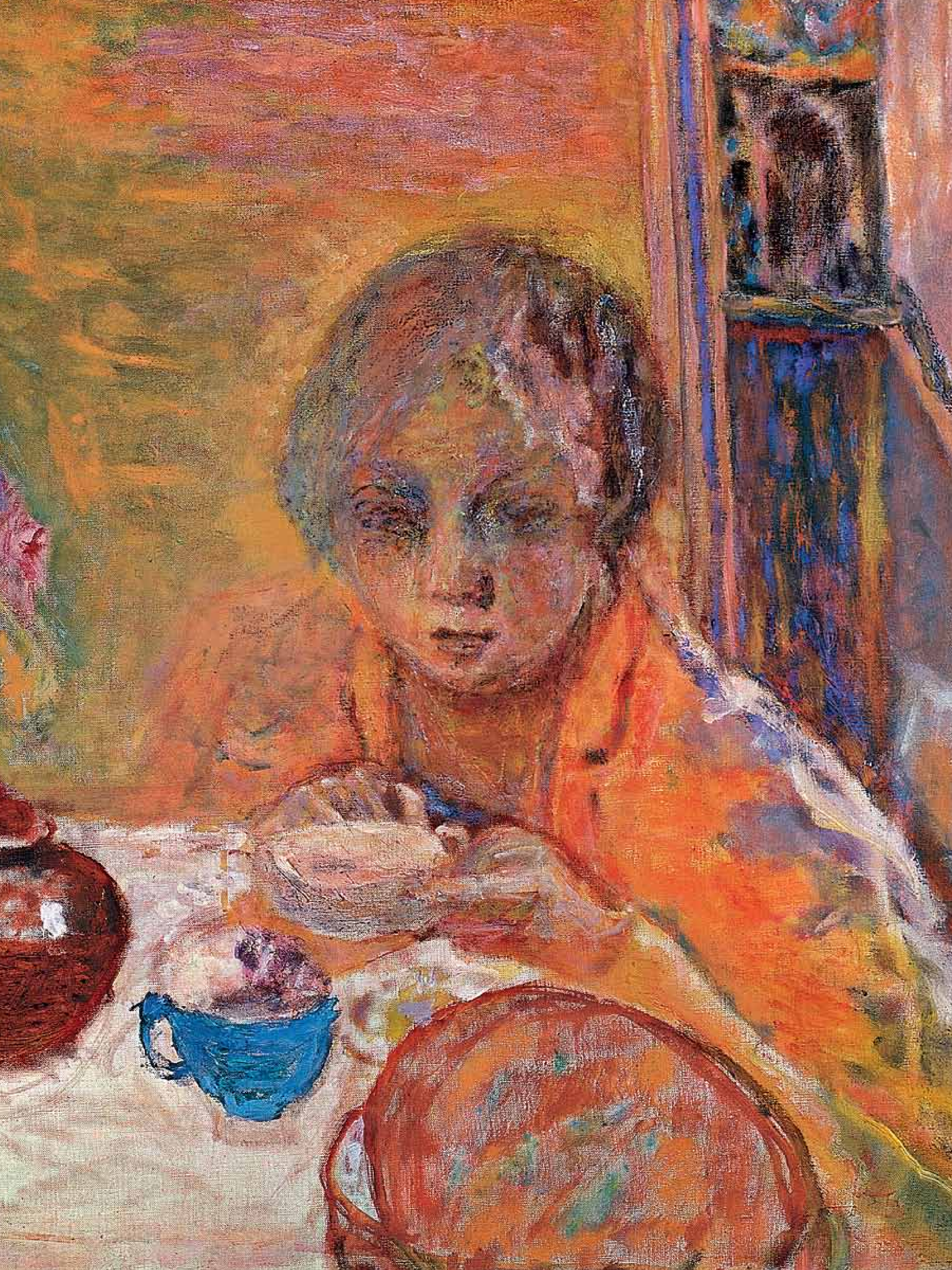
26. Duchamp 1983, *infra mince* no. 1: "Le possible est / un infra mince."

27. Ibid., *infra mince* no. 4: "La chaleur d'un siège (qui vient / d'être quitté) est infra-mince."

28. "L'invraisemblable c'est bien souvent le vrai même." Bonnard 1947, unpaged.

29. "L'importance d'un artiste se mesure à la quantité de nouveaux signes qu'il aura introduits dans le langage plastique . . ." Aragon 1943, p. 26; reprinted in Aragon 1971, vol. 1, p. 111; translation from Flam 1995, p. 150.

30. What Matisse might have meant in this context by the word "signs," and what the differences are between the way this idea was conceived by early-twentieth-century *artists* as opposed to late-twentieth-century *critics*, is a subject too vast to be dealt with here.



"The Cat Drank All the Milk!": Bonnard's Continuous Present

JACQUELINE MUNCK

Pierre Bonnard's panoramic terrace views beckon the viewer toward vast stretches of landscape, with the figures often frozen in place in the foreground—note, for example, the young tennis player caught mid-volley in *The Terrace at Vernonnet* (see fig. 54), or the supplicant child carrying a fruit basket in *Landscape in the Midi with Two Children* (fig. 48). The paintings Bonnard made of himself and his wife, Marthe, in their home at Le Bosquet, in contrast, reveal the hidden recesses and corners of the artist's home. As they carry out seemingly immutable daily rituals, we glimpse them in the dining room, the small salon, or the bathroom they added when they bought the villa in 1926, as well as in the Mediterranean garden, with its profusion of spring flowers. These are the places where Bonnard's confined relationship with Marthe, his model of choice, unfolded behind closed doors. "I have all my subjects at hand," Bonnard once wrote. "I go visit them. I take notes. And then I return home. And before I start to paint, I meditate, daydream."[1]

In the photographs of Bonnard taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Brassaï, and André Ostier between 1941 and 1946, we see the artist in his tiny studio, with its mezzanine and large picture window, his face betraying almost monklike concentration. This view of Bonnard, amid the straitened circumstances imposed by war, encourages us to consider him in the context of his disciplined daily work routine rather than rummage through the traces of his happier times. Bonnard's frequent assertion that he vacillated "between intimacy and decoration," as he wrote to his friend George Besson[2]—that is, between a tenuous observation of reality and the composition, between the temporality of perception and the creation of the work (or, rather, of time at work in the work itself: "it must ripen like an apple, there's no way of influencing time," he noted to Besson[3])—makes it hard to choose between, on the one hand, a purely morphological view of his art (à la Clement Greenberg and André Lhote[4]), which emphasizes formal analysis of his visual resolutions and "painterly maneuvers," an approach justified by Bonnard's own disdain for painting directly from the model, and, on the other hand, the interpretation of biographical, topographical, psychological, and physiological clues hidden in the contours of an object or the body of a model, which thus become the bearers of meanings beyond their merely visual appearances. The latter viewpoint, adopted by David Sylvester, for example, and in his wake Sarah Whitfield, John Elderfield, and Linda Nochlin, relies on a psycho-critical approach based on the act of *seeing*, which implicates both the

Fig. 47. Detail, *Lunch* or *Breakfast*, ca. 1932 (cat. no. 23)

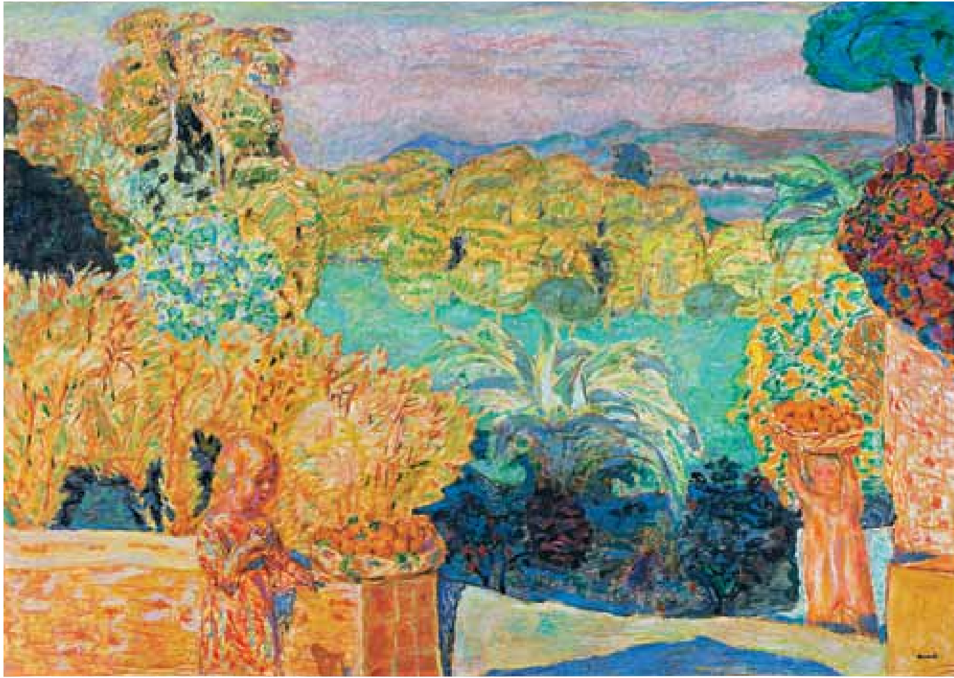


Fig. 48. Pierre Bonnard, *Landscape in the Midi with Two Children*, 1916–18. Oil on canvas, 54¾ x 77⅞ in. (139 x 197.8 cm). Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Gift of Sam and Ayala Zacks, 1970

artist and our own view of his work, and which has inspired yet another, more phenomenological way of interpreting the paintings, such as that advanced recently by Yve-Alain Bois.[5] Bonnard, according to Sylvester,

> *painted whatever belonged to his personal life, and he painted it the way he saw it in the ordinary course of events: one cannot imagine him arranging a still life on a table in order to make a picture of it; he would have painted the still life that happened to be there, rearranging it on the canvas, perhaps, but not interfering with the actual things—just as, in fact, he didn't cultivate his garden but let it grow as it would. There may well have been a connection between this passivity of his and his diffidence about painting from nature. . . . his deepest motive could have been an unwillingness to freeze the flow of life. . . . one thing [that] indubitably served him [was] that Marthe happened to have a compulsion to spend several hours a day washing herself or taking baths. The monument to her obsession is a series of canvases which probably stand alongside certain Matisses as the greatest works of art of our time. . . . All the things in the paintings are only incidentally what the paintings are about. What they are really about is seeing, the process itself of seeing. Which is why the principal actor in Bonnard's scenes is the light—the light that irradiates things, meaning possession, the light that disintegrates them, meaning loss.*[6]

It could be said that Bonnard imbued his work with a "schizoid" quality, constantly toggling between the present moment and the painting itself by highlighting the intimate rapport between painting and life, or rather the conflicts between them. In one sense painting became the stage for his resignation. A canvas is above all a table, he declared to his nephew, Charles Terrasse, explaining later in his notes the logic of a "surface whose laws are beyond objects," and which demands an exclusive, one might say quasi-passionate relationship. "Painting," he wrote Matisse in 1933, "is 'something' only provided one gives oneself up to it entirely."[7] For Bonnard, painting required, more than anything else, that he work on the canvas every day in the solitude of the Midi, where he was "isolated but still fascinated by technique, whose revelations," he hoped, would be

"endless."[8] Indeed, one of the things painting revealed to Bonnard was its own fallibility, leading him sometimes to attempt to bias the unknown in order to tame it. In his prewar paintings, for instance, Bonnard frequently depicted mirrors—structurally and visually—leading to a progressive covering of the canvas surface with indirect images (or reflections), as in *Reflection (The Tub)* (1909, Villa Flora Winterthur, Sammlung Hahnloser, Switzerland), *Le Café* (fig. 49), and *The Mantelpiece* (fig. 52), which has the effect of diminishing the potential descriptive function of the original motif.

Yet painting also helped reveal to Bonnard the cycle of life, especially that of plants, whose rebirth each spring always left him awestruck. In February 1941 he wrote to Matisse that he had seen "the first almond tree blooming and the mimosas are starting to make yellow spots";[9] "the vegetation is expanding—every day on my walks, a new species of little flower appears. . . . We're more interested in objects than in the structure of the universe."[10] Many of Bonnard's notes reiterate what for him was a primordial bond with nature: his attempts "to see it as a peasant does," and his enchantment with its perpetual renewal. "But as for vision, I see things differently every day, the sky, objects, everything changes continually. You can drown in it," he wrote, but it also "keeps one alive."[11] For Bonnard, walking in nature, like time spent in his studio, provided him with an outlet from the confinement of wartime, but also from his shrinking personal universe as Marthe's mental and physical state continued to deteriorate. In a January 1932 letter to his friend Maurice Denis, he had confided that Marthe was "unfortunately still a complete misanthrope, which might lessen but for now keeps me completely isolated, since the only remedy is to avoid human contact. I use the time to study painting technique and harvest my olives."[12] It is as if Bonnard, in his profound solitude—the "traveler of his own home,"[13] as Lhote called him—was gradually expanding his consciousness, honing his vision through the minor events out of which the fabric of reality is woven. Bonnard let himself be permeated to the point of confusion by the riot of sensations in the spectacle of nature, to be seduced by its wonders. Forever marveling at and surprised by the relationships he observed, Bonnard took pains to remain fully alert so as not to lose his first impressions once "the shock of sensation and memory" reoccurred.

In the canvases Bonnard painted at Le Cannet, like those he made in Vernon, Arcachon, and Deauville, the different domestic scenes and the various moments throughout the day—breakfast, siesta, sewing, afternoon tea, playtime with the dog, or Marthe immersing herself in the tub—are all bathed in natural light. In these interiors, shadows filter the light in rooms where inhabitants busy themselves, the painter indicating by variations in tone "the different planes, with attention to what is warm or cold, yellowed or bluish."[14] The apparent calm of these episodes from conjugal life is constantly belied, however, by accidents of color that disturb the composition, which since Bonnard's Nabi years had nonetheless gained a certain equilibrium. "Like the Asians," wrote Tristan Klingsor, "Bonnard rejects traditional balance . . . [and] distrusts geometry." For Klingsor, such "irregularity gives variety to these works," and their "apparent clumsiness" is integral to what he considered their "profound sense of rhythm."[15]

Fig. 49. Pierre Bonnard, *Le Café*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 28¾ x 41⅞ in. (73 x 106.4 cm). Tate, London; Presented by Sir Michael Sadler through The Art Fund, 1941

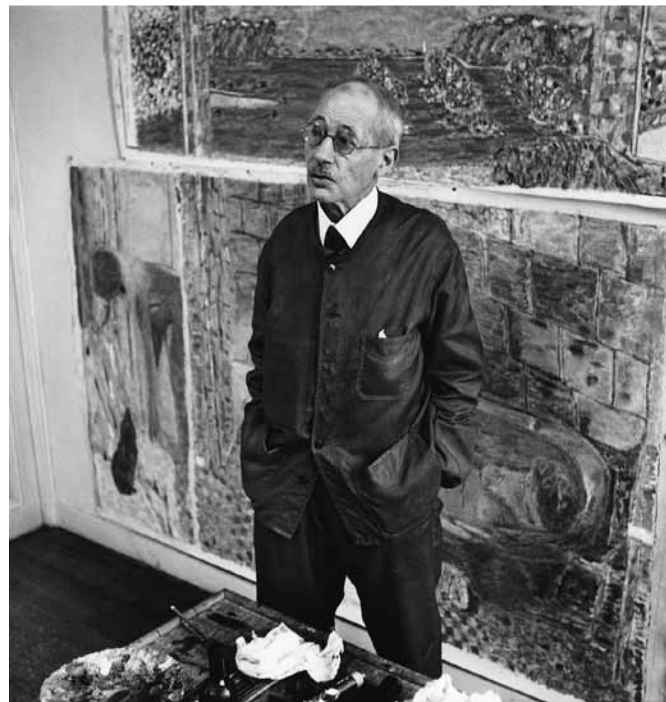


Fig. 50. André Ostier, *Bonnard in His Studio*, 1941. Gelatin silver print

The physical characteristics of the places where Bonnard painted as well as the manner in which he worked—at a remove from his subject; facing the wall onto which a loose canvas was tacked, in order to avoid the a priori boundaries imposed by stretchers; sometimes returning to the same painting years after initially working on it—had little effect on the works themselves. For Bonnard, the studio was a kind of itinerant enclosure, where half-finished canvases could be rolled and unrolled as necessary, depending on available wall space. Such was the case with *The Large Bath, Nude* (1937–39, private collection), which Bonnard worked on for years. It can be seen, in an unfinished state, in a photograph of Bonnard in his hotel bedroom at Deauville taken by Rogi André in 1937. In a photograph taken by André Ostier at Le Cannet in 1941 (fig. 50), we can see two works in progress, side by side on the same piece of canvas: a vertical painting of a standing nude with a dog (Dauberville 1665), and *Nude in the Bath and Small Dog* (fig. 51), a first sketch of which appears in Bonnard's daybook entry for April 27, 1940. As Bonnard told the painter Jules Joëts in March 1945, "I'm always seeking. I often return to things, take up a canvas again. Hence my stammering [*bafouille*]."[16]

To visitors who could not understand why he turned away from his subject to work from memory, Bonnard explained that he refused to be influenced by simple variations in atmosphere, declaring he would not paint before the motif, as the Impressionists had, for "the light changes too quickly. I do some small sketches and make notes on colors."[17] As he told Angèle Lamotte, "The presence of the object, the subject of the work, can be very distracting to a painter. . . . There is always a risk with direct observation that [he] will become sidetracked by incidentals and lose sight of the initial idea."[18] Indeed, Bonnard used watercolor to help create his coloristic harmonies. As he commented to Joëts, "I always make a quick, directly observed watercolor that helps me enormously and without which any subsequent work would be impossible. I set down my impressions of the colors. I refer to this sketch constantly to avoid going off track when executing the work itself."[19] In his daybook entry for April 8, 1934, Bonnard reiterated his refusal to let himself "be absorbed by the object," underscoring "the tension between the initial idea . . . and the variable and varied world of the object." He noted the "difficulty of direct observation . . . error of senses / adventure of the optical nerve / simplification corresponding to our sensory capabilities."[20] Drawing provided him with a compromise, a temporary solution that allowed "the colorist" to exercise his eye without taking "time to wonder about the intrinsic value of things."[21] Pushing his paintings to the edge of the visual and sensorial abyss, Bonnard alternated between the real and the painterly via analogical arrangements that provoke an effect of "*continual* discontinuities," to use Bois's phrase.[22] According to Lhote, "It's like the immobilization of a supreme (and symbolic) moment just before disaster strikes; everything is about to collapse, as in the still life with peaches relegated to the background of the painting."[23]

This tension between "the model you have before your eyes and the model you have in your head"[24] also extended to the arrangement of colors, whose delayed impact and slow commotion in Bonnard's paintings—as often observed in Bonnard's use of clashing, corrosive hues (violet and lilac, according to Lhote, being the only colors that

do not have an immediate visual effect)—accelerate the disintegration of the object. The very color relationships or dominant hues that help create the new visions of the subjects in Bonnard's late paintings in fact frequently provide the titles of the works, as in *Yellow and Red (Marthe and Her Dog)*, *Blue Nude*, *Gray Nude*, *White Interior* (cat. no. 36), and *The Blonde Head of Hair*. Bodies, fruit, flowers (the latter two at the peak of maturity) seem always on the verge of decomposition and decay, yielding the kind of formless mud and organic abstraction remarked upon by Greenberg.[25] There is a sense of imminent metamorphosis, as with Marthe's eternally adolescent body melting beneath iridescent light, the glint of the sun that makes the bathwater, tiles, and linoleum shimmer, and which evokes a magical colored world or, more darkly, the drowning of Ophelia.

Often Bonnard seems to have relegated certain human presences to the periphery of the canvas, where they are frequently truncated. Our notice of these figures is thus delayed, and we discover them only "surreptitiously," to use Bois's felicitous phrase. In *The Mantelpiece* (fig. 52), Marthe is reduced to a fragment of coiffed head in the lower right-hand corner of the mirror, while our gaze is directed toward the model before the mirror posed like the antique sculpture *The Dying Niobid* (National Museum, Rome). In *Young Women in the Garden (Renée Monchaty and Marthe Bonnard)* (cat. no. 72), we again see Marthe, here eclipsed by the sun-drenched apparition of the blonde Renée Monchaty against a yellow and white striped tablecloth, and by the luminous halo that erodes superfluous details. Marthe likewise blends into the decor of *Flowers on the Mantelpiece at Le Cannet* (cat. no. 12); she becomes part of the atmosphere of the room, almost like a secondary motif the painter hastily sketched and superimposed in the same color as the background, giving a sense of nostalgic presence/absence at the limits of perception. In these compositions and many others, such as *Table in Front of the Window* (cat. no. 37) or *The Studio with Mimosa* (see fig. 45), one senses the shock of an intrusion into ordinary reality by a gaze that registers the immediate details of the scene and

Fig. 51. Pierre Bonnard, *Nude in the Bath and Small Dog*, 1941–46. Oil on canvas, 48 x 59½ in. (121.9 x 151.1 cm). Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Acquired through the Generosity of the Sarah Mellon Scaife Family (70.50)

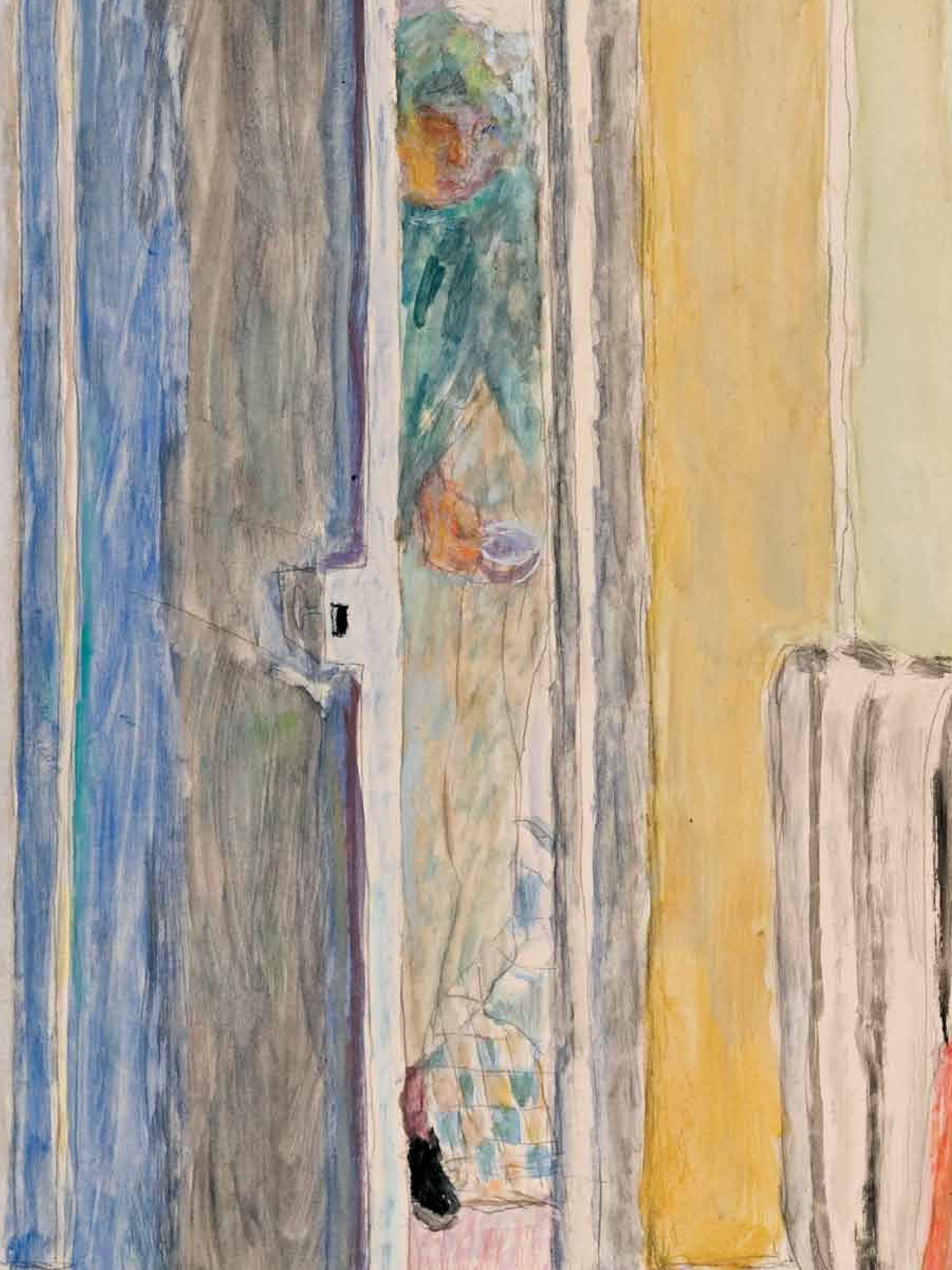
then, exercising its faculties of compensation and adaptation, instantly synthesizes several incompatible aspects of vision, such as nearness and distance—a mobile vision, or, as described by Sylvester, darting glances "out of the corner of [the] eye."[26] In so doing, this gaze re-creates the simultaneity of vision and perception, or "that which belongs to the world of things once they have been objectified."[27]

Fig. 52. Pierre Bonnard, *The Mantelpiece*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 31¾ x 49⅞ in. (80.7 x 126.7 cm). Margoline collection

In *Lunch* or *Breakfast* (see fig. 47), Marthe, her head sunk down into her shoulders, holds her breakfast bowl in both hands. She appears almost childlike—untamed, not yet socialized—just as she does in early photographs. Bonnard captures every trace of this animal quality in Marthe by relying on her natural, or instinctual, reception of sensations, her conscience in its precognitive state: her passive wait for the tea to grow cold; her attention diverted by the dog begging for its morning caress and treats; the scent of flowers on the table; the smell of brioche blending with that of fruit; the chirping of birds that distracts her eye from the task at hand; the muffled sounds of conversation rising through the house, which she does not even try to comprehend; the slow breeze through the flowers that makes their corollas sway, and whose changing colors attract the eye much in the way that light reflecting off bathroom tiles dissipates in the water at a stroke of the fingertips. Ever the "wonderstruck observer," in Maurice Denis's words, Bonnard favored such moments of somnolence or modest distractions, the passivity of anaesthetized consciousness upon waking or during meandering walks. But he also painted moments of abrasion or astringency that stimulate the skin—a warm touch, the shock of textures familiar to the body—with precise, concentrated gestures that lead us back to a more conscious presence in the outer world.

This state of latency and nonchalance, the "potpourri of indecision"[28] that Picasso so despised in Bonnard's works, eliminated the need for decisiveness; it allowed Bonnard to *not* decide, or, as Bois has suggested, it gave him the choice to *not* choose. One could say that Bonnard "let appear" on the canvas—in an involuntary, perhaps even invented confluence of givens from his perception and memory—images that obscure images (or that conflate vision and perception) in a seemingly magical dissolve, the way a *visage du dessous* might intermittently surface in the frozen face of an invalid. In that passionate quest for a pause in time, the painter, removing himself from the acceleration of the adult world, reenters the *now*—the continuous present—of early childhood, a time before one suffered the long passing of months; when one did not know the hierarchy of events, their chronology and conjugation; when yesterday, today, and tomorrow all blended together. "The cat drank all the milk!" Bonnard's nephew once blurted out on seeing him after several months, "as if he had left only the day before."[29] In the same way, Bonnard's "continuous present" is lodged in space—or, as the painter Peter Doig has described it, "between what he is looking at and thinking about, because a lot of his work . . . is thinking back."[30] At the surface of this space, in canvas after canvas, Bonnard reprised stitches in time much as a patient seamstress might stitch together scraps of an extremely fragile and precious cloth.

1. *Sept Jours* 1942, p. 16.
2. Pierre Bonnard, letter to George Besson, 1942, reported in Besson 1946, p. 10.
3. "Il faut que cela mûrisse comme une pomme, pas moyen d'agir sur le temps." Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 281; translation from London and New York 1998, p. 166.
4. "[Bonnard] introduit dans l'architecture simple du tableau tous les délices de l'intimité. Grâce à lui, le spectateur passe, sans s'en douter, des plaisirs matériels et comme bourgeois aux inquiétudes métaphysiques. Car il y a, dans ces constructions plastiques, une telle part d'arbitraire, une telle puissance d'abstraction . . . Au-delà de l'objet anecdotique, le peintre aperçoit l'élément plastique et son accord avec l'élément voisin . . . la composition de Bonnard s'opère surtout par la couleur ; elle n'est pas réductible à un canevas dessiné . . . les 'valeurs' n'obéissent pas au dessin, mais à des nécessités d'équilibre étrangères à l'objet." Lhote 1944, pp. 4, 5. Bonnard conceded that there was a pictorial logic in and of itself, as though he were disconnected from the object he represented: "Le tableau est une suite de taches qui se lient entre elles et finissent par former l'objet, le morceau sur lequel l'œil se promène sans aucun accroc."
5. Bois 2006.
6. Sylvester 1966, pp. 137, 139. The article appeared in the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, February 6, 1966, on the occasion of an important retrospective at the Royal Academy.
7. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, September 1933, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, pp. 44–45: "Vraiment la peinture c'est quelque chose à la condition de se donner tout entier."
8. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Maurice Denis, January–February 1930, Centre de Documentation, Musée Départemental Maurice Denis, Le Prieuré, Saint-Germain-en-Laye.
9. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, end of February 1941, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, pp. 80–81.
10. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, April 1941, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 88.
11. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, March 1940, in Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 62.
12. Pierre Bonnard, letter to Maurice Denis, January 1932, Centre de Documentation, Musée Départemental Maurice Denis, Le Prieuré, Saint-Germain-en-Laye.
13. "Ce voyageur autour de sa maison." Lhote 1944, p. 4.
14. Klingsor 1921, p. 246.
15. Ibid., p. 245.
16. Bernard 1953.
17. Rydbeck 1937; translation from Terrasse, A. 2000b, p. 123.
18. Statements by Pierre Bonnard assembled in 1943 by Angèle Lamotte; Lamotte and Bonnard 1947, unpaged.
19. Bernard 1953.
20. Daybook, April 8, 1934. Bonnard 1927–46.
21. ". . . ceux des coloristes perdent tout sens, réduits au blanc et noir parceque, chez eux, les 'valeurs' n'obéissent pas au dessin, mais à des nécessités d'équilibre étrangères à l'objet." Lhote 1944, p. 5.
22. Bois 2006, p. 63.
23. ". . . c'est comme l'immobilisation d'une minute suprême (et symbolique) où un désastre se prépare; tout va chavirer comme dans cette nature morte aux pêches reléguées dans le fond du tableau." Lhote 1944, p. 5.
24. "Le modèle qu'on a sous les yeux, et le modèle qu'on a dans la tête." Daybook, July 3, 1935. Translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 69.
25. Greenberg 1947, p. 53.
26. Sylvester 1966, p. 139.
27. See especially Clair 1983.
28. Gillot and Lake 1964, pp. 271–72.
29. Pierre Bonnard, *Correspondances*, which we know to be fictive, but based on his recollections.
30. Peter Doig, in Paris 2006, p. 273.



Intelligent Seeing

RIKA BURNHAM

". . . one must look repeatedly before being certain how many people are in the room. The light is uniformly clear; some of the figures are immediately visible, yet others are illusive phantoms, as if only at the last moment allowed to edge past a given composition's borders."—James Thrall Soby[1]

It is the foot that catches the eye. The foot in the black shoe that pushes aside the door, or perhaps floats midstep above the blue and yellow tiled floor. The person to whom it might belong holds a blue teacup and freezes momentarily on the other side of the threshold. Deep glimmering patches of orange draw attention to the face; the head and hair are dappled in stray bits of light. Two mismatched, empty saucers sit nervously on the edge of an undulating table, and wedged up against it is the back of a chair. A radiator and a picture framed in blue stack up in nonsequential space on the right. Vertical strips of light run up and down the walls: cool northern blues to the left of the door, tropical yellows on the panel to the right. As our eyes adjust to the thin light of the room, we pause. A dress seems to appear suddenly, fluttering in the doorway. We look again. Is the foot really attached to the person holding the teacup, or does it belong instead to a vanishing, silhouetted figure in profile rushing off to the right, whose leg we see beneath a gauzy skirt? Is the person carrying the cup nearly tripping over someone else's foot, or backing away from the door? Is it a man or woman? One person or two? One moment, it is Bonnard himself coming through the door, teacup in hand, tripping over the memory of his wife, Marthe, swooshing by and out of sight. A moment later it is someone we don't know who is coming through, pausing but not entering, perhaps even backing out, as a phantom exits to our right.

The year Bonnard made the gouache now known as *Marthe Entering the Room* (fig. 53) was the year Marthe died. Bonnard was in the habit of keeping a diary, mostly notes about the weather and sketches of what caught his eye (see figs. 13 and 14). In the entry for January 26, 1942, the day of Marthe's death, there are no words, no drawings, just a small vertical line crossed by a small horizontal line. Marthe—Bonnard's longtime companion before they eventually married—was his muse and his mistress, a creative source and the object of the artist's pictorial devotion. Ageless, she slipped in and out of his work for fifty years, eternally present, even after her death, but curiously absent, too. Sometimes she appears in sketchy outline, other times she arrives in thickly and carefully laid layers of rich color. Frequently we look into the rooms of Bonnard's paintings without first seeing her, and then suddenly we do.

But is the figure we are so often tempted to identify as Marthe *really* Marthe? Sometimes it is, but there are many figures in Bonnard's oeuvre that cannot be identified, such as the racquet-wielding or back-scratching figure rushing in from the right in *The*

Fig. 53. Detail, *Marthe Entering the Room*, 1942 (cat. no. 73)

Terrace at Vernonnet (fig. 54), or the curious partygoers on the balcony porch in the same picture, one of whom, dressed in a blue shirt, peers out at us. The same can be said of the two women, one brunette, one blonde, in *Young Women in the Garden (Renée Monchaty and Marthe Bonnard)* (cat. no. 72), or the two figures in *Before Dinner* (cat. no. 2), one of whom, while seated, is evidently addressing someone "offstage." No doubt some of these figures were other lovers, other models over the years, or neighbors who visited Le Bosquet. Sometimes it is the artist himself who slips into view: for example, as the mirror image that attaches itself to the head of the woman at the table in *The French Window (Morning at Le Cannet)* (cat. no. 42). And then there is Bonnard's dog, who makes an occasional cameo appearance—trotting into the scene, for instance, in *Before Dinner*—not to mention his cat, who materializes in *White Interior* (cat. no. 36). What is clear is that Bonnard's paintings, if you study them closely, become small theaters in which known and unknown characters enter and exit.

The mythology of Marthe and her reclusive life with Bonnard has kept us from seeing Bonnard's work as Bonnard wanted us to see it—with our own eyes, with our own experience. Bonnard asks us to see his work on *his* terms, slowly, meditatively, poetically. With too quick a look we see only unfinished work: what Picasso saw when he famously dismissed Bonnard's work as "a potpourri of indecision."[2] The casual viewer remarks on the flatness, the patterns, the curious cacophony, and moves on, but to linger is to be rewarded. Bonnard's paintings disrupt our conventional expectations. As Jack Flam notes in his essay in this volume, "Only after prolonged looking do you realize how complex, contradictory, and difficult Bonnard's paintings actually are."

Six months after Marthe died the Paris dealer Louis Carré commissioned a series of gouaches from Bonnard, and from these gouaches the painter and printmaker Jacques Villon was in turn commissioned to make a series of lithographs.[3] Bonnard worked on the prints with Villon for four years.[4] "I believe that the practice of lithography," wrote Jacques Laprade, "taught Bonnard the science of choosing rare tones."[5] Indeed, the thin but evocative colors of *Marthe Entering the Room* (one of the gouaches in the series) testify to that knowledge, particularly the delicately rendered interior world of Bonnard's small dining room. Cool blues and violet tints transition quietly to warm yellows and dark oranges in thin, carefully orchestrated washes. A gentle nostalgia yields to uncertainty. The title now assigned to this work inevitably directs us to think we see Marthe, but for many years the gouache was known simply as *The Radiator.*[6] It came to be called *Marthe Entering the Room* only after it was sold to the Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, in 1983.[7]

Marthe was already dead when Bonnard began the gouache series. Although we may ask whether the figure in the doorway of *Marthe Entering the Room* is Bonnard's memory of Marthe entering the room with a teacup, or if it is perhaps the artist himself, surprised at the sight of a phantasmal Marthe whizzing by, but memories, Bonnard reminds us, are entwined with sight. We are looking at the work of an artist who in the act of painting did not distinguish between observation and recollection. The fruits on the table provoked in him a memory of an evening meal years ago; the apples reminded him of something that happened yesterday; the door opened onto a recollection of a visitor from the previous week. In this way, we suddenly find, to use Sarah Whitfield's phrase, "the familiar looking unfamiliar."[8]

Bonnard thought a great deal about seeing and how we encounter the world. He asks us to see afresh, free of our expectations, and above all to be cautious of academic traditions, whose preoccupations regarding perspective and other pictorial conventions, he believed, can easily blind both painter and audience to the lived experience of seeing.

"Vision is *mobile*," Bonnard said.[9] Imagine him walking into the sitting room in Le Bosquet. Outside it is overcast; inside, the table is set. He walks through the house, stops for a moment in the small dining room, notes the light and the angle of a door, remembers something from yesterday, reaches for his sketchbook, draws the fruit on the table, thinks he sees Marthe. "And this vision is *variable*," he added. Thus his glances scatter around the room, his eye drawn here, then there. Bonnard understood that the eye does not see with perspectival logic, from foreground to background, but randomly. "I'm trying to do what I have *never* done," he remarked, "give the impression one has on entering a room: one sees everything and at the same time nothing."[10] Unpredictably but persistently the radiator caught Bonnard's unruly eye, as did the table where he found each day a new arrangement of familiar objects. He studied the door that opens in constant revelation, the window through which the endlessly changing exterior world of light and seasons intrudes and asserts itself.

It has been said that Cézanne's pictures ask, *Is this what I see?* If so, Bonnard's pictures ask, *Is this what I remember?* Thanks to Henri Cartier-Bresson and other photographers, we may glimpse Bonnard at work in his studio, tacking pictures to the wall, considering them, pausing, adding a bit of paint here and a bit of paint there. In photographs he is often dressed as if he were cold, in a hat and scarf, prepared and fortified to work. He sometimes took his canvases with him when he traveled, tacking them up in hotel rooms so that he could keep thinking about them, jabbing at them with dots of paint in an endless process of working and reworking that the painter Georges Rouault affectionately called "bonnarding."[11] Watching Bonnard, Mexican artist Angel Zarraga and French critic Félix Fénéon were astonished at how he walked back and forth between canvases, sketches in hand to jog his memory, daily adding dabs of color as he went from one to another. Weeks, months, even years went by as he caressed his memories in paint. *Is this what I remember?* The shimmering *Terrace at Vernonnet* comes to mind, a canvas that Bonnard worked on for nearly twenty years, tending to the scene he remembered, adding new memories as time passed. What was alive in Bonnard's memory came to life again in his work. It was Paul Valéry who said that a poem is never finished, only abandoned, and similar remarks have been attributed to many other artists and writers. But in Bonnard's case, it was not—or not only—ordinary perfectionism that drove him to continually revise his images. Rather, his preoccupation with the most ordinary domestic moments—teatime, the bath, entering a room—yielded a limitless supply of interwoven memories whose freshness, renewed each day, made finishing any given picture nearly impossible for him. This helps to explain why, despite Bonnard's perpetual fussing and dabbing, his canvases became over time not more resolved, but less.

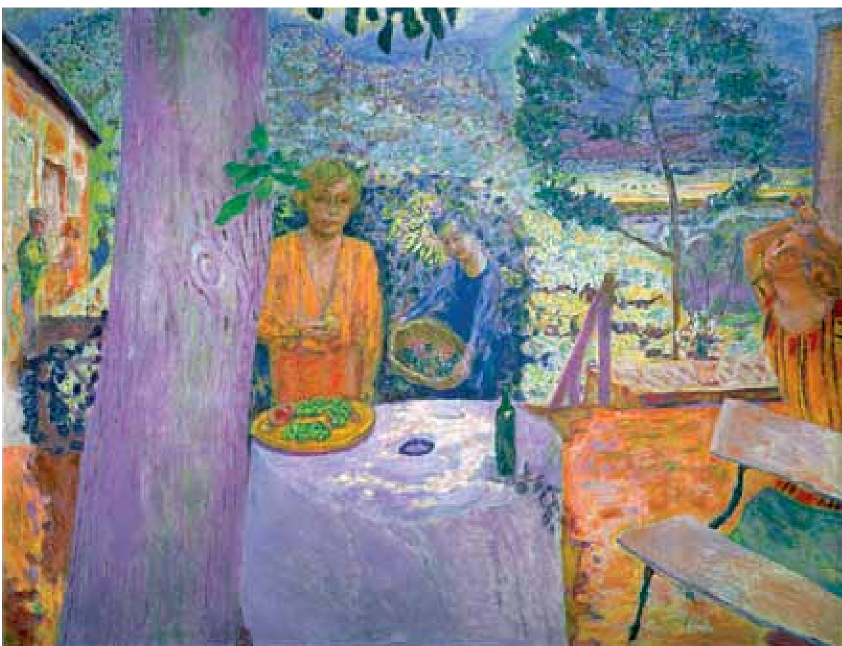


Fig. 54. Pierre Bonnard, *The Terrace at Vernonnet*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 58¼ x 76¾ in. (148 x 194.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of Florence J. Gould, 1968 (68.1)

Two other gouaches from the series commissioned by Carré show different slices of the room depicted in *Marthe Entering the Room*. The first, *The Gray Interior* (fig. 55), opens to a slightly wider view. Our focus is pulled

back to reveal the edge of a red checked tablecloth on the table, with a fireplace behind it, but the scene at right is the same: radiator, strips of light, and the open door, through which we see a figure, here clearly a woman, walking confidently. She may very well be Marthe, to judge from her blousy pink skirt and Marthe's signature white 1920s pumps. Without question she recalls a figure in an earlier work, the 1933 painting *Marthe in the Dining Room* (fig. 56), in which a woman—presumably Marthe, given her elegant attire and distinctive haircut—crosses in front of us, as another, unidentified figure bends quietly over the table. In the second gouache, *The Yellow Interior* (fig. 57), Bonnard's field of view expands to encompass a great deal of the room to the left of the table. A woman wearing a bold, flower-patterned, tight-fitting dress appears in the doorway. Her brown hair is shoulder length, and she stares out of the door frame, acknowledging us with an insouciant tilt of the head. She wears dark pumps and is silhouetted in turquoise light. It is tempting to think of her as another lover, from another time, making an appearance in Bonnard's theater of memory.

Michel Terrasse, the artist's grand-nephew, recounted meeting Bonnard in December 1942, nearly a year after Marthe's death. "Capturing afresh one of Marthe's poses as she got out of the bath, [Bonnard] would move from one canvas to another in his studio, laying on colour."[12] That Bonnard painted from memory often surprises viewers of his works, many of whom likely imagine that a man working in such a small universe surely sat at his dining room table and painted what he saw, or that he shifted his canvases from studio to porch and painted his backyard from there. But Bonnard visited the world in a different way. He needed continual contact with nature, with weather, with the countryside, and walked outside several times a day. As he walked he took notes in both drawings and words in order to capture the effects of outdoor light and air, perhaps so he could understand them better as they flowed through the doors and windows of his house. According to Sargy Mann, "With his pencil and scrap of paper he could catch life on the wing—a chance encounter, an effect of light so short lived that Monet would have had no time for it—and then in his studio, he could paint these moments for months, or even years."[13] Only in the studio did Bonnard begin to assemble images, to allow memories to float in and out of his working process. One day in 1936 Bonnard scribbled in his diary, "Consciousness, the shock of feeling and memory."[14] If he indeed conceived of consciousness itself as a fundamental tranquillity that is ruptured by feelings and memory, this would in some sense account for many of the phantoms in Bonnard's work: the figures, the layered memories, that enter in at the edges of consciousness and sight, in moments of heightened awareness when feeling and memory are inseparable. Sometimes they materialize slowly; at other times they enter silently, spectrally, into the room. It often takes the viewer a very long time to see them.

It is worth noting, as many observers have over the years, that reproductions in catalogues are particularly poor substitutes for standing in front of Bonnard's paintings and *looking* at them. In *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)* (cat. no. 41), we see a room dominated by a window tightly framing a verdant shimmering landscape. The table in the foreground is drenched in radiant white light streaming toward us. Vibrantly colored objects, solidly painted, are scattered across the table, each casting a shadow from an unseen light source. The orange rims of the plates shine sunlike. Blue shadows lie thick and luscious as cake frosting. Purple plums glow in the back. Close to the viewer is an almost shockingly red teacup that tilts up toward us, while a turquoise box, depicted in impossible perspective, perches in the upper-left corner of the table. Bouncing off the sunlit cloth, the eye perceives oddly scattered strips and blobs of light throughout the composition—in the landscape, on the balustrade, and in the lawn

outside the window. Almost sources of illumination themselves, rich whites mixed with blues hover on the panels to the right of the window, as yellows explode in the whites in the panels to the left. Then, just to the edge of the table on the right, we encounter an incomprehensible shape. We can only speculate what it is: perhaps the back of a jacket worn by someone exiting the room, or a chair turned with its back to the viewer and covered by a casually thrown shawl, left there half suspended. Surprisingly, a phantomlike woman appears on the left. At first we don't see her. She looks uncomfortable, as if she has been called unexpectedly into the room. Her ethereal, diminutive form is upstaged by the thickly painted objects on the table, yet she enters in her own light, a rich yellow-orange radiance that glows and scatters from her lower arm onto the chair next to her and then onto the wall. A few brushstrokes tell us she holds a teacup and

Fig. 55. Pierre Bonnard, *The Gray Interior*, ca. 1942. Gouache. Private collection, United States

Fig. 56. Pierre Bonnard, *Marthe in the Dining Room*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 43¾ x 23¼ in. (111 x 59 cm). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon

Fig. 57. Pierre Bonnard, *The Yellow Interior*, ca. 1942. Gouache on paper, 19⅝ x 25⅝ in. (50 x 65 cm). Private collection, Paris

saucer in her right hand, and a bit of bright orange on the cup is the only suggestion of her connection to the table setting, with its similar rich oranges. She does not seem to see us, but her eyes are piercing nonetheless. Weightless, neither completely present nor absent, she shimmers but does not move. It may be that we are seeing the wallpaper behind her through the translucent fabric of her dress.

The same room, but without its spectral presence, is sketched in crayon and watercolor in *Interior, Window* (cat. no. 47). The eye slides over the white tablecloth and into the dazzling, paradisiacal world beyond the window, which simultaneously pushes its way back into the room. A small mysterious form takes nascent shape at right; on the left side, however, the chair is clearly seen, our view uninterrupted by any ghostly apparition. In the drawing, then, Bonnard was setting the stage, while in the painting the mysterious presence is allowed to enter. Bonnard was always patrolling the boundary between the solid and the spectral, between reality and dreams.

Fig. 58. Pierre Bonnard, *The Green Blouse*, 1919. Oil on canvas, $40\frac{1}{8}$ x $26\frac{7}{8}$ in. (101.9 x 68.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ittleson Jr. Purchase Fund, 1963 (63.64)

Several years later, Bonnard painted *Dining Room on the Garden* (cat. no. 49), whose colors truly overwhelm the eye. A lush lavender and blue tablecloth with a red-orange edge rises up and forward (toward the viewer) and into the picture plane. Two yellow plates blister with edges of pinks, yellows, and fiery oranges. Luminous ice-white pitchers line up on the left. A lustrous vase formed of strange blue blobs holds a bouquet of dark roses. And, out the window, deep greens frame the ebullient but nearly indistinguishable blues of water and sky. In the midst of this visual abundance appears yet another spectral figure. Mute, masculine, she wears a dark green dress whose slender white collar is shot through with red that defines her face. Was she there all the time, upstaged by the roses teetering on the edge of the table, or do we just now see her, slowly, quietly entering into our vision? Her shoulder is turned so she can glide past us, her hand reaching for a doorknob we do not see. While everything else in the painting glows with increasing intensity, her shadowy being darkens and slides out of the room, off the edge. On the left her luminous equivalent lingers: a yellow, ghostly glow behind the chair that suggests another presence attended her appearance, or perhaps that she had been standing there only a few moments before and after she moved left only traces in light. We know neither who she is nor where she is going, but as she exits, the painting glows as if heated from within and below.

Look closely at the surface and you will see that much of *Dining Room on the Garden* is thinly painted. Slender tendrils of primed canvas visible through the surface give edge to things, adding to our sensation of some otherworldly or impossible light source. Surfaces are built up in some areas, again like frosting, and then drift to the barest wisps of paint in others. If we move back and away, the spectral woman reads as barely a trace, camouflaged like so many of Bonnard's phantoms. Move in close, however, and she builds in intensity, as the eyes adjust to the dark purple modeling, to the ochers that define her cheeks, to the blood-red, roselike images in her green dress. She seems to look us in the eye before slipping out of the room, and out of sight.[15]

Although spectral presences abound in Bonnard's interiors, many of his pictures, especially his early canvases, show figures that are emphatically and markedly present. What most of his paintings have in common, however, whether early or late, is that the figures in them either arrive in color and radiance or dissolve into color and radiance. In

The Green Blouse (fig. 58) the woman holding the cup and spoon (and wearing the blouse) is heralded by the striped yellow and orange curtain behind her. The rich color infuses into and throughout her in such a way that she emerges *from* it but also merges *with* it. Other figures are similarly camouflaged in the color of their attendant backgrounds, as in *The Breakfast Table* (cat. no. 55), or are nearly indistinguishable from it, such as the figure in blue holding the basket in *The Terrace at Vernonnet* or the person seen slyly emerging in the corner of *The Studio with Mimosa* (fig. 45). These figures are almost chameleon-like the way their skin, hair, and clothing seem to borrow the color of the objects and decor around them.

You can look for a long time at *White Interior* (fig. 59) before realizing that someone is there. The room's rich tableau—the radiator to the right of the half-opened door, the fireplace to the left, the sturdy chair pulled up to the table—is by now familiar to us. The luminous door and radiator, side by side, recall the porcelain, pearly substance of Bonnard's bath paintings. Above the radiator are splashes of unaccountable sunlight. The screen door opens onto the porch, revealing deep tropical skies and the beginnings of blue night air curling up into the oranges and greens. Only after scanning all of this does the eye hesitate and discover the almost imperceptible arc at the end of the table: a person, wearing a red striped robe, with a splash of yellow hair and a wisp of a face. Her dress is made of the same material as the carpet, with the same patterns. Instead of overlapping the table, she blends into the floor, and thus is perfectly camouflaged. Apparently unaware of anyone watching her, she seems to have just bent over before we, as viewers, happened upon the scene. Then we notice a small cat, with two tiny eyes, looking up at us. Did the cat just slide in, as cats do? Perhaps the woman was feeding it, and we are seeing her as she begins to rise back up. Her robe, no longer a camouflage, becomes one with the hot colors of the sky, and the figure within it almost disappears. Our eye then returns to the door, to the smoldering paradise without, for it is in such *exteriors* that Bonnard depicts the emotional temperatures of his domestic *interiors*. "I believe that when one is young," he wrote, "it is the object, the outside world that carries you away: that fills you with enthusiasm. Later, it is the interior realm, the need to express an emotion, that pushes the painter to choose this or that point of departure, this or that form."[16] The space in between those two realms is the redoubt of phantoms.

Fig. 59. Detail, *White Interior*, 1932 (cat. no. 36)

Even more difficult to perceive is the figure, barely a thin outline in white, in *Table in Front of the Window* (cat. no. 37). The volatile orange color of her skin is the same as that on the wall seemingly behind her. She enters in a rectangle of sunlight, her disjointed hand holding a skeletal spoon or perhaps reaching for an equally sketchy carafe. No features define her further, but she, like many of the other figures we've seen, comes with her own source of radiance. It spills onto the table and its edge, onto the curtains and the tiny leaves hanging above the window like a halo. This is the most ephemeral of figures, a face etched in white light, a fragment of a torso dissolved into dabs of paint, an arm sketched and resketched, appearing to reach into the room and retract at the same time.

Some figures, while not fugitive themselves, serve as decoys, slowing us from seeing others in the scene. Notice the woman striding into the room in *Marthe in the Dining Room* (fig. 56). Teacup casually in hand, she wears high-heeled shoes and the bright yellow and white jacket of a Chanel-style suit. She is framed in the yellow and red rectangles of the wall and table, whose colors spill onto her clothes. Only after witnessing her regal entrance do we see another, furtive presence in the room: a face bending over a tray on the table at left, bowing to the large commanding figure who has just walked in.

Bonnard wrote of "the demands and the pleasures of seeing, and its rewards," and noted the essential difference between "crude seeing and intelligent seeing."[17] For Bonnard seeing was where time, feeling, memory, and mystery all resided. It was the solid things Bonnard saw, the things he drew incessantly—the objects on the table, the views outside the window—that caught his attention, and from which he fashioned his sets and props. The actors that enter and exit his sets, however, are the dreams and phantoms of memory. Bonnard said he sought to "show what one sees when one enters a room all of a sudden,"[18] but these figures—who so often hide from us before materializing slowly into sight—are what he *didn't* see when he first walked into a room, and what we don't see when we first look at his paintings. You see everything else before you see them. One reason for this is that while Bonnard conjured through color, he also exploited the phenomenon of peripheral vision and its magical edge. According to art historian and critic Timothy Hyman:

> *In the previously uncharted territory of peripheral vision Bonnard discovered strange flattenings, wobbles, shifts of angle as well as of colour, and darkenings of tone, penumbral adventures and metamorphoses which liberated him from visual convention. It was as though the central area of fact were surrounded by much less predictable, almost fabulous, margins; where imagination and reverie and memory could be asserted as a heightened reality, in "impossible" intensities of colour.*[19]

Practice seeing in your peripheral vision and you will begin to see what Bonnard saw: the indeterminate presences, the stealthily arriving figures, the fugitive outlines so transparent the colors behind bleed through and partially conceal them. In both *The Breakfast Table* and *Interior: Dining Room* (cat. no. 71), we see figures only slowly, almost reluctantly. They are unresolved, out of focus, and nearly genderless. Bonnard registers the peripheral effects of seeing someone enter a room or quietly slip out. The woman in *The Breakfast Table* is also too large, as if only suddenly did she enter into the periphery, startling the viewer, whose eyes must shift to bring her into focus. In *Interior: Dining Room*, the woman is more peripheral than spectral, almost a side show to the pageantry of the table. The edges of Bonnard's paintings are entrances for mystery and menace alike.

The 1939 still life *The Checkered Tablecloth* (cat. no. 60) can initially appear subdued compared to many other Bonnard canvases. The tablecloth itself, ungoverned by perspective, rises to line up with a levitating red table and is a backdrop for two rather orderly red apples on the edge of a melon-colored plate. They sit in front of a tropical basket whose underlying orange color seeps up and infuses the rest of the shape. Flatness yields to glowing, arcing, soaring, floating surfaces. A richness of color begins to emerge. Some areas are built up in jewel-like, complementary complexities, while other areas are faint, rendered in thin washes of color. White glints appear, sometimes to denote volume, sometimes to highlight edges, almost like stray voltage. The plate at center casts an improbable white shadow. The apples and the sugar bowl take on increasing dimension and form the longer you look at them, as if they were really there, but then they startle us as they begin

to float and, thus, to deny the surface on which they should be resting. "My god is light," Bonnard said, but for the viewer, his god is also color, and no more so than in a painting such as this one, where colors jostle and pulsate—note how the primaries coalesce and disappear—and also float up, only to sink back down into the canvas.

Bonnard's understanding of seeing resulted from direct experience, from a fervent dialogue with a world that was visible but inseparable from thought, feeling, memory, even mystical awakenings and sensual desires. He rephrased the world of things, asking himself and the viewers of his work to see more, feel more, remember more. The casual viewer might say that not much changes in Bonnard's world, but the viewer who lingers experiences table settings that shift; the sudden appearance of spring blossoms in the flowering fruit tree; the unruly tablecloth that rises up; the chair that moved around in the night; an ever-changing exterior world that presses itself through the window; and the spectral presences of those who have drifted in from Bonnard's dreams to the edges of his paintings. Returning to *Marthe Entering the Room*, only now, perhaps, do we see the picture in the blue frame hanging on the wall. A woman's face materializes, two blue eyes and red lips. We look again at *The Checkered Tablecloth*, and there is an undercurrent of things lost to us—of a life stilled. We see the green and ocher shadow on the left, suggesting an unseen phantasmal presence beyond the picture's edge, leaning over the table. It shimmers, then grows dimmer as we continue to look. It is an entrance, used as an exit.

1. New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 12.
2. Gilot and Lake 1964, pp. 271–72.
3. Bouvet 1981, pp. 9–10; London and New York 1998, p. 263.
4. See Ives 1989–90, pp. 36–37.
5. Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 48; see also Bouvet 1981, p. 292.
6. Confusion surrounds many of the titles of Bonnard's works, which are surprisingly generic for the most part. Nearly all of them were assigned posthumously by owners or dealers, sometimes changing in translation or at auction.
7. According to Phaedra Siebert, curator of drawings at the Arkansas Arts Center, this gouache has consistently been referred to by the Arkansas Arts Center as *Marthe entrant le salon*, as it was called by James Kirkman, Ltd., when the center acquired it in 1983. However, several other institutions have referred to it as *Le radiateur* or *Le radiateur, Marthe entrant le salon*. A 1993 letter from the organizers of the 1994 exhibition "Bonnard at Le Bosquet" describes the image as "showing Marthe peeping round the doorway of the bathroom at the Villa le Bosquet," which explains the tile floor in the room Marthe is leaving.
8. London and New York 1998, p. 48.
9. Bell 1994, p. 23.
10. Terrasse, M. 1988, p. 22; Terrasse, M. 1987, p. 22: "J'essaie de faire ce que je n'ai *jamais* fait: donner l'impression que l'on a quand on pénètre dans une pièce, que l'on voit tout et rien à la fois."
11. New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 18.
12. Terrasse, M. 1988, p. 21; Terrasse, M. 1987, p. 21: ". . . saisi toute fraîche une attitude de Marthe sortant du bain, il allait dans son atelier d'une toile à l'autre déposer de la couleur."
13. Mann 1991, p. 14.
14. "Conscience, le choc de la sensation et de la mémoire." Daybook, May 8, 1936. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 194; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 70.
15. I thank Megan Fontanella, curatorial assistant, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, for her insight into this painting.
16. Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 43, and p. 279 n. 108: "Je crois que lorsqu'on est jeune, c'est l'objet, le monde extérieur qui vous enthousiasme: on est emballé. Plus tard, c'est intérieur, le besoin d'exprimer une émotion pousse le peintre à choisir tel ou tel point de départ, telle ou telle forme."
17. "Les exigences et les plaisirs de la vision et les satisfactions. Vision brute et vision intelligente." Daybook, June 13, 1930. Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, p. 183; translation from Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, p. 69.
18. Clair 1984b, p. 32; Clair 1984a, p. 19: To "montrer ce qu'on voit quand on pénètre soudain dans une pièce d'un seul coup."
19. Hyman 1998, pp. 160–61.

For their help in various and important ways, I thank Dita Amory, Christopher Caines, Elliott Kai-Kee, and Allison Stielau.

Catalogue

1. Still Life with Greyhound

Nature morte à la levrette

Ca. 1923
Oil on canvas, 27½ x 27½ in. (69.9 x 69.9 cm)
Private collection
D 1207

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; by descent to Terrasse family, Paris; Wildenstein and Co., New York; The Wallis Foundation, Santa Barbara; its sale, Christie's, New York, May 12, 1999, lot 38; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Webb 1966, p. 68, fig. 1; Young 1981, fig. 6

EXHIBITED: London 1966, p. 55, no. 154, ill. p. 98; London 1972, no. 5, ill.; Tokyo, Kōbe, Nagoya, and Fukuoka 1980–81, no. 48, pl. 48; Geneva 1981, no. 50; New York 1981, pp. 23, 63, no. 29, pl. 15; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 214–15, no. 104, ill.; Lausanne 1991, p. 157, no. 46, pl. 46; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 88, no. 66, ill. p. 73; Munich 1994, no. 95, ill.; Santa Barbara 1998, p. 18, no. 3, ill. p. 19

Bonnard's idiosyncratic pairing of a greyhound and a bountiful buffet table calls to mind Chardin's resplendent painting of the same subject (fig. 60), only Chardin's hound has a live parrot in its sights. Bonnard may have seen the earlier masterpiece at the Louvre, where it has been since the early eighteenth century. Among other well-known admirers of Chardin's canvas were Matisse, who copied *Buffet* on two occasions, and Proust, who in his 1895 "portrait" of Chardin wrote of its light and delectable fruits.

Still Life with Greyhound is more a record of the objects on the table than a study of their interrelationships. The bananas, peaches, linens, and plates clutter the sideboard quietly, with only the dog to interrupt the silence. The local color and chiaroscuro recall Bonnard's Nabi-period paintings, perhaps a last nod to the past before the experience of Mediterranean light infused his later pictures with daring, modernistic hues. DA

Fig. 60. Jean Siméon Chardin, *The Buffet*, 1728. Oil on canvas, 76⅜ x 50¾ in. (194 x 129 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (Inv. 3198)

2. *Before Dinner*
Avant dîner

1924
Oil on canvas, 35½ x 42 in. (90.2 x 106.7 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.156)
D 1266

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1924; bought by Mlle Ricotti; Galerie O. Pétridès, Paris; bought by Robert Lehman, June 1948; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975

SELECTED LITERATURE: Szabó 1975, p. 95, pl. 114; Giambruni 1989–90, pp. 85–87

EXHIBITED: New York 1954; Cincinnati 1959, p. 23, no. 168, pl. 168; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, p. 222, no. 110, ill.; Copenhagen 1986, no. 51, ill.

This view of the dining room at Ma Roulotte, the small house in Vernon that Bonnard bought in 1912, is one of the few interiors from the artist's later years in which the table is set for an actual meal with an orderly arrangement of dishes and cutlery, serving platters, and carafes. As such it represents a specificity of time—a stage set for what is to follow—that is equally uncommon in Bonnard's late interiors. And yet the conviviality one might expect before dinner is nowhere to be found. The models appear lost in thought, resisting contact or the mere suggestion of movement; only the dachshund registers any animation.

The painting reads as a series of interlocking squares and rectangles dominated by the luminous white of the dining table. These color fields are mapped with greater deliberation than the other components of the painting. The tabletop props were brushed so rapidly they appear as if they were "drawn" with brush and oil. Although Bonnard seldom stretched his canvases onto standard-size stretchers prior to finishing a painting, he did lay out the general dimensions of an image by painting framing lines around the periphery or by drawing in charcoal directly on the canvas. Here, he blocked out the pictorial field with a crimson line that is visible only when the picture is unframed.

A highly finished charcoal preparatory drawing for this work (fig. 61) offers a rare glimpse of a composition Bonnard realized fully on paper before executing it on canvas. The drawing reveals his methodology as he worked out the overall structure as well as the treatment of the color fields, patterns, and voids. Even the expressions of the models—how the one on the right slightly tilts her head, for example—is articulated on paper. Looking at the drawing, one could logically deduce that Bonnard sketched directly from models before embarking on the painting in his studio. DA

Fig. 61. Pierre Bonnard, *Before Dinner*, ca. 1924. Charcoal on paper, 9⅝ x 11¼ in. (24.5 x 28.5 cm). Private collection

BONNARD

3. Reflecting on the Day
Les Comptes de la journée

1924/1925–27
Oil on canvas, 21⅝ x 20⅛ in. (54.9 x 51.1 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Guggenheim Asher Associates
D 1262

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Félix Fénéon, Paris, by 1925; his sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, December 4, 1941, lot 31; bought by François Pacquement, Paris; his sale, Sotheby's, New York, May 11, 1999, lot 107; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Basler and Kunstler 1929, pl. 55; Laprade 1944, no. and pl. 12; Champigneulle 1952, ill. p. [410]

EXHIBITED: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1924*; Prague 1926, no. 3; Lyon 1928, no. 4; Brussels 1929, no. 430; Amsterdam 1939, no. 9; Paris 1952, no. 12; Paris 1955, no. 4; Paris 1957a, no. 40; Munich 1961, no. 6; Paris 1967, no. 115; London 1969, no. 19; Paris 1974, no. 1; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 269, no. 97, ill. p. 208 (Washington, D.C. only)

Among Bonnard's intimate views of domestic rituals, *Reflecting on the Day* is a particularly poignant example of the artist's ability to transform the everyday into the strange. Marthe and an unidentified woman sit silently before an imposing spread, their hunched forms squeezed tightly between the overloaded table and the looming presence of a dining room cupboard that reappears in *The Table* (cat. no. 15), painted the following year. Marthe's partially obscured features and disproportionate body as well as the ambiguity of her companion's actions lend this ordinary scene an air of mystery, even discomfort. This effect is only heightened by the extreme flatness, tilted perspective, and shallow space of the composition, which hark back to Bonnard's Nabi days and to the influence of Paul Gauguin.

Although most strongly observed in Bonnard's works from the early 1890s, Gauguin's powerful example of the expressive potential of color and form continued to influence Bonnard throughout his career. This enduring admiration can be seen in *Reflecting on the Day*, which bears a striking similarity both in composition and mood to Gauguin's *The Meal* (fig. 62), painted during the artist's first Tahitian sojourn. Bonnard could have seen *The Meal* at the posthumous retrospective of Gauguin's work held at the 1906 Salon d'Automne. Almost a close-up view of Gauguin's composition, Bonnard's canvas preserves the dark, somewhat ominous shadows cast solely by the objects on the table. Bonnard gave his scene a decidedly Western setting, however, substituting compotiers and local produce for a wooden bowl and exotic fruit, and a decadent slice of frosted cake for a menacing knife. While Bonnard's painting can be seen as an homage to Gauguin, its subtle plays on perception—Marthe's blurry, almost one-eyed visage, for example, or the strange, unidentifiable shapes in the background that read both as flat and three-dimensional, near and far—result in a sense of the uncanny that is Bonnard's alone. NM

Fig. 62. Paul Gauguin, *The Meal*, 1891. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 28¾ x 36¼ in. (73 x 92 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Bonnard

4. The Compotier

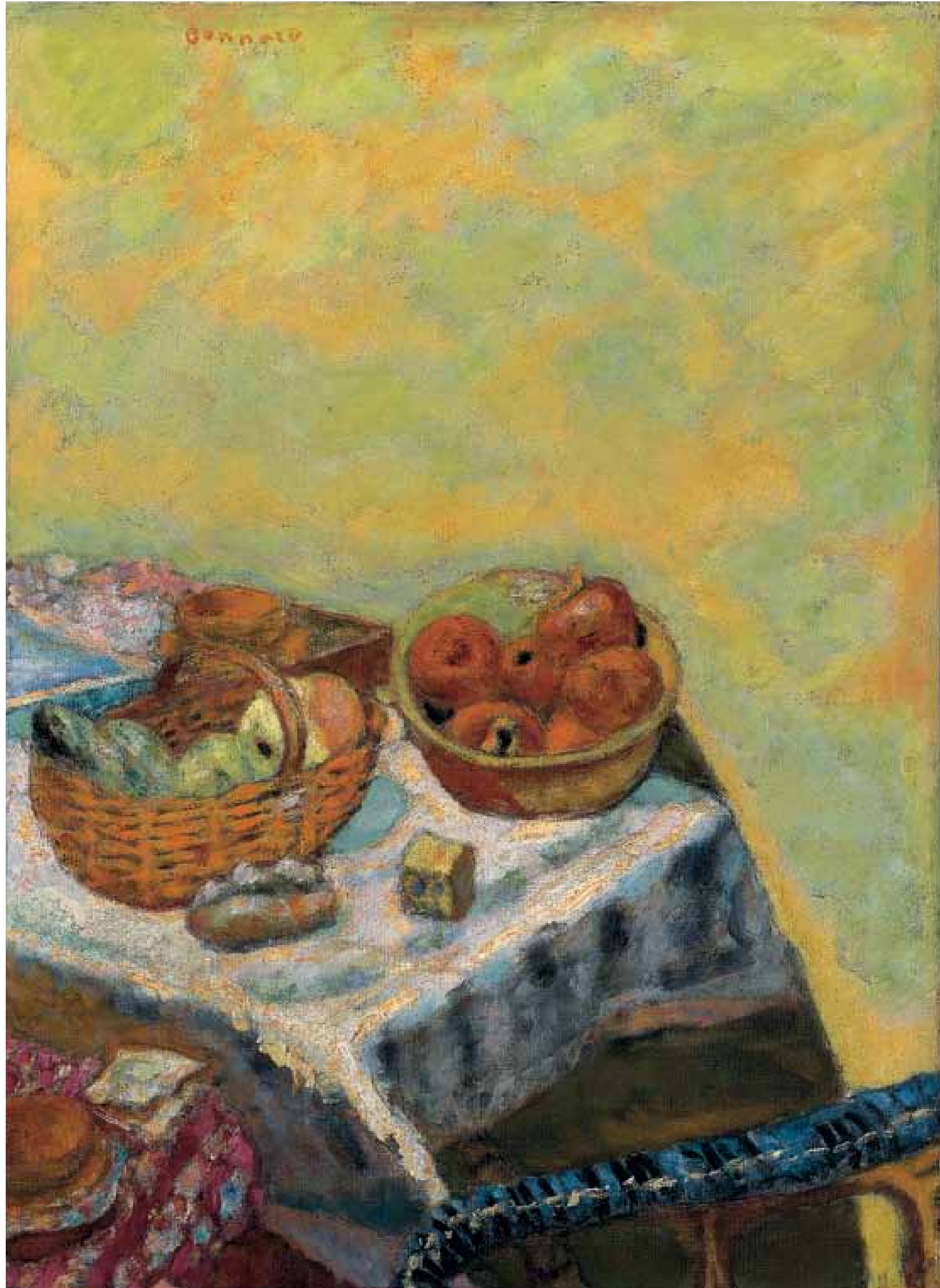
Le Compotier

Ca. 1924
Oil on canvas, 18½ x 12¼ in. (47 x 31 cm)
Private collection
D 1249

PROVENANCE: L'Art Moderne collection, Lucerne; its sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, June 20, 1935, lot 48; bought by Bignou Gallery, Paris; Galerie Alfred Daber, Paris; estate of Mme X (Camille Besson?); Ader-Picard-Tajan sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, November 24, 1990, lot 75; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Beer and Gillet 1947, p. 145, pl. 125; Natanson 1951, pl. 63; Polaillon-Kerven 1955, pp. 38–39; Watkins 1994, pp. 168, 171, 174, pl. 132; Terrasse, A. 2000a, p. 91, ill.

EXHIBITED: Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 63, ill. p. 107; Lyon 1954, no. 65, fig. 14; Paris 1957b, no. 34; Munich 1966–67, no. 95, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 105, ill.; Lausanne 1991, p. 159, no. 52, pl. 52; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 88, no. 67, ill.; Munich 1994, no. 97, ill.; Nagoya and Tokyo 1997, pp. 162–63, 247, no. 68, ill.; Martigny 1999, pp. 122–23, no. 44, ill.; Paris 2000, p. 101, no. 36, ill. p. 59; Lisbon 2001, p. 71; Paris 2006, pp. 196, 321, no. 59, ill.; Rome 2006–7, pp. 172–73, no. 15, ill.



5. Basket of Fruit in the Sun
Panier de fruits au soleil

Ca. 1927
Oil on canvas, 24¼ x 18 in. (61.6 x 45.7 cm)
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, B.A. 1929
D 1244

PROVENANCE: Louis Vauxcelles, Paris; by descent to his wife, Mme Vauxcelles; Sam Salz Inc., New York; Mr. and Mrs. William Goetz, Holmby Hills, California; Theodore H. Cummings, Beverly Hills; sale, Sotheby's, London, April 26, 1967, lot 12; Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia; their gift to Yale University Art Gallery, 1983

EXHIBITED: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1934*; San Francisco 1959, no. 4, ill.; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 42, ill. p. 50 (Chicago and Los Angeles only)

6. The White Tablecloth

La Nappe blanche

1925
Oil on canvas, 39⅜ x 42⅞ in. (100 x 109 cm)
Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, Germany
D 1309

Provenance: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1925; bought by Mme Nathan, 1937; by descent to her grandson, Gilbert Joseph; Gallery Rosengart, Lucerne, by 1977; bought by the Von der Heydt-Museum, 1977

Selected literature: *L'Art d'aujourd'hui* 1927, pl. 45; Terrasse, A. 2000b, ill. p. 86

Exhibited: Paris 1950, p. 23, no. 47; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 88, no. 70, ill. p. 89; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 184, no. 35, ill. p. 119

Although in some respects this painting aligns with many of Bonnard's other late interiors—for example, in the way the stark white tabletop becomes a surrogate canvas for an array of platters, a basket of bread, a carafe, and an effulgent basket of fruit—here the eccentricities of perception, or Bonnard's *memory* of perception, extend the painting's formal ambiguities almost to the point of indecipherability. Although the eye searches for some corrective input that would help identify the jack-o'-lantern–like basket of fruit in the upper-left corner, or lend corporeality to the female figure at lower left, it must settle instead for profound disequilibrium. The ethereal figure at left, whose head trails off in an indistinct field of light, contrasts with the self-engaged standing woman, whose hot palette echoes the fiery tones of the interior. Even the table arrangement is ill at ease. The intersecting plates hover above the blinding white tabletop, and the plate and compotier in the near ground appear to slide off the side. The air of unrest, disquietude, and inscrutability that prevails is unleavened by a suffusion of raking light: a picture of a seemingly ordinary ritual that is anything but ordinary. DA

7. Still Life with Bouquet of Flowers (La Vénus de Cyrène)

Nature morte au bouquet de fleurs (La Vénus de Cyrène)

1930
Oil on canvas, 23⅝ x 51⅜ in. (60 x 130.5 cm)
Kunstmuseum Basel
D 1437

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Josse and Gaston Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, September 1930; disappeared during the German occupation of Paris, 1940–44; Galerie Beyeler, Basel; given by the Esther Mengold Foundation to the Kunstmuseum Basel, 1956; bought from the heirs of Bernheim-Jeune by the Kunstmuseum Basel, 1997

SELECTED LITERATURE: Fermigier 1969, p. 126, ill.; Hyman 1998, p. 138, fig. 108

EXHIBITED: Basel 1955a, no. 4; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 248–49, no. 126, ill.; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 90, no. 85, ill. p. 88; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 43, ill. p. 124; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 272, no. 119, ill. p. 226; Winterthur 2004–5, no. 74, ill. p. 102

The unusual format of this long, rectangular canvas recalls the decorative panels painted by Bonnard and the Nabis in the 1890s. The yellow-orange tones, abstracted background, and the placement of a book at center, in particular, bring to mind the title panel in Édouard Vuillard's ensemble *Album* (1895, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Where the latter was painted to embellish the home of Vuillard's great patrons, Thadée and Misia Natanson, Bonnard's canvas was created in honor of his friend and dealer, Josse Bernheim-Jeune. Similar to how Van Gogh sometimes used images of contemporary literature to add to or enhance the meanings of his works, here Bonnard painted a portrait of the dealer by representing his publications. The bright yellow cover of Bernheim-Jeune's 1930 novel, *La Vénus de Cyrène*, stands out prominently among the still-life elements on the table, while a corner of his periodical, *Le Bulletin artistique de la vie*, hovers at the edge of the composition like one of Bonnard's spectral figures. Painted the same year the novel was published, Bonnard's still life appears to have been made to commemorate Bernheim-Jeune's literary achievement. Bonnard modestly downplayed his own involvement in the project, however, as the illustration he created for the novel's cover is conspicuously absent from the representation of the book in the painting. NM

8. *Woman with Mimosa*

La Femme au mimosa

1924
Oil on canvas, 19⅛ x 24⅝ in. (48.5 x 62.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Ann Eden Woodward, 1975 (1978.264.8)
D 1257

PROVENANCE: Paul Rosenberg and Co., New York; Dr. Sandbloom, Stockholm, by 1949; Olivier B. James, New York, until 1955; sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, October 19, 1955, lot 55; Larry Aldrich, New York, 1955–63; sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, October 30, 1963, lot 18; Ann Eden Woodward, New York, 1963–75; her bequest to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975

SELECTED LITERATURE: Söderberg 1949, ill. p. 52; *Art News* 1955, ill.; *Pictures on Exhibit* 1955, ill. p. 32; *Art and Auctions* 1963

EXHIBITED: New York 1956, pp. 4, 11, no. 7, ill.; Palm Beach 1957, no. 13, ill.; Richmond and Atlanta 1959, no. 2; New York and other cities 1960–62, no. 4; New York 1981, pp. 24, 45, no. 36, fig. 17; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 220–21, no. 109, ill.; Roslyn Harbor 1992, no. 102; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 88, no. 69, ill. p. 44; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 184, no. 34, ill. p. 117; Humlebaek and Basel 2004–5, pp. 96–97, fig. 13

9. Basket of Fruit
Panier de fruits

1930
Pencil on paper, 4¾ x 5⅞ in. (12 x 15 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau and Paris; his estate; by descent to current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Amoureaux 1985, ill. p. 96; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 312, ill. p. 177; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, ill. p. 138

EXHIBITED: Munich 1966–67, no. 196, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 202, ill.; Rome and Turin 1971–72, no. 50, ill.; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 56, no. 11, ill.

10. Still Life with Apples, Le Cannet
Nature morte aux pommes, Le Cannet

1924
Pencil on paper, 5 x 6¼ in. (12.7 x 16 cm)
Musée Pierre Bonnard Le Cannet, Côte d'Azur
On deposit from a private collection

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to Bowers collection; by descent to current owner

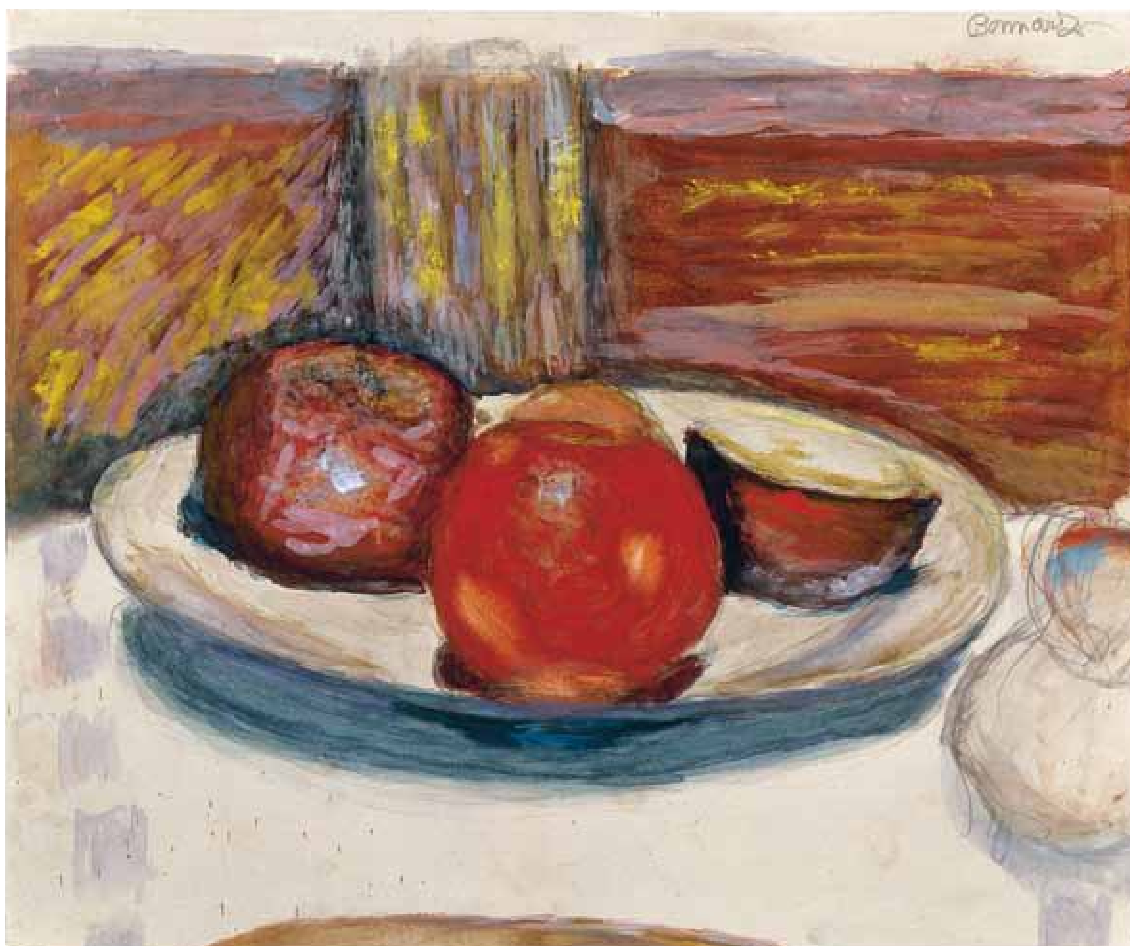
EXHIBITED: Paris 1972, no. 113, ill.; Canberra and Brisbane 2003, p. 180, no. 75, ill. p. 175, fig. 153; Rome 2006–7, p. 170, no. 13, ill.; Marseille 2007, p. 94, no. 73, ill.

11. The Plate of Apples
L'Assiette de pommes

1926 (?)
Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 10¼ x 12¼ in.
(26 x 31 cm)
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Département des Arts Plastiques,
Neuchâtel, Switzerland

PROVENANCE: Yvan and Hélène Amez-Droz, Paris, by 1979; their bequest to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1979

EXHIBITED: Winterthur 2004–5, no. 120, ill. p. 152



12. Flowers on the Mantelpiece at Le Cannet
Fleurs sur la cheminée au Cannet

1927
Oil on canvas, 41¾ x 28⅝ in. (106 x 72.8 cm)
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon
D 1385

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1928; bought by Kapferer; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon

EXHIBITED: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1927*; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 30, ill. p. 94; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 90, no. 79, ill. p. 15

Bonnard often used the mantelpiece in his small upstairs sitting room at Le Cannet as a stage or proscenium for his repertoire of familiar objects: here a ceramic vase with a crisscross pattern and a loose arrangement of anemones. Marthe's cropped body enters stage left. The suffusion of yellow throughout the canvas, which sets off the silvery mantel and its vertical support, contrasts markedly with the rich, black fireplace. The insistent verticality and countering horizontals bring to mind the architectural representations in Roman wall painting, such as those found at Pompeii.

The presence of Marthe's figure in the otherwise orderly arrangement of the painting brings a different range of meaning to the work. She appears to gaze at the only yellow flower among the violet and magenta anemones as she collects the fallen dead leaves. Her diagonal arm attracts our eye onto the mantel, and with this gesture we realize the mantel is at eye level. This awareness, in turn, affects the way we see and understand the rest of the painting—for instance, that the rectangular shape at bottom is the tabletop tilted up parallel to the picture plane. DA

13. Flowers on a Red Carpet
Fleurs sur un tapis rouge

1928
Oil on canvas, 22½ x 24 in. (57 x 61 cm)
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon
D 1402

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, November 1928; bought by Dr. Charpentier; his sale, Galerie Charpentier, March 20, 1954, no. 7; private collection, Paris; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon

SELECTED LITERATURE: Charpentier 1939, ill. p. 177; Spar 1956, p. 113

EXHIBITED: Paris 1937, no. 22; Paris 1939

14. Basket of Fruit
Corbeille de fruits

1930
Watercolor, gouache, and pen on paper, 10⅞ x 14⅝ in.
(27.5 x 37 cm)
Private collection

Provenance: Marcel Guérin, Paris, by 1959; bought by Marianne Feilchenfeldt, 1959; to current owner, 2001

Selected literature: Cogniat 1968, ill. p. 54; Amoureaux 1985, ill. p. 97; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 312, ill. p. 174

Exhibited: Munich 1966–67, no. 158, ill.; Rome and Turin 1971–72, no. 29, ill.; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 34, ill. p. 99; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 56, no. 10, ill.; Winterthur 2004–5, no. 135, ill. p. 160

15. The Table
La Table

1925
Oil on canvas, 40½ x 29¼ in. (102.9 x 74.3 cm)
Tate, London
Presented by the Courtauld Fund Trustees, 1926
D 1310

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris; Independent Gallery, London; presented by the Trustees of the Courtauld Fund to the Tate Gallery, 1926

SELECTED LITERATURE: Earp 1926, ill. p. 64; Manson 1926, p. 96; Tatlock 1926, pl. 4g; Rothenstein 1949, pl. 79; Cooper and Blunt 1954, no. 1, pl. 64; Harteel and Swanenburg 1955, pp. 64, 69; Alley 1959, p. 12, pl. 7; Sylvester 1962; Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 204; Fermigier 1969, p. 24, ill.; Ōoka et al. 1972, p. 102, fig. 7; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 312, ill. p. 151; Cogniat 1991, p. 55, ill. p. 70; Mann 1994, pp. 36–37, fig. 19; Hyman 1998, p. 139, fig. 109; Watkins 1998, pp. 44, 46, fig. 29; Terrasse, A. 2000a, pp. 86–87, ill.

EXHIBITED: Edinburgh 1932, no. 211; London 1948, no. 1; Paris 1955–56, no. 2; London 1957b, p. 20, pl. 9; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 34, ill. p. 47; London 1966, p. 58, no. 179; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 102–3, no. 27, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 168–69, no. 31, ill.; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 222–23, no. 111, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 152–53, no. 50, ill.; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 270, no. 102, ill. p. 213

At a table haphazardly laid with nuts and fruits, ceramics, and cutlery, Marthe appears in the distance, out of reach, seemingly intent on stirring some concoction for her dog, whose muzzle is faintly visible at left. A luminous white tabletop casting violet-gray shadows dominates our field of view, perhaps—as in *The White Tablecloth* (cat. no. 6)—a metaphor for an artist's primed canvas. Bonnard once admitted that white was a color he had been investigating all his life, and many of the late interiors bear out such experiments. Here he transforms the white rectangle from an indefinite field of space into a powerful planar reality. DA

16. *Woman with Basket of Fruit*

Femme au panier de fruits

1915–18 or ca. 1926
Oil on canvas, 27¼ x 15¾ in. (69.2 x 40 cm)
The Baltimore Museum of Art
The Cone Collection, Bequest of Frederic W. Cone (BMA 1950.190)
D 1362

PROVENANCE: sale, L'Art Moderne, Lausanne, 1928; bought by Degryse; his sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, March 10, 1933; sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, December 1, 1933, lot 42; Frederic W. Cone, by 1950; his bequest to The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1950

SELECTED LITERATURE: Terrasse, M. 1996, ill. p. 191

EXHIBITED: Paris 1926, no. 7; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 59; Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1953*; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 24, ill. p. 39; Nagoya and Tokyo 1997, pp. 152–53, 246, no. 62, ill.

Whereas in *White Interior* (cat. no. 36) white serves to anchor the painting's complex geometry, here it acts as a staging ground for a full spectrum of other colors, both warm and cool. The solid mass of fruit, heaped onto a raffia basket, in a nod to Cézanne, teeters on a tablecloth whose varied hues appear literally to spill off the tabletop in liquid motion. Even Poucette, the family's dachshund, seems blinded by how the white of the fabric is translated into a trembling blue-violet.

As in so many of Bonnard's late paintings, the pictorial field of *Woman with Basket of Fruit* has the appearance of a cinematic frame that has captured a haphazard moment of daily life: the dog trotting along to inspect his meal; the female figure, detached from her surroundings; and the fruit basket at center stage. Opinions differ as to the date of this work. If the model is identified as Renée Monchaty, the later date (ca. 1926) is highly unlikely. Renée died in 1925, following a liaison with the artist, and Bonnard abruptly abandoned all paintings for which she modeled, such was the depth of his sorrow. DA

17. Untitled (Basket of Fruit)

Ca. 1920
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 4⅞ x 7⅛ in. (12.5 x 18 cm)
Collection of Anisabelle Berès-Montanari, Paris

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to the artist's grand-nephew, Antoine Terrasse, Fontainebleau; bought by Anisabelle Berès-Montanari, Paris

18. Basket of Fruit
Panier de fruits

Ca. 1923
Pencil on paper, 4½ x 6¾ in. (11.4 x 17.1 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau and Paris; his estate; by descent to current owner

19. Basket of Fruit in the Dining Room at Le Cannet

Corbeille de fruit dans la salle à manger du Cannet

1928
Oil on canvas, 20⅜ x 23⅝ in. (51.8 x 60 cm)
Private collection
D 1401

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1928; Georges Renand, Paris; Raphäel Gerard, Paris; Jacques Lindon, New York, by 1947; bought by Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem, New York, 1947; their sale, Sotheby's, New York, May 8, 1995, lot 30; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Edouard-Joseph 1930, ill. p. 158; Werth et al. 1945, ill. p. 23

EXHIBITED: Paris 1937, no. 28; New York 1956, pp. 4, 13, no. 10, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 168–69, no. 58, ill.

Bonnard's modest repertoire of still-life motifs came not from his studio but from the entirety of his house. The raffia basket seen here was a favorite prop; it appears again and again in his Le Cannet interiors, both in paintings and in gouaches, where it assumes many guises, as in the striking 1930 gouache *Basket of Fruit* (cat. no. 14). Just such a basket is mentioned in a description of Le Bosquet, the hillside villa above Cannes where Bonnard lived the last twenty years of his life, written by the artist's grand-nephew, Michel Terrasse: "On the dining room table covered in red felt stood baskets with tall handles of plaited osier or raffia—somewhere to put the peonies and mimosa, the oranges, lemons and persimmons gathered, with the figs, from the garden." DA

20. *Work Table*

La Table de travail

1926/1937
Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. (121.9 x 91.4 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon (2006.128.12)
D 1356

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, January 1937; bought by Pierre Loeb; Paul Rosenberg, Paris; seized by the Nazi Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg during World War II; restituted to France by the Allied forces, March 27, 1946; private collection, Switzerland, 1965; Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia; gift to the National Gallery of Art, 2006

SELECTED LITERATURE: McBride 1953, ill. p. 32; Fermigier 1969, p. 27, ill.

EXHIBITED: London 1935, no. 32; Amsterdam 1939, no. 16; Paris 1946b, no. 52, ill.; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 140, no. 53, ill. pp. 50, 103; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 40, ill. p. 57

Unlike most of Bonnard's late interiors, which are typically built of broken brushstrokes knitted across the surface of the canvas, this anomalous picture has large, continuous planes of color—most notably the lapis lazuli–blue rug with rosettes—that recall Matisse's bold patterns. Indeed, a debt to Matisse is implicit in this densely constructed, spatially charged interior, which could be seen almost as an homage to Bonnard's great friend and contemporary. Bonnard completed the painting in 1926, only to return to it years later (a common practice for him) in order to simplify the design of the rug.

Work Table was confiscated by the Nazis during the Second World War and eventually found its way into Hermann Göring's collection of appropriated art works. Recovered by the Allies after the war, the painting was restituted to France in March 1946 and was included that year in an exhibition of repatriated French masterpieces. DA

ALBUM
MUSICA

21. Plate of Fruit
Plat de fruits

Ca. 1930
Watercolor and gouache on paper, 12¾ x 19¾ in. (32.5 x 50 cm)
Private collection, France

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to current owner, 1958

SELECTED LITERATURE: Amoureaux 1985, pp. 80–81, ill.; Genty and Vernon 2003, pp. 179, 181, fig. 485

22. The Yellow Shawl
Le Châle jaune

Ca. 1925
Oil on canvas, 50¼ x 37¾ in. (127.6 x 95.9 cm)
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven
Gift from the Estate of Paul Mellon
D 1323

PROVENANCE: private collection, Paris, by 1965; Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia; his estate, after 1999; its gift to Yale University Art Gallery, 2006

SELECTED LITERATURE: Jourdain 1946, ill.; Vaillant et al. 1965, p. 229, ill. p. 206

23. *Lunch* or *Breakfast*

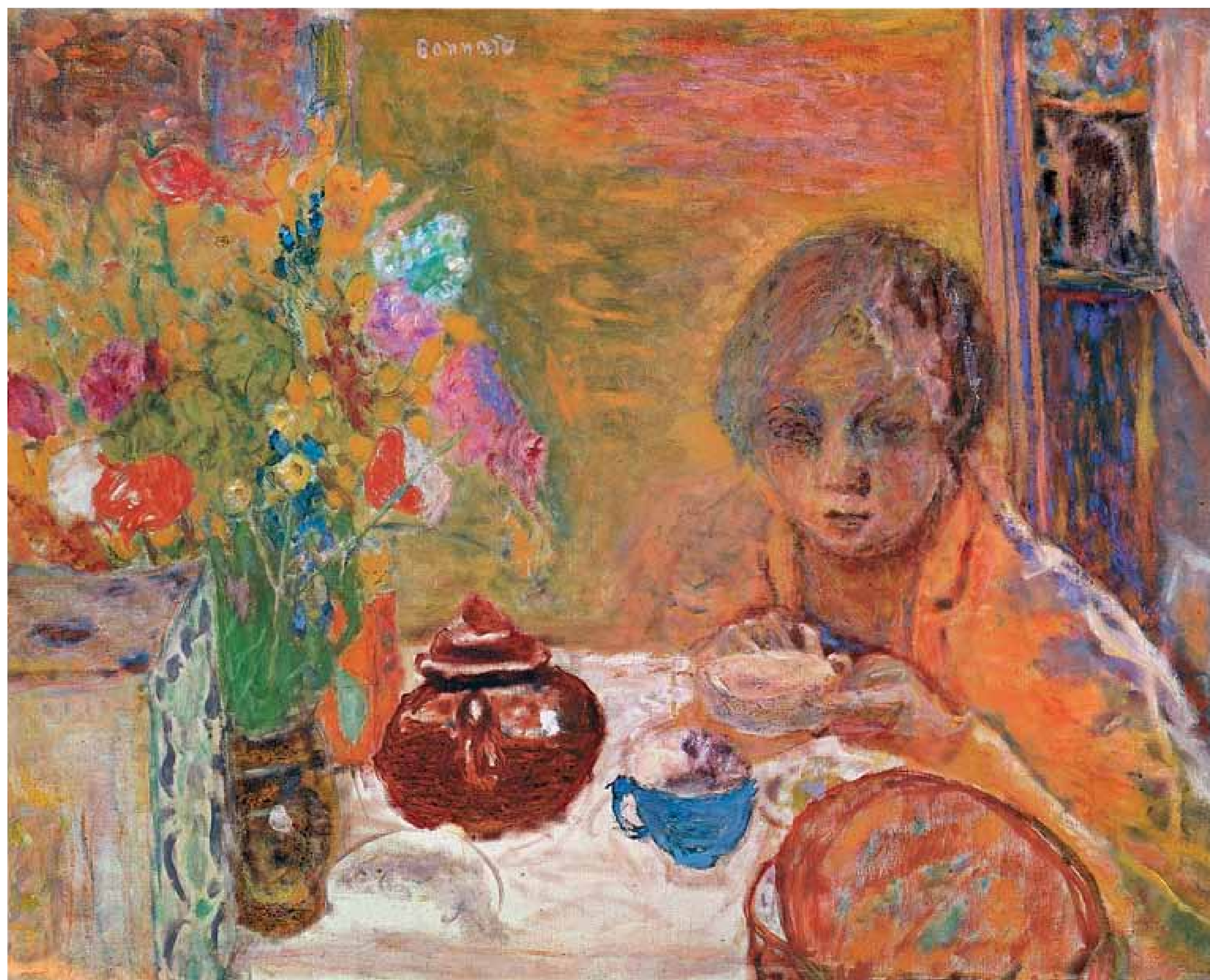
Le Déjeuner or *Le Petit Déjeuner*

Ca. 1932
Oil on canvas, 26¾ x 29⅛ in. (68 x 74 cm)
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
D 1500

PROVENANCE: bought from the artist by the City of Paris, February 1936; deposited at Musée du Petit Palais, Paris; transferred to Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1988

SELECTED LITERATURE: d'Ors and Lassaigne 1937, p. 25; Escholier 1937, ill. p. 25; Guenne 1937, p. 100, ill.; Bazin and Logé 1950, p. 98; Cogniat 1950, vol. 2, ill. p. 125; Natanson 1951, pl. 58; Rumpel 1952, no. and pl. 18; Terrasse, A. 1964, ill. p. 71; Tajika 1966, pl. 65; Vaillant 1967; Cogniat 1968, ill. p. 64; Fermigier 1969, p. 28, ill.; Charmet and Ochsé 1972, pp. 62–63, ill.; Ōoka et al. 1972, p. 122, no. 28, ill.; Clair 1975, ill.; Fermigier 1987, p. 26; Janvier 1998, p. 52

EXHIBITED: Venice 1934, no. 28; Paris 1946a, no. 28; Paris 1947, no. 72; Rotterdam 1952–53, no. 3; Paris 1967, no. 125, ill., cover; Bordeaux 1978, p. 188, no. 181; Tokyo, Tochigi, Sapporo, and Kyoto 1979, no. 92; Paris 1980, no. 108; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 264–65, no. 136, ill.; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 92, no. 93, ill. p. 45; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 50, ill. p. 114; Le Cannet, Espace Bonnard, 2001*; Madrid 2001–2, p. 147, no. 52; Jackson, Miss. and Miami Beach 2004–5, pp. 23, 154; Paris 2006, pp. 198, 322, no. 61, ill.



24. The Cherries

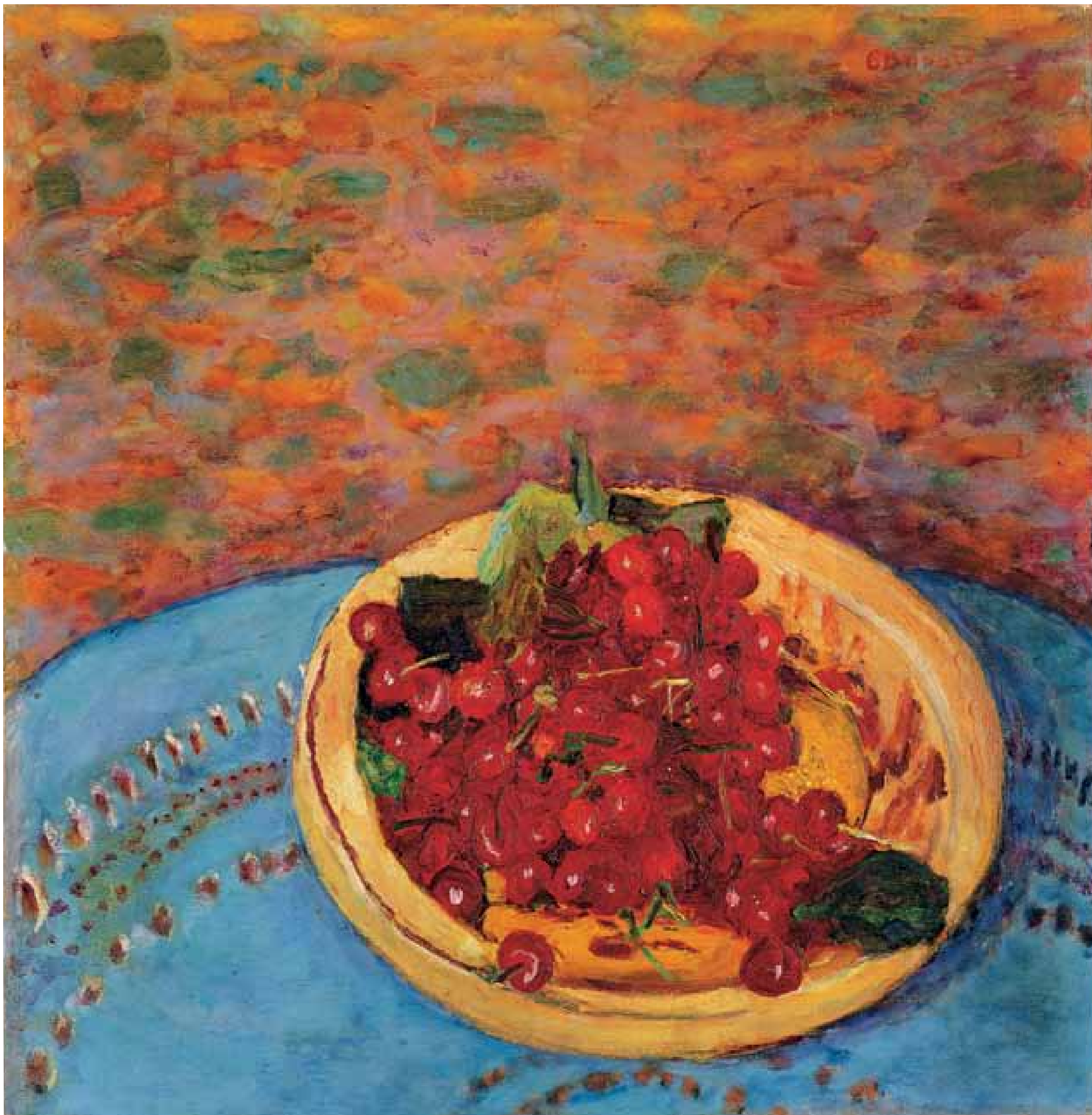
Les Cerises

1923
Oil on canvas, 23 x 22½ in. (58.5 x 57 cm)
Private collection
D 1204

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1923; bought by Henri Canonne, Paris; Guy Weiss-weiller, Neuilly-sur-Seine; current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Hahnloser-Ingold 1985, pp. 52–53, ill.

EXHIBITED: Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, p. 214, no. 103, ill.; Lausanne 1991, pp. 158–59, no. 50, pl. 50; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 184, no. 30, ill. p. 123; Munich 1994, no. 96, ill.; Martigny 1999, pp. 118–19, no. 42, ill.; Winterthur 2004–5, no. 64, ill. p. 88



25. Still Life with Fruit

Nature morte aux fruits

Ca. 1935
Pencil and gouache on cream-colored paper, 12¾ x 13 in.
(32.5 x 33 cm)
Private collection

Provenance: Gustav Zumsteg, Zurich; Huguette Berès, Paris; Richard L. Feigen and Co., New York; bought by current owner

Selected literature: Terrasse, M. 1996, ill. p. 164

Exhibited: Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 142, no. 107, ill. p. 54; Zurich 1949, no. 171; Milan 1955, no. 77; Tokyo and Kyoto 1968, no. 122, pl. 131; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 125, no. 148, ill. p. 10

26. Fruit, Harmony in the Light

Fruits, harmonie claire

Ca. 1930
Graphite, gouache, and watercolor on paper, 14⅜ x 13¼ in.
(36.5 x 33.7 cm)
Musée d'Orsay, on deposit in the Département des Arts
Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris
Gift of Claude Roger-Marx in memory of his father, his brother,
and his son, who died for France, 1974

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Roger Marx, Paris; by descent to his son, Claude Roger-Marx, Paris; his gift to the Musée d'Orsay, 1974

LITERATURE: Cogniat 1968, ill. p. 55; Amoureaux 1985, pp. 106–7, ill.

EXHIBITED: Bordeaux 1986, p. 146, no. 78, ill. p. 149; London and New York 1998, p. 248, no. 99, ill.; Tokyo, Kagoshima, and Tokushima 2004, pp. 132–33, 200, no. 53, ill.

27. Breakfast

Le Petit Déjeuner

Ca. 1930
Oil on canvas, 17¾ x 22 in. (45.1 x 55.9 cm)
Private collection
D 1523

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1936; bought by Percy Moore Turner, London, by 1957; his sale, Christie, Manson and Woods, London, November 1, 1957, lot 57; Alex Reid and Lefevre, Ltd., London; Mrs. L. B. Wescott, Rosemont, New Jersey; sale, Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York, October 19, 1977, lot 60; Mr. and Mrs. Heller, Miami; Murauchi Art Museum, Hachioji, Japan; Waring Hopkins, Paris; bought by private collection; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: *Art and Auctions* 1957a, ill. p. 569; *Art and Auctions* 1957b, p. 593; Vaillant 1967; Murauchi Art Museum 1992, no. 83, ill.

EXHIBITED: Madison, N.J., Drew University, Macculloch Hall, 1961*; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 49, ill. p. 82; Munich 1966–67, no. 117, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 132, ill.; Trenton, The New Jersey State Museum, 1972*; Saitama 1989, no. 8, ill.; Tokyo, Nara, Yokohama, and Fukuoka 1991, no. 53, ill.; Nagoya and Tokyo 1997, pp. 158–59, 247, no. 65, ill.

The shadowy palette of *Breakfast* recalls Bonnard's Nabi-period paintings, with their earthen colors blended in a narrow tonal range. Here, however, light gives presence to the patterned tablecloth, the brilliant rim of the terracotta jug, and Marthe's arching back, as she spoons tea or cereal in rapt concentration. Her figure merges chromatically with the furnishings, an effect seen in many of Bonnard's late interiors. The dappled blue-white ground (at upper right) that migrates to Marthe's profiled head shrouds her in even greater mystery.

Reading Bonnard's late paintings often demands time and patience. Passages that make sense at first glance frequently evolve to signify something else altogether. Color is key to decoding such passages. The amorphous mass of striated purple paint behind Marthe's right hand, for instance, initially reads as some strange reflection. Only after prolonged scrutiny does it come into focus as the model's arm. DA

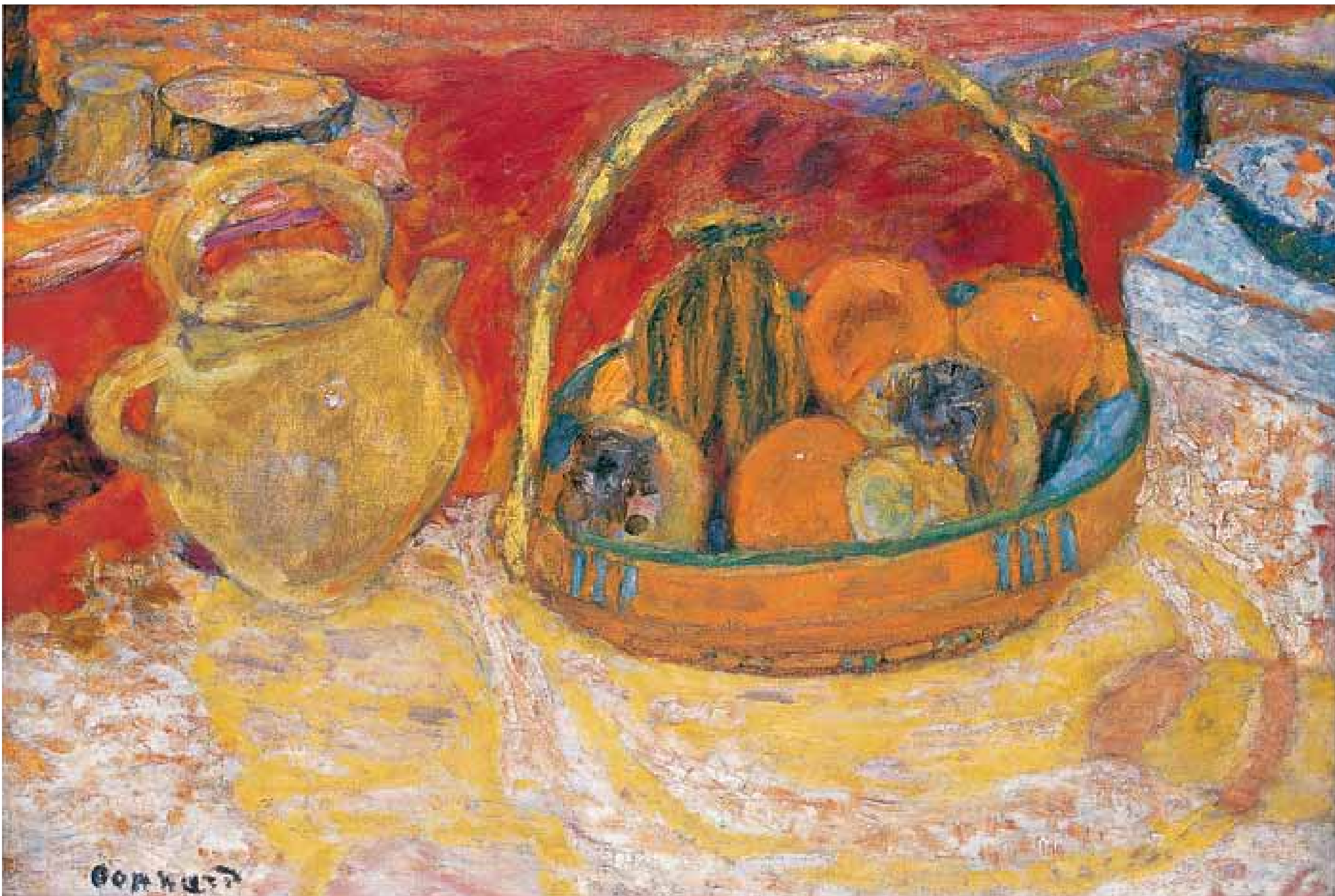
28. Study for "Still Life, Yellow and Red"
Étude pour "Nature morte jaune et rouge"

1931
Pencil on beige laid paper, 6⅝ x 9½ in. (16.7 x 24 cm)
Musée de Grenoble

Provenance: Piasa, Paris; its sale, Drouot Richelieu, Paris, March 19, 2004; bought by the Société des Amis du Musée de Grenoble; their gift to the Musée de Grenoble, 2005

Selected literature: Piasa 2004, lot 2004; Grenoble 2007

Exhibited: Grenoble 2008, p. 26, ill.



29. Still Life, Yellow and Red
Nature morte jaune et rouge

1931
Oil on canvas, 18½ x 20⅜ in. (47 x 51.8 cm)
Musée de Grenoble
D 1469

Provenance: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1933; bought by the Musée de Grenoble, 1933

Selected literature: Andry-Farcy 1939, p. 5, ill.; Lhote 1948, pl. 5; Natanson 1951, pl. 81

Exhibited: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1933*; Amsterdam 1935, no. 9, ill.; Paris 1935a, p. 116, no. 200; Zurich 1946, no. 111; Amsterdam 1947, no. 54; Copenhagen 1947, no. 34; Paris 1947, no. 71; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 64a; Mulhouse 1951, no. 24; Montrouge 1980; Chambéry and Grenoble 1981–82, p. 106, no. 497; Bordeaux 1986, p. 128, no. 66, ill. p. 130; Nagoya and Tokyo 1997, pp. 168–69, 248, no. 71, ill.; Saint-Tropez 1998; Le Cannet, Espace Bonnard, 2001*

30. Study for "Large Yellow Nude" (recto)

Étude pour "Le Grand Nu jaune"

1931
Pencil on paper, 6⅜ x 4⅞ in. (16.2 x 12.4 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Roger Hauert; Jean-Paul Loup, River Forest, Illinois; bought by Dorothy A. and George L. Sturman, 1975; sale, Christie's, New York, September 12, 2007, lot 27; bought by current owner

EXHIBITED: Tucson 1986–87, no. 11; The Boca Raton Museum of Art, 2003–7*

This small sheet with recto and verso studies of Marthe standing in front of a mirror is a superb example of Bonnard's working out a full-scale subject on paper before executing it on canvas. Even in this early sketch, the seemingly awkward, tentative Marthe is as fully realized as her surroundings—all rendered in the scribbles, dashes, lines, and shadings that constituted Bonnard's idiosyncratic graphic lexicon. This drawing has been thought to be a study for *The Toilette (Nude at the Mirror)* (cat. no. 31), but it more accurately anticipates the very similar *Large Yellow Nude* (fig. 63), where Marthe and her "toilette" nearly dissolve in raking yellow light. The pose of the model in both of the paintings and in the drawing recalls that of a classical nude, the Medici Venus, in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (see London and New York 1998, p. 182). DA

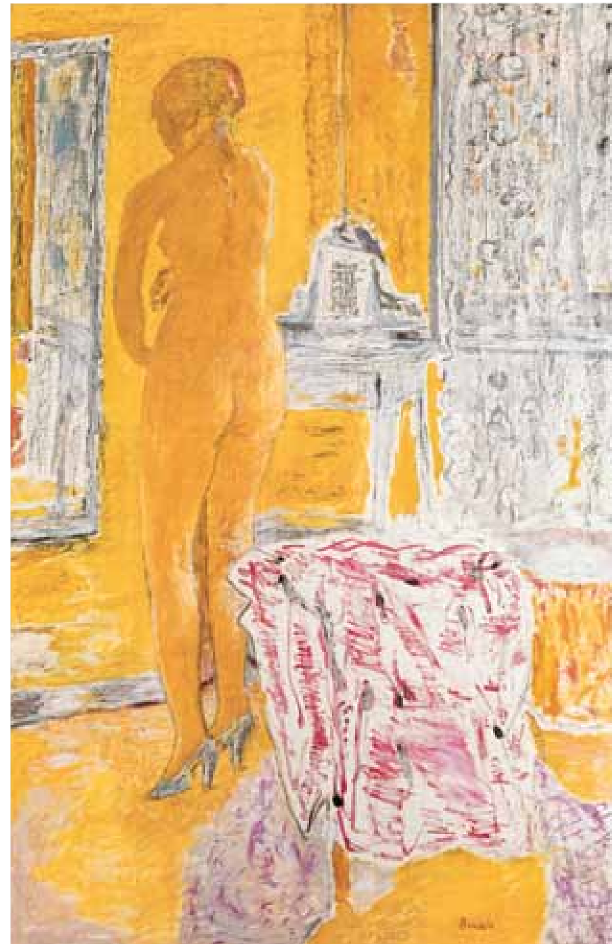


Fig. 63. Pierre Bonnard, *Large Yellow Nude*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 66⅞ x 42¼ in. (170 x 107.3 cm). Private collection

31. The Toilette (Nude at the Mirror)
La Toilette (Nu au miroir)

1931
Oil on canvas, 60⅝ x 41⅛ in. (154 x 104.5 cm)
Ca' Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Venice
D 1479

Not in exhibition

Provenance: acquired from the artist by Gaston Bernheim de Villiers, Paris, 1931; bought by Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna at the Venice Biennale, 1934

Selected literature: Guenne 1933, ill. p. 373; Besson 1934, pl. 49; Besson 1943, ill. p. 41; Natanson 1951, pl. 86; Cassou 1952, pl. 52; Russoli and Martin 1967, pl. 12; Fermigier 1969, pp. 138–39, ill.; Negri 1970, p. 80, pl. 54; Fortenescu 1980, pl. 52; Fermigier 1987, pp. 112–13; Hyman 1998, p. 148, fig. 116; Terrasse, A. 2000a, p. 137, ill. p. 5

Exhibited: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1933*; Venice 1934, no. 29; Basel 1955b, no. 84; Milan 1955, no. 60, ill.; Nice 1955, no. 38; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 55, ill. p. 87; London 1966, p. 62, no. 214; Munich 1966–67, no. 112, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 129; Rome and Turin 1971–72, no. 17, ill.; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 117, no. 49, ill. p. 82; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 128–29, no. 40, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 196–97, no. 45, ill.; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 258–59, no. 133, ill.; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 36, ill. p. 103; Munich 1994, no. 119, ill.; Rome 1994–95, p. 69, no. 11; London and New York 1998, pp. 180–81, no. 64, ill.; Paris 2006, pp. 212–13, 324–25, no. 67, ill.

This image of Marthe standing by a mirror in what appears to be her bedroom on the second floor of Le Bosquet is a study of reflective surfaces: the mirror, the window, and Marthe's back, all shimmering verticals reflecting light and form. Curiously, the intangibles of this spatially intense painting are more "real" than the tangible objects. The plate of peaches in the mirror is more precisely painted than the actual fruit; the reflected table shows more explicit geometry than the actual tabletop, which is lost among overlapping planes. The vanity table beyond the fruit likewise disappears in a miasma of light that emanates from the tall window and its patterned lace curtains.

One could argue that in this painting Marthe is a surrogate for the painter, and her cloth a surrogate for the rag Bonnard so often held in his hand while painting (see fig. 19). Amplifying the metaphor, the mirror becomes a sort of canvas that serves to clarify our reading of the surroundings. Marthe, who literally divides the pictorial field in half, is the physical and emotional center of the painting. On either side of her light transitions into form, or one might say form dematerializes in light. Her shoes, the only unambiguous elements among the passages at bottom, establish the horizontal of the ground in this otherwise insistently vertical composition.

Bonnard often altered the proportions of his canvases until just before he finished painting. Here the vertical band of canvas at right, several inches wide, is an example of a late addition by the artist, who perhaps judged the earlier composition too emphatically vertical. DA

32. Still Life
Nature morte

1930
Pencil on paper, 7½ x 5⅛ in. (19 x 13 cm)
Private collection, France

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to current owner, 1958

SELECTED LITERATURE: Genty and Vernon 2003, p. 176, fig. 471

33. Still Life with Studies of Details (recto)
Nature morte avec études des détails

Ca. 1930
Pencil on paper, 5 x 6½ in. (12.7 x 16.5 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Jill Newhouse

PROVENANCE: by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau and Paris; private collection, France; current owner

34. Still Life with Plum Pits

Nature morte au noyaux de prunes

1932
Watercolor and gouache on paper laid on canvas, 10 x 12¾ in.
(25.5 x 32.5 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Dr. Arthur and Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler, Winterthur, Switzerland, 1932; by descent to Hans Robert Hahnloser, Bern, 1952; by descent to current owner, 1974

SELECTED LITERATURE: Vaillant et al. 1965, pp. 183–84, ill. p. 180

EXHIBITED: Zurich, Bremen, and Bielefeld 1982–83, no. 34, ill. p. 47 and cover; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 38, ill. p. 104; Winterthur 2004–5, no. 141, ill. p. 161

This painterly still life on paper is one of a series of drawings in gouache and watercolor that Bonnard made toward the end of his life. His decision to work in these media was prompted by his patron Arthur Hahnloser, who provided Bonnard with materials while he was convalescing following hospitalization in 1930. Bonnard first tried painting in watercolor, but he found its fast-drying components unsympathetic to his slow working routine. It was thanks to the introduction of gouache that he was able to modify *Still Life with Plum Pits* over a two-year period, while Hahnloser waited patiently. DA

35. Corner of the Dining Room at Le Cannet

Coin de salle à manger au Cannet

1932
Oil on canvas, 31⅞ x 35½ in. (81 x 90 cm)
Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne/
Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris
State Purchase, 1933
D 1496

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, by 1933; bought by the government of France for the Musée de Luxembourg, Paris, 1933; transferred to the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1942

SELECTED LITERATURE: Cassou, Dorival, and Homolle 1947, p. 17, salle 4, no. 2; Cassou 1948, unpaged, ill.; Natanson 1951, pl. 83; Harteel and Swanenburg 1955, p. 64; Dorival 1961, p. 25, ill. p. 293; Terrasse, M. 1987, ill. p. 66

EXHIBITED: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1933*; Cambrai and other cities 1945–46, no. 45; Paris 1947, no. 76; Liège, Ghent, and Luxembourg 1948–49, no. 53, ill.; Zurich 1949, no. 109; Berlin 1956, no. 12, pl. 9; Braunschweig, Bremen, and Cologne 1956–57, no. 38, ill.; London 1957a, p. 10, no. 16; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 117, no. 51, ill. p. 93; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 92, no. 92; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 48, ill. p. 166; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 69, no. 18, ill.; Le Cannet 2007, pp. 94–95, ill.

Bonnard, employing one of his favorite color strategies, here uses white as a major color component in tandem with small quantities of intense dark hues, notably rich reds and greens but also yellow, so often a companion to white in his works. The strong surface organization of the composition is made all the more powerful by a dialogue between convex and concave forms. "It is the things close at hand," as Bonnard once stated, "that give an idea of the universe as the human eye sees it, a universe which can be undulated, convex or concave." Note, for example, how the convex vase of flowers on the table is contained in space by the back of the dark chair. The yellow shawl, with its chevron of colored dots, is a shallower convex form; the woman wearing it appears to be looking toward the massive vase on the mantel, yet another powerful convexity. (Although the woman is faceless, the position of her left ear allows us to deduce the direction of her gaze.) The bellylike vase pulls the eye back through the flowers to the center of the painting and to the convex basket of fruit, which in turn is contained within the concave fireplace. The mysterious presence of the woman in the shawl, combined with the oddly volumetric vase—a mingling of intangible and tangible, ethereal and solid—gives the painting a strangely haunted feeling that is completely different from the more domestic *Yellow Shawl* (cat. no. 22), painted a few years earlier in Arcachon. DA

Bonnard

36. White Interior
Intérieur blanc

1932
Oil on canvas, 43⅛ x 61⅜ in. (109.5 x 155.8 cm)
Musée de Grenoble
D 1497

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1933; bought by the Musée de Grenoble, 1933

SELECTED LITERATURE: Guenne 1935b, ill.; Escholier 1937, p. 25; Bazaine 1944, ill. p. 45; Laprade 1944, no. and pl. 15; Natanson 1951, pl. 80; Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 209; Terrasse, A. 1967, ill. p. 140; Negri 1970, p. 79, pl. 53; Terrasse, M. 1987, ill. pp. 84–85; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 313, ill. p. 187; Mann 1991, p. 28, fig. O; Bell 1994, p. 112, pl. 41; Mann 1994, pp. 31–32, 53, figs. 16–17; Watkins 1994, pp. 204–5, pl. 156; Terrasse, M. 1996, ill. p. 216; Hyman 1998, p. 136, fig. 106; Watkins 1998, pp. 38–39, fig. 24; Terrasse, A. 2000a, pp. 97–100, ill.

EXHIBITED: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1933*; Amsterdam 1947, no. 43; Copenhagen 1947, no. 33; Paris 1947, no. 74; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 66a, ill. p. 114; Zurich 1949, no. 111; Paris 1967, no. 130, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 134–35, no. 43, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 202–3, no. 48, ill.; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 37, ill. p. 105; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 92, no. 91, ill. p. 38; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 49, ill. p. 168; Nagoya and Tokyo 1997, pp. 184–85, 250, no. 79, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 188–89, no. 68, ill. (London only); Saint-Tropez 1998, pp. 56–57; Martigny 1999, pp. 138–39, no. 52, ill.; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 273, no. 121, p. 228; Paris 2006, pp. 192–93, 320–21, no. 57, ill.

Set in the upstairs sitting room of Le Bosquet, *White Interior* exploits "all possible liberties of line, form, proportions, [and] colors," as Bonnard wrote in his daybook (January 15, 1934), in order to "make feeling intelligible and clearly visible." The painting ignores conventions of space, proportion, and color, confounding our expectations. The spatial field, for example, is much wider than what the human eye could naturally see. The exterior views of the Mediterranean, Cannes, and the Esterel Mountains in the distance at first offer a more conventional description of time and place, but the framelike horizontals and verticals of the door mullions suggest instead a strange triptych- or diptychlike configuration of landscapes. The rectilinearity of the tabletop, the half-open door at center, and the angled drop of the fireplace interior contribute to the complexity of the composition.

The true subject of the painting is color, particularly white and its nuanced variations in the presence of yellow, blue, ocher, and red. By using yellow and violet in combination with white, Bonnard heightened the impact of white as the predominant color on all of the flat, rectilinear surfaces, notably the door to the balcony, the accordionlike radiator, and the rapidly brushed door to the bathroom. The latter appears to be drifting oddly alongside an opaque white wall and the chalky white mantelpiece at the periphery of the canvas, all three of which read as if they occupy the same plane.

The geometry of the room's white-gray-yellow architecture is interrupted, or one might say relieved, by the presence of Marthe leaning over to tend to her cat. As with so many figures in Bonnard's late interiors, she blends into the surrounding palette, here the mottled red, orange, yellow, and black of the floor. Her radiant yellow head guides the eye to the small teapot that sits on yet another white planar surface, perhaps a tray leaning on a chair. The still life of crockery makes some oblique suggestion of a meal but offers no more explicit clues to the ritual. DA

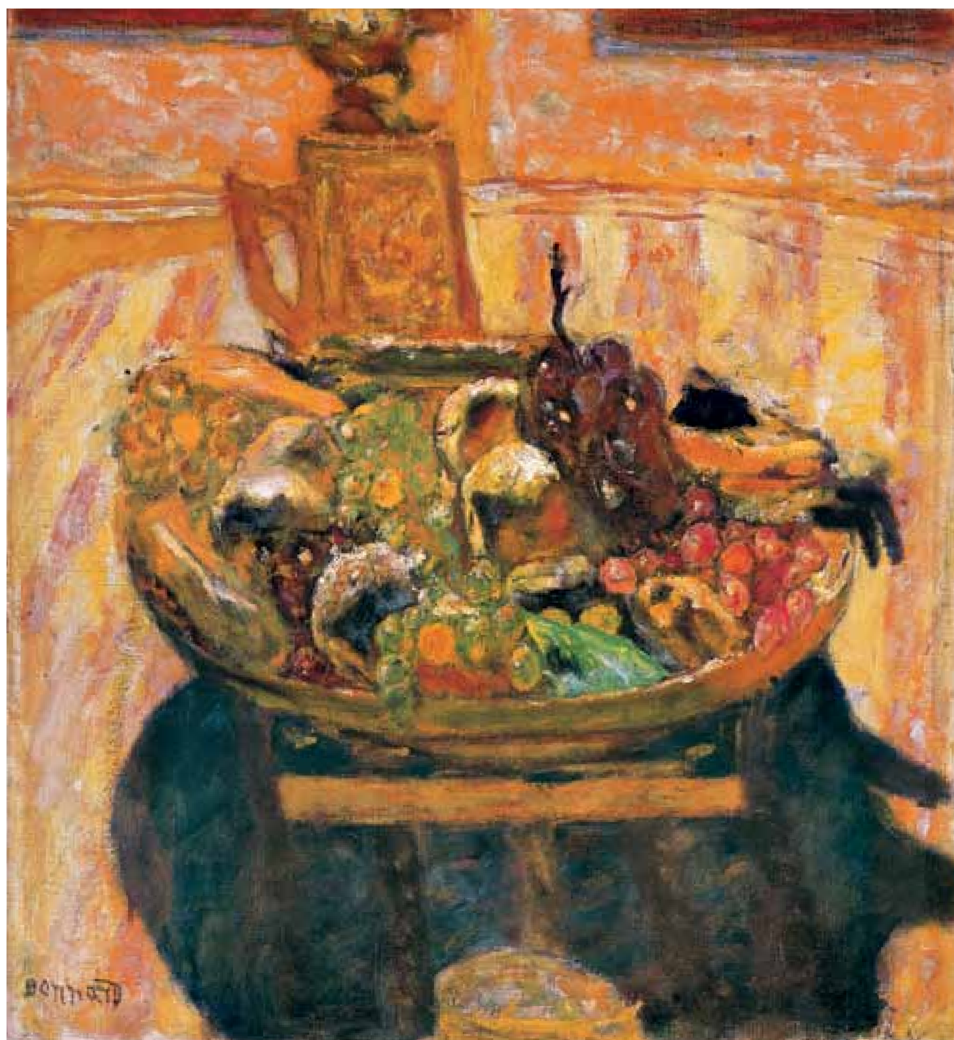
37. Table in Front of the Window
La Table devant la fenêtre

1934–35
Oil on canvas, 40 x 28½ in. (101.6 x 72.4 cm)
Private collection
D 1525

PROVENANCE: Sidney Janis Galleries, New York; Kirkeby collection; Edward A. Bragaline, New York; current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Davidson 1963, ill. p. 556; Cogniat 1991, p. 51, ill. p. 72; Hyman 1998, p. 187, fig. 149; Watkins 1998, pp. 28–29, fig. 16

EXHIBITED: New York 1963, no. 1, ill.; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 109, no. 77, ill. p. 60; London and New York 1998, pp. 194–95, no. 71, ill.



38. Bowl of Fruit

Coupe de fruits

1933
Oil on canvas, 22⅞ x 20⅞ in. (57.9 x 53 cm)
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Bequest of Lisa Norris Elkins, 1950
D 1515

Provenance: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris; Gaston Bernheim de Villiers, Paris, by 1939–probably 1946; Knoedler and Co., New York; bought by William M. and Lisa Norris Elkins, Philadelphia, by 1947; bequeathed by Lisa Norris Elkins to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1950

Selected literature: Blomberg 1939, ill. p. 5; *Arts* 1956, ill.; Clair 1975, ill.; Terrasse, M. 1996, ill. p. 241

Exhibited: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1933*; Belgrade 1937; Paris 1946c, no. 32; Philadelphia 1947; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 67, ill. p. 118; Paris 1950, p. 24, no. 58; New York 1956, pp. 5, 18, no. 15, ill.; Palm Beach 1957, no. 24, ill.; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 56, ill. p. 55; Munich 1966–67, no. 116, ill.; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, p. 274, no. 143, ill.; Munich 1994, no. 120, ill.; Nagoya and Tokyo 1997, pp. 170–71, 248, no. 72, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 190–91, no. 69, ill.; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 273, no. 122, ill. pp. 229–31; Paris 2006, pp. 199, 322–23, no. 62, ill.

The evenly distributed, raking light that bathes this large fruit bowl—dematerializing its pears, apples, bananas, and grapes, and creating the intense opaque shadow below—could only be artificial in origin, perhaps from an overhead light or some other kind of ceiling fixture. Although there is no consensus in recent writing as to where Bonnard painted this picture (see London and New York 1998, p. 192), the setting is undoubtedly the same as that used for *Table in Front of the Window* (cat. no. 37), painted the following year. In the latter painting, the linearity of the red striped tablecloth dissolves in the still-life passage, where the same kind of electric light bleaches the entire painting. Here the fruit bowl becomes a surrogate palette, its fruits dollops of paint keyed to the colors of the painting. DA

Fig. 64. Pierre Bonnard, *Still Life in Front of the Window*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 29½ x 22½ in. (75 x 57 cm). Muzeul Naţional de Artă al României, Bucharest

39. *Still Life at the Window*

Nature morte à la fenêtre

Ca. 1930
Pencil on paper, 12¼ x 9¼ in. (31 x 23.5 cm)
Private collection

Provenance: by descent to the artist's grand-nephew, Michel Terrasse, France; Jill Newhouse, New York; bought by current owner

This drawing is a preparatory study for *Still Life in Front of the Window* (fig. 64), which in turn mirrors *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)* (cat. no. 41). The two paintings date from Bonnard's stay at the Villa Castellamare in Arcachon, a period of heightened still-life activity for him. DA

40. Study for "Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)"

Étude pour "La Salle à manger sur le jardin"

Ca. 1930
Pencil with traces of watercolor on paper, 13 x 9½ in. (33 x 24.1 cm)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Stephens

PROVENANCE: private collection, France; Jill Newhouse, New York, by 2005; bought by current owners, 2005

41. Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)

La Salle à manger sur le jardin

1930–31
Oil on canvas, 62⅞ x 44⅞ in. (159.6 x 113.8 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Given anonymously 1941
D 1473

PROVENANCE: Jacques Seligmann Galleries, New York, 1931; bought by Stephen C. Clark, New York, 1931; given anonymously to The Museum of Modern Art, 1941

SELECTED LITERATURE: Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 208; Fermigier 1969, p. 26, ill.; Fermigier 1987, p. 24; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 313, ill. p. 188; Bell 1994, p. 108, pl. 39; Watkins 1994, pp. 176–77, pl. 134; Terrasse, M. 1996, ill. p. 239; Hyman 1998, p. 140, fig. 110; Watkins 1998, frontispiece; Terrasse, A. 2000a, p. 95, ill.; Genty and Vernon 2003, p. 56, fig. 104

EXHIBITED: New York 1934–35, no. 41; New York 1939, no. 89, ill.; Paris 1947, no. 65; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 64, ill. p. 109; Chicago 1955, no. 1, ill.; Washington, D.C. 1958, no. 4, ill.; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 52, ill. p. 81; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 132–33, no. 42, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 198–99, no. 46, ill.; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 47, ill. p. 135; New York 1997a, pp. 28–29, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 176–77, no. 62, ill.; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 272, no. 118, ill. p. 225 (Washington, D.C. only); Paris 2006, pp. 186–87, 319, no. 54, ill.; Williamstown, Mass. and New York 2006–7, no. 28, ill. p. 170

Ostensibly a view of the breakfast table at the Villa Castellamare, this well-known, complex painting continues to pose interesting questions. The entire top half—that is, the view of the garden outside the window—has all the attributes of a great Persian carpet, from intricate designs and interlocking shapes close in tonal range to tightly "woven" marks. In the near ground, a veritable phalanx of carafe-shaped balusters progresses from light, to dark at center, and back into light. The purple grid of the wall seems to hold in place the ethereal, cropped figure of the woman with the cup and saucer. Below her is a small dark shape set against white, perhaps Bonnard's dog.

Looking at the right side of the canvas, we discover what is quite probably a deliberate ambiguity: an object usually viewed as a detail of a chair, but one that may also be read as the cropped head of Marthe as seen in the extreme foreground. The density of the marks in this passage and the visible overpainting allow us to see how Bonnard enlarged the original brown-orange shape so that its contours would overlap the corner of the window frame, breaking the symmetry of the composition. Indeed, turning the distant chair into a dramatically proximate head adds dynamism and depth to the spatial order of the canvas and gives more resonance to the empty cup and saucer at bottom, which appear to anchor the other objects on the table.

Bonnard delighted in introducing a disruptive element into an otherwise orderly structure. Sometimes he did so with color, as in *Le Café* (fig. 49), and at other times with form, such as the chair in *Corner of a Table* (ca. 1935, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris). In other variants of this image (see fig. 64), a chair clearly occupies the place of the ambiguous chair/face passage. Perhaps Bonnard, after securing the reading of a chair, judged the overall composition too static, and so subtly introduced a secondary reading: an intruding figure about to take up the cup. DA

42. The French Window (Morning at Le Cannet)

La Porte-Fenêtre (Matinée au Cannet)

1932
Oil on canvas, 34 x 44¾ in. (87 x 111 cm)
Private collection
D 1499

PROVENANCE: Jean-Arthur Fontaine; Paul de Laboulaye, Paris, ca. 1952; by descent to private collection, France; sale, Sotheby's, London, February 4, 2003, lot 16; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Besson 1934, pl. 48; Laprade 1944, no. and pl. 16; Terrasse, M. 1987, ill. pp. 82–83; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 313, ill. p. 186; Harrison 2005, pp. 195–96, ill.

EXHIBITED: Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, 1933*; London 1952, no. 5; Rotterdam 1953, no. 86; Basel 1955b, no. 85; Paris 1957a, no. 41; Munich 1966–67, no. 115, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 127; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 117, no. 52, ill. p. 96; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 53, no. 7, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 186–87, no. 67, ill.

In Bonnard's daybook entry for April 16, 1927, he made the following note about color: "proximity of white, lending a luminosity to some bright colored spots." In this painting, a paradigm of how the late interiors investigate light and color—color as built of light, light as radiating color—white serves as a highlighting brushstroke for the unfolding color spectrum. The "bright colored spots" are in fact nuanced tones of yellow and blue. The venue is the Naples yellow upstairs sitting room of Le Bosquet, directly across the hall from Bonnard's studio.

The brilliant light that defines the coffeepot also guides the eye across the checkered tablecloth to the arc of the chair, to Marthe's arched shoulder, to her radiant head, and, finally, to the reflected likeness of Bonnard gazing back at Marthe in the mirror, as if linking himself to her—in art as in life—as her painter and protector. The reading of the props and furniture surrounding the mirror becomes a spatial conundrum not easily solved. If it is the back of Marthe's chair that is reflected in the mirror, why does it "exist" outside the frame? The strange, oblong cushioning form behind Marthe's head, which in the painting joins her to Bonnard's self-image, is the back of Marthe's head transposed by the mirror. The conflation of form and reflected form is all the stranger given that, in the logic of the scene, Bonnard was painting not in the upstairs sitting room but in the studio next door. DA

Bonnard

43. Still Life with Ham
Nature morte au jambon

1940
Oil on canvas, 17 x 25 in. (43.2 x 63.5 cm)
Private collection
D 1590

PROVENANCE: Pétridès collection, Paris; Valentine Dudensing, France; Sidney Janis, New York; bought by Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., September 1953; to current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Laprade 1944, no. and pl. 19; Lhote 1944, pl. 3

EXHIBITED: New York 1953, no. 3, ill.; New York and Cambridge, Mass. 1957, pp. 18–19, no. 9, fig. 6b

44. *Still Life with Fruit*

Nature morte aux fruits

1936
Oil on canvas, 14½ x 24 in. (36.8 x 61 cm)
Private collection
D 1545

Provenance: Alex Reid and Lefevre, Ltd., London; bought by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., September 1938; to current owner

Selected literature: *Prologue* 1947; *House and Garden* 1948, ill. p. 81; Terrasse, A. 1964, ill. p. 76

Exhibited: Montreal 1937, no. 2; St. Louis, City Art Museum, 1941*; St. Louis, Caroll Knight Gallery, 1947*; Cleveland and New York 1948, p. 141, no. 71, ill. p. 119; New York and Cambridge, Mass. 1957, pp. 16–17, no. 8, fig. 6a; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 144–45, no. 48, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 210–11, no. 52, ill.

45. Plate, Orange Jug, and Casserole
Le Plateau, cruche orange et casserole

1933
Oil on canvas, 11⅞ x 16⅛ in. (30 x 41 cm)
Galerie de Rive, S.A., Geneva
D 1509

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; Galerie de Rive, S.A., Geneva

46. Fruit, Harmony in the Dark

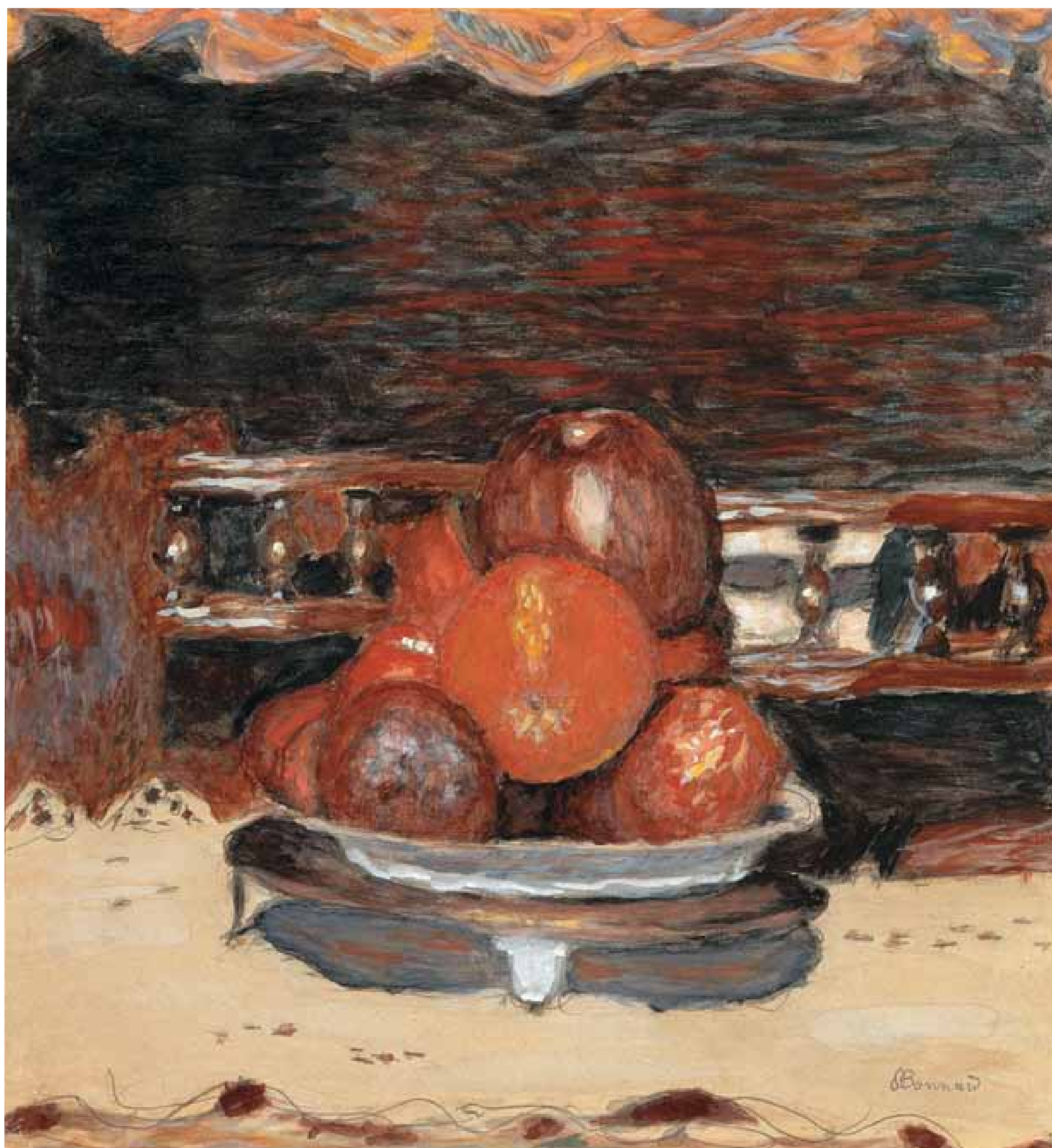
Fruits, harmonie foncée

Ca. 1930
Graphite, gouache, and watercolor on paper, 14⅞ x 13⅛ in. (37.7 x 33.2 cm)
Musée d'Orsay, on deposit in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris
Gift of Claude Roger-Marx in memory of his father, his brother, and his son, who died for France, 1974

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Roger Marx, Paris; by descent to his son, Claude Roger-Marx, Paris; his gift to the Musée d'Orsay, 1974

SELECTED LITERATURE: Roger-Marx 1950, pl. 21; Amoureaux 1985, pp. 108–9, ill.

EXHIBITED: Bordeaux 1986, p. 146, no. 79, ill. p. 149; London and New York 1998, p. 249, no. 100, ill.; Tokyo, Kagoshima, and Tokushima 2004, pp. 134–35, 200, no. 54, ill.



47. Interior, Window

Intérieur, fenêtre

Ca. 1930
Watercolor over pencil on paper, 6 x 4⅝ in. (15.2 x 11.7 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to Bowers collection, Paris, probably by 1949; by descent to Pierrette Vernon, Paris, after 1999; bought by current owner, 2003

SELECTED LITERATURE: Cogniat 1968, ill. p. 39; Genty and Vernon 2003, pp. 56–57, fig. 106

Absent the disquieting presence of Marthe, *Interior, Window* lays out the spatial and architectural framework for *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)* (cat. no. 41), a painting as compelling for its vertiginous garden as for its tabletop breakfast offerings. Here Bonnard limited his palette to shades of brown, blue, and yellow. The setting, said to be the dining room of the Villa Castellamare, the house Bonnard rented in Arcachon (near Bordeaux), is rapidly brushed yet extensively realized. Bonnard lived in Arcachon from November 1930 to April 1931, a period when he launched several of his most significant late interiors. DA

48. Still Life with Fruit
Nature morte aux fruits

1930
Watercolor and gouache over pencil on paper, 6¼ x 5⅛ in. (16 x 13 cm)
Private collection, France

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to current owner, 1958

SELECTED LITERATURE: Amoureaux 1985, pp. 82–83, ill.; Genty and Vernon 2003, pp. 179–80, 182, fig. 483 and back cover

49. Dining Room on the Garden

Grande salle à manger sur le jardin

1934–35
Oil on canvas, 50 x 53¼ in. (126.8 x 135.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, Gift, Solomon R. Guggenheim (38.432)
D 1524

Provenance: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1935; bought by Galerie Pierre (Pierre Loeb), Paris, February 1937; bought by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 1938; its gift to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1938

Selected literature: Guenne 1935a, ill. p. 248; *Verve* 1937, ill. p. [93]; Guggenheim et al. 1959, pp. 24–25, pl. 7; Terrasse, A. 1964, p. 80, ill. p. 74; Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 209; Werner 1966, ill. p. 27; Charmet 1967, pp. 40–41; Terrasse, A. 1967, ill. pp. 146, 147; Fermigier 1969, pp. 140–41, ill.; Ōoka et al. 1972, p. 124, no. 34, pl. 34; Rudenstine 1976, vol. 1, pp. 39–41, no. 20, ill.; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 313, ill. p. 189; Cogeval 1993, pp. 120–21, no. 39, ill.

Exhibited: Paris 1935b, no. 159; Paris 1937, no. 25; Helsinki 1957, no. 2; Paris 1958, p. 12, no. 9, fig. 9; New York 1959–60; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 108, no. 57, ill. p. 56; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 117, no. 53, ill. p. 97; London and New York 1998, pp. 192–93, no. 70, ill.; Paris 2006, pp. 190–91, 320, no. 56, ill.

One of more than sixty dining-room scenes Bonnard produced between 1927 and 1947, this painting depicts a paradisiacal and mysterious garden glimpsed through the large casement window of a house that cannot be identified with certainty. It offers a wide-angle view of a narrow, compressed space, with the dining table cropped at left and right by the edges of the canvas. The rich, complex layers of color—lavenders, iridescent blues, and mottled red-greens—seem almost to spread and vibrate over the hot red-orange tablecloth, suggesting multiple layers of fabric. (Did the Bonnard household set the table in this eccentric way, or do the layered cloths perhaps suggest the passage of time?) On them we find an odd, slightly disorganized assemblage of bowls, pitchers, boxes, and a vase of red flowers. An ocher-green piece of cutlery, possibly a knife, is overshadowed by a melon-colored box and is thus slower to materialize before the eye. Slender leaf tips droop down from foliage that appears to hang above the top edge of the painting, ambiguous, as in *The Terrace at Vernonnet* (fig. 54), as to whether they are indoors or outside.

Like many of Bonnard's paintings, *Dining Room on the Garden* was worked on over a considerable period of time and is in some places thickly painted. The unusual opacity of the surface is also partly a result of a wax lining used to conserve it. Several passages are surprisingly thin, however, revealing provocative slivers of unprimed canvas that imply the presence of an inner light and recall the late work of both Cézanne and Matisse.

Behind the table, the imposing window overlooking garden and sea becomes a diptych of deep Mediterranean blues and greens, suggestive of spring (on the left) and summer (on the right), or maybe morning and late afternoon, respectively. The dining chair placed directly below the center of the window, where the frames of the two halves of the casement meet, blends seamlessly into the wood of the window frame, creating the illusion of a virtual artist's easel. The vibrant hues of the garden vista correspond to the other colors of the interior, enhancing the suggestion of trompe l'oeil. The scene is made active by the presence of the unidentified woman in a green dress at right, who blends mysteriously into her surroundings, and by the patch of yellow radiance on the opposite side of the canvas. RB

50. Study for "Le Café" or "Breakfast"
Étude pour "Le Café" ou "Le Petit Déjeuner"

Ca. 1935
Pencil on paper, 5⅞ x 7⅜ in. (14.9 x 18.7 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Neffe-Degandt Fine Art, London

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau and Paris; Alfred Ayrton, ca. 1966; bought by Christian Neffe, J. P. L. Fine Arts, London, ca. 1986; bought by current owner, June 1987

SELECTED LITERATURE: Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 315, ill. p. 289; Mann 1991, p. 19, fig. J

EXHIBITED: Rome and Turin 1971–72, no. 51, ill.; New York and other cities 1972–74, no. 76

51. Cup of Tea by the Radiator

La Tasse de thé au radiateur

1932
Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper laid on canvas,
9½ x 13 in. (24 x 33 cm)
Musée Pierre Bonnard Le Cannet, Côte d'Azur
On deposit from a private collection

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to Bowers collection; by descent to present owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Genty and Vernon 2003, pp. 157–58, fig. 411

EXHIBITED: Toulouse 1997, p. 29; Canberra and Brisbane 2003, p. 180, no. 80, ill. p. 176; Rome 2006–7, p. 377, no. 146, ill.; Marseille 2007, pp. 117, 131, no. 126, ill.

52. *A Table Set for Breakfast*

Une table servie pour le petit déjeuner

Ca. 1930
Pencil on paper, 6⅝ x 5⅛ in. (16.8 x 13 cm)
Private collection

Provenance: Kyra Gerard and Alfred Ayrton, 1972–87; J. P. L. Fine Arts, London, 1987; bought by Catherine Gamble Curran, New York, ca. 1987–2007; to current owner, 2007

Selected literature: Cogniat 1991, ill. p. 44

Exhibited: Rome and Turin 1971–72, no. 55; New York and other cities 1972–74, no. 72; Geneva 1976, no. 83; Nottingham and other cities 1984–85, no. 72; London 1987, no. 40; New York 1997b, unpaged

53. *The Dessert*

Le Dessert

1931
Pencil on paper (verso of Galerie Bernheim-Jeune letterhead, dated September 24, 1931), 5⅜ x 8¼ in. (13.5 x 21 cm)
Private collection, New York

Provenance: by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau and Paris; Galerie de l'Oeil, Paris; Olivier Bernier, Paris; Jill Newhouse, New York, by 2000; bought by current owner, 2000

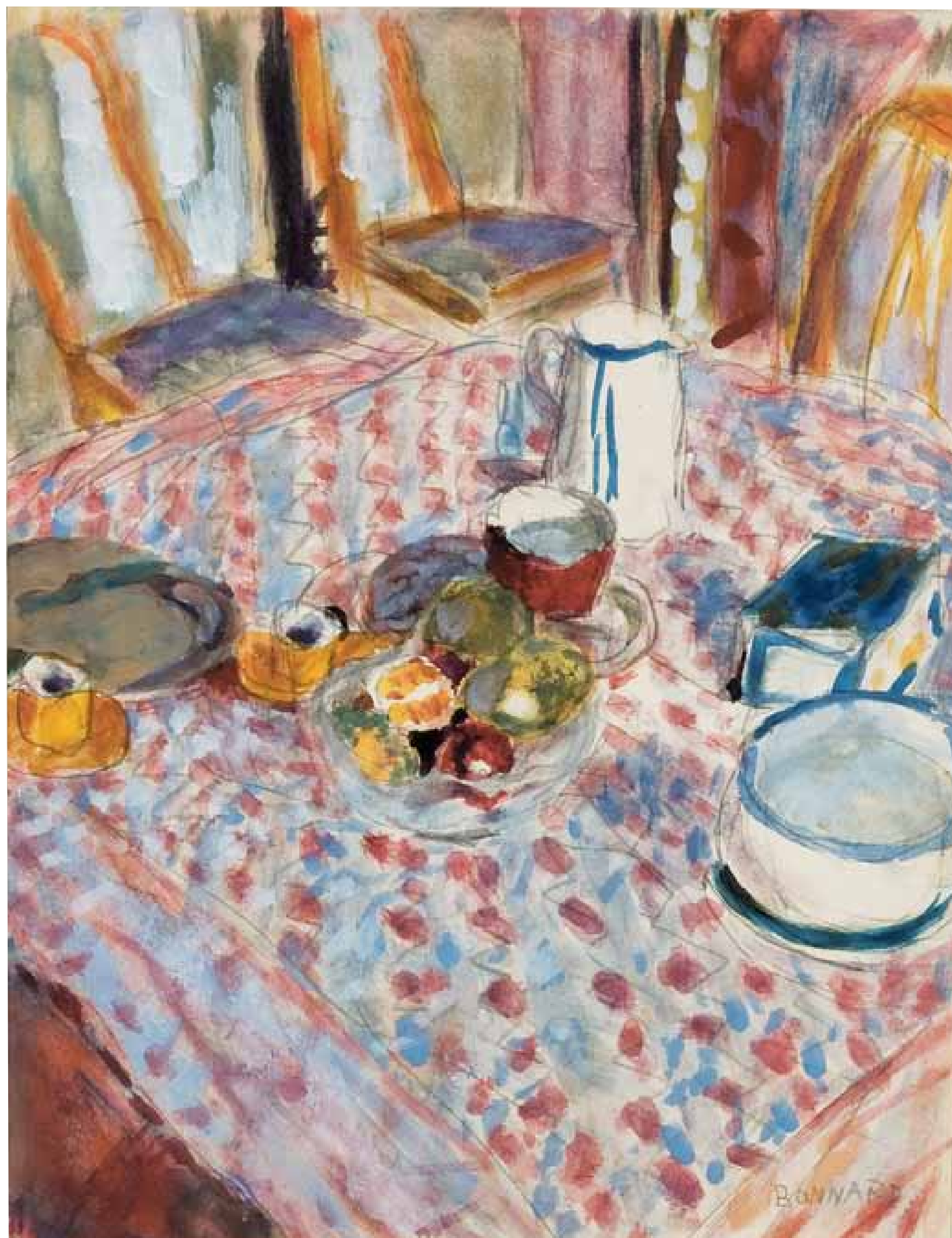
Exhibited: Paris 1968, p. 12, no. 167; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 97, no. 139, ill. p. 71; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 187, no. 84, ill. p. 49

54. Still Life on a Red Checkered Tablecloth

Nature morte sur une nappe à carreaux rouges

1930–35
Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 12¼ x 9½ in.
(31.1 x 24 cm)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joe R. Long, Austin

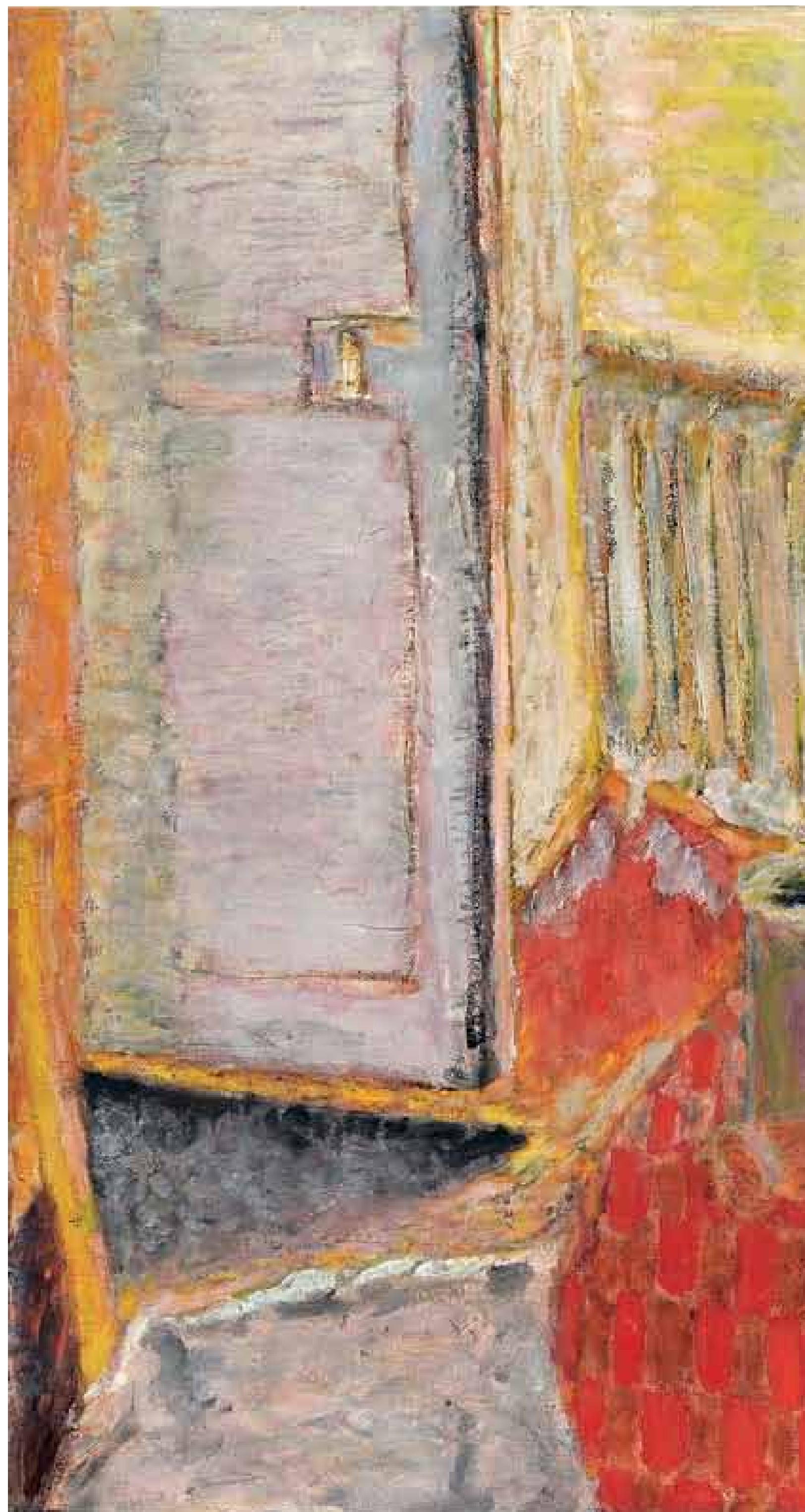
PROVENANCE: Guy Patrice and Michel Dauberville, Paris, by January 2004; Galerie Cazeau-Beraudière, Paris; bought by current owners, January 2004



55. The Breakfast Table

Le Petit Déjeuner

1936
Oil on canvas, 25⅛ x 37½ in. (63.8 x 95.3 cm)
Private collection, New York
D 1549



PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris; Mr. and Mrs. William B. Jaffe, New York; to current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Dezarrois et al. 1936, p. 204; d'Ors and Lassaigne 1937, pp. 261–62, ill.; d'Uckerman 1937, ill. p. 59; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 86, fig. 34; Kimmelman 2005, pp. 13–14

EXHIBITED: Pittsburgh 1936; New York 1956, pp. 5, 15, no. 16, ill.; Pittsburgh 1958–59, no. 66, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 198–99, no. 73, ill. (New York only)

A 1936 *Time* magazine article announcing the winners of that year's Carnegie International described Bonnard as a "spectacled French Post-Impressionist" who painted a "gaily colored still life of a breakfast table." Bonnard's canvas won second prize in the competition, worth $600 in cash.

Although the setting of *The Breakfast Table* is the familiar upstairs sitting room of Le Bosquet (see cat. no. 36), the title of this work is at odds with the crepuscular landscape apparent through the French doors, a vista that by day encompasses a view of Cannes, the sea, and the distant Esterel Mountains. Although it is understood that Bonnard rarely painted perceptually, and therefore the light in his paintings is light filtered through his memory, here there are no signs of daylight, and it is almost certainly not the breakfast hour unless breakfast was taken prior to sunrise. The room is illuminated by electric light, whose diffuse, even luminosity is rarely seen in the late interiors (see cat. no. 38). The compressed space, strongly geometric appointments, oddities of scale, and other occasional ambiguities of planar form are, however, all typical of the artist's late work.

Looking at the figures—traditionally identified as the spectral Marthe, oversize yet flattened, leaning forward to furtively drink her tea, and Bonnard himself, said to be reflected in the wall mirror at right—we recognize yet another conundrum, for the figure who appears meekly in the reflection is not Bonnard but another woman, albeit a strangely androgynous one. This identity confusion probably arises from the fact that in other paintings Bonnard did indeed put himself into the mirror as a silent witness to the quiet activity in the room. DA

56. Basket of Fruit Reflected in a Mirror
Corbeille de fruits se reflétant dans une glace du buffet

Ca. 1944–46
Oil on canvas, 18⅝ x 28⅛ in. (47.3 x 71.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller 1984
D 1681

Provenance: collection of the artist; his estate; Galerie Beyeler, Basel, by 1966; private collection, Switzerland; David and Peggy Rockefeller, New York, 1969–84; their gift to The Museum of Modern Art, 1984

Selected literature: Terrasse, A. 1967, ill. pp. 186, 187; Terrasse, M. 1987, ill. pp. 74–75

Exhibited: Venice 1950, no. 19; Basel 1966, no. 43, ill.; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 186, no. 61, ill. p. 129; London and New York 1998, pp. 234–35, no. 91, ill.

In this thickly painted canvas, our view of the fruit and sundry objects at center is cropped by layers of horizontal red bands. These red strata are demarcated, in turn, by two pale yellow vertical panels; the one at left is attached to a horizontal yellow band, and together they suggest part of a frame. In fact, the horizontal red bands are the shelves of a red cupboard in Bonnard's dining room at Le Bosquet, and, surprisingly, this is not a still-life image reflected in a mirror but a detail of the haphazard assortment of dining-table objects stored on the cupboard's shelves: compotiers, a jug, eggcups, and, yes, some fruit in a basket.

In an earlier painting of the red cupboard (ca. 1939, private collection), Bonnard showed the fruit and ceramics lining the shelves, and he bathed the whole scene in a persimmon red palette. Here the yellow framing bands at left and below designate the frame of the cupboard (or breakfront), shown with the door open. The vertical band at right, which extends down the entire length of the canvas, is the fore edge of that door, which conceals a piece of fruit on a shelf, or possibly a ledge, outside the cupboard. An unidentified object rests on the ledge at left. Bonnard included this shelf in the near ground as a spatial focal point, thus dividing the upper cupboard from its lower reaches. The painting is one of four seen pinned to the artist's studio wall in a photograph taken by Brassaï in August 1946 (see fig. 23), only a few months before Bonnard died. DA

57. The Dessert

Le Dessert

1940
Oil on canvas, 18¼ x 25¾ in. (46.3 x 65.3 cm)
Beyeler Collection, Basel
D 1589

PROVENANCE: Tannenbaum Gallery, New York; Sonja Henie and Niels Onstad, Oslo; Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway; sale, Christie's, London, February 7, 2005, lot 18; bought by Fondation Beyeler, Basel

SELECTED LITERATURE: Beer and Gillet 1947, p. 147, pl. 127; Lhote 1944, pl. 4; Lhote 1948, pl. 9; Terrasse, A. 1967, ill. p. 164

EXHIBITED: Oslo and other cities, Collection Sonja Henie–Niels Onstad, 1960–63*; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 109, no. 75, ill. p. 59; Munich 1966–67, no. 126, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 143, ill.; Los Angeles 1971, no. 11; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 118, no. 61, ill. p. 94; Bordeaux 1978, no. 182; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 278–79, no. 147, ill.; Tampere 1985; Bordeaux 1986, p. 132, no. 70, ill. p. 135; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 45, ill. p. 114; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 93, no. 101, ill. p. 71; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 56, ill. p. 127; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 80, no. 35, ill.; Nice, Musée Matisse, 1996*; Tokyo, Kagoshima, and Tokushima 2004, pp. 142–43, 201, no. 58, ill.

58. Bouquet of Mimosas

Bouquet de mimosas

Ca. 1945
Oil on canvas, 24⅜ x 26¾ in. (61.9 x 67.9 cm)
Collection of Henry Silverman, courtesy Richard L. Feigen and Co.
D 1656

Provenance: Galerie Maeght, Paris; Philippe Leclerq; private collection; Henry Silverman, New York

Selected literature: Clair 1975, ill.; Terrasse, M. 1987, ill. p. 63

Exhibited: Ghent 1950; Munich 1966–67, no. 130, ill.; Paris 1967, no. 150, ill.; Geneva 1969, no. 27, ill. p. 20; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 119, no. 71, ill. p. 104; Marcq-en-Barœul 1978, no. 42, ill.; Paris 1995, no. and pl. 49; Nice, Musée Matisse, 1996*

"There is always color, [but] it has yet to become light."—Pierre Bonnard

If the light in Bonnard's late paintings often seems to transform color, and what color describes, into brilliant tapestries of mottled hues, this painting of a vase of mimosas, one of the artist's last still lifes, is an epiphany of light's full potential. The warm yellows and burning orange brushstrokes build a surface that pulsates with energy. The flowers of the mimosa tree in Bonnard's garden at Le Bosquet often found their way into the late interiors (see cat. no. 8). The Provençal vase seen here likewise makes several appearances (see fig. 24). This painting of relatively simple structure can be said to encapsulate aspects of landscape, still life, and interior in a single image: the mimosa as a metaphor for the garden, the terracotta vase as an emblem of still life, and the diminutive chair and wall structure as oblique suggestions of an interior. DA

Bonnard

59. Cover of Verve magazine

Summer 1938 (vol. 1, no. 3)
Chromolithograph, 10⅜ x 14 in. (26.5 x 35.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

SELECTED LITERATURE: *Verve* 1938, cover; Paris 1973, p. 42; Anthonioz 1988, p. 71, ill. p. 70; Terrasse, A. 1989, pp. 280–83, no. 52, ill.

In 1938 Bonnard was invited to design the cover for the summer issue of *Verve*, the French magazine of art and literature founded by the famous publisher Tériade. Bonnard's wraparound design merges type and dining-table effects with the same sense of haphazard abandon that characterizes the array of mealtime props in his paintings of the period. The familiar red tablecloth, flattened to align with the vertical format of the magazine cover, recalls the dining room at Le Cannet, the mise-en-scène for so many of the artist's late interiors. Upending the table was a device Bonnard frequently turned to in order to better expose its contents, and here the graphic equivalent takes that strategy to a novel extreme. Indeed, the plates, cutlery, fruit, and flowers all appear to slide off the table, rendering the periphery of the lithographic image as arresting as any of those in paint. DA

60. The Checkered Tablecloth
Corbeille et assiette de fruits sur la nappe à carreaux rouges

1939
Oil on canvas, 23 x 23 in. (58.4 x 58.4 cm)
The Art Institute of Chicago
Gift of Mary and Leigh B. Block (1988.141.4)
D 1575

PROVENANCE: Galerie O. Pétridès, Paris, by 1944; Jacques Lindon, New York, by August 1948; bought by Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block, Chicago, August 1948; their gift to the Art Institute of Chicago, April 1988

SELECTED LITERATURE: Laprade 1944, cover ill.; Lhote 1944, pl. 1; Lhote 1948, pl. 6; *Life* 1952, ill. p. 95; du Plessix 1966, ill. p. 69; Terrasse, M. 1987, p. 124; Watkins 1994, pp. 208, 209, pl. 159; Christie's London 2005, p. 53, fig. 2

EXHIBITED: Chicago 1963, p. 3; Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles 1967, no. 28, ill.; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 118, no. 59, ill. p. 89; Tokyo, Nara, Yokohama, and Fukuoka 1991, no. 54, ill.; Chicago 1992, pp. 83, 101, ill.; Nagaoka, Nagoya, and Yokohama 1994, pp. 128–29, no. 40, ill.

Most of Bonnard's still lifes—drawings as well as paintings—look as if he had just happened upon the array of objects depicted. These miniature domestic scenes seem not arranged but simply found, snapshots of daily life captured in pencil or paint. *The Checkered Tablecloth*, in contrast, is constructed, its effect self-conscious. It appears, for example, that either Bonnard or someone else must have set the two red apples carefully and deliberately on the upper edge of the salmon-colored plate. A thickly impastoed yellow sugar bowl sits to the left of the fruits, and a glowing orange basket filled with grapes and perhaps peaches is tucked behind it. A jaunty sprig of leaves hovers over the apples, slyly suggesting by its placement a bird of paradise that has just landed and perched on the basket's edge. Bonnard's use of white is particular interesting, bouncing the eye from the highlights on the sugar bowl to the glints on the grapes, the oval saucer behind the basket, the daring white outlines that define the table's edge, and the scumbled, bright white shadow cast by the plate at center.

The painting tautly contains a number of spatial contradictions and other pictorial devices paradigmatic of Bonnard's late interiors. The richly colored red-orange tablecloth upends itself flat to the picture plane, as if to better show off the objects upon it. The volumetric fruits cluster tensely at the center, while the handle of the basket twists backward diagonally in space. In the background, indeterminate features of the room—a fireplace? wallpaper? the back of a chair? the edge of a door?—jostle for position and contribute to the overall dazzling effect. RB

61. Bouquet of Flowers

Bouquet de fleurs

Ca. 1940
Pencil on paper, 16 x 12 in. (40.5 x 30.4 cm)
Private collection, France, courtesy Galerie Peirce, Paris

PROVENANCE: by descent to heirs of the artist; Galerie Cazeau-Béraudière, Paris; Galerie Peirce, Paris; to current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Genty and Vernon 2003, p. 178, no. 479

Bonnard used his drawings not only as aide-mémoire when laying out the structure of a painting but also as guides to color, or to his memory of color. The various types of marks in this drawing were all likely keyed to specific color tones. DA

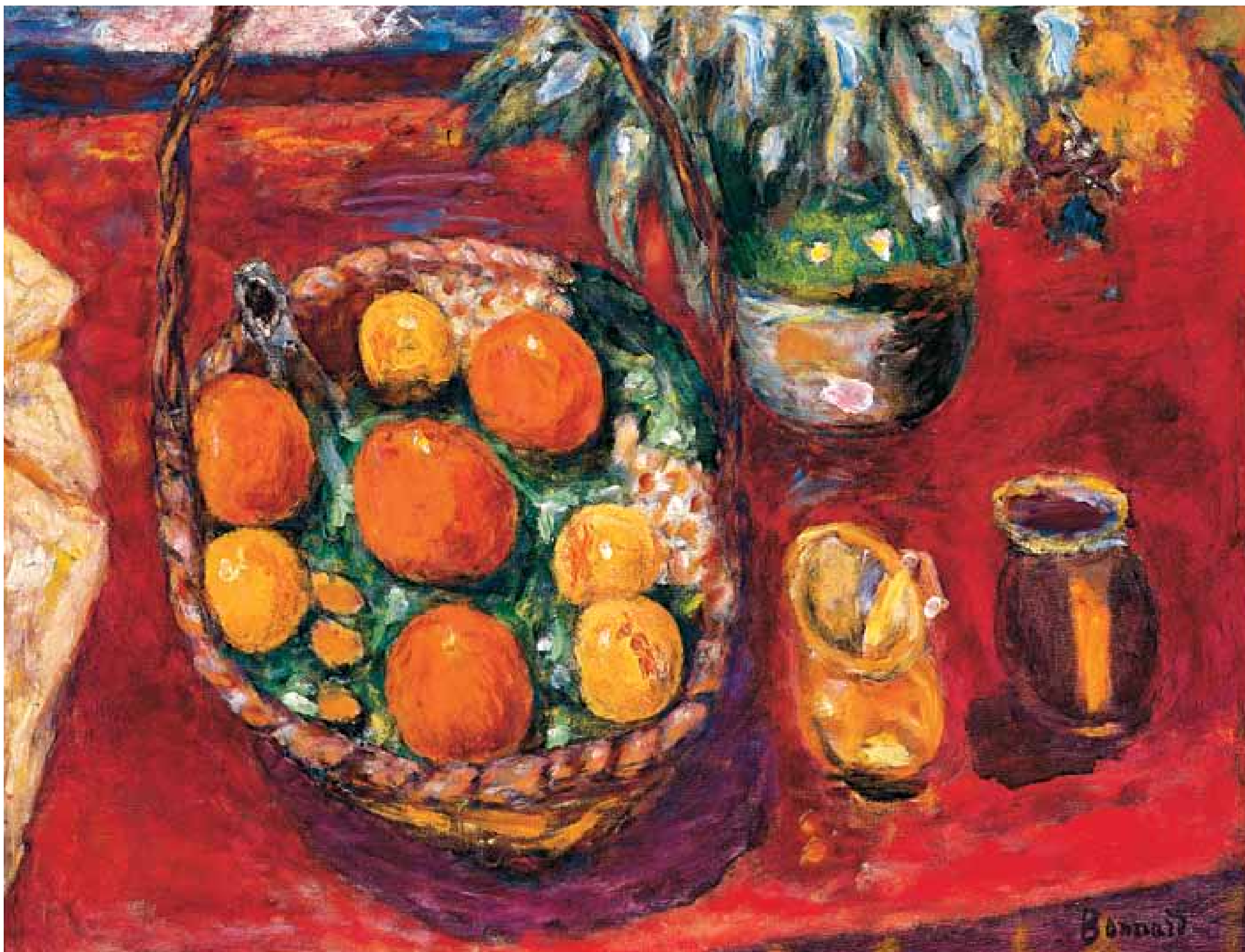
62. Basket of Fruit: Oranges and Persimmons
Corbeille de fruits: Oranges et kakis

Ca. 1940
Oil on canvas, 22¾ x 29¼ in. (58 x 74.5 cm)
Private collection
D 1592

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; acquired by Wildenstein and Co., New York; bought by current owner, 2004

SELECTED LITERATURE: Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 121; Metken 1984, ill. p. 1102

EXHIBITED: London 1966, p. 62, no. 215; Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, and Sydney 1971–72, no. 26, ill.; Albi 1972, no. 26, ill.; São Paulo 1972, no. 26, ill.; Tokyo, Kōbe, Nagoya, and Fukuoka 1980–81, no. 76, pl. 76; Geneva 1981, no. 76, pl. 76; New York 1981, pp. 27, 80, no. 51, pl. 32; Madrid 1983, no. 56; Lausanne 1991, p. 165, no. 68, pl. 68; Montreal 1998, no. 34, ill. pp. 87, 94; Martigny 1999, pp. 154–55, no. 60, ill.; Paris 2000, p. 102, no. 51, ill. p. 77



63. Vase of Flowers on a Red Cloth
Vase de fleurs sur la nappe rouge

Ca. 1940
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 5¼ x 5¾ in. (13.2 x 14.5 cm)
Collection of Thomas G. Kimble

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; Neffe-Degandt Fine Art, London; private collection, London; Jill Newhouse, New York, by 2001; bought by Thomas G. Kimble, 2001

SELECTED LITERATURE: Bonnard 1947, ill.; Cogniat 1968, ill. p. 60

EXHIBITED: Salzburg and London 1991, no. 24, ill.

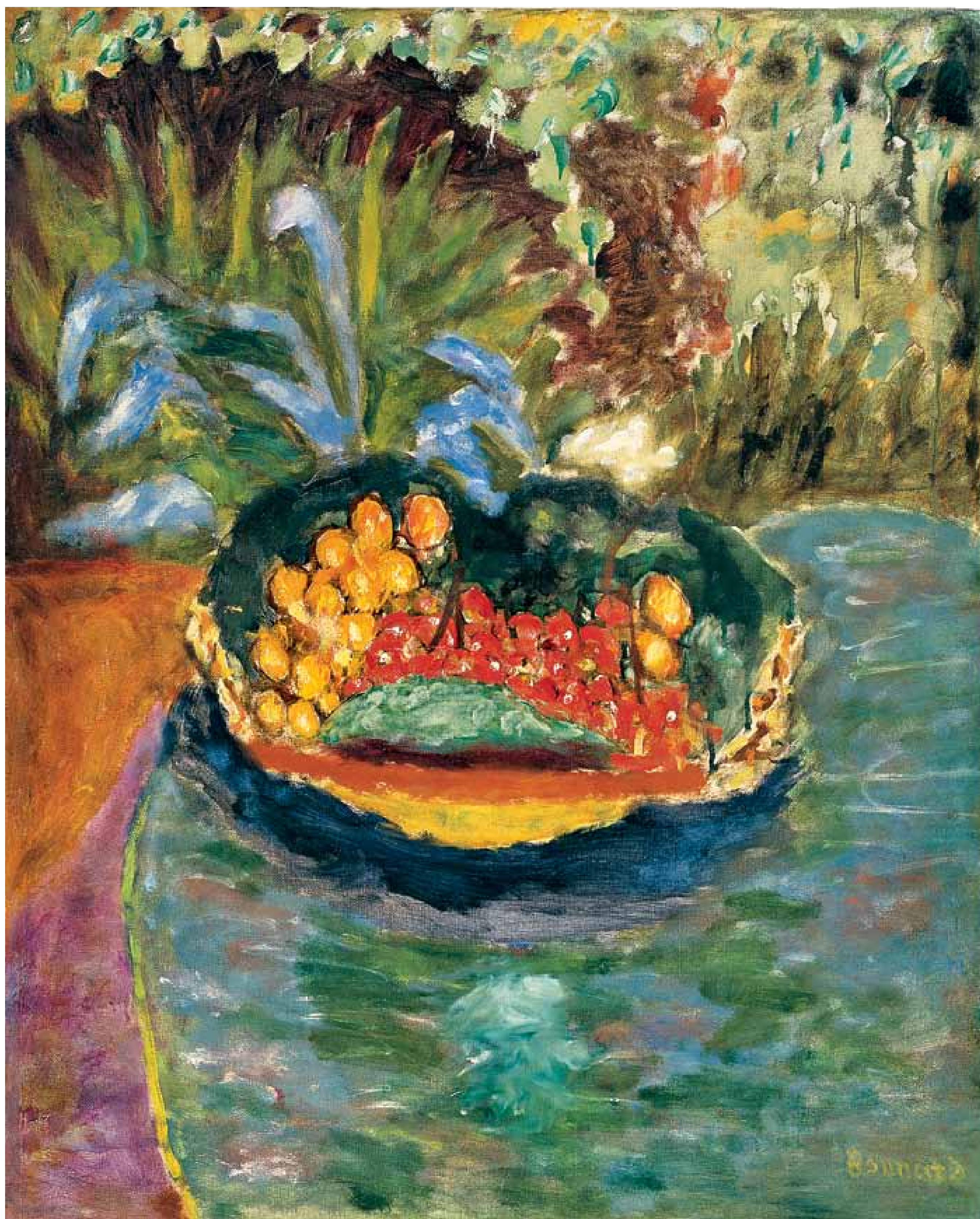
64. Basket of Fruit on a Table in the Garden at Le Cannet
Corbeille de fruits sur une table dans le jardin du Cannet

Ca. 1943–44
Oil on canvas, 26½ x 21½ in. (67.3 x 54.6 cm)
Private collection, New York
D 1644

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; Wildenstein and Co., New York, 1963; bought by current owner, October 1963

SELECTED LITERATURE: Cogniat 1991, ill. p. 87

EXHIBITED: New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 109, no. 78, ill. p. 104; London and New York 1998, pp. 232–33, no. 90, ill.



65. Still Life with Bottle of Red Wine

Nature morte à la bouteille de vin rouge

1942
Oil on canvas, 25⅝ x 21¼ in. (65 x 54 cm)
Collection of Pilar and Stephen Robert
D 1621

PROVENANCE: sale, Palais Galliéra, Paris, June 21, 1961, lot 38; private collection, Switzerland, by 1984; Pilar and Stephen Robert

SELECTED LITERATURE: *Art and Auctions* 1961, p. 366; Paris 1961, no. 38, pl. 9

EXHIBITED: Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 119, no. 66, ill. p. 100; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 158, no. 55, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 222–23, no. 58, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 222–23, no. 85, ill.; Martigny 1999, pp. 158–59, no. 62, ill.

66. Woman at the Dining Table, Le Cannet

Femme au table, Le Cannet

Ca. 1943
Pencil on paper, 8¼ x 10¾ in. (21 x 27.3 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau and Paris; Jill Newhouse, New York, by 2008; bought by current owner, 2008

67. Still Life with Baskets of Fruit

Nature morte aux paniers de fruits

Ca. 1940
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 14¾ x 10 in. (37.5 x 25.4 cm)
Collection of Sebastian Christmas Poulsen, courtesy Jason McCoy, Inc., New York

PROVENANCE: by descent to Terrasse family, France; Galerie Cazeau-Béraudière, Paris; sale, Sotheby's, New York, May 9, 2007, lot 197; bought by Jill Newhouse, New York; bought by Jason McCoy, Inc., New York, 2008; bought by Sebastian Christmas Poulsen, 2008

SELECTED LITERATURE: Genty and Vernon 2003, p. 177, fig. 478; Neffe-Degandt/Jill Newhouse 2005, pp. 78–79, no. 41, ill.; Sotheby's New York 2007, lot 197, ill. p. 138

68. Villa Bosquet, Le Cannet, Morning
Villa du Bosquet, Le Cannet, le matin

Ca. 1945
Watercolor and gouache on paper, 23¾ x 19¾ in. (60.3 x 50.2 cm)
Private collection

PROVENANCE: private collection, Neuchâtel, by 1965; private collection, Switzerland, by 1994; current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 213; Amoureaux 1985, pp. 122–23, ill.; Terrasse, M. 1987, ill. p. 58; Cogeval 1993, pp. 132–33, no. 45, ill.

EXHIBITED: Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 288–89, no. 154, ill.; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 47, ill. p. 115; Lausanne 1991, p. 172, no. 87, pl. 87; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 97, no. 55, ill.

69. In the Bathroom
Dans la salle de bain

Ca. 1940
Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 24⅜ in. (92 x 61 cm)
Collection of Stephen Mazoh
D 1598

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; sale, Sotheby's, London, December 1, 1982, lot 26; sale, Sotheby's, London, June 28, 1988, lot 33; bought by Stephen Mazoh, 1988

SELECTED LITERATURE: Hyman 1998, no. 136, ill. p. 168; Bell 1999, p. 103, ill.

EXHIBITED: Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 93, no. 100, ill. p. 37; Düsseldorf 1993, no. 57, p. 169, ill.; London and Newcastle 1994, no. 37, p. 83, ill.; New York 1997a, p. 31, ill.; Rome 2006–7, no. 138, p. 363, ill.

70. Still Life with Melon
Nature morte au melon

1941
Oil on canvas, 20⅛ x 24⅜ in. (51 x 62 cm)
Private collection
D 1629

PROVENANCE: acquired from the artist by Galerie Pierre Colle, Paris; by descent to private collection, Paris; its sale, Sotheby's, New York, November 5, 2003, lot 11; bought by private collection; its sale, Sotheby's, New York, May 8, 2007, lot 4; bought by current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Lhote 1944, pl. 10; Lhote 1948, pl. 13; Beer and Gillet 1947, ill. p. 146

EXHIBITED: London and New York 1998, no. 84

71. Interior: Dining Room

La Salle à manger

1942–46
Oil on canvas, 33⅛ x 39⅜ in. (84 x 100 cm)
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon
D 1682

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to Bowers collection; Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2006

SELECTED LITERATURE: Lamotte and Bonnard 1947, ill.; Cleveland and New York 1948, ill. p. 125; Terrasse, A. 1967, ill. pp. 186, 187; Fermigier 1969, p. 159, ill.; Cogniat 1991, ill. p. 71

EXHIBITED: Paris 1947, no. 94; Rotterdam 1952–53; New York 1965, no. 26, ill.

72. Young Women in the Garden (Renée Monchaty and Marthe Bonnard)

Jeunes femmes au jardin (Renée Monchaty et Marthe Bonnard)

Ca. 1921–23/1945–46
Oil on canvas, 23⅞ x 30⅜ in. (60.5 x 77 cm)
Private collection
D 1103

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; by descent to the artist's nephew, Charles Terrasse, Paris and Fontainebleau; current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: Terrasse, A. 1964, pp. 62, 64, ill.; Vaillant 1967; Ōoka et al. 1972, p. 120, no. 22, pl. 22; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 312, ill. p. 157; Cogniat 1991, ill. p. 80; Watkins 1997, pp. 27–28, fig. 15; Hyman 1998, pp. 112–14, fig. 87; Watkins 1998, pp. 27–28, fig. 15; Chicago and New York 2001, p. 198, ill.; Harrison 2005, pp. 196, 200, ill. p. 198; Kimmelman 2005, pp. 17, 27

EXHIBITED: Lisbon 1965; London 1966, p. 57, no. 172; Munich 1966–67, no. 94, ill.; Humlebaek 1967, no. 47; Paris 1967, no. 102, ill.; Geneva 1969, no. 17, ill. p. 15; Rome and Turin 1971–72, no. 11, ill.; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 115, no. 31, ill. p. 99; Colmar 1982, no. 27; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984a, pp. 88–89, no. 20, ill.; Paris, Washington, D.C., and Dallas 1984b, pp. 148–49, no. 21, ill.; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 206–7, no. 98, ill.; Bordeaux 1986, p. 112, no. 53, ill. p. 113; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 87, no. 63, cover ill.; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 184, no. 29, ill. p. 115; Munich 1994, no. 93, ill.; Paris 1995, no. and pl. 33; London and New York 1998, pp. 138–39, no. 43, ill.; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 268, no. 90, ill. pp. 70, 184–85 (Washington, D.C. only)

Aptly described as a canvas with archaeology, *Young Women in the Garden* has layers of paint that are separated by time as well as layers of narrative that link its two models to Bonnard's fraught emotional history. Begun about 1921–23, when the artist was in love with the golden-haired Renée Monchaty, it was finished in 1945–46, shortly after the death of Marthe, here the shadowy brunette. The painting was perhaps originally intended to be a consummation of the artist's love for Renée, before Marthe intervened in the affair, causing Renée to commit suicide in 1925. Bonnard kept the unfinished canvas in his studio for the rest of his life. When he finally returned to it in 1945, he gilded the background in saffron yellow, as if to give the memory of Renée a transcendent radiance. Marthe may have prevailed in life, but her presence here in paint is decidedly marginal, even voyeuristic. DA

73. Marthe Entering the Room
Marthe entrant le salon

1942
Gouache and pencil on paper, 25⅝ x 19¾ in. (65.1 x 50.2 cm)
Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection, Purchase, Fred W. Allsopp Memorial Acquisition Fund (1983.010.004)

Provenance: acquired from the artist by Louis Carré, Paris; his estate; James Kirkman, Ltd., London; bought by the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation, 1983

Exhibited: Little Rock, Arkansas Arts Center, 1985*; London and Newcastle 1994, p. 87, no. 40, ill.; Gifu, Takasaki, Kitakyushu, and Tanabe 2003–4, ill. p. 43

This small gouache is one of several renderings of the small dining room on the second floor of Le Bosquet known as the *petit salon* (see also cat. nos. 36 and 42). In each, Bonnard adopted a point of view opposite a corner of the room and then extended or compressed the scene to include or exclude elements such as the fireplace, door, radiator, and window. Here he cropped out the fireplace at left and the balcony at right to focus on the architectural features surrounding the interior door to the bathroom, which is being pushed open by a broad-shouldered figure pausing midstep, with one foot lifted above the tiled floor. In the foreground is a still-life passage of two saucers on a white tablecloth, whose sketchy brushwork, next to the large, boldly rendered chair, makes the saucers look fragile, the table shaky.

With his fastidious observations of shifting light and restless domestic arrangements, Bonnard transforms this everyday room into a compact stage, building the scene in delicate washes of color that are thinner and more translucent than the thick layers he typically used in his oils. Vestiges of preliminary drawing can be seen beneath the wavering lines and overlapping planes. Bonnard executed this work in 1942, the year he began a collaboration with Jacques Villon on a series of lithographs that included a rendering of this picture. RB

74. Self-Portrait
Autoportrait

Ca. 1938–40
Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. (76.2 x 61 cm)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1972
D 1599

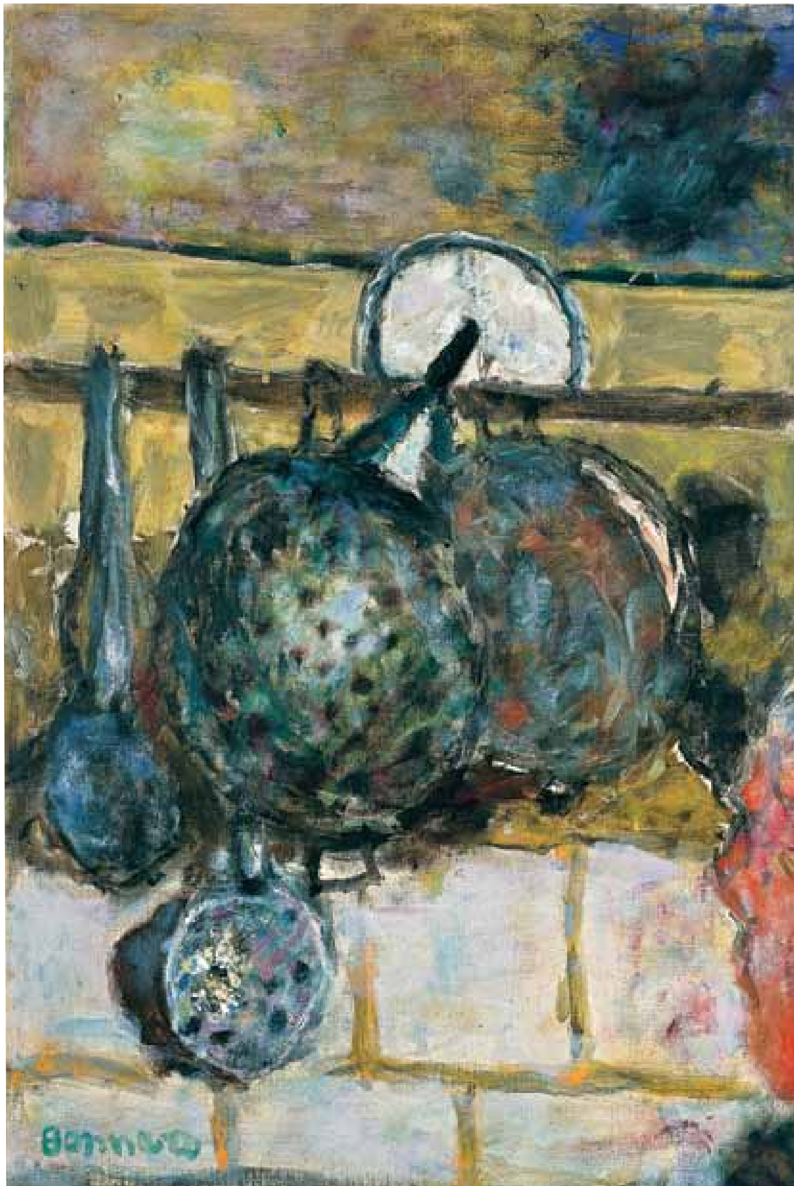
Provenance: the artist's sister, Andrée Terrasse, France; Wildenstein and Co., New York, by 1965; bought by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1972

Selected literature: Vaillant et al. 1965, ill. p. 137; Terrasse, A. 1988, p. 315, ill. p. 295; Bond and Tunnicliffe 2006, p. 425

Exhibited: New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, p. 109, no. 74, ill. p. 98; London 1966, p. 65, no. 246; Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, and Sydney 1971–72, no. 36, cover ill.; Zurich and Frankfurt am Main 1984–85, pp. 276–77, no. 145, ill.; London and New York 1998, pp. 208–9, no. 78, ill.; Washington, D.C. and Denver 2002–3, p. 274, no. 135, ill. p. 243; Canberra and Brisbane 2003, p. 179, no. 55, ill. p. 67, fig. 66 (Brisbane only); London and Sydney 2005–6, no. 45; Rome 2006–7, pp. 476–77, no. 218, ill.

In this late self-portrait, Bonnard looks less like a painter and more like an everyman professional, perhaps a dentist or a doctor. There are none of the frills of the bohemian; instead, we recognize the humanity of the person whose physical countenance bears the concentration of a man trying to thread a needle. His hands, of notably different shapes, add to the quiet drama of the work; one reading of them is that we are seeing Bonnard cleaning and wiping off paint from his brushes with paint rags.

This vantage shows Bonnard at the mirror that hung over the washbasin in his bedroom. The modest white room is flooded with an encompassing yellow light, amplified by the rich blue shadow of the artist's white shirt. The passage of blue at left is a chair draped with clothing or towels. Below the mirror is a shelf with toiletries, only one of which—the bottle beside Bonnard's proper right hand—is reflected in the mirror, indicated by the intensely warm green brushmarks just above the tip of the cap. Behind Bonnard is a cupboard, whose moldings, with their strong crosslike structure, resemble stretcher bars seen from the back of a canvas: a subtle reminder of the artist's true vocation. DA



p. 120, no. 76, ill. p. 107; Bordeaux 1986, p. 140, no. 74, ill. p. 141; Milan 1988–89, p. 204, no. 52, ill. p. 120; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 94, no. 110, ill. p. 74; Paris 2000, p. 102, no. 58, ill. p. 87

More than a prosaic picture of a colander, saucepan, ladle, and slotted spoon, this still life, one of Bonnard's last, is a metaphor for day's end, or perhaps even the end of days. A sorrowful air prevails; the meal is over, the table has been cleared, and the tools of the kitchen are back in place. The painting is made all the more enigmatic by the presence of a barely perceptible male figure (who else could it be but Bonnard?) edging onto the canvas in profile, one of the many strange peripheral figures in Bonnard's late paintings.

The dark, limited palette of *Cooking Utensils*, anomalous in Bonnard's later work, gave rise to some consternation in his day. When the art dealer Aimé Maeght paid a visit to Le Bosquet to look at the picture with an eye to selling it, he expressed displeasure with the palette and urged Bonnard to remove some black (see p. 29, n. 70). When Bonnard refused, Maeght grudgingly agreed to take it as is. The story continues that the painting prompted Maeght to organize the December 1946 exhibition "Black Is a Color," which included paintings by Braque, Matisse, and Rouault, among others. DA

75. Cooking Utensils
Les Ustensiles de cuisine

1946
Oil on canvas, 20½ x 14⅝ in. (52 x 37 cm)
Collection of Sylvie Baltazart-Eon, Paris
D 1684

PROVENANCE: sale, Palais Galliéra, Paris, June 19, 1962, lot 10; Aimé Maeght, France; by descent to Mr. and Mrs. Adrien Maeght, France; by descent to current owner

SELECTED LITERATURE: *Art and Auctions* 1962, p. 227; Clair 1975, ill.

EXHIBITED: Paris 1946–47; Valence 1947, no. 3; Zurich 1949, no. 119; Le Cannet 1967–68, no. 11; Tokyo and Kyoto 1968, no. 76, pl. 137; Hamburg 1970, no. 62, pl. 59; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975,

76. Portrait of the Artist in the Bathroom Mirror (Self-Portrait)
Portrait de l'artiste dans la glace du cabinet de toilette (Autoportrait)

1939–46
Oil on canvas, 28¾ x 20⅛ in. (73 x 51 cm)
Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne/
Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris
Dation 1984
D 1664

PROVENANCE: collection of the artist; his estate; Wildenstein collection; Mrs. Frank Jay Gould, 1975; her *dation* to the Centre Georges Pompidou, 1984

SELECTED LITERATURE: Lhote 1944, pl. 13; Ōoka et al. 1972, p. 127, no. 37, pl. 37; Watkins 1994, p. 221, pl. 166; Hyman 1998, p. 175,

fig. 141; Janvier 1998, p. 76; Watkins 1998, pp. 72, 74, fig. 50; Kimmelman 2005, pp. 9–10

Exhibited: Amsterdam 1947, no. 67; Copenhagen 1947, no. 54; Venice 1950, no. 17; New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 1964–65, addendum, unpaged, ill. (Los Angeles only); Munich 1966–67, no. 139; Humlebaek 1967, no. 80; Paris 1967, no. 153, ill.; Tokyo and Kyoto 1968, no. 75, pl. 140; Saint-Paul-de-Vence 1975, p. 119, no. 72, ill. p. 105; Venice 1990, pp. 146–47; Nice 1992; Humlebaek 1992–93, p. 93, no. 98; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 185, no. 59, ill. p. 161; Geneva 1995–96, p. 67, no. 8; London and New York 1998, pp. 244–45, no. 96, ill.; Rouen 2000–2001, p. 212, no. 48, ill. p. 213; São Paulo 2001–2; Paris 2006, pp. 44–45, 303, no. 7, ill.

Shockingly bald and naked to the waist, an ascetic Bonnard seems to be contemplating the vicissitudes of life in this, his final self-portrait. Painted in the early 1940s and first shown in 1943 (he later reworked the canvas and finished it in 1946), the portrait spans a period of intense personal grief (Marthe's death) and global calamity (World War II). As if to reflect these circumstances, Bonnard sits in a highly compressed space bound by the mirror glass and the cupboard door behind him. The presence of the white door could be read as an oblique reference to transition, or even mortality.

The artist's figure is illuminated from behind, as in the slightly earlier self-portrait (cat. no. 74), reinforcing the volume and mass of his round head and torso; a golden light flickers on his shoulders and pate. A surprising touch of red and magenta behind the ear registers the backlighting and echoes the rich reds of the brush on the shelf. Conspicuously absent are the spectacles Bonnard wears in other self-portraits; here, evidently, he is looking for inner truth, an impression underscored by the skin stretched taut over his emphatic cranial dome. Impairment is subtly implied by the form of the chair back to his left, which could be read symbolically as an orthopedic walking stick ready to support his weight.

The shelf below the mirror and its parade of objects increase the sense of transience. Indeed, the subtext of their friezelike arrangement—that of passing or processing—is almost funereal. The brush as catafalque moves to the left; the next object follows; the attendant bottle looks on, its cap (as in cat. no. 74) straddling two worlds, mirror and shelf. Lushly painted, this portrait reflects profound vulnerability and acceptance. It is as if Bonnard, no longer angered by his failing powers—as in the earlier, defiant self-portait titled *The Boxer* (1931, private collection)—seems content simply to wait, and paint. DA

Selected Chronology

This chronology surveys the last twenty-five years of Bonnard's life (1923–47), the period that is the focus of this exhibition. For the artist's early life and career, see the chronologies published in London and New York 1998 (pp. 256–63) and Paris 2006 (pp. 289–99) .

1923
January: Bonnard makes working visits to the Côte d'Azur town of Le Cannet and to his home in Vernon (near Giverny), which he calls Ma Roulotte ("my caravan"). Receives third prize at the Carnegie International Exhibition, Pittsburgh.
November–December: Three paintings exhibited at the Salon d'Automne, Paris.

1924
Retrospective exhibition of sixty-eight paintings at Galerie Druet, Paris.

Fig. 65. *Bonnard's house, Le Bosquet, overlooking Cannes*

1925
June: Josse and Gaston Bernheim-Jeune, Bonnard's dealers since 1900, exhibit some of his works in a pavilion at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris, and at their own gallery.
August: In a civil ceremony, Bonnard marries his longtime model and companion, Maria Boursin, who calls herself Marthe de Méligny.
September: Renée Monchaty, Bonnard's model and lover, commits suicide.

1926
February: After several years of visiting Le Cannet, Bonnard buys a villa there, which he names Le Bosquet ("the grove") (fig. 65). From now until the end of his life, he will divide his time among Le Cannet, Vernon, and his apartment and studio space in Paris, while making extended but temporary stays in Normandy and other parts of France.
March: Exhibits one painting at the Venice Biennale and six at the Salon des Indépendants retrospective.
September: Travels to the United States as a member of the Carnegie International jury.
November–December: Twenty paintings shown at Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris.

1927
February: Moves with Marthe into Le Bosquet after renovations are complete and buys a neighboring plot of land in order to expand the garden. Bonnard writes to Matisse that the house, which is pink, "is on Avenue Victoria, the highest in the neighborhood."[1]
Charles Terrasse, Bonnard's nephew, publishes an important monograph on the artist.

1928
April: Bonnard's first one-artist exhibition outside France opens at the de Hauke Gallery, New York.
Autumn: Travels to Arcachon, Paris, Vernon, and Vichy.
November–December: Exhibition of Bonnard's work opens at Galerie Bernheim-Jeune.

Fig. 66. Hans Robert Hahnloser, *Bonnard as an Odalisque in Matisse's Studio at Nice*, 1929. Modern print after original glass-plate negative, 7⅞ x 11⅞ in. (20 x 30 cm). Archives Hahnloser-Bühler

1929
Summer: Extended travels take Bonnard to Grasse, Grenoble, and Vernon, and later through Normandy and Brittany.
October: Sees the Chardin exhibition at the Galerie du Théatre Pigalle while staying in Paris; returns to Le Cannet in November.

1930
January–February: Seven paintings exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
June: Seven paintings shown at the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol.
November: Begins working visit to Arcachon, a coastal resort town southwest of Bordeaux, staying at the Villa Castellamare, where he remains until April 1931.

1931
Spends the spring in Paris, the summer in Vernon, and the autumn in Le Cannet. During the next few years Bonnard produces some of his most significant interiors and nudes.

1932
Works in Le Cannet from January to April and in Vernon from May to September; returns to Le Cannet in October.

1933
June: Two major exhibitions of Bonnard's work open in Paris, with twenty-six recent paintings shown at Galerie Bernheim-Jeune and thirty-one portraits exhibited at Galerie Braun.

1933–34
Works in La Baule, Brittany, staying at the Villa Nirvana.

1934
March: Forty-four paintings exhibited at Wildenstein Gallery, New York.
June–September: Works in various towns on the Normandy coast before returning to Le Cannet.

1935
Spends the first half of the year in Le Cannet and the second half in Trouville and Deauville, with brief trips to Vernon and London, where there is an exhibition of his paintings at Reid and Lefevre Gallery.

1936
Spends most of year in Deauville, in northwest France.
October: *The Breakfast Table* (cat. no. 55) wins second prize at the Carnegie International Exhibition.
December: "Bonnard-Vuillard," featuring seventeen works by Bonnard, opens at Galerie Paul, Paris.

1937
Makes extended visit to Deauville, where he is interviewed by Ingrid Rydbeck for the Swedish journal *Konstrevy*. The published interview is accompanied by photographs taken by Rogi André (Rosza Klein) showing several of Bonnard's late masterpieces in progress, tacked to the flowered wallpaper of his hotel room.
June: Returns to Paris. Thirty-three paintings included in the exhibition "Les Maîtres de l'art indépendant, 1895–1937," at the Petit Palais (June–October). Two works acquired by the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

1938
Designs cover for *Verve*, the arts magazine published by Tériade. Spends four months at Le Cannet followed by five months at Deauville.
December: Paintings and prints by Bonnard and Vuillard exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago.

1939
Spends January and February in Le Cannet before returning to Paris in March to his new apartment at 2 Place de la Porte-des-Ternes.
July–August: Makes two weeklong visits to Trouville, his last to Normandy.
September: Leaves Paris for Le Cannet, where he will remain for the duration of World War II.

1940
April: Nominated by Augustus John to the Royal Academy of Arts, London; elected honorary academician.
September: War causes fuel and food shortages in and around Cannes. Bonnard writes to Matisse that "material concerns and worries about the future are troubling me a lot, and I'm afraid that painting may abandon me because of a lack of mental freedom."[2]

1941
January: Mentions food shortages in a letter to Matisse, but declines to move to a hotel for comfort, explaining that "I would lose what constitutes the basis of my existence and my kind of work: the constant contact with nature."[3]
Photographed by André Ostier at Le Bosquet, followed by sittings in 1942, 1945, and 1946.

1941–42
Refuses commission from the Vichy government for a portrait of Maréchal Pétain.

1942
January 26: After a short illness, Marthe dies at the age of 73 and is buried at the cemetery in Le Cannet.
March: Exhibition of Bonnard's works on paper at Weyhe Gallery, New York. Louis Carré commissions eleven gouaches from Bonnard to be made into lithographs by Jacques Villon, including *Marthe Entering the Room* (cat. no. 73). The series is completed in 1946.

1943
Work begins on Jean and Henry Dauberville's catalogue raisonné of Bonnard's paintings, which will be published from 1968 to 1974.

1944
February: Photographed at Le Bosquet by Henri Cartier-Bresson (fig. 67).
December: Exhibition of Bonnard's lithographs and works on paper at Pierre Berès's gallery in Paris.

1945
July: Visits Paris for the first time since 1939. Returns to Le Cannet accompanied by his niece Renée Terrasse.

1946
June–July: Thirty-four paintings included in a retrospective exhibition at Galerie Bernheim-Jeune.
August: Photographed by Brassaï at Le Bosquet.

1947
January 23: Bonnard dies in Le Cannet.
August: *Verve* publishes a memorial special edition that includes a cover design and illustrations by Bonnard as well as extracts from his daybooks.
October–December: Retrospective exhibition at the Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris.
Beginning of legal dispute over Bonnard's estate, which will last until 1963.

1948
March–September: Major Bonnard retrospective is held at the Cleveland Museum of Art in the spring and at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the autumn.

1. Bonnard and Matisse 1992, p. 34.
2. Ibid., p. 68.
3. Ibid., p. 80.

Fig. 67. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Bonnard's Studio at Le Cannet*, 1944. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy Magnum Photos

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