



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

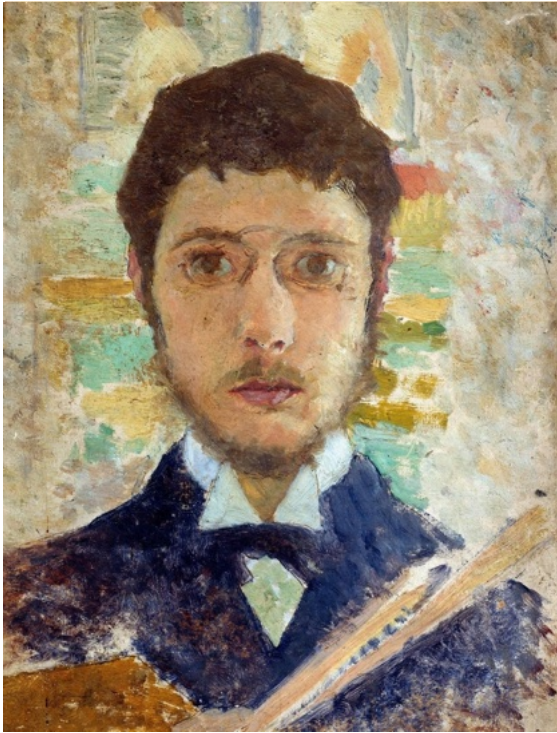
Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk



- Welcome. This is one of over 250 talks on the history of Western Art arranged chronologically from cave art through to recent art.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



30-04 PIERRE BONNARD

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

Pierre Bonnard, *Self-portrait*, 1889,
private collection

- This is Section 30 on Post-Impressionism and this talk is on Pierre Bonnard one of the founders of a group called the Nabis (pronounced “na” as in “nappy”, “bis”).

BIOGRAPHY PIERRE BONNARD

- Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) was a French painter and printmaker, renowned for his radiant use of colour and his intimate depictions of domestic life. Born in Fontenay-aux-Roses, near Paris, he was the second of three children of Eugène Bonnard, a senior official in the Ministry of War, and Élisabeth Mertzdorff, from Alsace. His childhood in a cultured, bourgeois household was comfortable, and frequent holidays in the Dauphiné countryside deeply nurtured his love of light and landscape.
- Encouraged by his father to pursue a secure profession, Bonnard studied law at the Sorbonne, qualifying in 1888, but he was simultaneously attending art classes at the Académie Julian and later the École des Beaux-Arts. There he met painters Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier, and Édouard Vuillard, **becoming one of the group known as Les Nabis**—artists **influenced by Gauguin’s** Symbolism and by the flat planes and asymmetry of Japanese prints.
- Bonnard’s mature style evolved away from the decorative Nabi aesthetic towards explorations of colour and light. He became a master of intimate interior scenes, landscapes, and nudes, using fragmented perspectives and glowing tonal harmonies to evoke memory and emotion rather than direct observation.
- From 1893 he lived with Marthe de Mélny (pronounced “mart de mel-in-ee”) born Maria Boursin), who became the recurrent subject of his work and his

eventual wife in 1925. Their relationship was passionate but fraught; Marthe's fragile health and jealousy isolated them in the south of France. Bonnard also had affairs with Renée Monchaty and Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle; Monchaty's suicide shortly after his marriage haunted him for years.

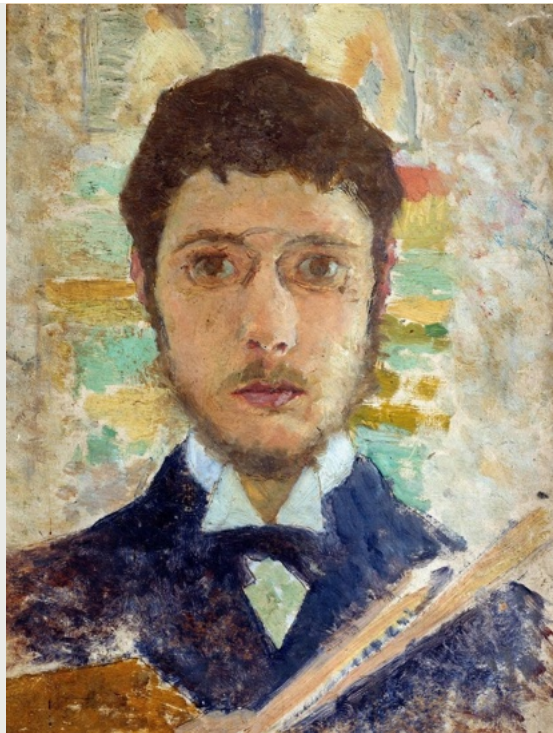
REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bonnard

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/pierre-bonnard-781/eight-essentials-know-about-pierre-bonnard>

https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_212_300024917.pdf

<https://apollo-magazine.com/pierre-bonnard-tate-modern/>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
Self-portrait, 1889, tempera on
canvas, 21.5 × 15.8 cm, private
collection

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Self-portrait*, 1889, tempera on canvas, 21.5 × 15.8 cm, private collection

- He was born in the inner suburbs of Paris to a upper middle-class family—his father was a senior official in the Ministry of War. He showed a talent for drawing as well as caricatures at an early age and he painted frequently in the gardens of his parents' country home. To satisfy his father he earned his license in law, and began practicing as a lawyer in 1888 but while studying law he had also been attending art classes at the Académie Julian where he met future friends and fellow artists such as Maurice Denis and that same year they formed **Les Nabis**.
- The Nabis were a French avant-garde group active roughly 1888–1900, formed by young artists influenced by Paul Gauguin and Symbolism. Key figures included Paul Sérusier (pronounced "seh-ROO-see-ay"), Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, Maurice Denis, Félix Vallotton, and Ker-Xavier Roussel. The name, meaning "prophets" in Hebrew, reflected their ambition to create a new artistic vision, emphasising colour, flatness, and symbolism over realism. They saw themselves as the "prophets of modern art" who would revolutionise the foundations of painting.
- It is a difficult group to categorise as they encompassed a wide range of style but the group was sparked by Sérusier's ***The Talisman*** (1888) and Denis' theoretical writings. By 1900, members had diverged stylistically—some toward domestic scenes, others religious or decorative art—causing the group to dissolve naturally, though its influence on modernism persisted.
- And what was Bonnard like, a friend described him as "**the humorist among**

us; his nonchalant gaiety, and humour expressed in his productions, of which the decorative spirit always preserved a sort of satire, from which he later departed”.

- In the self-portrait, the palette and brush confirm his choice of career - the high collar and bow tie were standard uniform for students at the Académie Julian.
- In 1888, he was also accepted by the École des Beaux-Arts, where he met Édouard Vuillard and he sold his first commercial work, which helped him convince his family that he could make a living as an artist.
- In 1889, when he painted this self-portrait he started two years of military service as a soldier in an infantry regiment. But he only completed about a year of obligatory training before committing himself to his art career.

NOTES

- The name "Nabis" is derived from the Hebrew word nabi, meaning "prophet" or "seer." The term was coined in 1888 by the French poet Henri Cazalis, who drew a parallel between the group of young artists' mission to revitalize and transform modern painting and the role of ancient prophets who sought to renew Israel. The Nabis saw themselves as "prophets of modern art," bearing a quasi-spiritual responsibility to revolutionize the traditional foundations of painting. This symbolic name reflected their belief in the artist as a visionary capable of revealing deeper metaphysical and emotional truths through art, rather than merely copying nature. They embraced a style that emphasised personal symbolism, emotion, and decorative qualities over naturalistic representation. The founding members included Paul Sérusier, Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Édouard Vuillard, and others, who collectively aimed to renew art's expressive power in the late nineteenth century Parisian avant-garde context.
- Marthe de Méligny. He met Marthe ('Mart') de Méligny when he was 26 and she was 16. At least **she told him she was 16**. It was not until they married over 30 years later that he found out that when they first met she had been 24. She was a compulsive washer and didn't like to go out or have company at home. **She took an umbrella** when they went out to hide her face from other people. Nevertheless, she did not object to being painted including many paintings of her in the bath. She inspired his life and his work and was one of his main subjects for many decades, but Bonnard wrote to a friend in 1930, **'For quite some time now I have been living a very secluded life as**

Marthe has become completely anti-social and I am obliged to avoid all contact with other people.' He was a quiet, idiosyncratic painter who worked quietly in his studio at home for sixty years.

- Pierre Bonnard was known for maintaining a modest lifestyle and was not heavily driven by financial pursuits. His focus was primarily on his art, and he was often described as more of a private individual who did not seek wealth or fame actively. Bonnard's financial situation was relatively stable, supported by the sales of his art and the prices that his works fetched in galleries and auctions. Despite his lack of ostentation, Bonnard's paintings became increasingly valued over time, especially posthumously, which contributed to his secure financial legacy. His approach to money was marked by a dedication to his craft rather than material accumulation, aligning with his discreet personality and artistic priorities.
- Pierre Bonnard shared a close and respectful friendship with **Claude Monet**, despite their generational difference. Bonnard bought a property called La Roulotte in Vernonnet near Giverny, where Monet lived, and the two artists often visited each other's homes. Their bond was rooted in a shared admiration for Japanese art, nature, and gardens, as well as their dedication to exploring colour and light in painting. Monet valued Bonnard's opinion, as indicated in correspondence relating to the "Water Lilies" series. Bonnard also captured intimate moments of their friendship in his art, including a notable drawing of Monet and Bonnard's wife Marthe in Monet's dining room at Giverny. Their friendship lasted until Monet's death in 1926, marking a significant artistic exchange between two great French painters of their time.
- Bonnard and **Matisse** shared a deep mutual admiration and respect, underpinned by a friendship that lasted over four decades. Their relationship was rich in correspondence and artistic exchange, influenced by their respective approaches to colour and composition. Although they had distinct styles—Bonnard with his intimate interior scenes and subtle colour palette, and Matisse with his bold, primary colours—their friendship was characterised by a shared quest to elevate painting as a means of expressing emotional and visual purity. Their friendship was also one of intellectual camaraderie, often exploring themes of colour, form, and the human figure. Their mutual influence and respect are evident in exhibitions and scholarly discussions, which highlight their significant roles in the development of modern art.

- Besides Monet and Matisse, Pierre Bonnard had close relationships with several important artists and collectors. Notably, he shared a deep and enduring friendship with **Édouard Vuillard**, his fellow Nabi, with whom he had a “fraternal friendship” marked by common tastes and artistic curiosity from their student days through to lifelong correspondence. Additionally, Bonnard developed strong friendships with the Hahnloser couple, prominent collectors who supported his work over many years and provided him with emotional support. Another significant friendship was with the art dealer and collector Aimé Maeght, who regarded Bonnard as a major influence and close friend despite their generational gap. These relationships were important both personally and professionally, enriching Bonnard’s artistic life beyond his connections with Monet and Matisse.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bonnard



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
France-Champagne, 1891
 (designed in 1889), colour
 lithograph, 80.5 × 60 cm, Debray
 Champagne company

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *France-Champagne*, 1891 (designed in 1889), colour lithograph, 80.5 × 60 cm, Debray Champagne company

- His 1891 colour lithograph, *France-Champagne*, was an advertising poster commissioned by the **Debray Champagne** company that **launched his career** and established him as a **major figure** in the Post-Impressionist art movement, the Nabis. The poster is a celebration of Parisian nightlife and his many posters are notable for their vibrant colours, bold outlines, and the influence of Japanese woodcut prints. His posters inspired Toulouse-Lautrec in the poster medium.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/116238/france-champagne>
- <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/69693>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Street Corner*, from the *Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some scenes of Parisian life), 26.9 × 35.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Album cover*, from the *Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some scenes of Parisian life) portfolio 1895–98, published 1899, 41 × 33.5 cm, colour lithograph, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Album cover*, from the *Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some scenes of Parisian life) portfolio 1895–98, published 1899, 41 × 33.5 cm, colour lithograph, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Street Corner*, from the *Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some scenes of Parisian life), 26.9 × 35.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

- This is the Album cover of *Some scenes of Parisian life* (*Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris*) and (CLICK) I have selected this one page *Street Corner* to show his command of colour lithography and book illustration.
- Bonnard's poster and lithograph work was not merely commercial; it was integral to his artistic development, employing the same themes of family life, urban scenes, and decorative colour that he developed in painting. His graphic art helped bridge the avant-garde and popular culture and democratised art by bringing it into public spaces through affordable and accessible prints.
- This facet of Bonnard's oeuvre demonstrates his wit and inventiveness, as well as his deep engagement with colour and composition beyond the canvas.
- His lithographs, illustrated books, and posters played a key role in democratising art by making it accessible to a broader audience outside galleries. Though his **primary focus shifted increasingly to painting**, he continued to engage with **graphic arts to the end of his life**, making this aspect an **important and enduring** part of his work and his public presence. However, in this talk I will **focus on his paintings** rather than his parallel career in commercial work and colour lithography.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.metmuseum.org/met-publications/pierre-bonnard-the-graphic-art>
- <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/337218>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Woman with Dog*, 1891, 40.6 × 32.4 cm, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Woman with Dog*, 1891, 40.6 × 32.4 cm, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown

- *Woman with Dog* is a charming intimate scene featuring **Bonnard's sister and cousin in a garden**, engaging playfully with the family dog. This early work was painted during Bonnard's active involvement with the *Nabis*.
- The prominent checkered dress creates an element of abstraction combined with her natural attitude, bending tenderly towards the dog and these elements embody Bonnard's interest in domestic, everyday moments transmuted into what could be called "visual poetry".
- The composition is marked by flat planes of vibrant colour and strong outlines, reflecting the influence of **Japanese woodblock prints**, a hallmark of the influential Japonism movement. Bonnard's technique here blends pencil and ink with oil paint, sometimes carving into the paint, revealing his experimental approach to composition and texture.
- Painted at a time of **artistic ferment and friendship with fellow Nabis** such as Édouard Vuillard, *Woman with Dog* exemplifies his synthesis of observation and stylisation. The abstracted background figures and bold floral motifs highlight his move away from realism towards a decorative pictorial space, where form and colour harmonise to evoke mood rather than detailed narrative.
- This painting represents Bonnard's breakthrough in expressing bourgeois intimacy with innovation and sensitivity, heralding his later acclaim as a master of colour, light, and domestic tranquility. Through this work, Bonnard earned

his nickname, the “**very Japanese Nabi**,” ultimately paving the way to his development of modern French art’s rich decorative vision. [1][2]

REFERENCES

- [1](<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/woman-with-dog-pierre-bonnard-1891/>)
- [2](<https://www.vmuseum.fr/en/artist/pierre-bonnard-women-with-a-dog-4044.html>)
- [3](<https://www.phillipscollection.org/collection/woman-dog>)
- [4](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pierre-bonnard/woman-with-dog-1891>)
- [5](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/509051499299600/posts/2813495992188461/>)
- [6](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3208900389223007/posts/5878747135571639/>)
- [7](<https://www.mcgawgraphics.com/products/pierre-bonnard-women-with-a-dog-1891>)
- [8](https://www.reddit.com/r/museum/comments/1ak4ies/pierre_bonnard_women_with_a_dog_1891/)
- [9](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard_-_Women_with_Dog,_1891.jpg)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Checkered Blouse*, 1892, 61 × 33 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Checkered Blouse*, 1892, 61 × 33 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *The Checkered Blouse* is a portrait of his sister **Andrée Terrasse**, who was wife of the well-known composer Claude Terrasse. Painted when Bonnard was in his mid-twenties, this work exemplifies the strong familial and artistic bonds surrounding him during his formative years.
- It shows his characteristic use of **vivid colour, flat planes, and pattern**, here expressed through the striking garment that dominates the composition. The painting blends realism with decoration, reflecting Bonnard's evolving style as he balanced intimate portraiture with his interest in pattern and surface.
- The choice of Andrée Terrasse as a model situates the work within Bonnard's close-knit social and familial milieu. It also connects him to the musical world through Claude Terrasse, which further highlights Bonnard's rich cultural environment and the exchange between visual art and performing arts during this time.
- *The Checkered Blouse* represents a key moment in Bonnard's career, as he was **moving from academic realism towards a more stylised and decorative art form**. This shift laid the groundwork for his later mature works, which explored the interplay of memory, light, and colour. The painting remains a vivid example of Bonnard's early aesthetic explorations and his skill in transforming everyday subjects into lyrical, vibrant compositions.[1][9]

NOTES

- "When he painted this piece in 1892, at the beginning of his career, Pierre

Bonnard had just discovered Japanese art thanks to two exhibitions in Paris, the first in 1888 at the dealer Siegfried (Samuel) Bing's, the other two years later at the National School of Fine-Arts. He was very deeply marked by this, and was even known among the Nabis as "nabi très japonard".

- The woman who served as model for The Chequered Blouse is Andrée Terrasse (1872-1923), a sister of the artist and the composer Claude Terrasse's wife.
- This painting owes its oblong shape to the influence of kakemonos, paintings on silk or on paper that were suspended vertically, the height of which was, like here, roughly equal to twice the width. Bonnard also found inspiration in the layout of Ukiyo-e, etchings in which the characters are often split by the framing and that ignore the symmetry usually found in Western artworks. He chose unusual angles and multiplied the viewpoints : the table is seen from a high angle, it is on the same plane as the model which for her part is seen from below. Bonnard succeeds in giving an impression of volume without using either traditional perspective or modelling. Arabesques suggesting anatomy create the illusion of shapes through the drawing." (Musée d'Orsay)

REFERENCES

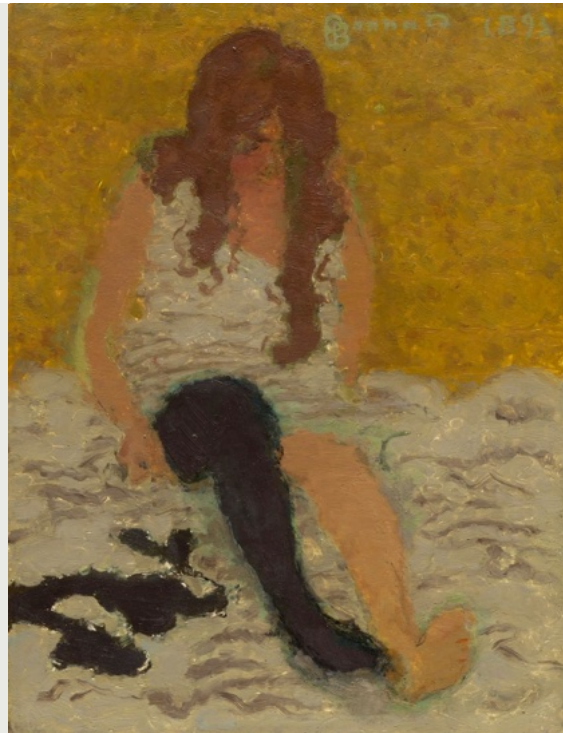
<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-corsage-carreaux-8017>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Terrasse

- [1](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bonnard/early2.html)
- [2](<https://www.topofart.com/artists/Bonnard/art-reproduction/16805/The-Checkered-Blouse.php>)
- [3](<https://www.etsy.com/listing/1594436556/pierre-bonnard-the-checkered-blouse>)
- [4](<https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/Pierre-Bonnard/409972/The-Checked-Blouse,-1892.html>)
- [5](<https://www.ebay.com/itm/395495962414>)
- [6](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu/x-99-08208/99_08208)
- [7](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/509051499299600/posts/2217786611759405/>)
- [8](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LE_CORSAGE_%C3%80_CARR

[EAUX.JPG](#))

- [9](<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-corsage-carreaux-8017>)
- [10](<https://www.instagram.com/p/DGeLeJzMD6Z/>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
Woman Putting on Her Stockings,
1893, 35.2 x 27 cm, The Cleveland
Museum of Art

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Woman Putting on Her Stockings*, 1893, 35.2 x 27 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art

- The woman is Marthe ('Mart') de Mélny a very important person in his life. Over the years he painted drew and photographed her hundreds of times and she was his muse and partner and eventually marrying in 1925.
- They met the year this was painted when he was 26 and she was 16. At least she told him she was 16. It was not until they married over 30 years later that he found out that when they first met she had been 24.
- She was a compulsive washer and didn't like to go out or have company at home. She took an umbrella when they went out to hide her face from other people. Nevertheless, she did not object to being painted including many paintings of her in the bath.
- She inspired his life and his work and was one of his main subjects for many decades, but Bonnard wrote to a friend in 1930, '**For quite some time now I have been living a very secluded life as Marthe has become completely anti-social and I am obliged to avoid all contact with other people.**' He was a quiet, idiosyncratic painter who worked quietly in his studio at home for sixty years.

REFERENCES

<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/2020.102>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The White Cat*, 1894, 50 × 65 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The White Cat*, 1894, 50 × 65 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *The White Cat* illustrates Bonnard's enduring affection for cats, a recurrent theme throughout his career. The painting features a white cat in an exaggeratedly arched pose, with distorted limbs and narrowed eyes, combining humour and affection. Bonnard spent considerable time refining the cat's posture, as preparatory drawings reveal, highlighting his deep observational skills. His approach here is playful, creating a caricature-like image that suggests both the animal's domesticated nature and its independent spirit.
- Cats held a special place in Bonnard's life and art. They appear frequently in his domestic scenes, often adding a lyrical, poetic detail that complements his intimate portrayals of everyday life. His love for these animals merged with his fascination for decorative composition and Japanese prints, which influenced the flattened perspective and bold lines seen in *The White Cat*. The work echoes the style of the *Nabis* movement to which Bonnard belonged, combining symbolic and decorative elements.
- By 1894, Bonnard was gaining recognition within avant-garde circles, exhibiting with the *Nabis* group, but he was not yet financially successful. His reputation grew steadily, driven by the charming intimacy and vibrant colour in his works rather than commercial acclaim. *The White Cat* plays a significant role in tracing Bonnard's transition from decorative symbolism to his signature post-impressionist style, where emotion and memory took precedence over strict representation, cementing his place in modern art history.[1][5][6]

NOTES

- "Here, Bonnard uses distortion to create a humorous image of this cat arching its back. A strange animal, exaggeratedly arched on its paws, with its head drawn down into its shoulders, eyes like slits and a cunning expression. It seems both tame and wild.
- The painter spent a long time deciding on the shape and the position of the paws, as can be seen in the preparatory drawings. The x-ray of this work also reveals many changes, some of which are actually visible to the naked eye. "Art is not nature" he used to say, to the extent that his White Cat has become almost a caricature, "a comical and humorous image created through the genius of its master who observed and understood it so well" (Elisabeth Foucart-Walter).
- The decorative style of the painting – the prominence of the sinuous lines, the absence of any depth in the figure placed flat on the background – places this work from 1894 in the Nabi tradition. There is a Japanese inspiration in the bold, asymmetric composition as well as in the choice of subject – one that was very popular in the prints that Bonnard was so fond of. Hokusai (1760-1849) and Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) in particular had painted these familiar felines.
- Throughout his work, Bonnard produced innumerable paintings that featured cats - sometimes as a simple detail, visible to a greater or lesser degree, sometimes, like The White Cat, as the central subject." (Musée d'Orsay)

REFERENCES

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-chat-blanc-8019>

- [1](<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-chat-blanc-8019>)
- [2](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1748037352167720/posts/3623887204582716/>)
- [3](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3208900389223007/posts/6781844861928524/>)
- [4](<https://www.instagram.com/p/C-YmcQuR13D/?hl=en>)
- [5](<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/pierre-bonnard-le-chat-blanc-the-white-cat>)
- [6](https://www.reddit.com/r/museum/comments/6uvkpe/pierre_bonnard_l

[e chat blanc 1894/](#))

- [7](<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/lenfant-au-pate-de-sable-8020>)
- [8](<https://www.thelittleartseeker.paris/bonnard-in-orsay-3/>)
- [9](<https://parisbreakfasts.blogspot.com/2015/03/pierre-bonnard-1867-1947-peindre.html>)
- [10](<https://www.boutiquesdemusees.fr/en/products/musee-orsay/265-pierre-bonnard-1867-1947/>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *At the Races, Longchamp*, 1894, 48 × 63 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *At the Races, Longchamp*, 1894, 48 × 63 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Sold for £769,250 on 20 June 2012

- Horse racing was popular in late nineteenth-century Paris and Bonnard shows his fascination with the subject here. He was influenced by Edgar Degas, who had famously depicted racetracks and jockeys with an observational realism and dynamic draftsmanship. Note the difference, Degas preferred calm, poised scenes of racehorses often before or after the race, Bonnard's approach emphasised the energy and bustle of the event. Bonnard has used the triptych device in order to show three different scenes from Longchamp, each with a different perspective, be it the focus on the horses and riders, on some of the glamorous bystanders or on the crowd of spectators. In the middle panel, the forms are assembled as a flat pattern with deliberately little attention paid to the illusion of three-dimensional space or perspective, in keeping with the style of Japanese prints but with a different emphasis on colour and brushwork. The three panels also remind us of a photo album, and photography was a great influence on Bonnard.
- At the time he painted this, he was gaining recognition among avant-garde circles as part of the *Nabis* group but was not yet financially successful or widely known to the general public. His work was appreciated mainly by a small circle of critics and collectors who followed the post-Impressionist avant-garde in Paris.
- The painting also marks Bonnard's transition from his early Nabi decorative style towards the colouristic and compositional innovations that would define

his mature work. His love of horses and racing likely emanated from his broader fascination with movement, light, and everyday leisure—key themes of his lifelong exploration of modern life's intimate moments.[1][4][5][6]

CHRISTIE'S NOTES

- "Painted in 1887 [Musée d'Orsay, dates it 1894], *Les courses à Longchamp* is an important triptych dating from Pierre Bonnard's celebrated Nabi period. Bonnard has used the triptych device in order to show three different scenes from Longchamp, each with a different perspective, be it the focus on the horses and riders, on some of the glamorous bystanders or on the crowd of spectators. By presenting three panels with such different senses of perspective, Bonnard emphasises the autonomy of each one. At the same time, the juxtaposition of the three allows him to explore and celebrate three different facets of the races. And crucially, it allows him to celebrate one of the great constant sources of fascination in his work, which he had come to love as a child: nature.
- In a sense, *Les courses à Longchamp* shows Bonnard adding a Nabi twist to the legacy of Edgar Degas. The theme of the races was one that was greatly associated with Degas and his Impressionist paintings; here, Bonnard has managed to adopt Degas' carefully-constructed sense of spontaneity but has augmented it with an intimisme that harks back to his membership of the Nabis, as does the accumulation of paint and forms in some of the panels. Indeed, in the middle panel, the forms appear to tumble up the composition with deliberately little attention paid to the illusion of three-dimensional space or perspective, in keeping with the tenets of the Nabis; by contrast, in the right-hand panel, Bonnard balances the Nabi treatment of the picture surface as a flat plane with the emphatic diagonal hinting at the scene stretching into the distance.
- It was now, in the mid to late 1890s, that some of the Nabis began to appreciate the legacy of the Impressionists. Previously, they had been the prophets of the teachings of Paul Gauguin, as 'revealed' to them by their founder Paul Sérusier. Now, Bonnard managed to reconcile the ideas of the Nabis with a greater, more Impressionistic sensitivity to colour. 'When my friends and I decided to pick up the research of the Impressionists and try to take it further, we wanted to outshine them in their naturalistic impressions of colour,' Bonnard explained. 'Art is not Nature. We were

stricter in composition. There was a lot more to be got out of colour as a means of expression' (Bonnard, quoted in N. Watkins, Bonnard, London, 1994, p. 61). The Nabis and the Impressionists shared the aim of capturing a fleeting instant in their pictures, while adding some notion of sensation, but the Nabis brought a new subjectivity and involvement to their works, something that Renoir recognised when he congratulated Bonnard on his illustrations for *La Revue Blanche* in the same year that this work was painted. The differing angles and compositions of the three panels in *Les courses à Longchamp* add to its atmosphere of spontaneity, allowing the pictures to resemble the photography that so interested Bonnard, heightening the triptych's sense of authenticity." (Christie's)

LONGCHAMP

- Longchamp Racecourse, or Hippodrome de Longchamp, is located in the Bois de Boulogne in the 16th arrondissement of Paris, France. Established in 1857, it rapidly became one of the most prestigious and popular horse racing venues in Europe. The racecourse covers 57 hectares and features multiple interlaced tracks ranging from 1,000 to 4,000 metres in length, including a challenging hill section.
- By the late 19th century, Longchamp was already a fashionable destination for the Parisian elite and aristocracy. Emperor Napoleon III and his wife Eugénie famously attended its opening day, arriving by private yacht along the Seine. The course was easily accessible to Parisians, often by steamboat on the river, making it a highly social public space much like the famous Epsom Derby in England.
- Longchamp hosted many high-profile races, notably the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, established in 1920, which remains one of the most prestigious thoroughbred races in the world. The racecourse's atmosphere combined sport with social spectacle, allowing the fashionable to "see and be seen," much as the Epsom Derby served in British society.
- Thus, Longchamp in the 1890s was both a vibrant sporting venue and an emblem of upper-class Parisian leisure culture, making it a fitting subject for Bonnard's artistic exploration of modern social life and contemporary entertainment.

REFERENCES

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5584727>

- [1](<http://www.artistdatabase.com/top-artists/french/edgar-degas>)
- [2](https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_212_300024917.pdf)
- [3](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/147119783294511/posts/1239243874082091/>)
- [4](<https://shopgoldenrule.com/products/rare-vintage-1946-bonnard-swiss-art-print>)
- [5](<https://www.artera.ae/artworks/e2045051-a743-4dd0-a9f5-4f9fd12f9c2f>)
- [6](https://www.paintingmania.com/races-longchamp-257_50669.html)
- [7](<https://www.cuttersguide.com/pdf/French/french-prints-in-the-era-of-impressionism-and-symbolism-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-bulletin-v-46-no-1-summer-1988.pdf>)
- [8](<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/pierre-bonnards-1948-moma-11766/>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bourgeois Afternoon* (*L'Après-midi bourgeoise*), 1900, 139 × 212 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bourgeois Afternoon* (*L'Après-midi bourgeoise*), 1900, 139 × 212 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *The Bourgeois Afternoon* also known as *La Famille Terrasse*, is a large-scale oil painting showing the family of composer Claude Terrasse, Bonnard's brother-in-law, relaxing on the terrace of their country house, Le Clos, in the village of Grand Lemps in Isère. The scene is a sunny, tranquil afternoon moment imbued with an intimate, almost playful atmosphere.
- Bonnard painted the family members in fixed poses, occasionally caricatured with a naïve touch reminiscent of Henri Rousseau or Georges Seurat, blending realism with decorative abstraction. This work is a pivotal moment in Bonnard's career, marking **a transition away from the Nabis** and Japanese art to a more personal style focused on outdoor light and space.
- The characters and poses are approaching a caricature and the title and the theme lend a mischievous and humorous interpretation to the painting. Despite its unusually large format for Bonnard, the group portrait does borrow compositional elements from Impressionism but diverges in mood and style, reflecting Bonnard's humour and unique vision. The large, open windows looking out onto the countryside foreshadow his later mastery of interior and landscape scenes.
- At the time, Bonnard was gaining respect in artistic circles but was still not yet widely financially successful but this painting was exhibited at the **1900 Salon des Indépendants** in Paris and was acquired by prominent gallerists Bernheim-Jeune, marking an important step in his professional career. [2][3][5]

NOTES

- "This stunning Bourgeois Afternoon is where Bonnard really started to find himself", wrote Thadée Natanson, in 1951, in *Le Bonnard que je propose*. Did the chief editor of the *Revue blanche* foresee, in this painting, the future blossoming of the painter as he came out of his Nabi period? In fact, this work was produced at a turning point in the artist's career when he abandoned his earlier leanings towards Japanese Art and Art Nouveau.
- The scene portrays the family of the composer Claude Terrasse, the artist's brother in law, at Le Clos, their house in the village of Grand Lemps (Isère), on a sunny afternoon. Although an unusually large format for Bonnard's works at this time, the painting follows in the tradition of the large group portrait of which Degas' Bellelli family (Musée d'Orsay) is one of the most remarkable examples.
- Bonnard borrowed his composition of the figures from other Impressionists, but their influence stops there. This collection of characters, in fixed poses, sometimes approaching caricature, is reminiscent of a primitive fresco. There is also the naïve inspiration of a Douanier Rousseau, or of Seurat in *La Grande Jatte*.
- During his Nabi period the artist was fond of decorative compositions and comic distortions. Moreover, humour is one of the dominant qualities of this group portrait, mischievously entitled *The Bourgeois Afternoon*.
- This painting anticipates his later works where large windows open out on to the countryside of Vernonnet or Le Cannet. It has an astonishingly modern resonance about it, and prefigures certain paintings by Balthus (1908-2001)." (Musée d'Orsay)

REFERENCES

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/oeuvres/lapres-midi-bourgeoise-25646>

[1](<https://www.facebook.com/ecaterina.guzenco/photos/pierre-bonnard-the-bourgeois-afternoon-detail-1900-mus%C3%A9e-dorsay-paris/10221381623690126/>)

[2](<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/lapres-midi-bourgeoise-25646>)

[3](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pierre-bonnard/the-bourgeois-afternoon-or-the-terrace-family-1900>)

[4](<https://www.facebook.com/ecaterina.guzenco/posts/pierre-bonnard-the->

[bourgeois-afternoon-detail-1900-mus%C3%A9e-dorsay-paris/10221381638650500/](https://www.musee-ladorsay.org/en/visiting-the-museum/exhibitions/bourgeois-afternoon-detail-1900-mus%C3%A9e-dorsay-paris/10221381638650500/))

[5](<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/pierre-bonnard-lapres-midi-bourgeoise-dit-aussi-la-famille-terrasse-a-bourgeois-afternoon-or-the-terrasse-family>)

[6](<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/the-bourgeois-afternoon-or-the-terrasse-family-pierre-bonnard-1900/>)

[7](<https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/Pierre-Bonnard/688363/The-Bourgeois-Afternoon.html>)

[8](<https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/Pierre-Bonnard/856195/Bourgeois-Afternoon-or-the-Terrace-Family,-1900.html>)

[9]([https://arthive.com/pierrebonnard/works/389298~The bourgeois afternoon or the Family on the terrace](https://arthive.com/pierrebonnard/works/389298~The_bourgeois_afternoon_or_the_Family_on_the_terrace))

[10](https://www.paintingmania.com/bourgeois-afternoon-or-terrasse-family-257_50701.html)

Unknown (original sculpture) and Gian Lorenzo Bernini (mattress), c. 100–500 CE (original sculpture) and 1620 (mattress), sculpture, marble, Hermaphroditus, 173.5 cm, The Louvre, Paris



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Siesta*, 1900, 100 × 130 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Siesta*, 1900, 100 × 130 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Unknown (original sculpture) and Gian Lorenzo Bernini (mattress), c. 100–500 CE (original sculpture) and 1620 (mattress), sculpture, marble, Hermaphroditus, 173.5 cm, The Louvre, Paris

- We now see the beginning of his tender and intimate portraits of Marthe de Mélny (born Maria Boursin), his lifelong muse and partner. This painting captures Marthe reclining nude on a rumpled bed in their Paris apartment, bathed in warm, natural sunlight pouring through the window. Bonnard's delicate brushwork and nuanced use of colour emphasise the serene atmosphere of peaceful repose during a mid-day rest, reflecting the quiet rhythms of their domestic life.
- Bonnard painted *Siesta* during his 'realist' period, when he was **moving away** from the symbolic and decorative approaches of the Nabis group to focus on **closely observed, personal subjects**. The work was inspired by a sequence of photographs Bonnard took of Marthe, (CLICK) but he departed from strict photographic realism by reconfiguring her pose to echo the classical eroticism of the Borghese Hermaphrodite sculpture in the Louvre. *Siesta* was well known among Paris's literary and artistic circles and was once owned by Gertrude Stein.(CLICK)
- He met Marthe in 1893 when he was 26 and she was 16. At least **she told him she was 16**. It was not until they married over 30 years later that he found out that when they first met she had been 24. She was a compulsive washer and didn't like to go out or have company at home. **She took an umbrella** when

they went out to hide her face from other people. Nevertheless, she did not object to being painted including many paintings of her in the bath.

- "In the years before their marriage, Bonnard had love affairs with two other women, who also served as models for some of his paintings: Renée Monchaty (the partner of the American painter Harry Lachmann) and Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle, the wife of a doctor. It has been suggested that Bonnard may have been the father of Lucienne's second son. Renée Monchaty committed suicide shortly after Bonnard and de Mélny married." (Wikipedia)

NOTES

- "*Siesta* belongs to Pierre Bonnard's 'realist' period, during which he painted frank portraits documenting his relationship with his model and muse Marthe Boursin while exploring the new possibilities offered by photography. Bonnard took a sequence of photographs of Marthe at their apartment when sunlight flooded their bedroom. *Siesta* relates to those images, but not slavishly so, as Marthe's pose has been reconfigured to evoke the Borghese Hermaphrodite, a famously erotic sculpture in the Louvre. *Siesta* was well known among Paris's literary and artistic circles and was once owned by Gertrude Stein." (National Gallery of Victoria)

REFERENCES

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/3800/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleeping_Hermaphroditus



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bathroom*, 1908, 124.5 × 109 cm, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bathroom*, 1908, 124.5 × 109 cm, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

- *The Bathroom* (1908), also known as *The Dressing Room with Pink Sofa*, is a large oil painting (124.5 × 109 cm) showing Marthe in their bathroom or dressing room. Although not explicitly confirmed, it is believed that this room was located in their Paris apartment, possibly on rue Lepic, reflecting their comfortable bourgeois life.
- The painting showcases Bonnard's fascination with light, reflection, and domestic privacy. Marthe is partially seen through fragmented reflections in the dressing table mirror and the shallow bath water, creating a complex, layered image. Bonnard's technique employs vibrant, shimmering colour that renders the interior almost dreamlike. This work belongs to a series created around 1908 when Bonnard increasingly explored mirrors and reflective surfaces, experimenting with perspective and fragmented space.
- Note the anomalies which are critical to understanding Bonnard. The reflection of Marthe shows her partly frontal and partly turned because he is representing her at different moments in time, the chair reflected in the mirror is not in the room, he frequently omitted or distorted furniture, the perspective of the room, its walls the floor, the bed, bath and mirror are all incorrect in terms of the formal rules of perspective this again is typical as he merged multiple viewpoints and moments in time as he is painting not what he is seeing but what he remembers seeing.
- By 1908, Bonnard was well established within avant-garde circles and had gained critical recognition, but he was not yet financially secure. His works

garnered respect for their intimacy and innovative use of colour, yet commercial success came gradually.

- *The Bathroom* is emblematic of his Intimism style, focusing on tender domestic moments, mainly characterised by his long-term relationship with Marthe, who appears in over 300 of his paintings. **Intimism** is a recognised art movement from the late 19th and early 20th centuries that focuses on depicting intimate, personal domestic scenes, often within interiors. The term comes from the French word meaning "innermost," and it captures the movement's aim to reveal the quiet, emotional depth of everyday life in private spaces. Intimism is closely associated with painters like Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard, both former members of the Nabis group. These artists concentrated on scenes such as family members in domestic settings, capturing moments of solitude, reflection, or ordinary activities with a poetic sensitivity.
- This painting reflects Bonnard's personal world—ordered, private, and suffused in gentle light—capturing a moment of quiet intimacy that became a defining feature of his oeuvre and his life's work.[1][2][3]

NOTES

- Probably the bathroom at 49 rue Lepic which he rented from 1908 to 1914.
- The Intimist movement differs from Impressionism by emphasising texture, exaggerated palette, and the merging of figure and ground rather than strict observation of natural light or perspective. Often, Intimist paintings evoke mood over realism. French novelist André Gide famously described Intimist works as "speaking in a low tone, suitable to confidences," highlighting their subtle, understated emotional communication.
- While Intimism was relatively short-lived and not widely followed beyond a few key artists, its impact was significant. It inspired later developments in modern art by celebrating the beauty and emotional significance of the mundane and private, influencing the way artists portray personal and domestic subjects. Beyond painting, the term "intimism" has also been applied in literature, film, and other disciplines to describe a focus on intimate, everyday narratives.
- Thus, Intimism stands as a distinguished movement highlighting the intimate and emotional textures of life, with Pierre Bonnard as one of its foremost exponents.

REFERENCES

- [1](<https://www.artera.ae/artworks/8431414c-230c-4b7f-bf8b-2bc7c7b9c625>)
- [2](<https://eclecticlight.co/2018/09/12/pierre-bonnard-on-reflection/>)
- [3](<https://time.com/archive/6733418/art-bonnard-a-shimmer-of-hints/>)
- [4](<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/the-toilet-pierre-bonnard-1908/>)
- [5](<https://www.facebook.com/mypassionforpierrebonnard/photos/the-bathroom-also-known-as-the-dressing-room-with-pink-sofa-pierre-bonnard-1908ht/147029962682092/>)
- [6](<https://www.topartprint.com/artists/Bonnard/art-print/3627/The-Bathroom-Mirror.php>)
- [7](<https://www.topofart.com/artists/Bonnard/art-reproduction/3627/The-Bathroom-Mirror.php>)
- [8](<https://www.wayfair.com/decor-pillows/pdp/east-urban-home-the-toilet-c1908-by-pierre-bonnard-wrapped-canvas-painting-print-ebny8019.html>)
- [9](<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The-toilet-1908.jpg>)
- [10](<https://www.getdailyart.com/en/18845/pierre-bonnard/the-toilet>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
Woman in Front of a Mirror,
c.1908, 124.2 × 47.4 cm, National
Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Woman in Front of a Mirror*, c.1908, 124.2 × 47.4 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

- Another portrait of Marthe when they were living in Paris and increasingly absorbed in exploring intimate domestic scenes, particularly those involving Marthe, whom he portrayed in various private moments.
- This painting belongs to a period when Bonnard was fascinated by reflections and mirrors, using them cleverly to reveal different perspectives of the female form as we have just seen. In *Woman in Front of a Mirror*, Marthe is shown partly clothed, turning towards the mirror.
- He often used photography as a tool for capturing unexpected angles which he then incorporated into his paintings. However, later, around 1920, he moved away from this and increasingly depended on his drawings as the main source for his images.
- He was meticulous about colour layering, using his own “interior logic” rather than naturalistic colour, often juxtaposing unlikely colours like pink with orange or lemon yellow with olive green to create shimmering, vibrating effects. He also gave great importance to reflected colour, especially in shadows, which contributed to the subtle vibrancy of his work.
- He had the habit of tacking canvases directly to the wall so he could step back and view the work from different distances and angles, helping him assess the overall effect more accurately as he progressed. This working method allowed Bonnard a dynamic interaction with his work, balancing colour, composition, and sensation in a highly original and personal process.

REFERENCES

- [1](<https://eclecticlight.co/2018/09/12/pierre-bonnard-on-reflection/>)
- [2](<https://nga.gov.au/exhibitions/pierre-bonnard/>)
- [3](http://zaidan.ca/Art_Gallery/Bonnard/Pierre-Bonnard.html)
- [4](<https://maryannadair.com/pierre-bonnard-woman-in-front-of-mirror-1908/>)
- [5](<https://dma.org/art/collection/object/5332716>)
- [6](<https://impressionistsgallery.co.uk/museums/list/National%20Gallery%20of%20Australia.html>)
- [7](<https://searchthecollection.nga.gov.au/object/16491>)
- [8](<https://www.reproduction-gallery.com/oil-painting/1063834263/woman-in-front-of-a-mirror-1908-by-pierre-bonnard/>)
- [9](<https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/Pierre-Bonnard/688958/Woman-in-Front-of-the-Mirror.html>)

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/whats-on/exhibitions/photographs-pierre-bonnard-1867-1946>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Dining Room in the Country*, 1913, 164.5 × 205.7 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Dining Room in the Country*, 1913, 164.5 × 205.7 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art

- *The Dining Room in the Country* shows the **interior of his country house, Ma Roulotte (My Caravan)**, located in Vernonnet on the Seine near Paris. The painting shows a warm and inviting dining room opening onto a bright garden, with Marthe seen leaning on a windowsill. Cats perched on chairs add a charming domestic detail to the scene. Bonnard united the interior and exterior spaces through the open windows and door, blending tones to create harmony between the inside and outside.
- Bonnard painted this work **entirely from memory**, a hallmark of his style that emphasised subjective emotional response over strict realistic depiction. This approach also aligned with Symbolist ideas, focusing on mood and impression rather than photographic accuracy. The bright colours and loose brushwork emphasise the expressive qualities Bonnard prized.
- **By 1913, Bonnard was well established within artistic circles as a leading figure** among the *Nabis* and Intimist painters, though like much of his career, financial success arrived gradually. The painting reflects his lifelong focus on intimate, everyday domestic life, an exploration of comfort, privacy, and the subtle interaction between humans and their environments.
- The work was exhibited at major exhibitions and helped solidify Bonnard's reputation as a master of colour, light, and composition, capturing the quiet beauty of bourgeois living.[1][2][3][4][5][9]

NOTES

- “In 1912, Pierre Bonnard bought a country house called Ma Roulotte (My Caravan) at Vernonnet, a small town on the Seine. This painting shows the dining room there, with cats perching on the chairs and Marthe de Méligny, the artist's wife, leaning on the windowsill. Bonnard, who considered himself the last of the Impressionists, emphasized the expressive qualities of bright colors and loose brushstrokes in this picture. He united the interior with the exterior through the open window and door, and linked the forms by bathing them in related hues. Unlike the Impressionists, however, Bonnard painted entirely from memory. And like the Symbolists, he wanted his works to reflect his subjective response to the subject.” (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

REFERENCES

<https://collections.artsimia.org/art/1240/dining-room-in-the-country-pierre-bonnard>

- [1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dining_Room_in_the_Country)
- [2](<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/the-dining-room-in-the-country-pierre-bonnard-1913/>)
- [3](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bonnard/late1.html)
- [4](<https://www.wgbh.org/forum-network/lectures/pierre-bonnard-dining-room-in-the-country>)
- [5](<https://archive.worcesterart.org/exhibitions/pierre-bonnard-dining-room-in-the-country/>)
- [6](<https://penwithlit.com/2023/04/14/pierre-bonnard-dining-room-in-the-country-1913/>)
- [7](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pierre-bonnard/the-dining-room-in-the-country-1913>)
- [8]([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_dining_room_in_the_county_by_Pierre_Bonnard_\(1913\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_dining_room_in_the_county_by_Pierre_Bonnard_(1913).jpg))
- [9](<http://collections.artsimia.org/art/1240/dining-room-in-the-country-pierre-bonnard>)
- [10](<https://www.instagram.com/p/Ct29NptwIC/?hl=en>)



Pierre
Bonnard
(1867–1947),
Coffee,
1915, 73 ×
106.4 cm,
Tate

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Coffee*, 1915, 73 × 106.4 cm, Tate

- This is *Coffee*. The work contains a number of typical Bonnard puzzles. Look at the back wall, is it the outside with a curtain on the left or a painting? The perspective of the table looks wrong making it look like a cliff. Why is it vertical? It creates a barrier between us and the woman. On the right there is a vertical bar that matches the area behind the dog but the two have no logical connection. Bonnard's paintings often exhibit this type of eccentricity and whimsy and have a dreamlike quality. His paintings often included a **cat or dog** staring out at us, a **patterned edge** with no apparent purpose, or a **wildly tilting table**, or a **cut-off figure** leaning in from the side but above all they often included **his wife Marthe**. His visual taste meant that he never takes his idiosyncratic approach too far and we are left with a puzzle, a wry smile or a poetic feeling rather than being offended by a gross over-statement or too much decoration.
- Bonnard did not paint from life but drew his subject, which he sometimes photographed, and made notes on the colours. He then went back to his studio where he painted from his drawings and notes. He wrote, '**I take notes. Then I go home. And before I start painting I reflect, I dream.**' The dreaming is important as it takes us from a mere representation of a scene to the edgy, whimsical puzzles I mentioned. We can see from the sketches, for example, that he has explored different tilts of the head and we can also see that the figure on the right is a late addition. In his small studio he worked on many canvases at the same time, which he tacked onto the walls. In this way he could switch between works, dream a little more, and more freely determine the final form

of a painting.

NOTES

- Pierre Bonnard (3 October 1867 — 23 January 1947) was born in Northern France and his father was an important official in the Ministry of War. He studied law and briefly became a barrister but he studied art on the side and decided to become an artist. In 1891, aged 24, he met Toulouse-Lautrec and began showing his work at the annual exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants.
- He was a French painter and printmaker who, in the 1890s, was a founding member, with Maurice Denis and Édouard Vuillard, of the Post-Impressionist group of avant-garde painters Les Nabis (pronounced nah-BEE, it means 'the prophets' in Hebrew and Arabic). Most of them studied at the Académie Julian in Paris.
- Bonnard preferred to work from memory, using drawings as a reference, and his paintings are often characterized by a dreamlike quality. The intimate domestic scenes, for which he is perhaps best known, often include his wife Marthe de Mélny (1869-1942, pronounced "mart de mel-in-ee"), who he met in Paris in 1893 crossing a boulevard. He was a quiet man and his life never suffered from disasters and reversals in circumstances. Marthe's real name was Maria Boursin but she broke off contact with her family before moving to Paris. She came from a lower-class family which is why Bonnard did not tell his family and did not marry for 30 years. Marthe died in January 1942, aged 73, after fifty years of poor health.
- "The dining table was one of Bonnard's favourite subjects. Its associations with domestic routine and conviviality were in tune with his intimate vision of art. Here, the artist's wife Marthe sips coffee, with her pet dog at her side. The table stretches invitingly before us, so that the painting appears to record the casual glance of someone about to sit down opposite Marthe. As can be seen in the preparatory sketches shown alongside the painting here, Bonnard's composition was carefully planned and developed." (Tate)

REFERENCES

- <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-coffee-n05414>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
Nude Crouching in the Tub,
1918, Musée d'Orsay

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Nude Crouching in the Tub*, 1918, Musée d'Orsay

- *Nude Crouching in the Tub* shows Marthe in an intimate bathroom scene. She is shown bent over in a small bathtub, captured in a moment of quiet routine and privacy. The setting, likely their Parisian apartment or Vernonnet house, focuses on the personal, everyday aspect of their life together.
- Though by 1918 Bonnard had established himself within the avant-garde and Nabis circles, financial success and widespread recognition came slowly and partly after this period. The depiction of Marthe, who lived with various health issues, also allegorically speaks to their shared private life with its mix of tenderness and fragility.
- ***Nude Crouching in the Tub*** is a key example of **Bonnard's Intimist style** and his lifelong focus on intimately witnessing daily life.[4][5][6]. This painting is part of a long series investigating bathing as a metaphor for cleansing, renewal, and the intimate rhythms of life. Marthe spent a large part of her life bathing.
- Marthe's near-ritualistic bathing was not merely a domestic habit but seems to have stemmed from psychological and physical disturbance, and Bonnard's art transforms that private obsession into a deeply symbolic language.
- Marthe de Mélny (real name Maria Boursin) suffered from **chronic ill health**, probably **psychosomatic** in part. Contemporary accounts and Bonnard's letters suggest she was **hypochondriac, anxious, and possibly obsessive about cleanliness and purification**. She took long, repeated baths daily, often remaining in the water for hours. The bathing likely soothed both physical symptoms (she complained of intestinal and skin ailments) and psychological

distress—a means of regaining control, calm, and a sense of bodily integrity.

- Pierre Bonnard's *Nude Crouching in the Tub* (1918) shares thematic and compositional connections with the bathing scenes of **Edgar Degas**, though Bonnard's approach is **more meditative and intimate**. While Degas famously depicted bathers as dynamic, sequential actions, focusing on the act of bathing itself, Bonnard transformed the motif into a quiet ritual, emphasising emotion and mental relief rather than physical movement.
- (CLICK) This is one of the photographs he took of Marthe as ideas and sketches that he assembled into the painting.

NOTES ON PHOTOGRAPHY

- Bonnard's use of photography was unusual and influential. While photography had become more popular and easily accessible by the late 19th and early 20th centuries and some artists such as **Edgar Degas** and **Édouard Vuillard** also used it, Bonnard's approach stood out for his experimental integration of photographic techniques into his painting process.
- **Bonnard took just over 200 amateur photographs throughout his lifetime**, mainly of intimate domestic scenes featuring his wife Marthe and **family settings**. These were not simply documentary snapshots; rather, he used photographs to explore **unusual compositions, cropping, and perspectives that broke** with traditional academic representation. His photos were often blurred, capturing **fleeting moments** and a sense of immediacy and movement, which conveyed a more intimate, naturalistic realism. This use of photography helped him to depict Marthe in unposed, incidental postures that would be challenging to hold for live sittings.
- Moreover, Bonnard **did not rely solely on photography for exact replication**; instead, he used photographic images **as inspirations and visual memory** aids to paint from memory and imagination. This allowed him freedom to experiment with colour, light, framing, and spatial ambiguity, which became hallmarks of his distinctive style.

REFERENCES

- [1](<https://www.heritage-print.com/nude-crouching-bathtub-nu-accroupi-au-tub-15510825.html>)
- [2](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/461717484435146/posts/177450714>

[9822833/](#))

- [3](<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/2020.124>)
- [4](<https://apollo-magazine.com/pierre-bonnard-tate-modern/>)
- [5](<https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/Pierre-Bonnard/758946/Nude-Crouching-in-the-Bathtub.html>)
- [6](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874865979439648/posts/3688192134773681/>)
- [7](<https://www.artheroes.com/en/artwork/Crouched-nude-in-the-bath-Pierre-Bonnard-1918/594748/450>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bowl of Milk*, c. 1919, 116.2 × 121 cm, Tate, London

- *The Bowl of Milk* shows an intimate domestic scene with a woman, most likely Marthe, holding a small bowl of milk, about to place it down for the black cat approaching her at her feet. The setting is a warmly lit room with French windows opening to a balcony overlooking the sea, a location probably inspired by Bonnard's stay in Antibes on the Mediterranean coast after World War I.
- By 1919, Bonnard had gained respect in the avant-garde but was not yet widely financially successful. His reputation grew steadily due to such refined depictions of personal, quiet scenes which deeply resonated with his circle and collectors. The painting's preparatory sketches show Bonnard's meticulous process and his interest in light, composition, and emotional resonance.
- *The Bowl of Milk* was first exhibited at the **Salon des Indépendants in 1920**, marking an **important milestone** in Bonnard's career, showcasing his fascination with colour, light, pattern, and the intimacy of everyday life.[1][2][3][4][6]

NOTES

- "Bonnard painted this work in the south of France. He moved there during the First World War with his partner Marthe de Méliny, pictured here. This view is of the room they rented. Light reflected from the sea pours through the balcony window. The strong light leaves many details in shadow, including de Méliny's face and the cat awaiting its milk. Preparatory drawings show

Bonnard testing a variety of details and poses before he brought them together in the final painting.” (Tate)

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-the-bowl-of-milk-t00936>

- [1](<https://eclecticlight.co/2019/08/13/work-in-progress-pierre-bonnards-coffee-and-the-bowl-of-milk/>)
- [2](https://www.instagram.com/p/DAWPtilsa_l/?hl=en)
- [3](<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/the-bowl-of-milk-pierre-bonnard-1919/>)
- [4](<https://wessiedutoit.com/notes-on-the-bowl-of-milk/>)
- [5](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pierre-bonnard/the-bowl-of-milk-1919>)
- [6](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-the-bowl-of-milk-t00936>)
- [7](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-preparatory-sketch-for-the-bowl-of-milk-t06543>)
- [8](<https://www.kingandmcgaw.com/prints/pierre-bonnard/the-bowl-of-milk-c-1919-471306>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
The Terrace at Vernon, 1920–
 1939, 120 × 105 cm, private
 French collector

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Terrace at Vernon*, 1920–1939, 120 × 105 cm, private French collector

Sold at Christie's 9 February 2011 for £7,209,250

- *The Terrace at Vernon* shows a figure on the shaded terrace of Bonnard's **country house, Ma Roulotte**, in Vernonnet (pronounced "vernon-ay") on the Seine between Normandy and Île-de-France. The painting shows a contemplative **domestic scene with figures**, possibly including Marthe, surrounded by elements of their comfortable bourgeois life such as **fruit and wine**. The terrace acts as a stage framing the overgrown garden beyond, which rises like a curtain behind the figures.
- Bonnard began working on this painting in **1920 and completed it in 1939**, reflecting a long engagement with this motif. The **central figure's gaze** and the subtle gestures create an enigmatic and introspective atmosphere, hinting at complex emotional undercurrents. Some art historians suggest the painting may symbolically reflect Bonnard's relationships with **two women: Marthe and Renée Montchaty**, a lover who tragically died in 1925.
- During these years Bonnard moved south to **Le Cannet** but retained strong ties to his Vernonnet home. The painting showcases his late-career shift towards abstraction, subordinating detailed narrative to atmospheric effects. By this period, Bonnard was well respected yet remained **financially modest**. **The Terrace at Vernon** embodies both his devotion to capturing family intimacy and his mature stylistic innovations in post-Impressionist colour and form.[1][2][3][5]

NOTES

- "Painted in 1923, *Terrasse à Vernon* is a colourist masterclass, showing the view from *Ma Roulotte*, the Norman home of Pierre Bonnard. This picture, which was one of only three that Bonnard selected to be exhibited at the Salon d'Automne that year, and which was very well-received, is saturated with luscious greens, lapis and turquoise, while the ground has a sunny feel that is enhanced by the glimmer of light of the young woman watching the artist - or the viewer. The composition itself deliberately avoids classical perspective or a sense of over-central emphasis, to drag the viewer's attention, ensuring that our eye grazes across the entirety of the canvas, taking in the landscape as a whole while also enjoying such details as the blue and white stripes of the table-cloth, the red petals of the flowers or the landscape that stretches out in the background, or rather which reaches up the height of the canvas to the horizon, two thirds of the way to its top. This is a device that Bonnard used in many of his most accomplished landscapes, satisfying his innate passion for monumental canvases filled with colour - the legacy of his Nabi past.
- It was in 1888 that his friend Paul Sérusier had painted a work in the company of Paul Gauguin that came to be known as *Le Talisman* because of its epiphanic role in the movement. In that picture, Sérusier had learnt to abandon the illusion of three-dimensional space, creating a picture surface that had a decorative quality in its own right. This, combined with the Nabis' fascination with Japanese woodcuts, had led them to create pictures focussed on the colour-structure of their picture surfaces, avoiding any illusory perspectives. While Bonnard abandoned the rigours of such techniques in the period after the turn of the century, favouring instead the increasingly sensuous colourism that is displayed to such great effect in *Terrasse à Vernon*, it is telling that the lessons of previous decades had remained in the way that he constructed his pictures. While this is perhaps more explicit in the interior views that allowed him to play with windows, doors and walls, as well as the contrasting pools of landscape visible through the various apertures, it is nonetheless in evidence here, not least in his use of various dynamic diagonals within the forms of the trees, the banister and the sloping terrace itself, which introduce a zig-zagging effect, revealing the pictorial scaffolding with which Bonnard has so painstakingly created this image, a concept that would echo two and a half decades later through Mark Rothko's early abstract paintings. As Bonnard had explained

of his work a decade earlier, 'after drawing comes the composition, which must be balanced. A well-composed painting is half done' (Bonnard, quoted in N. Watkins, *Bonnard*, London, 1994, p. 134). In similar terms, Bonnard wrote in his notes:

- 'Show nature when it's beautiful. Everything has its moment of beauty. Beauty is the fulfillment of seeing. Seeing is fulfilled by simplicity and order. Simplicity and order are produced by dividing legible surfaces, grouping compatible colors, etc' (Bonnard, quoted in A. Terrasse, 'Bonnard's Notes,' pp. 51-70, *Bonnard: The Late Paintings*, ed. S.M. Newman, exh.cat., New York, 1984, p. 69).
- Bonnard had purchased his house at Vernonnet (pronounced "vernon-ay"), christened *Ma Roulotte*, or 'My Caravan', in 1912, and it remained one of the key bases for his painting campaigns until the eve of the Second World War, by which time he was increasingly spending time in the South of France at Le Cannet. The sweeping views from his house provided ample subject matter for the artist. The house's location was also close to another great master, Claude Monet, whom Bonnard often visited. The pair had a great mutual admiration." (Christie's)

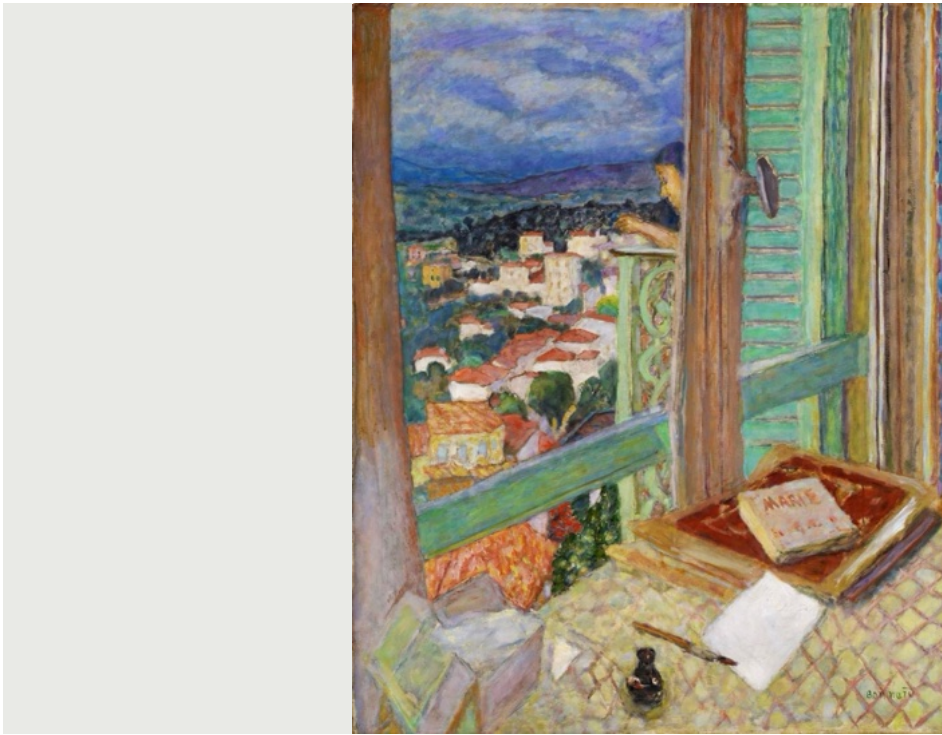
REFERENCES

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5407008>

- [1](<https://customprints.metmuseum.org/detail/488790/bonnard-the-terrace-at-vernonnet>)
- [2](https://archive.artic.edu/easel/gallery/pop_ups/terrace_1_pop.htm)
- [3](<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/489687>)
- [4](<https://www.phillipscollection.org/collection/terrace>)
- [5](<https://www.paintersonpaintings.com/archive/susanna-coffey-on-pierre-bonnard>)
- [6](<https://www.arthistoryproject.com/artists/pierre-bonnard/the-terrace-at-vernonnet/>)
- [7](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pierre-bonnard/the-terrace-at-vernon-1939>)
- [8](<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/the-terrace-at-vernon-pierre-bonnard-1920-1939/>)
- [9](<https://www.facebook.com/theartdistricts/posts/pierre-bonnardthe->

[terrace-at-vernonnetoil-on-canvas1939the-metropolitan-museum-
o/1512687523488288/](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/1512687523488288))

- [10](https://www.paintingmania.com/terrace-vernon-257_50825.html))



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Window*, 1925, 108.6 × 88.6 cm, Tate, London

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Window*, 1925, 108.6 × 88.6 cm, Tate, London

- *The Window* shows a view from the artist's apartment in **Le Cannet on the French Riviera**. The painting shows a sunlit balcony with a woman, likely **Marthe** partially obscured by an open shutter and surrounded by various domestic details. The window serves as a **frame between the interior and exterior worlds**, merging landscape and personal space.
- On the table, a novel, **Marie by Peter Nansen**—an author **Bonnard illustrated** in 1898—appears prominently, reflecting his **ongoing engagement** with literary circles and his appreciation for narrative and memory. This subtle inclusion links visual and literary art, underscoring Bonnard's multifaceted creativity.
- Bonnard painted *The Window* during his **mature phase** when his **palette had lightened** and his **compositions become more imaginative**. It captures his fascination with light, memory, and the intimate moments witnessed through interior spaces.
- By 1925, his reputation was bolstered by his unique approach to colour and form, as well as his tender depictions of Marthe, who was central to his work.

NOTES

- "In this work, Bonnard unites interior and exterior in the strong sunlight of the South of France. It was made in a rented apartment at Le Cannet, the town which the artist's wife Marthe is seen surveying from the balcony. The sensuality and warmth of the south entranced Bonnard, but in his paintings he habitually framed the landscape with windows or doorways, as if submitting the

abundance of nature to human control.” (Tate)

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-the-window-n04494>

- [1](<https://www.arthistoryproject.com/artists/pierre-bonnard/the-window/>)
- [2](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1748037352167720/posts/3633437316961038/>)
- [3](<http://art-exhibitions.blogspot.com/2019/01/bonnard-at-tate-look-out-for-1925.html>)
- [4](<https://contemporaryartsociety.org/objects/window-la-fenetre-1925>)
- [5](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/umdvrc1ic/x-d10-14352/D10-14352?fn1=umdvrc1ic_asn%3Bfq1%3DPierre+Bonnard%3Blastview%3Dreslist%3Bresnum%3D35%3Bsize%3D50%3Bsubview%3Ddetail%3Bview%3Dentry%3Brgn1%3Dic_all%3Bq1%3D%2A)
- [6](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-the-window-n04494>)
- [7](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/pierre-bonnard-781/eight-essentials-know-about-pierre-bonnard>)
- [8](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard,_1925_-_La_fen%C3%AAtre.jpg)
- [9](<https://www.ebay.com/itm/155788494898>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bath*, 1925, 86 × 120.6 cm, Tate, London

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Bath*, 1925, 86 × 120.6 cm, Tate, London

- *The Bath* shows **Marthe, immersed partially in a bathtub** in their home. Marthe was known to spend extended hours bathing as a **remedy for various health conditions**, and Bonnard captured these intimate, quotidian moments with affection and keen observation. The painting focuses on the lower half of her body submerged in water, surrounded by ochre tiles and the pale whiteness of the bathtub.
- Marthe spent many hours in the bathroom: she may have had **tuberculosis**, for which **water therapy** was a popular treatment, or she may have had an obsessive neurosis. The effect is **strangely lifeless**, and **almost tomb-like**; as if the painting were a silent expression of sorrow for Marthe's plight.
- ***The Bath*** exemplifies Bonnard's Intimist style and his evolution towards larger, more colourful compositions that investigate the interplay of reflection, light, and form. The painting remains **one of his most celebrated portrayals of bathing**, revealing a tender and deeply personal aspect of his artistic life.[1][5][6][7]

NOTES

- "This is one of a series of paintings that Bonnard made of his wife Marthe in the bath. Though she was in her mid-fifties, the artist depicts her as a young woman. Marthe spent many hours in the bathroom: she may have had tuberculosis, for which water therapy was a popular treatment, or she may have had an obsessive neurosis. The bath, cut off at both ends, and the structure of the wall create a rigorously geometric composition. The effect is strangely

lifeless, and almost tomb-like; as if the painting were a silent expression of sorrow for Marthe's plight." (Tate)

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-the-bath-n04495>

- [1](<http://art-exhibitions.blogspot.com/2019/01/bonnard-at-tate-look-out-for-1925.html>)
- [2](<https://apollo-magazine.com/pierre-bonnard-tate-modern/>)
- [3](<https://shop.tate.org.uk/pierre-bonnard-the-bath/piebon1923.html>)
- [4](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/461717484435146/posts/1771875386752676/>)
- [5](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-nude-in-the-bath-t12611>)
- [6](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-the-bath-n04495>)
- [7](<https://www.kingandmcgaw.com/prints/pierre-bonnard/the-bath-1925-471309>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Nude in the Bath* (*Nu dans le bain*), 1936–1938, 120 × 110 cm, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Nude in the Bath* (*Nu dans le bain*), 1936–1938, 120 × 110 cm, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris

- We have just seen *The Bath* of 1925 and this is ***Nude in the Bath* some ten years later** in 1936–1938. Both capture intimate moments of his muse and wife Marthe, yet they differ significantly in composition, style, and emotional tone, reflecting **Bonnard's evolving artistic vision** over more than a decade.
- *Nude in the Bath* adopts a more experimental approach. It features an aerial, cropped view of Marthe's nude figure against a **shimmering array of violet and gold tiles**, creating a **near-abstract pattern**. This later work marks Bonnard's **deeper abstraction and flattening of space**, with a stronger emphasis on decorative motifs and colour dynamics, moving away from the more naturalistic, narrative scene of the earlier painting.
- He said, "**Marthe, eternally young and graceful is omnipresent; she takes a nap, has lunch, plays with the dog, takes a bath.**"
- It reveals his **gradual departure from representation** towards a sensory experience dominated by pattern and colour. By this later period, **Bonnard was well regarded, having developed a signature style**, though like much of his career, **financial success remained moderate**. [4][6][7][9][10]

NOTES

- "Marthe dismembered or floating in the passivity of a near dead is the heroine of her most exciting canvases" writes Linda Nochlin
- "During the 1920s, Bonnard's originality was affirmed who, moving away from

the decorative formulas of the pre-war - between evocation and discovery in reverse of the impressionist analysis of Monet and Renoir - favours the bold chords of colour and light in a new rigour and sophistication of the compositions (dining rooms and interiors, panoramic terraces and stages in the bathroom).

- In 1926, Bonnard and his wife acquired the villa "Le Bosquet" in Le Cannet, soon adding a new garden, which became the recurring place of closed doors between the artist and his model through the rituals of everyday life: "I have all my subjects at hand. I'm going to see them. I take notes. And then I go home. And before painting, I think, I dream. In her universe, Marthe, eternally young and graceful is omnipresent; she takes a nap, has lunch, plays with the dog, takes a bath..." (Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris)

REFERENCES

<https://www.mam.paris.fr/fr/oeuvre/nu-dans-le-bain>

- [1](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/461717484435146/posts/1773647876575427/>)
- [2](<https://www.artprinta.com/products/pierre-bonnard-1936-nude-in-the-bath-art-print-fine-art-reproduction-wall-art>)
- [3](<https://eclecticlight.co/2018/08/08/pierre-bonnard-bathrooms-and-tabletops-1931-1936/>)
- [4](<https://newcriterion.com/article/pierre-bonnard-at-tate-modern/>)
- [5](https://www.reddit.com/r/museum/comments/14z859g/pierre_bonnard_nude_in_bathtub_1936/)
- [6](<https://brooklynrail.org/2023/12/artseen/Bonnards-Worlds/>)
- [7](<https://www.navigart.fr/mamparis/artwork/pierre-bonnard-nu-dans-le-bain-180000000000393/note/18572>)
- [8]([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard_-_nu_dans_le_bain_\(amvp_2520_554713\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard_-_nu_dans_le_bain_(amvp_2520_554713).jpg))
- [9](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bonnard-nude-in-the-bath-t12611>)
- [10](<https://apollo-magazine.com/pierre-bonnard-tate-modern/>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)*, 1930–31, 159.6 × 113.8 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)*, 1930–31, 159.6 × 113.8 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)* is one of his most luminous domestic interiors. It was painted in his home in **Le Cannet** looking from a cool, shadowed dining room toward a brilliantly lit garden beyond.
- **At the table on the left sits his wife, Marthe.** She appears **small and withdrawn**, absorbed in breakfast or thought. The scene's real subject is the shifting interplay of light, memory, and sensation from the patterned tablecloth to the warm yellows and oranges of the sunlit garden.
- He worked from **drawings and memory** rather than direct observation, so the painting represents not a single moment but a reconstruction of experience — how a familiar room feels rather than how it looks.
- There is a **second figure on the right** — a woman seen only partially, standing. Her form is loosely defined, almost dissolving into the colour and light around her, but she appears to be another presence within the domestic space, perhaps a guest or a servant or possibly another view of Marthe from a different moment. Bonnard often left figures deliberately ambiguous, as if they were memories or traces rather than solid people.
- In the garden there are faint silhouettes and patches of colour suggest additional figures — **perhaps a child or two women** — though they are rendered so fluidly that it is difficult to distinguish them from the dappled foliage and sunlight. These possible figures are less “people” than sensations of life continuing beyond the threshold, part of the living rhythm between

interior and exterior.

- Bonnard's intention was **never documentary realism**; he was after the atmosphere of remembered life. The second figure and the ghostlike presences in the garden heighten the sense of layered time and perception — as if the painter were recalling several overlapping moments in the same domestic scene.

REFERENCES

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79604>

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre Bonnard, 1930-31 -
The Breakfast Room.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard,_1930-31_-_The_Breakfast_Room.jpg)

<https://eclecticlight.co/2018/09/19/pierre-bonnard-the-world-beyond/>



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947),
The Garden Steps, 1942-44,
60 × 73 cm, National Gallery
of Art, Washington D.C.

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Garden Steps*, 1942-44, 60 × 73 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

- *The Garden Steps* shows the steps in the garden of Bonnard's home in **Le Cannet**, a coastal village on the **French Riviera** where the artist moved permanently in 1926. This location became crucial to his late career, providing a rich source of inspiration with its vibrant Mediterranean light, lush vegetation, and serene domestic atmosphere.
- The years during which Bonnard painted *The Garden Steps* were marked by his **gradual physical decline, including worsening eyesight**. Despite this, his work retained its vibrancy and complexity, reflecting a lifetime of mastery over colour and composition. His move to Le Cannet was partly motivated by health concerns and a desire for a tranquil retreat, which is deeply evoked in this painting. [4][6][8]

REFERENCES

- [1](<https://www.alamy.com/stairs-in-the-artists-garden-1942-1944-pierre-bonnard-national-gallery-of-art-washington-dc-usa-north-america-image366008245.html>)
- [2]([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard,_Stairs_in_the_Artist's_Garden_\(1942-1944\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Bonnard,_Stairs_in_the_Artist's_Garden_(1942-1944).jpg))
- [3](<https://www.facebook.com/NGVMelbourne/posts/the-2020-melbourne-winter-masterpieces-exhibition-pierre-bonnard-opens-5-junepie/10157591337841163/>)

- [4](<https://www.nga.gov/artworks/52155-stairs-artists-garden>)
- [5](<https://www.topofart.com/artists/Bonnard/art-reproduction/3630/Stairs-in-the-Artists-Garden.php>)
- [6](<https://www.pubhist.com/w19589>)
- [7](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pierre-bonnard/the-garden-steps-1940>)
- [8](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1190559014397366/posts/9224383964348124/>)



Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Last Self Portrait*, 1945, 55.2 × 45.8 cm, Fondation Bemberg, Toulouse

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *The Last Self Portrait*, 1945, 55.2 × 45.8 cm, Fondation Bemberg, Toulouse

- *The Last Self Portrait* was created during the final years of his life. By this time, Bonnard's **vision was severely failing due to cataracts**, yet he continued to paint with determination and unique sensitivity to colour and light.
- Bonnard died on 23 January 1947 at his home in Le Cannet on the French Riviera. His **funeral was a relatively quiet** affair, reflecting his private nature, but his influence on modern art was profound and widely acknowledged by contemporaries and later generations. He inspired many artists not only through his innovative use of colour and light but also for his intimate portrayals of domestic life and interiors, which have become iconic in modern art history.
- His legacy includes pioneering **advances in colour theory** and the synthesis of **personal memory with visual perception**. Bonnard's exploration of everyday subjects elevated the ordinary into poetic, vibrant compositions that bridged Impressionism and modernism. He notably influenced later artists interested in colour field painting, abstraction, and Intimist themes.
- Though never a commercial superstar during his lifetime, Bonnard's work is now celebrated worldwide for its rich palette, emotional depth, and subtle abstraction. His contributions to art continue to be studied and exhibited, securing his place as a major figure in 20th-century painting.[1][3][6][7]

REFERENCES

- [1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bonnard)

- [2](<https://nickybourdillon.wordpress.com/pierre-bonnard/>)
- [3](<https://www.escapeintolife.com/essays/pierre-bonnard-the-intimiste/>)
- [4](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Italian.liberty/posts/24968239389468146/>)
- [5](<https://www.facebook.com/groups/281036280688347/posts/645906687534636/>)
- [6](<https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/pierre-bonnard-1867-1947-the-late-interiors>)
- [7](<https://sitkaartblog.wordpress.com/2017/01/04/pierre-bonnard-prints-and-paintings/>)



30-04 PIERRE BONNARD

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

Pierre Bonnard, *The Last Self Portrait*, 1945, Fondation Bemberg, Toulouse

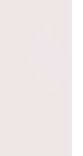
- Pierre Bonnard was a pioneering modernist who influenced much later movements such as **Colour Field painting**, where artists like **Mark Rothko** echoed Bonnard's emphasis on luminous colour and emotional resonance. His bold harmony of contrasting tones and the decorative flatness of his paintings prefigured aspects of Cubism and abstraction.
- Today, Bonnard's works **command high prices at auction**, often reaching **millions of pounds**, reflecting his sustained market value. His paintings are held in major collections worldwide, including the Musée d'Orsay, Tate, MoMA, and the National Gallery of Art.
- Art history now sees Bonnard as a key figure **bridging late 19th-century Post-Impressionism with early 20th-century modernism**, celebrated for transforming ordinary moments into vibrant visual poetry, and continuing to inspire contemporary artists with his unique colour sensibility and intimate subject matter. [1][2][3][5]
- That brings me to the end and thank you once again for your time and attention.

REFERENCES

- [1](<https://gallerythane.com/blogs/news/pierre-bonnard-a-visionary-artist-and-his-timeless-canvases>)
- [2](<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-11-contemporary-artists-channeling-pierre-bonnards-post-impressionist-vision>)
- [3](<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/bonnard-pierre/>)
- [4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bonnard)
- [5](<https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/pierre-bonnard-7-things-you-need-to->

know)

- [6](<https://taeartman.com/pierre-bonnard-%E0%B8%9B%E0%B8%B4%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%A3%E0%B9%8C-%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A3%E0%B9%8C/?lang=en>)
- [7](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/pierre-bonnard-781/eight-essentials-know-about-pierre-bonnard>)
- [8](<https://nga.gov.au/exhibitions/pierre-bonnard/>)
- [9](<https://www.keranews.org/arts-culture/2023-12-12/if-you-like-impressionists-heres-why-you-shouldnt-miss-this-modern-master-at-fort-worths-kimbell>)
- [10](<https://www.michaelwerner.com/news/pierre-bonnard-and-peter-doig>)



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

