

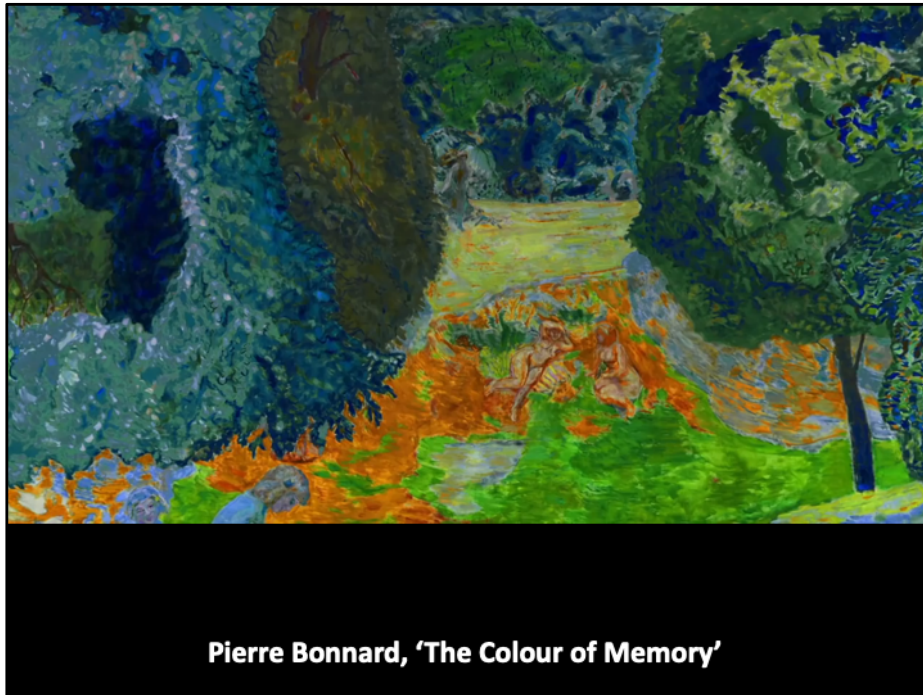
Bio: Bonnard

- **Pierre Bonnard** (3 October 1867 — 23 January 1947, aged 79) was born in Northern France five miles from the centre of Paris. His father was an important official in the Ministry of War. He had a brother Charles, and a sister, Andrée. Pierre had a talent for drawing as well as caricatures and frequently painted in his parents garden. He also had a strong interest in literature and received his baccalaureate in the classic. To satisfy his father he studied law but failed his final exams to become a **barrister in 1888** (some sources say he practised as a lawyer for a few years before becoming an artist). He studied art on the side and attended the **Académie Julian** in Paris. At the Académie he met his future friends and fellow artists, Paul Sérusier, **Maurice Denis**, Gabriel Ibels and Paul Ranson.
- **In 1888**, aged 21, after he failed his law exams he was accepted by the **École des Beaux-Arts**, where he met **Edouard Vuillard** and Ker Xavier Roussel. He also **sold his first commercial work of art**, a design for poster for France-Champagne, which helped him convince his family that he could make a living as an artist. He set up his first studio at on rue Lechapelais, set up an informal group with his friends called Les Nabis (pronounced lay na-BEE, it means ‘the prophets’ in Hebrew and Arabic). Bonnard and Vuillard had a particularly strong personal bond which continued through their lives. They were outspoken supporters of Albert Dreyfus, a

Jewish officer in the French army who was wrongly accused of treason in one of the period's most infamous political scandals, they came to be in direct opposition to Denis and Sérusier, who were on the side of the French army. The Dreyfus Affair ran from 1894 to 1906.

- **In 1891**, aged 24, he met **Toulouse-Lautrec** and began showing his work at the annual exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants. He set up a studio with Denis and Vuillard. The work of Japanese artists became an important influence and was called *Le Nabi le très japonard* ('japonard' was a made up word perhaps a combination of 'japon', Japan and Bonnard). He designed furniture, fabrics, fans and other objects. His poster designs brought him a wider audience and in 1892 he began to produce lithographs.
- **1893**. The intimate domestic scenes, for which he is perhaps best known, often include his wife **Marthe de Méligny** (1869-1942, pronounced 'Mart de Melinee'), who he met in Paris in 1893 crossing a boulevard. 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. Before they married in 1925 he had affairs with Renée Monchaty ('ren-ee mon-shat-ee', the partner of an American painter) and Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle, the wife of a doctor. Monchaty committed suicide shortly after Bonnard and de Méligny married creating a scandal which resulted in them leaving Paris for the south of France.
- In **1894** he began to paint the urban street life of Paris and his first portrait of Marthe.
- In **1895** he became an early participant in the Art Nouveau movement and designed a stained glass window for Tiffany. He held his first one-man exhibition at the Durand-Ruel Gallery.
- **1900-1938**. He started to become well-known and in demand and exhibited at the Salon des Independents and a number of galleries. The art world was changing with dizzying speed during this period and Bonnard developed a unique personal style. In 1908 he made his first long stay in Saint-Tropez. During the First World War he concentrated on nudes and portraits including a number of large compositions and by the end of the War his reputation was firmly established. In **1918** he was selected, along with Renoir, as an honorary President of the Association of Young French Artists. In **1925** following the scandal regarding his young lover's suicide he purchased a villa in Cannes.
- **1939-1947**, his final years. When the Second World War started he fled Paris for the south of France where he stayed until the end of the war. He finished his last painting, *The Almond Tree in Blossom*, a week before his death in his cottage on La Route de Serra Capeou near Le Cannet, on the French Riviera, in 1947.
- He preferred to work from memory, using drawings as a reference, and his paintings are often characterized by a dreamlike quality. He was a quiet man and

his life never suffered from disasters and reversals in circumstances.



Introduction to the exhibition by the BBC

Pierre Bonnard, The Colour of Memory exhibition, Tate Modern, 23 Jan 2019 – 06 May 2019

- "Spanning the years from 1900 until the artist's death in 1947, *Bonnard: The Colour of Memory* deals with landscapes and domestic scenes, portraits and still-lives that zing with colours fresh from the artist's imagination ... Strange crops and viewpoints and vivid colours give them a dreamlike quality, veiled in emotion that is fine-tuned and concentrated in the remembering." (TheArtsDesk.com)
- **'Colours so intense, rich and vivid, you feel fed by them', critic**
- Picasso dismissed Bonnard as "**not really a modern painter**" and called him "**a pot-pourri of indecision**".
- Waldemar Januszczak (art critic *The Times*) picked up Picasso's comment and wrote, "**Too many marks. Too many colours. Too little sense of direction.**"
- Henri Matisse, in response to critics, wrote "**I maintain that Bonnard is a great artist for our time and, naturally, for posterity.**"
- Bonnard wrote, "**I go and look. I take notes. Then I go home. And before I start painting, I reflect, I dream.**"

References

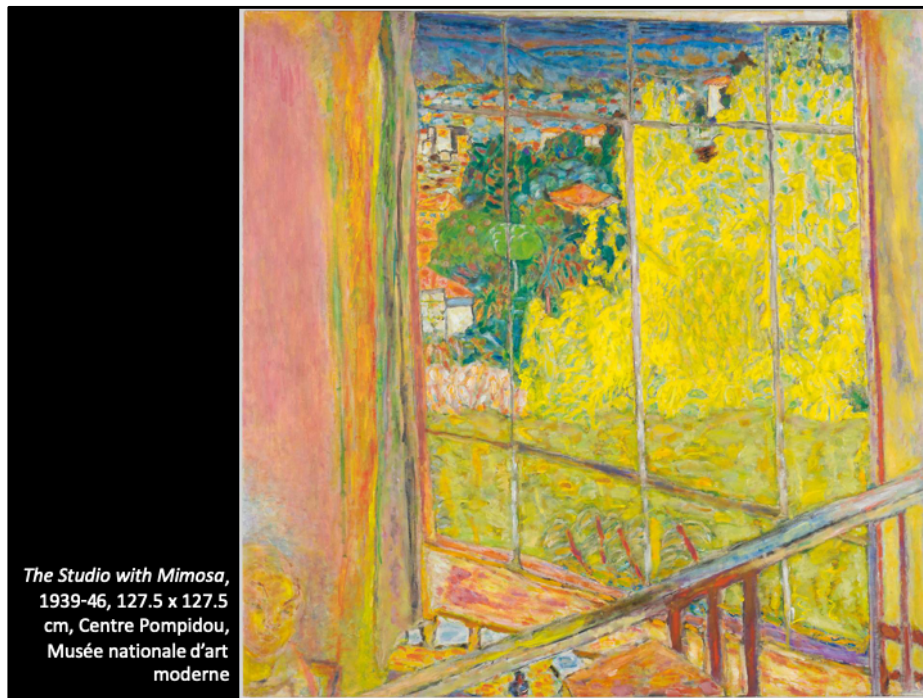
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bonnard
- <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20190201-the-man-who-painted-moods>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jan/01/pierre-bonnard-the-painter-with-the-golden-touch-archive-1966>
- <https://theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/pierre-bonnard-colour-memory-review-tate-modern-plenty-empty>
- <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2019/01/was-pierre-bonnard-any-good/>



Pierre Bonnard smoking a pipe in the garden of Grand-Lemps around 1906

Pierre Bonnard, *Pierre Bonnard smoking a pipe in the garden of Grand-Lemps* around 1906, albumen paper test from a negative on gelatin silver bromide film, 6.5 x 9.0 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- So, the question hanging over Bonnard is 'Was he a second-rate Impressionist or a leading twentieth-century artist?'

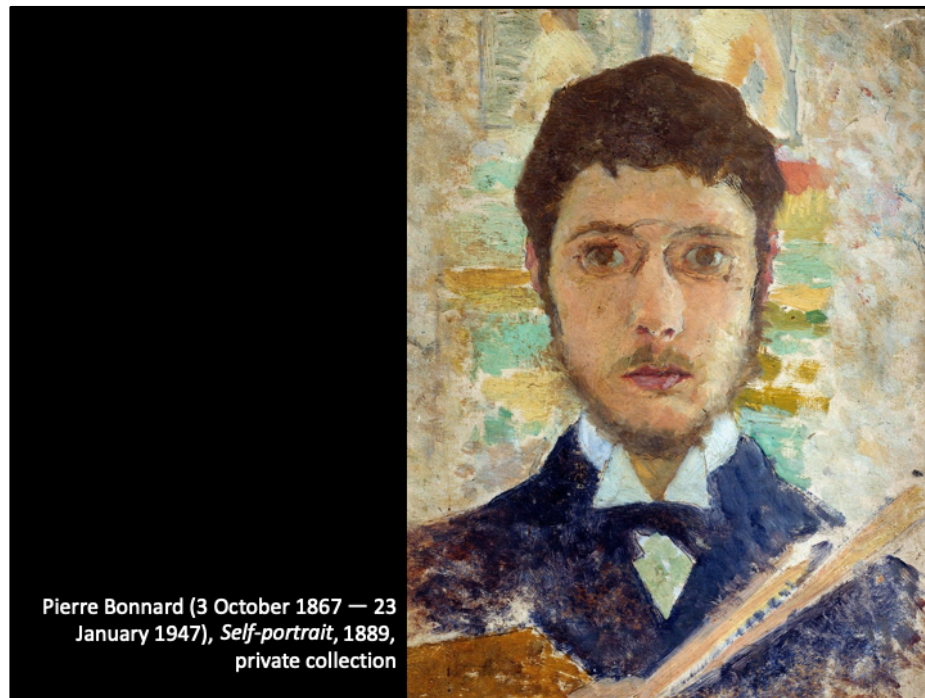


The Studio with Mimosa, 1939-46, 127.5 x 127.5 cm, Centre Pompidou, Musée nationale d'art moderne

- This is a late painting shown at the end of the exhibition. Bonnard once said, “**One cannot have too much yellow.**” The painting enables us to examine Picasso’s comment more closely and compare it with something Bonnard wrote.
- Pablo Picasso wrote about Bonnard, “*That’s not painting, what he does. He never looks 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 colour 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 power, taking over from nature**, not expecting her to supply you with information and good advice.*”
- Bonnard wrote, “*I tried to paint a bouquet of roses directly, scrupulously, I was*

*absorbed by the details. Then I realized that I was floundering. I had **lost my original thought** and couldn't get back to it again; I couldn't find what it was that has captivated me, my starting point. **Through captivation or inspiration, a painter achieves universality.** It's captivation that tells him the 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."*

- It seems that Picasso and Bonnard both agree that one cannot copy nature but they both work in very different ways. Picasso seizes power and takes over from nature, Bonnard works slowly and tentatively sometimes over many years building on his initial inspiration. Is there room for both approaches? Doesn't the difference between Picasso and Bonnard reflect the variety of human experience?

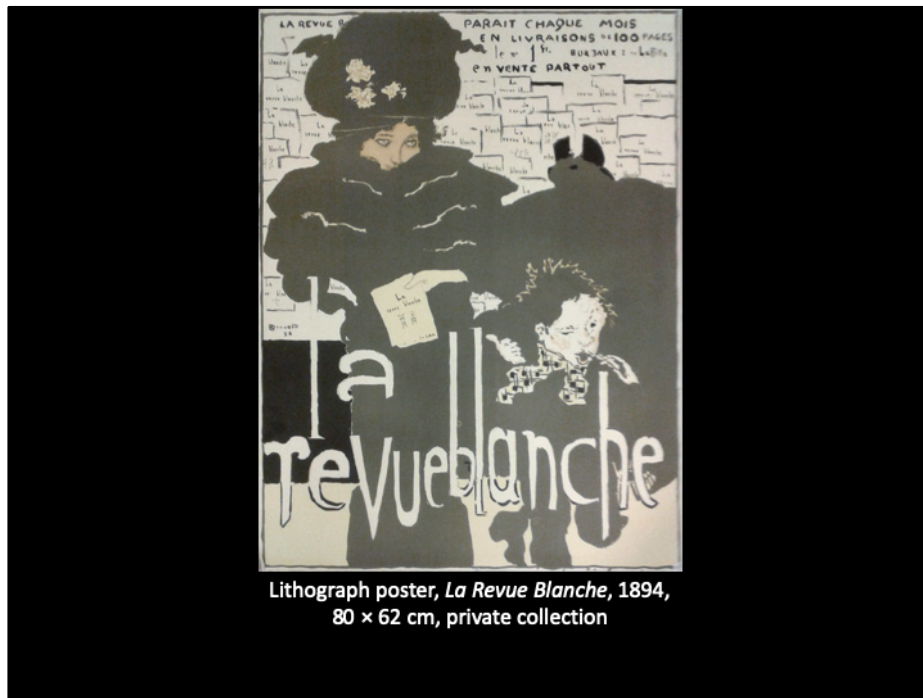


Pierre Bonnard (3 October 1867 — 23 January 1947), *Self-portrait*, 1889, private collection

Pierre Bonnard (3 October 1867 — 23 January 1947), *Self-portrait*, 1889, private collection

- Let us find out a little more about the artist. The exhibition starts with the mature Bonnard but we will go back to the beginning.
- **Pierre Bonnard** (3 October 1867 — 23 January 1947, aged 79) was born in Northern France and his father was an important official in the Ministry of War. He had a brother Charles, and a sister, Andrée. Pierre had a talent for drawing as well as caricatures and frequently painted in his parents garden. He also had a strong interest in literature and received his baccalaureate in the classic. To satisfy his father he studied law and briefly became a barrister in 1888. He studied art on the side and attended the Académie Julian in Paris. At the Académie he met his future friends and fellow artists, Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, Gabriel Ibels and Paul Ranson.
- **In 1888**, aged 21, Bonnard was accepted by the École des Beaux-Arts, where he met Edouard Vuillard and Ker Xavier Roussel. He also sold his first commercial work of art, a design for poster for France-Champagne, which helped him convince his family that he could make a living as an artist. He set up his first studio at on rue Lechapelais and began his career as an artist.

- At this point Bonnard was a member of the **Nabis** and he was called 'le Nabi très japonard' ('the very Japanese Nabi').



Lithograph poster, *La Revue Blanche*, 1894, 80 × 62 cm, private collection, printed in four colours

“The magazine appears every month and consists of 100 pages ... for sale everywhere”.

- **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 lay na-BEE, it means ‘the prophets’ in Hebrew and Arabic). Most of them studied at the Académie Julian in Paris.

KEY WORD: LES NABIS

- French artists 1888 to 1900
- Includes Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, and Édouard Vuillard
- Admired Paul Gauguin and Paul Cézanne
- Believed art is not a depiction of nature but a synthesis of metaphors and symbols

Woman with a Dog, 1891,
40.6 × 32.4 cm, Clark Art
Institute

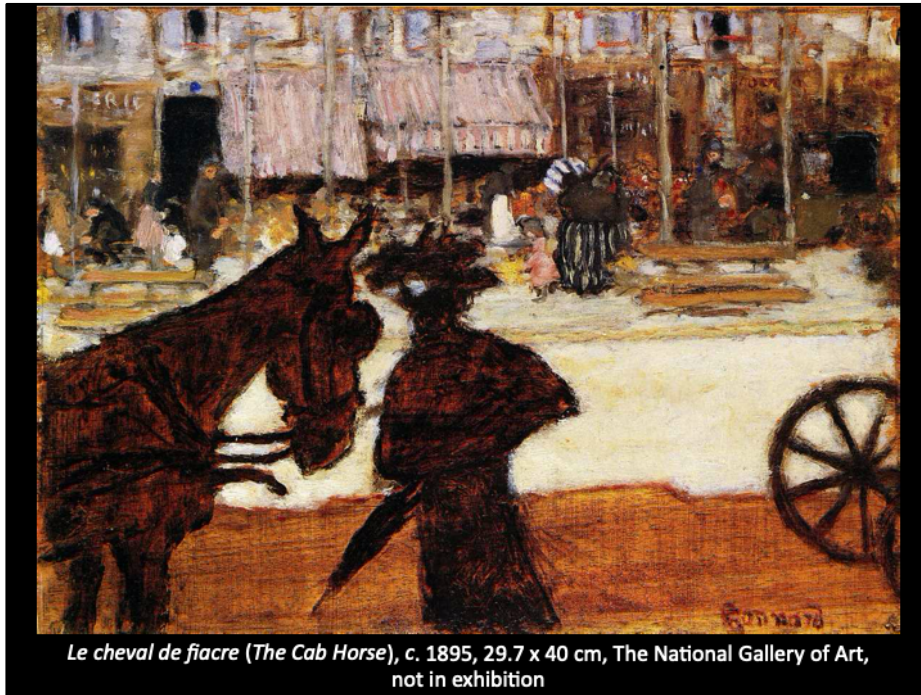


Woman with a Dog, 1891, 40.6 × 32.4 cm, Clark Art Institute, Massachusetts

- The chequered blouse, the unusual perspective with elements cut-off and the flat planes were inspired by Japanese prints.
- Bonnard received his license to practice law in 1888 but he failed in the examination for entering the official registry of lawyers so art was his only option. After the summer holidays, he joined with his friends from the Academy Julien to form **Les Nabis**, an informal group of artists with different styles and philosophies but common artistic ambitions. He sold enough of his work to convince his family that he could make a career of being artist.
- At the time, Bonnard, as he later wrote, was entirely unaware of the impressionist painters, or of Gauguin and other new painters. In 1890 **Maurice Denis**, at age twenty, formalized the doctrine: "**a painting was simply 'a surface plane covered with colours assembled in a certain order.'**"
- Who were the Nabis? **Les Nabis** (French pronunciation 'le nabi') was a group of young French artists active in Paris from **1888 until 1900**, who played a large part in the transition from impressionism and academic art to abstract art, symbolism and the other early movements of modernism. The members included Pierre

Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Paul Ranson, Édouard Vuillard, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Félix Vallotton, and Paul Sérusier. Most were students at the Académie Julian in Paris in the late 1880s. The artists shared a common admiration for Paul Gauguin and Paul Cézanne and a determination to renew the art of painting but varied greatly in their individual style. They believed that a work of art was not a depiction of nature, but a synthesis of metaphors and symbols created by the artist.

- **in 1891**, three of the Nabis, **Pierre Bonnard**, **Édouard Vuillard** and **Maurice Denis**, took a studio at 28 rue Pigalle in Paris.
- The Nabis throughout their existence were a sort of **half-serious semi-secret society**, who used humorous nicknames and a private vocabulary.
- The graphic art of Japan, known as Japonism, particularly woodblock prints, was an important influence on the Nabis. The style was popularized in France by the art dealer Siegfried Bing, who travelled to Japan to collect prints by Hokusai and other Japanese artists.
- **Pierre Bonnard** was particularly **influenced by the Japanese style**; his nickname among the Nabis was "**Le plus japonard**" ('the most Japanese'). At this time his models included his sister Andrée and his cousin Berthe Schaefer.
- **In 1900, the artists held their final exhibition**, and went their separate ways.
- Some of the Nabis had highly religious, philosophical or mystical approaches to their paintings, but Bonnard remained more cheerful and un-ideological. One said, "**Pierre Bonnard was the humourist 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". Although, when Bonnard joined the group, he was not aware of Paul Gauguin he later became a major influence along with Paul Cézanne and the prints of Hokusai and other Japanese artists. They rejected the materialism of the new industrial age, and admired the poetry of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Edgar Allan Poe. They placed themselves in opposition to the current of naturalism expressed in the paintings of Courbet and Manet and the literature of Émile Zola. The Nabis took their name from the Arabic word *nabi*, or prophet, and the similar word in Hebrew, *nebiim*,^[a] The term was coined in 1888 by the linguist Auguste Cazalis, who drew a parallel between the way these painters aimed to revitalize painting (as *prophets of modern art*) and the way the ancient prophets had rejuvenated Israel.



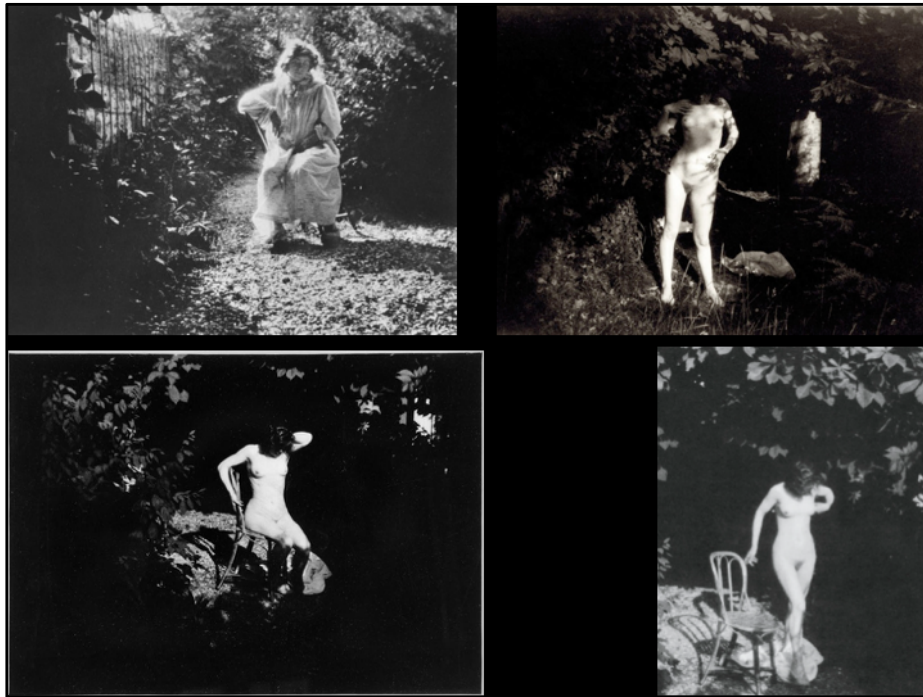
Le cheval de fiacre (The Cab Horse), c. 1895, 29.7 x 40 cm, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection, not in exhibition

- Early in his career Bonnard adopted the lifelong practice of taking an early morning walk with his sketchpad. The sketches have the radical perspectives and flat, linear areas of Japanese ukiyo-e prints. He produced over a hundred paintings and prints during the 1890s of the bustling streets of Paris.
- **1893.** On a winter's day in 1893 Bonnard was crossing a boulevard in Paris when he met Marthe Boursin. She said, **"My name is Marthe de Meligny, I work making artificial flowers. I am an orphan. I am sixteen years old. And you?"**
- The intimate domestic scenes, for which he is perhaps best known, often include his wife Marthe de Méligny (1869-1942, pronounced 'Mart de Melinee'). Marthe's real name was Maria Boursin but she broke off contact with her poor family before moving to Paris and adopted a more cultured name. She was also 24 when they first met not 16. 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.
- She was timid and birdlike and was not popular among his friends. In 1918

Bonnard began an affair with a tall, blonde model named Renée Monchaty; but he never left Marthe and even painted the two women together. Finally in 1925, after living together for 30 years, he finally married Marthe; a month later Renée killed herself. Marthe learned to paint and exhibited her work between 1921 and 1929.

References

- <https://nonsite.org/article/bonnards-sidewalk-theater>



Marthe de Méligny (1869-1942), photographs by Pierre Bonnard, c. 1900-01 (Room 1)

Room 2 (photos and two paintings)

Mirror Above a Washstand, 1908

In the Bathroom, 1907

- The Tate exhibition started with a series of small intimate photographs taken by Bonnard of his wife Marthe. Marthe became his principal subject for the rest of his life.
- In the late 1890s Bonnard became a keen amateur photographer. Approximately 200 photographs survive and there are mostly photos of his friends in the countryside. He continued to sketch Parisian street life rather than take photographs which would have been an easy and rapid way of recording the scenes.
- 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 Méligny** (1869-1942, pronounced 'Mart de Melinee').

- “At the beginning of the exhibition, we are encouraged to think of Bonnard’s as an essentially photographic way of seeing. Tiny prints of nude women, or of family groups, with figures sometimes sharp and sometimes blurred with movement, are snapshots even when posed. They coincide with the sudden advent of amateur photography, made possible in 1895 when Kodak launched a handheld camera that was not only easy to carry about, but that supported home printing once the negatives had been processed. Figures tumble towards the camera, sometimes at the edges of a frame, sometimes aware that they are being photographed, at other times not, qualities that find their way into Bonnard’s paintings, too.”
(TheArtsDesk.com)

Tate Booklet

- Defying convention, Pierre Bonnard and Marthe de M ligny lived as a couple for thirty years before marrying in 1925, These paintings from the first years of the twentieth century capture their intimate world.
- In 1900 they had photographed each other naked in a summer garden, resembling a modern Adam and Eve. These informal snaps inspired some of Bonnard's compositions. More generally, photography helped him to move away from the conventional poses of artists' models.
- His paintings of de M ligny capture incidental moments in the day, especially as she bathed and dressed. She sought treatment at spa towns and regularly took baths as a remedy for various illnesses. From glimpses of her daily activities, Bonnard constructed an idealised vision of their life together that remained a key element of his work.



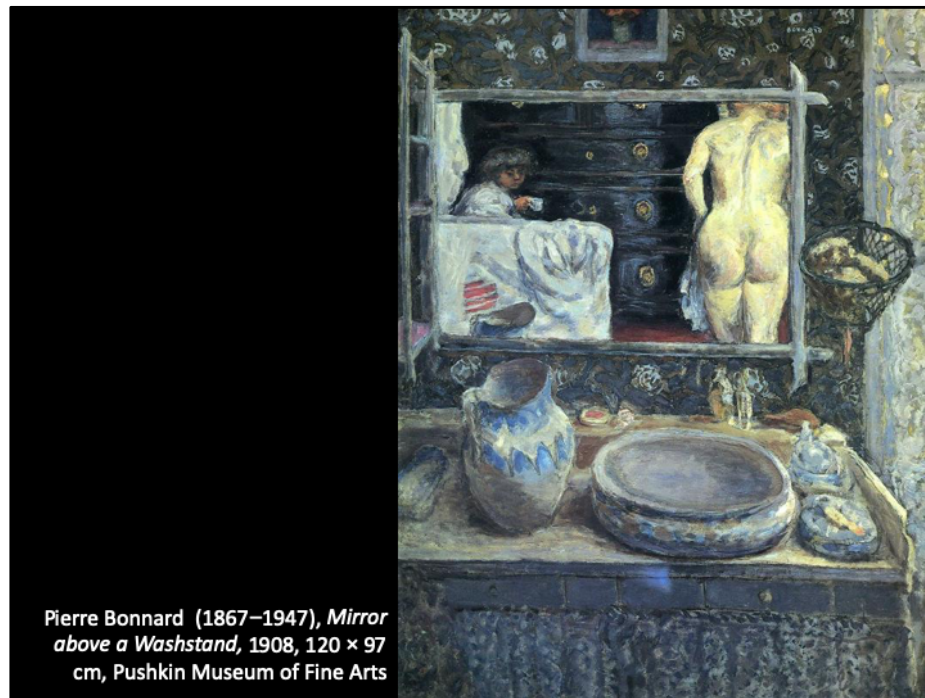
Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), *Man and Woman*, 1900, 115.0 x 72.3 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- The woman has a strong resemblance to Marthe and we see her playing with her cats while Bonnard undresses. She became the principal subject of his work. Occasionally we see the two of them together but this is the only painting in which he shows himself full length and naked. The screen divides the picture into two like a religious diptych.
- Japanese *Ukiyo-e* prints often have a diptych or triptych structure in order to illustrate two or three strands of a narrative. In this case the two sides are treated differently, Marthe is small and painted delicately, especially her skin tones and the image is balanced vertically by the bed and the picture on the wall. The right panel is taken up by the large figure of Bonnard. Although the strong division can indicate separation, as is often the case with Edvard Munch, in this case it unites and creates an anticipatory stillness. For Bonnard painting was not so much an act of depicting a scene as discovering relationships and moods. Through contemplation and revision he discovers a universal moment of anticipation that bonds a man and a woman, the title of the piece.

Room 1 (3 paintings including *Man and Woman*)

Tate Booklet

- The paintings of Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) create a remarkable sense of intimacy. Many of them allow glimpses into a **private world, depicting the domestic life** that Bonnard shared with his companion, Marthe de Méligny.
- Although these works lovingly record the details of daily life, **they do not simply transcribe what the artist saw**. An initial moment of inspiration would be remembered, reflected upon, and reimagined as he composed his paintings in the studio. Rarely satisfied with his first effort, he often worked on each canvas over several months or even years.
- As Bonnard said, **'I come back... I do not leave it. let myself become absorbed by the object itself'**.
- Beginning around 1900, this exhibition focuses on his mature work, as he developed a highly individual command of colour. Organised chronologically, it explores the presence of time and memory in Bonnard's sensuous images of everyday life."

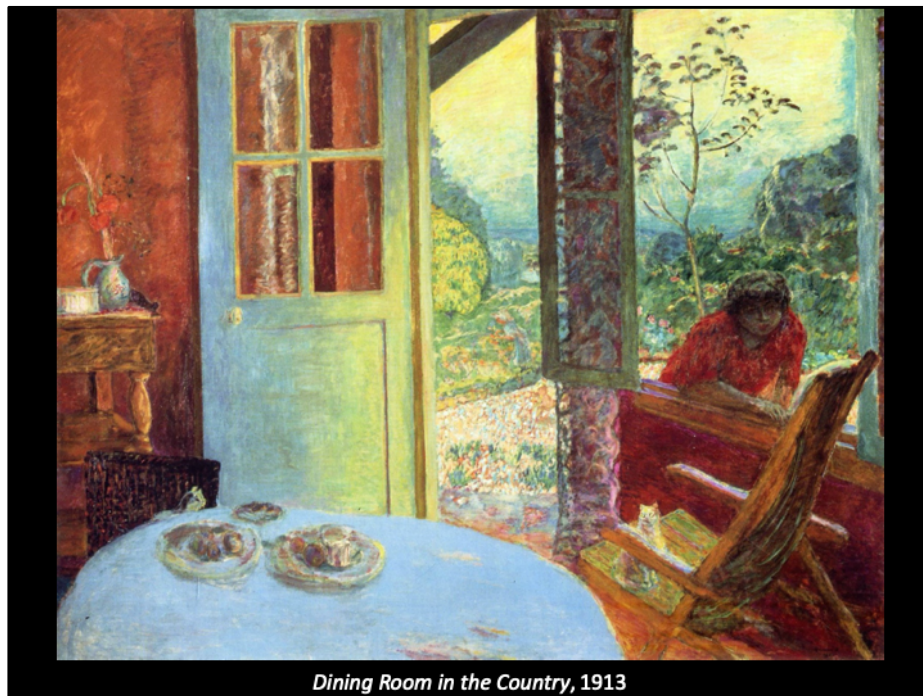


Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Mirror above a Washstand*, 1908, 120 × 97 cm, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts (Room 2)

- In 1907-1908 Bonnard worked on a **series of paintings usually showing the same interior with a nude and a mirror over a washstand**. The interior and objects painted on the canvas are found in the space "**behind the looking glass**", on the one hand, and the real world in which the spectator is standing, on the other. The painting is a still-life of a washstand with its conventional elements but the mirror opens up a looking-glass world in which we see his partner Marthe drinking coffee while a model poses for him.
- It is not only the compositional idiosyncrasies of the camera that interest Bonnard, but the act of mediated looking. *Mirror Above a Washstand*, 1908, was painted some years before the onset of his consuming interest in colour, and in a palette of greys and blues he creates a picture within a picture, the nude subject of the painting seen reflected in a mirror, her figure cropped in a way that recalls a view through a lens. He wrote on the back 'Do not varnish' as the mat tone was an important element.
- As a young man, Bonnard established his reputation as a painter of decorative schemes, producing large-format panels designed as murals. As he grew older, the

commissions flooded in.

- In June and July 1909, Bonnard made his first extended trip to **Saint-Tropez**, at the invitation of the painter Henri Manguin, a friend of Signac, Cross and Matisse. In a letter to his mother, he described how he had an “*Arabian Nights* experience”, dazzled by “**the sea, yellow walls, and reflections as colourful as the lights themselves**”. The hedonistic ambience of the French Riviera, reminiscent of the Classical ideal of Arcadia, was a paradise for painters. Bonnard returned there almost every year, renting villas in Grasse, Saint-Tropez, Cannes and Le Cannet, before **buying a little house which he called “Le Bosquet”, located above Le Cannet, with a panoramic vista of the bay.**



Dining Room in the Country, 1913 (Room 3)

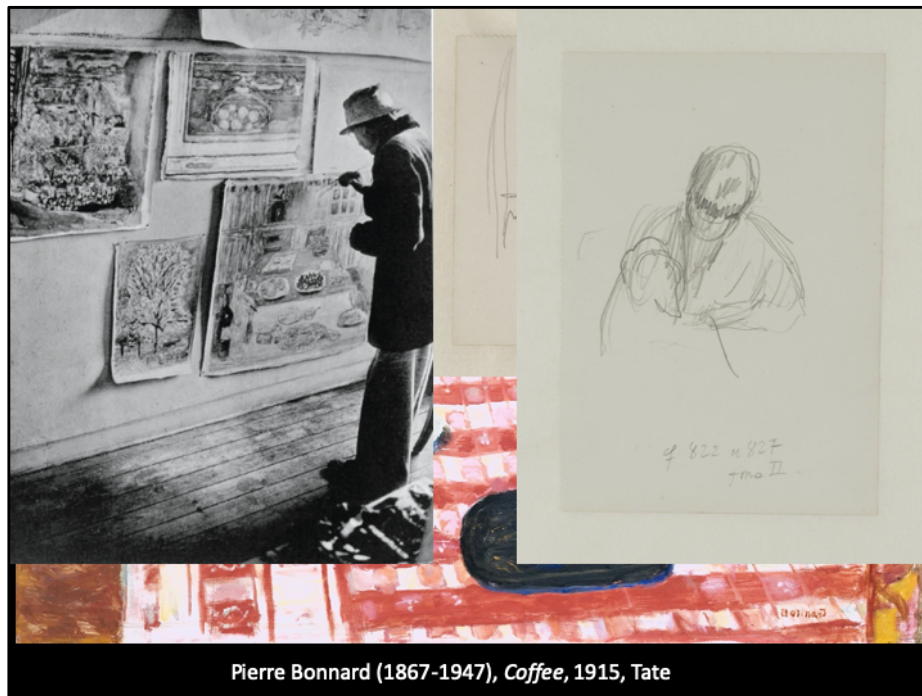
- 'I leave it... I come back... I do not let myself become absorbed by the object itself'.
- Bonnard bought his first car in 1911 and made trips to explore the countryside around Paris.
- After several trips to Normandy, Bonnard bought a little house on stilts in Vernonnet in the Seine valley in August 1912. He christened this hideaway nestling between the sky and river "Ma Roulotte" (My Caravan) and its panoramic view disappearing into the distance fired his imagination. While staying there he visited Monet at Giverny, a short distance away. Their discussions led him to break away from Naturalism and develop a poetic interpretation of nature.

Artstack

- 'Pierre Bonnard (3 October 1867 - 23 January 1947) was a French painter and printmaker, as well as a founding member of the Post-Impressionist group of avant-garde painters Les Nabis. 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 Meligny. Bonnard has been described as "**the most thoroughly idiosyncratic of all the great twentieth-century painters**", and the unusual vantage points of his compositions rely less on traditional modes of pictorial structure than voluptuous colour, poetic allusions and visual wit. Identified as a late practitioner of Impressionism in the early 20th century, Bonnard has since been recognized for his unique use of colour and his complex imagery. "**It's not just the colours that radiate in a Bonnard**", writes Roberta Smith, "**there's also the heat of mixed emotions, rubbed into smoothness, shrouded in chromatic veils and intensified by unexpected spatial conundrums and by elusive, uneasy figures.**"

- "**Monet observed scenes obsessively**, painting them at different points in the day and year to record the effects of changing light. Bonnard also returned to favourite subjects, particularly the view from the dining room onto the garden of his Normandy holiday home. But **Bonnard** was not looking for lengthening shadows, or colours mixed in sunlight and rain, but rather **the recollection of these things, tempered by the melancholy of time lost.**" (TheArtsDesk.com)
- https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/archives/exhibitions-archives/article/pierre-bonnard-41180.html?S=&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=252&cHash=a58e9c226e&print=1&no_cache=1&



Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), *Coffee*, 1915, Tate (Room 3)

Three sketches for *Coffee*

Bonnard's working practise, photo

- Around 1912 Bonnard altered direction and started to explore the possibilities of colour.
- Bonnard wrote, '**The presence of the object ... is a hindrance for the painter when he is painting.**'

Room 3

- **Whimsy with taste.** This is *Coffee* by the French painter Pierre Bonnard and it was painted in 1915. The work contains a number of 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.

- **Working methods.** 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 have all my subjects to hand. I go back and look at them. 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.
- **Marthe de Mélny.** The woman on the left is his wife Marthe ('Mart') de Mélny who he met 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.

Room 3

Tate booklet

- Around 1912, when he was already **in his mid-forties, Bonnard altered the direction of his painting.** His early success in the 1890s had been with decorative and fashionable work. Now he began to explore the possibilities of colour in an entirely individual way. Other artists of his generation, such as Henri Matisse, **earned the nickname 'fauves' (wild beasts)** for their use of raw colour. Bonnard took up the challenge, enriching his colour combinations.
- At the same time, he focused increasingly on landscape. Bonnard bought his first car in 1911 and made trips to explore the countryside around Paris. He regularly spent extended periods in southern France, and his paintings were infused with the powerful light that he experienced there. His mother's home at Le Grand-Lemps in the Dauphiné, south-east France, was another favourite location. In 1912 he bought a small house at Vernonnet in Normandy which he called Ma Roulotte

(My Caravan). The house and its surroundings immediately became subjects for his work.



A Village in Ruins Near Ham, 1917, painted in response to the Somme and the First World War.

- The First World War began in August 1914. In a matter of weeks, German forces reached the river Marne, within 30 miles of Paris. Bonnard and de Méligny were living in St-Germain-en-Laye, to the west of the city. The German advance brought the conflict within earshot.
- At 46 years old, Bonnard was still eligible to serve in the French army, but continued to focus on his art. Although for the most part he painted his familiar subjects, a number of the works in this room show that he was not oblivious to the war.
- **A Village in Ruins near Ham** 1917 records the legacy of the terrible struggle along the Somme.
- His “completely unexpected” response to the Battle of the Somme, made during an artists’ official mission to the Western Front to record the terrible events.
- This wartime painting vividly reveals how Bonnard responded to contemporary events. It depicts the **ruins of a village on the river Somme**, the scene of an extended battle during 1916. The destruction makes the location unrecognisable. Between a seated, despairing figure on the left and a cluster of French troops to

the right, a Red Cross vehicle can be made out. The **watery technique here reflects the desolation** that Bonnard experienced on visiting the war zone in May 1917. The painting, along with works by other artists who toured the area, was immediately acquired by the French state.



Summer, 1917, 260 x 340 cm, Fondation Marguerite et Aimé Maeght, Saint-Paul-France

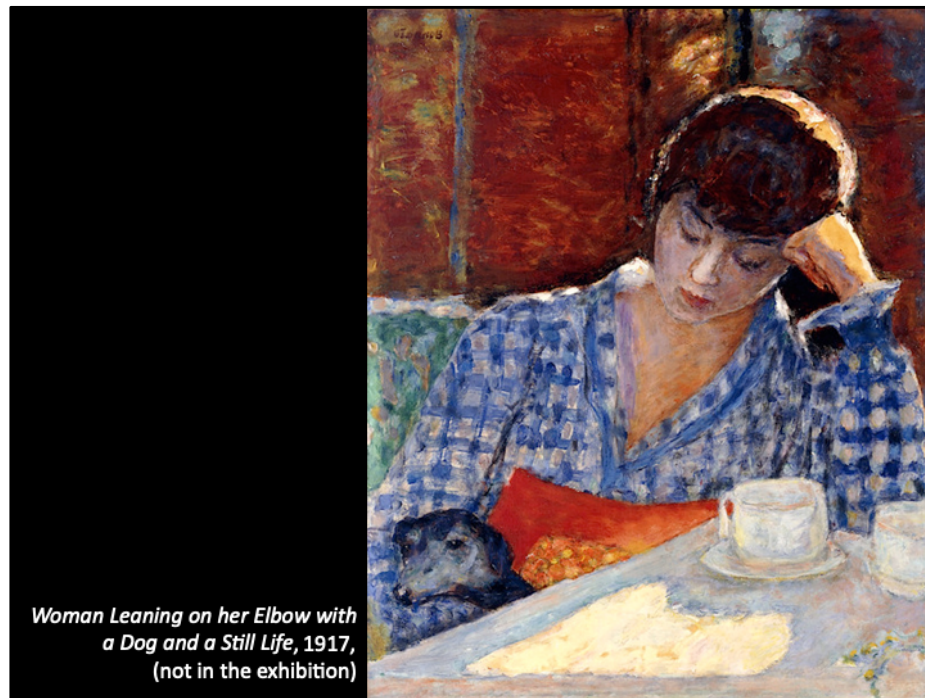
- Made around the same time, ***Summer*** 1917 may offer a vision of the peace that all hoped was to come. Critics of the time avoided the more sombre aspects of Bonnard's paintings, describing him as a 'painter of happiness.' **Bonnard later noted, 'he who sings is not always happy.'** Bonnard was to live through two world wars, the death of his mother, the suicide of his mistress and the long-term illness and subsequent death of his wife Marthe. The consequence of these events are shown in the melancholic self-portraits of the artist.
- This vast painting was begun in 1917, shortly after the artist had returned from painting the devastation at the Somme. Its vision of a pastoral paradise could not seem further removed from the harsh realities of war; Bonnard spoke of the painting as "the only possible refuge".
- The first thing you notice about it is the massed blocks of vivid, contrasting colours. On closer inspection, these blocks dissolve into a variety of hues – from lilac to ultramarine, yellow ochre to burnt umber – and the painting appears to dance before your eyes. In an early instance of a technique Bonnard would frequently use in his later work, the figures are depicted in virtually the same tones as their

surroundings, as though to convey their harmony with the world around them.

- Bonnard worked on **Summer** immediately after visiting the war zone shown in **A Village in Ruins near Ham**, displayed next to it. The contrast between the paintings is telling. In place of a ruined landscape and regimented or damaged bodies, Bonnard imagines a lush paradise of safety and ease. It may express a longing for peace to replace the destruction of war. The painting was commissioned by his Swiss friends, the Hahnlosers. Due to a miscalculation, however, it was too large for their house.

References

- <https://www.1843magazine.com/culture/look-closer/the-colourful-life-of-pierre-bonnard>



Femme accoudée ('Woman Leaning') or Woman Leaning on her Elbow with a Dog and a Still Life, 1917, (not in the exhibition)

- The woman is Marthe. Between 1915 and 1925 Bonnard had affairs with two women—**Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle** (c. 1890-1927) and **Renée Monchaty** (1900-1925). At the same time he continued to live with his long-term partner **Marthe de Méligny** (1869-1942).



Nude Crouching in the Tub, 1918, 85 × 74 cm, Musée d'Orsay (Room 5)

- Although **Marthe, Bonnard's mistress then wife**, was omnipresent in his paintings since they met in 1893, she did not hold the painter's exclusive attention. Nevertheless, she is often his model as in *Nude Crouching in the Bathtub*.
- "One unfolding aspect of Bonnard's painting is how photography informed his compositions. Although **the 200 or so amateur photographs** he took during his lifetime is a modest number in comparison to that of contemporaries such as Edouard Vuillard, who left behind over 2,000 photographs, it is thanks to these images that he was able to depict Marthe in situations seemingly **so natural and unposed**. Life models would struggle to hold such incidental positions for the time it would take an artist to translate them ... The production of the first **Pocket Kodak camera in 1895** had stimulated a host of amateur photographers such as Bonnard – who had his **own 1896 version** of the same Kodak model – to experiment with photography as an art form in its own right." (Country Life)
- **Marthe suffered from an illness throughout her life and frequent bathing brought relief.** Here we see her engaged in an intimate moment, she is focused on the bathing, her head down, seemingly unaware of the photographer. Bonnard has raised the viewpoint and changed the pose to include a jug she is pouring into the

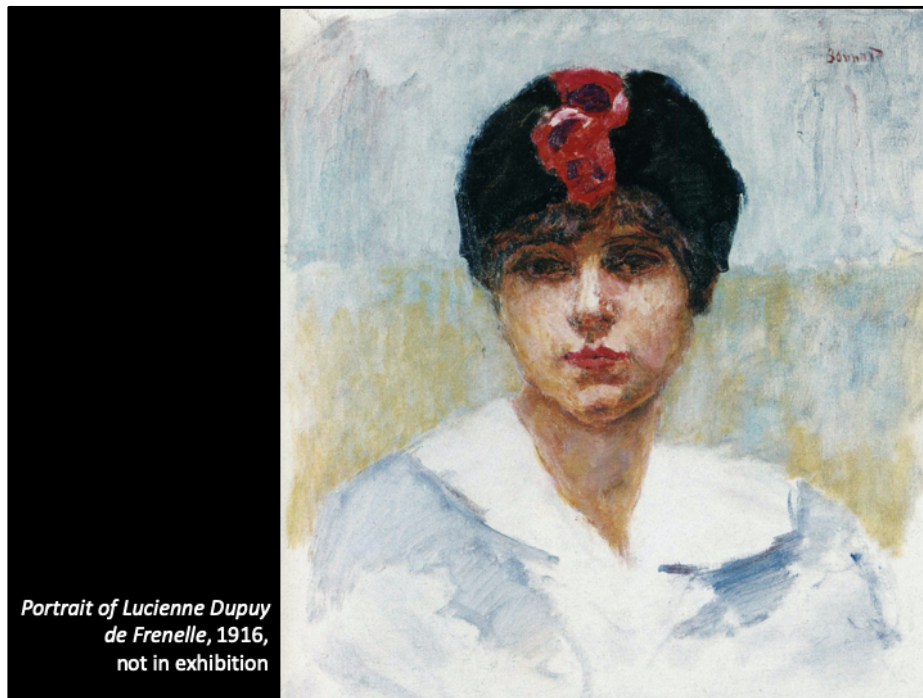
tub. There is a dreamlike quality and the ritual has been transformed into something sensual and perhaps melancholic.

- After 1920 Bonnard gave up photography and turned to drawing instead.
- Bonnard wrote: **“Poor Marthe has become completely misanthropic. She no longer wants to see anyone, not even her old friends, and we are condemned to absolute solitude.”**
- “If I wrote to you every time I think about you, our past, painting, etc. you would have enough letters to fill a library”, Vuillard wrote in his last letter to Bonnard dated 4 May 1940”.
- United by common tastes and the same curiosity, Bonnard and Vuillard shared their discoveries and experimentations, their freedom and independence, but also their friends, exhibitions and literature. Their correspondence between 1891 and 1940 reflects this “fraternal friendship”. The pair met at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, before taking open classes at the Académie Julian, like Denis, Ranson, Roussel, Ibels and Piot before them, all of whom were passionate about new discoveries, Symbolist literature, theatre and Wagner's music. When this moment of emulation came to an end, their friendship and the contributions of each individual remained. Bonnard and Vuillard continued to visit one another and remained in touch until the death of the latter in 1940, which devastated Bonnard.

References

How Pierre Bonnard used photography to help him paint pictures that would once have been near-impossible, see

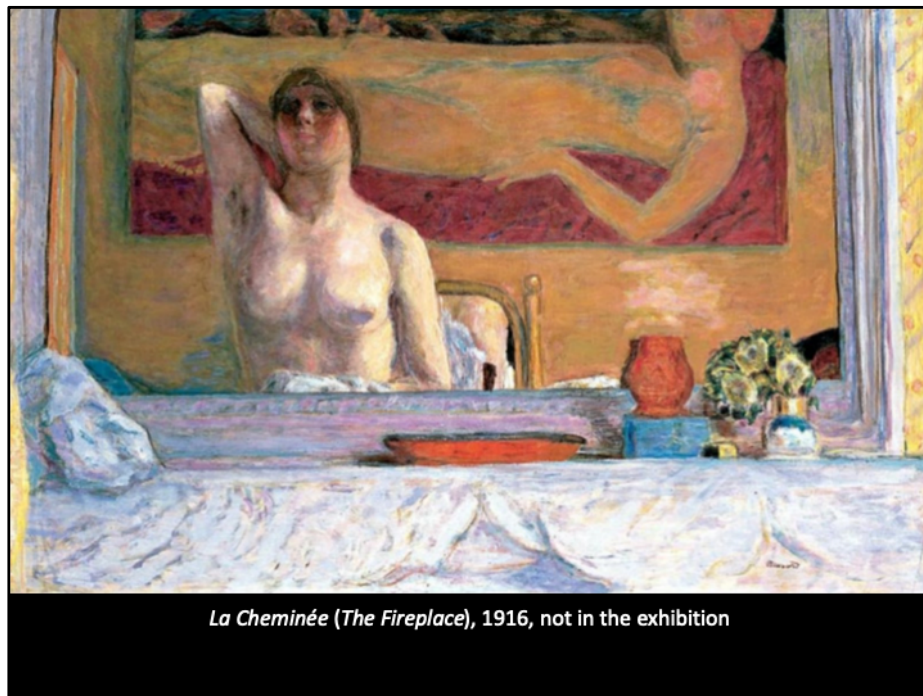
- <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/articles/focus-pierre-bonnard-used-photography-help-paint-pictures-near-impossible-192974>



*Portrait of Lucienne Dupuy
de Frenelle, 1916,
not in exhibition*

Portrait of Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle, 1916, not in exhibition

- Bonnard had a **light-hearted fling with Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle**. She was an irresistible, round-headed, bob-haired beauty whom Bonnard **met around 1915**.



La Cheminée (The Fireplace), 1916, not in the exhibition

- **This is another painting of Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle. Their affair ended around 1918**, but they remained friends. In *La Cheminée (The Fireplace)* she stands naked before a fireplace mirror, one hand raised behind her head. A horizontal nude painting by Bonnard's friend **Maurice Denis** is reflected behind Lucienne, whose back is in turn reflected in a smaller mirror. The brown hair in the lower right corner of the mirror is believed to be Marthe's head. The painting by Denis is now lost.
- The war years were a giddy, frenetic time: Bonnard was showing at the best galleries and was at the peak of his game when Marthe, Lucienne, and Renée were all part of his life.
- Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle was the wife of a doctor and it has been suggested that Bonnard may have been the father of her second son.
- Note that some sources say the woman is Renée Monchaty but Monchaty did not have blond hair.

References

- <https://paintersonpaintings.com/tony-robbin-on-bonnards-bathers/>



Young Women in the Garden, 1921-3/1945-6, private collection

Young Women in the Garden, 1921-3/1945-6, private collection

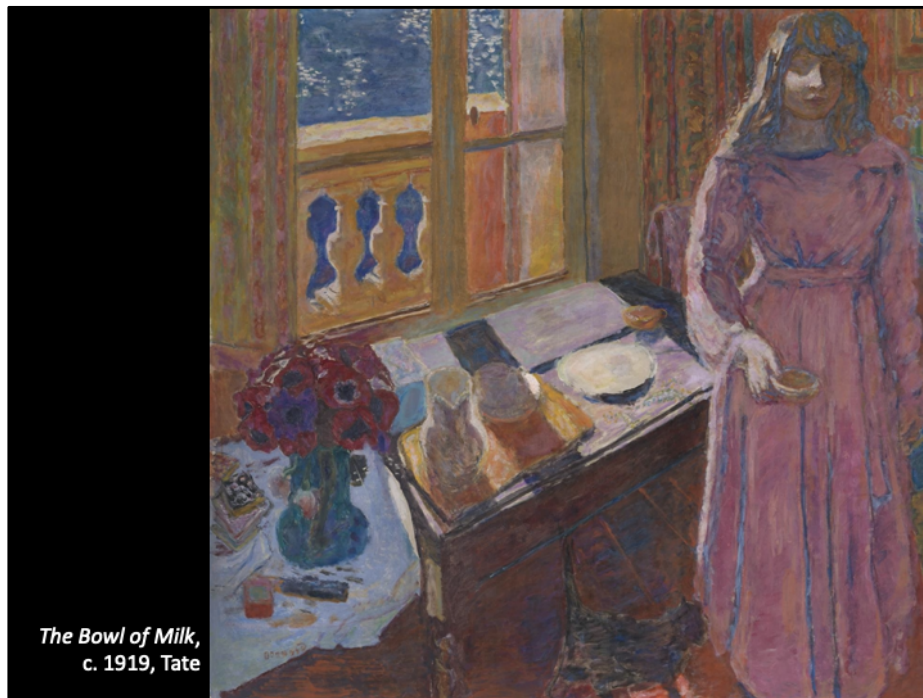
- Also, in the same room is *Young Woman in the Garden*, a work that he painted in 1921-23 and then returned to in 1945-46, just a couple of years before he died and three years after Marthe had died.
- **Facing us is Renée Monchaty** (1900-1925), a tall blonde model that he met in 1918. He began an affair with her but never left **Marthe, who is marginalised** at the right edge of the painting. In 1925 Bonnard married Marthe and a month **later Renée killed herself**. The ensuing scandal led to Bonnard and Marthe fleeing Paris and the **media-frenzy** to the south of France, abandoning the house in Saint Germain for ever. **The 'Villa Bosquet', just outside Cannes, is where they would remain for the rest of their lives**. Isolated amongst the olive groves it was the **perfect retreat**. The 'villa' wasn't as grand as it sounded, but at least it had a decent bathroom.
- It is not clear why Bonnard returned to this painting in 1945. Perhaps he was trying to lay old ghosts to rest. Following their marriage and Renée's suicide Marthe insisted he destroy all his pictures of Renée but this one survived. He returned to it in 1945 and submitted it to the 1946 Paris Salon. He travelled to Paris from the south of France to attend as he had done every year since he fled with Marthe in

1925. This was the last time he was to attend. In the bottom right corner of the painting, at first glance unnoticed, is Marthe looking over the back of a chair at her rival.

- Bonnard met **Renée Monchaty (1900-1925)**, an aspiring artist in her twenties when he had been living with Marthe for twenty years. She became his model and mistress. He painted more than 20 portraits of her.
- She was sometimes called Chaty, a painter, model, and younger friend of Marthe and partner of the American painter Harry Lachman (1886-1975). Curators and authors differ on when it started, but all seem to agree that Bonnard was truly in love. Bonnard was in his fifties (Marthe too) when he met Renée, a beauty in her early twenties. They were both on the rebound: **Renée from a serious relationship with Harry Lachman**, and Bonnard from a **light-hearted fling with Lucienne Dupuy de Frenelle**.
- It seems that all of that was acceptable to Marthe until **Bonnard took a trip to Rome in 1921 with Renée**, leaving Marthe behind. Timothy Hyman writes that the purpose of the trip was to meet Renée's parents, to ask their permission to marry. Marthe, ill, without money of her own or a strong connection to her family, and certainly without the protection of palimony laws in France at that time, dramatically, yet believably, **threatened to kill herself** if Bonnard abandoned her. As a result he **gave up Renée**, and to reassure her, married Marthe in August, 1925. A few weeks later, it was Renée who killed herself, perhaps in her bed with a revolver, or as some authors have it, perhaps in her bath. [There is no fully researched biography of Bonnard, and many facts are murky.]
- Thereafter, images of the bather stand for both Marthe and Renée, and perhaps also for Lucienne who died of an illness in May, 1927. The images are phantoms, avatars for women who are not there: two because they are dead, and the other because she was increasingly withdrawn into her illness, which took a massive toll on her personally. The restricted, ghostlike, almost transparent appearance of the bathers, blocked from the viewer, results.
- In 1925, the same year that Bonnard finally married Marthe, Renée committed suicide. Marthe forced Bonnard to destroy all the painting that reminded him of Monchaty. Bonnard was devastated by Renée's death, and this painting of her for the rest of his life.

References

- <https://www.thelondonmagazine.org/article/painted-ladies-bonnard-and-his-muses-by-lynn-bushell/>



The Bowl of Milk, c. 1919, Tate

- This is another painting of Renée Monchaty, the tall blonde model that he met in 1918.

Room 5 (drawings)

Tate Booklet

- For Bonnard, the **early months of peace were marred by the death of his mother, Elizabeth**, in March 1919, This signalled a larger with the past. Her home in the Dauphine: had been a site of childhood holidays and family gatherings.
- Bonnard's painting became more subtle. Still engaged with the 'photographic' view oi the snatched moment, he explored **complex ways of composing and framing** his vision. Familiar interiors and the everyday activities of reading and preparing meals were seen from fresh and surprising perspectives.
- From his house in Vernonnet, **Bonnard regularly visited Claude Monet (1840-1926) at Giverny**. Seeing the older Impressionist painter work on his large water-lily canvases seems to have invigorated Bonnard's own landscape studies.



Piazza del Popolo, 1922, Philips

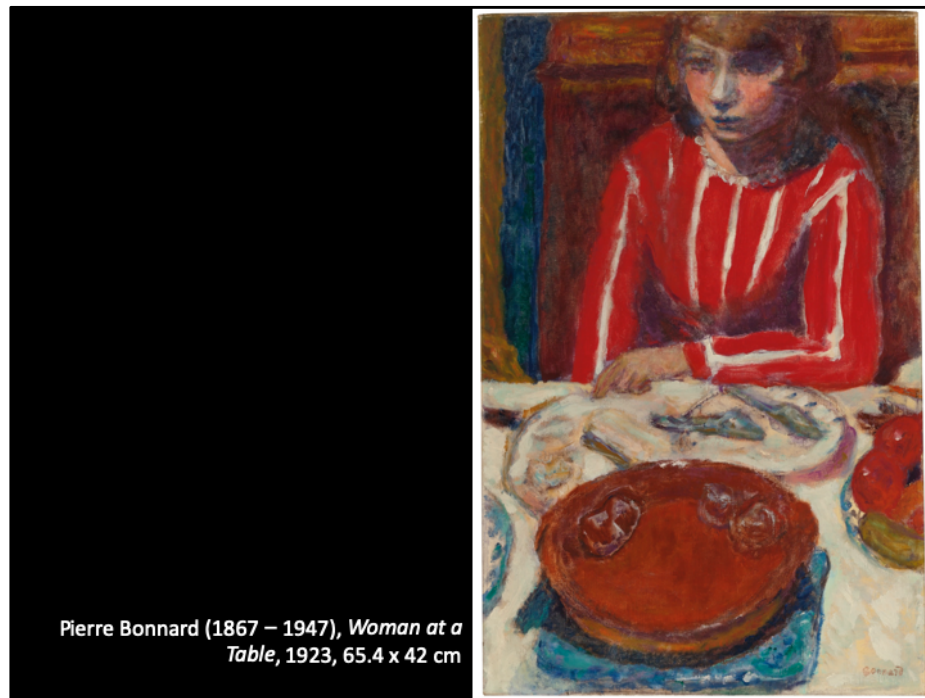
- “Bonnard visited Rome in March 1921 with **Renée Monchaty**, spending two weeks there. The present painting appears to be **the only work he made** as a *ricordo* of his stay. However, it is possible that Bonnard did not paint the picture in Rome, but rather in France following his return. This possibility arises since Dauberville in the *catalogue raisonné* of Bonnard's paintings assigns the picture the date of 1922. In any event, given the specificity of view and detail, there can be no doubt the picture is based on close observation of the piazza. Indeed, the vantage point is set in the passageway next to the Porta del Popolo. At the left edge, one sees the corner of the great Renaissance church, **S. Maria del Popolo**; in the background are the twin structures of S. Maria dei Miracoli and S. Maria di Montesanto, flanking the via del Corso; and at the center is the monumental Egyptian obelisk (on a Baroque base) that forms the focal point of the square. Clearly revelling in the composition and the opportunities to display his daring colorist technique, Bonnard was captivated by the beauty and charm of this elegant piazza.” (Christies)
- Also in the room were *The Open French Window, Vernon* (1921) and *The Door*

Opening onto the Garden, c.1924, private collection courtesy of Jill Newhouse Gallery, New York showing he often returned to the same subject.

Room 6 (4 paintings)

Tate Booklet

- 'If one has in a sequence a simple colour as the point of departure, one composes the whole painting around it.'
- In the early 1920s Bonnard used both new and familiar subjects to explore the possibilities of colour and composition. He was now increasingly away from Paris, but still exhibited there every year. Working independently of his contemporaries, he developed a more individual approach. He would go beyond natural appearances to intensify colour on the canvas and set sharply contrasting colours alongside each other.
- His house at Vernonnet was a constant source of inspiration. Many of the paintings he made there show the relationship between interior and exterior, man-made and natural environments. Each painting recorded subtle shifts in the fall of light and used colour to bring different elements together.
- During these years Bonnard's relationship with de Méligny was threatened when he began a love affair with Renée Monchaty, who sometimes modelled for him. Bonnard and Monchaty visited Rome together in 1921, an experience that he recalled in the painting *Piazza del Popolo*, Rome 1922



Pierre Bonnard (1867 – 1947), *Woman at a Table*, 1923, 65.4 x 42 cm

Pierre Bonnard (1867 – 1947), *Woman at a Table*, 1923, 65.4 x 42 cm

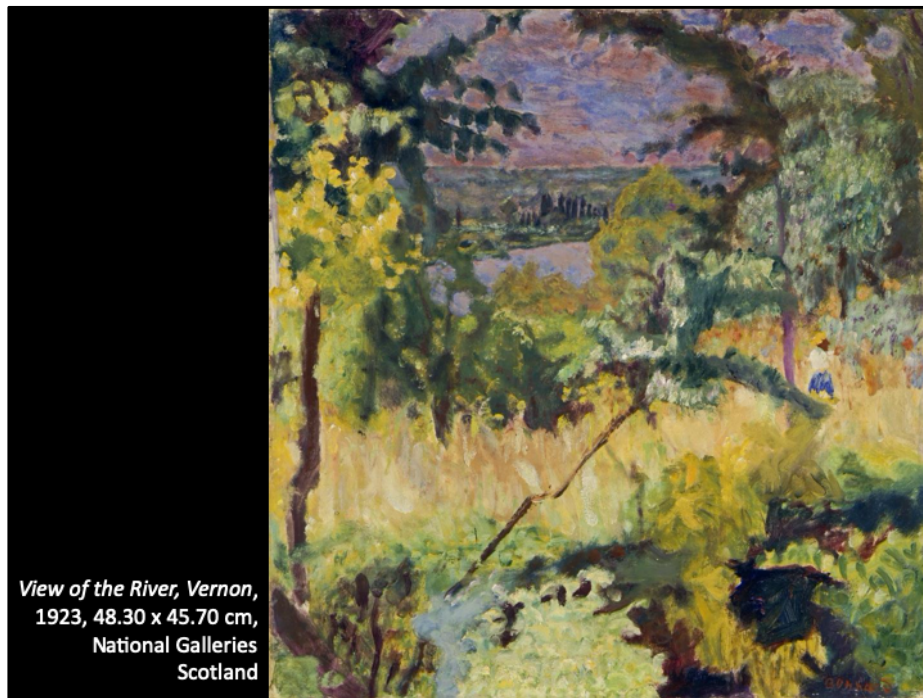
Sotheby's Catalogue Note

- Executed in 1923, *Femme à table* is a remarkably vibrant composition that explores two of Bonnard's main themes, the intimate moments of everyday life and portraiture. The present work shares the brilliant quality of light characteristic found in Bonnard's Mediterranean works also dating from this time period, with the light breaking through onto the scene and enveloping the table scape and the seated woman with a warm glow and bursting color. Discussing Bonnard's work from the period, John Rewald notes, "With the exception of Vuillard, no painter of his generation was to endow his technique with so much sensual delight, so much feeling for the indefinable texture of paint, so much vibration. His paintings are covered with color applied with a delicate voluptuousness that confers to the pigment a life of its own and treats every single stroke like a clear note of a symphony. At the same time Bonnard's colours changed from opaque to transparent and brilliant, and his perceptiveness seemed to grow as his brush found ever more expert and more subtle means to capture the richness both of his imagination and of nature" (J. Rewald in *Pierre Bonnard* (exhibition catalogue), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1948, p.

48).

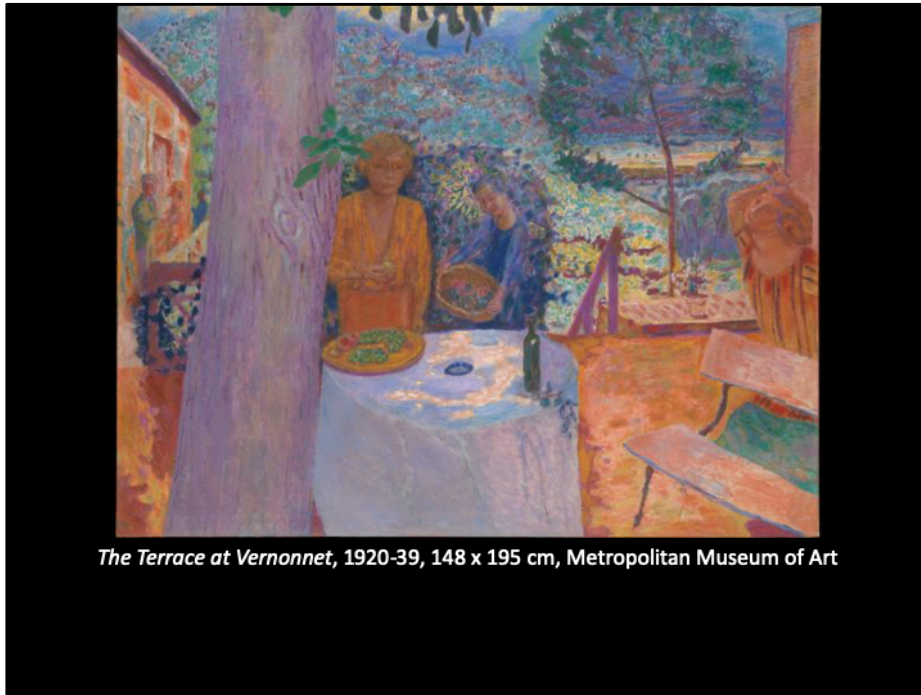
The woman in the present work bears a **striking resemblance to Bonnard's wife Marthe** the beloved subject of many works throughout his oeuvre. Here, she is the linchpin of the composition situated at the center. Bonnard's main concern was to capture the quiet moments of domestic life in a decorative and modern style. In *Femme à table*, balance is struck between the jostle and brightness of the paint and the quiet, almost meditative stillness of the moment. Timothy Hyman comments on this focus stating, "Bonnard's art could not operate within the vestigial spatial formula inherited by most twentieth-century painters; that shallow shelf, or simplified vertical/horizontal grid, which was the legacy of Poussin and David, via Cézanne and Cubism. In the previously uncharted territory of peripheral vision, Bonnard discovered strange flattening, wobbles, sifts of angle as well as of colour, and darkening 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" (T. Hyman, *Bonnard*, London, 1998, pp. 160-161).

As is the case for many of Bonnard's best interior scenes, this picture requires the viewer to take time to look at the composition and absorb the spatial relationships of all of its elements. John Elderfield wrote about the importance of examining Bonnard's pictures carefully, stating, "**Bonnard would say that, first and foremost, he sought to paint the savour of things, to recover their savour. This is his Chardin side. He requires that a painting be slowly absorbed, be savoured, so that its surprises well up**, one after another, into the field of perception and thereby articulate the original seductive vision in its performative representation by the beholder" (Sarah Whitfield & John Elderfield, *Bonnard* [exhibition catalogue], Tate Gallery, London & The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1998, pp. 47-48).



View of the River, Vernon, 1923, 48.30 x 45.70 cm, National Galleries Scotland (Room 7)

- This painting shows a view close to Bonnard's home in Vernonnet in northern France. The river Seine can be seen through the trees and bushes, while on the right there are three figures walking through the undergrowth. A fallen tree or branch is reduced to a slashed diagonal line which serves to unite the foreground and distance. As in many of Bonnard's mature landscapes, the rich colour and sensuous handling of paint create a feeling of warmth and luxuriance.



The Terrace at Vernonnet, 1920-39, 148 x 195 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Sunlight at Vernonnet, 1920, 47.5 x 56.2 cm, Museum of Wales

The Terrace at Vernonnet, 1920-39, Oil on canvas, 148 x 195 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

- Museum of Wales, "This painting of around 1920 depicts the artist's garden, viewed from his house at Vernonnet in the Seine valley. The woman at lower right may be his wife Marthe. An earlier version of this view (Courtauld Institute Galleries, London), painted in around 1910, has a more sombre palette. In his later years Bonnard was fascinated by the relationship between interiors and gardens. Margaret Davies purchased this work in 1960." It was acquired by the Museum of Wales from Margaret Davies as a bequest in 1963.
- Susanna Coffey, "Pierre Bonnard's painting *The Terrace at Vernonnet* in The Met appears to be a scene of domestic tranquillity and pleasure but if one looks more closely it might give pause."

Room 9 (corridor with documents, drawings and two paintings)

Tate Booklet

- This room includes a selection of photographs which document Bonnard's studio

in the south of France. They include images by notable photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson and André Ostier. Accompanying them is a range of archival material, including copies of the modernist art magazine *Verve*, and extracts from interviews with the artist.

- Together these materials offer a unique insight into Bonnard's everyday surroundings, his working practices and his philosophical approach to painting.

References

<https://paintersonpaintings.com/susanna-coffey-on-pierre-bonnard/> discusses *The Terrace at Vernonnet*, 1920-39, Metropolitan Museum of Art
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/489687>



The Window, 1925, Tate

The Window, 1925, 108.6 × 88.6 cm, Tate, presented by Lord Ivor Spencer Churchill through the Contemporary Art Society 1930, (Room 8)

Lithograph illustration of *Marie*, 1898, 10 × 7.5 cm

- “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 gallery label)
- On the table is the novel *Marie* by Peter Nansen, for which Bonnard drew the illustrations: it was published by the *Revue Blanche* in 1898.



The Bath, 1925, 86 × 120.6 cm, Tate

- **It was also in 1925 that Bonnard first pictured his wife full-length in the bath.** Marthe had always had a fondness for bathing. Some suggested this was a reflection of a **manic personality**; however it may simply have been a **therapy for a skin ailment** and the tubercular laryngitis, which Marthe suffered from and eventually died of in 1942.
- 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. 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.

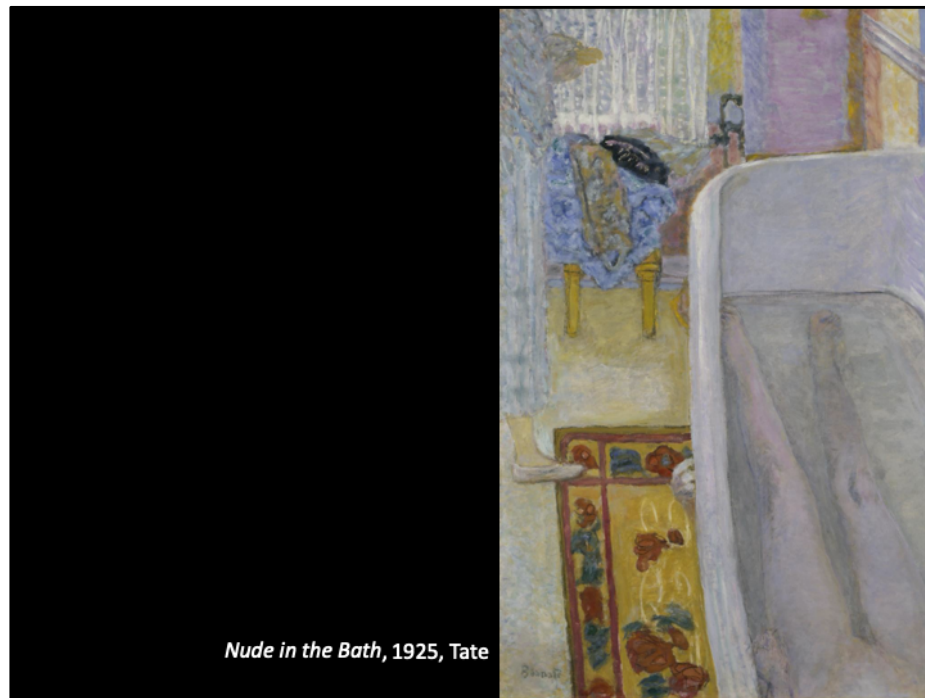
Room 8 (8 paintings, interiors and nudes)

Tate Booklet

- The paintings in this room were all made in 1925. A number have been taken out of their frames in order to give a sense of how they appeared when Bonnard was working on them. He usually pinned his canvas directly on the wall, rather than using an artist's easel. This had several advantages for him. His compositions could

grow to fill the space of the canvas and he could work on several paintings side by side. It also allowed him to roll UP his canvases and take them with him as he travelled around France.

- Looking at the unframed pictures reveals that Bonnard painted very close to the edge of canvas. Sometimes he painted in a line around the edge to show Where the frame would be. When, finally, the canvases were stretched and framed by his dealers Bernheim-Jeune, they were no longer part of Bonnard's private world and became objects entering the public realm.



Nude in the Bath, 1925, Tate

Nude in the Bath, 1925, 104.8 × 65.4 cm, Tate (Room 8)

- Bonnard shows us a very unusual view of a woman in a bath, probably modelled by his wife Marthe. The picture has a vertical format and the room is brightly lit but the most distinctive feature is that the woman and the bath are both cut off. On the left is a standing figure dressed in a pale robe with his head cut off. The figure may be Bonnard. The couple married in 1925, the year this painting was produced. In total Bonnard painted Marthe over 300 times and many of these paintings show her in or emerging from a bath. He painted her in the bath so often because she spent so much time in the bath because of her health. She may have suffered from a tubercular condition for which the recommended treatment was frequent bathing.



The Table or The White Tablecloth, 1925, 102.9 × 74.3 cm, Tate (Room 8)

- The woman is probably Marthe Bonnard, the artist's wife. She is looking towards a dog whose muzzle is faintly visible on the left, and seems to be preparing its food in a bowl.
- Everything in a Bonnard painting is **tentative, edges are never straight and faces and bodies are often hidden or obscured**. He painted from memory and was not trying to reproduce what he saw but what he felt about a scene. A dreamy recollection of time lost. He used small photographs and rough sketches to remind him of the scene and he tacked canvases on his studio wall and would move from one to another. **For Bonnard a painting was never finished and it is said he was once caught by a guard trying to make changes to one of his paintings hanging in a gallery**. Unlike many artists, such as Whistler and Francis Bacon he never rejected a work but sent everything he produced to his dealer.

Notes

- "This painting was bought as a result of the Courtauld Fund. In January 1924 the wealthy textile manufacturer Samuel Courtauld gave the large sum of £50,000 to create a trust for buying Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works for the Tate

Gallery. Between 1924 and 1927 the Trust bought nineteen paintings by artists such as Edouard Manet, Paul Gauguin, Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne. This donation transformed the Tate's Collection of modern art by non-British artists. This significant painting was acquired only a year after it was made, and was the first work by Bonnard to enter the Tate Collection. " (Tate)



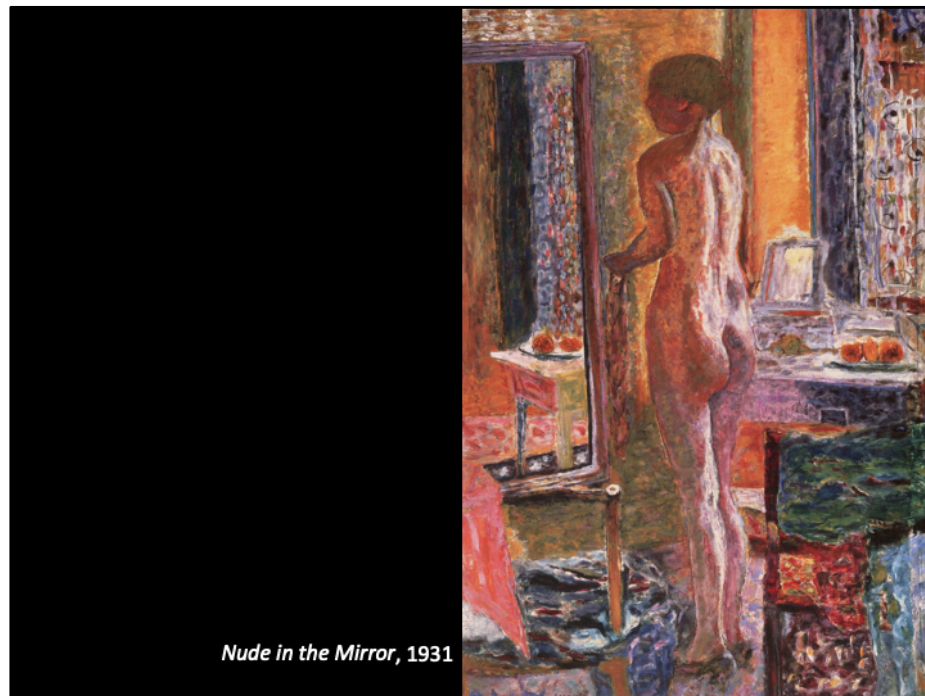
Landscape at Le Cannet, 1928, 128 x 278.2 cm, Kimbell Art Museum

Landscape at Le Cannet, 1928, 128 x 278.2 cm, Kimbell Art Museum (Room 10)

- It shows the colourful, sun drenched landscape around his villa near Cannes as an Earthly paradise with people in harmony with nature. He bought the villa just north of Cannes in 1926 as he believed it would be good for his wife's health.
- He called the villa *Le Bosquet* (*The Grove*) because of the trees surrounding it. He has positioned himself on a hill above the villa looking west, towards the Esterel mountains. In the centre a girl and her dog can be seen passing his villa and he places himself in the right foreground beside a pair of goats. A cow stands beside spiky plants on the left of the picture.
- This nine foot painting was acquired by Texan gallery Kimbell Art Museum in 2018.

See

<https://www.kimbellart.org/content/news-bonnard-acquisition>



Nude in the Mirror, 1931

Nude in the Mirror, 1931

Room 10

Tate Booklet

- In 1926 Bonnard and de Méligny purchased a modest house, in the village of Le Cannet, in the south of France. They named the house Le Bosquet (The Grove), due to the surrounding thicket of trees, and made a series of alterations to the property. Interior walls were knocked down to create a greater sense of space, and the windows were modified to let in more light. A studio was created in the north corner of the house, and a modern bathroom installed for de Méligny.
- Bonnard continued to travel, maintaining a studio in Paris and spending portions of the summer in Normandy. From 1927, however, he spent increasing periods in the south. The southern climate had a significant impact on his work, flooding his paintings with warm light and rich shades of orange, red and yellow. Yet the raw scrutiny of his self-portraits suggests underlying anxieties and tensions.

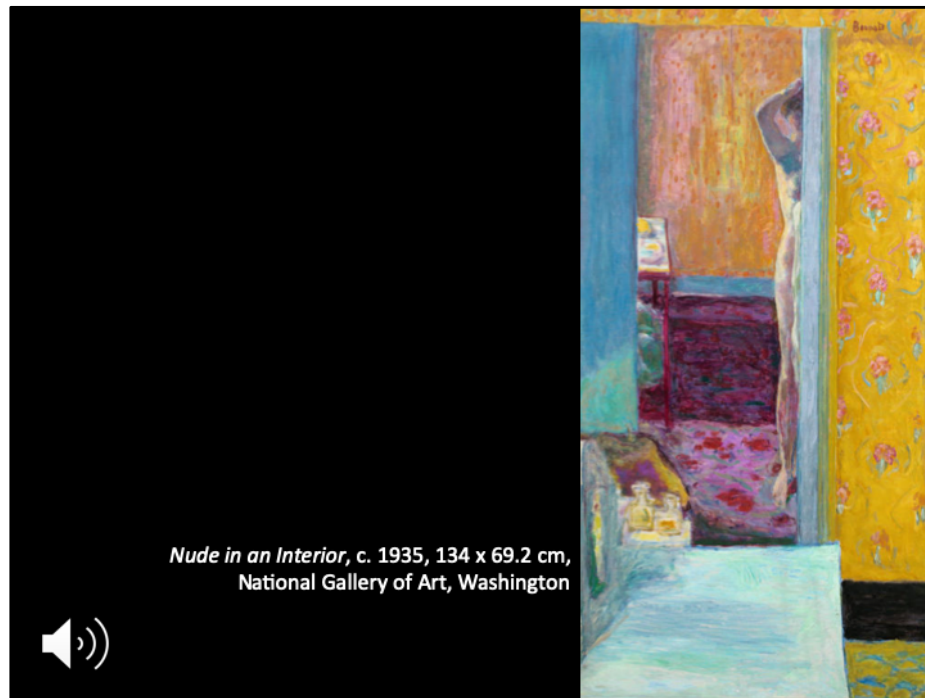
EPPH

"In art a woman looking into a mirror, a common subject, is a give-away. As EPPH has explained about Manet's *Before the Mirror* (1876) or Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* (1932) Bonnard turns his female model (left) - his wife, Marthe - into a representation

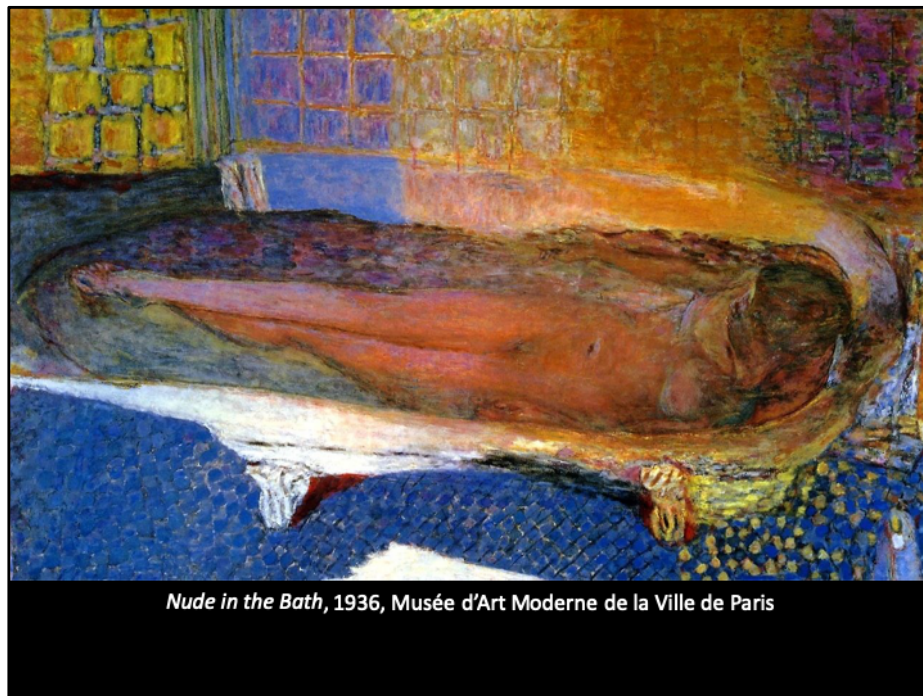
of himself. She is both model and artist. Dita Amory has written: "One could argue that in this painting Marthe is a surrogate for the painter, and her cloth a surrogate for the rag Bonnard so often held in his hand while painting. Amplifying the metaphor, the mirror becomes a sort of canvas..."

In addition, as Amory noted, many of the passages within the painting are ambiguous and difficult to define with the objects in the mirror more clearly described than those outside. Like the stained-glass, rose window of a medieval cathedral, much of this painting is a confusing, multi-colored shimmer of light. Why? What is going on?"

http://www.everypainterpaintshimself.com/article/bonnards_nude_at_a_mirror_or_the_toilette_1931



Nude in an Interior, c. 1935, 134 x 69.2 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon



Nude in the Bath, 1936, 93 × 147 cm, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Room 11)

- Bonnard was almost 70 when he painted this and it is considered one of his major works. It is a conventional even banal scene of a woman taking a bath in a tiled bathroom. He has transformed this conventional scene into a shimmering confusion of iridescent colours.
- The woman is, of course, his wife Marthe, shown from above as a young woman even though she was 67 at the time. Her face is not visible and her long, slender body is blurred by the blue, mauve and green water. His early works are often sensual or even erotic but by the 1930s his works like this had become radiant, lyrical and joyful. This is not an accurate portrait but a representation of his memories, his love, desire and affection.
- Bonnard was a quiet and retiring man whom a colleague once fondly described as 'capable of embellishing all the ugly things of our life with the ingenious and iridescent flowerings of his imagination'.

Room 11 (14 paintings, ghastly yellow walls)

Tate Booklet

- 'The presence of the object is a hindrance for the painter when he is painting,'
- Bonnard held a major exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris in June 1933. At a time of economic slump, with political extremism gaining power across Europe, the colourful seduction of Bonnard's work was seen as a message of hope. Critics passed over the more challenging aspects of his art to portray him as a 'painter of happiness'. However, as Bonnard noted, 'he who sings is not always happy'.
- Marthe de Méligny continued to act as his principal subject. Her health was deteriorating, and she would take baths every day, following the water treatment prescribed for her various ailments. Bonnard captures the intimacy and melancholy of their relationship in *Nude in the Bath* 1936, whose experimental use of colour suggests the distance of memory.



In the Bathroom, 1940, 92 x 61 cm

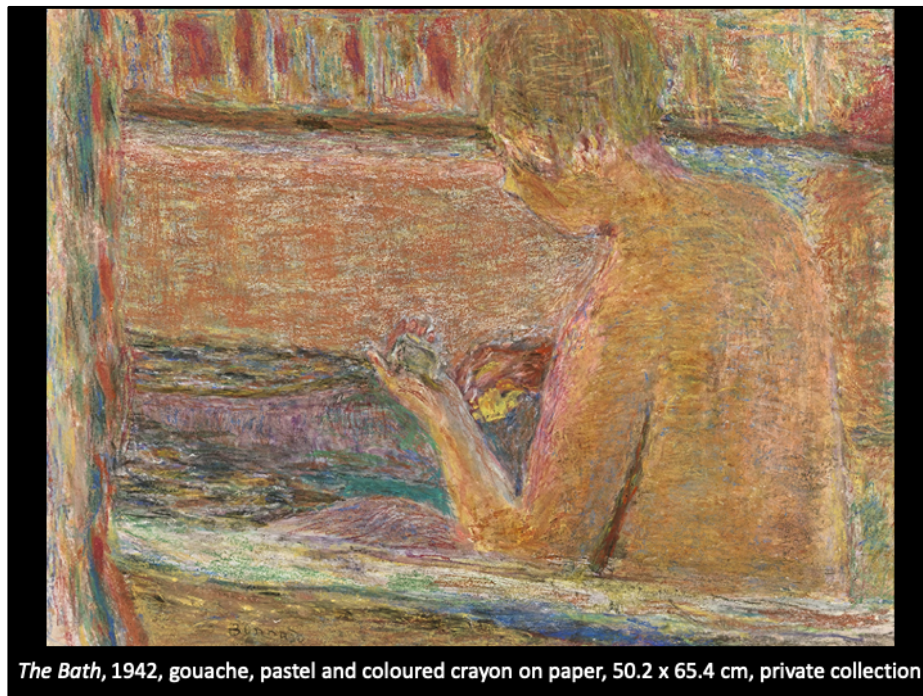
- Bonnard takes the glimpse of a body to the extreme. We are looking down the bath and see a foot at the far end and part of a breast on the right but the majority of the picture is a conventional bathroom in a shimmering light that enters through a large window without curtains.

Room 12 (3 paintings, video, 5 photos, sketches)

Tate Booklet

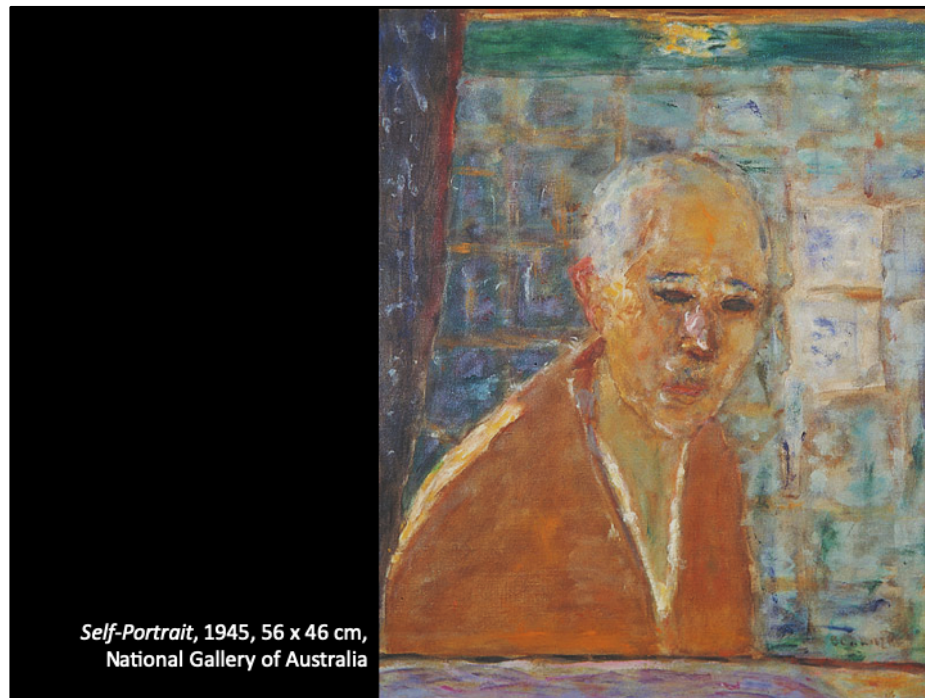
- **In 1938 the Bonnards sold their house in Normandy and, following the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, retreated to Le Cannet.** Painted over seven years, *The Sunlit Terrace* 1939-46 spanned the passage of the conflict. The elongated canvas casts a sweeping view out into the world. Given the restrictions placed on movement during the war, the scene captures a sense of confinement but also the promise of freedom.
- **De Méligny died of a heart attack in 1942. 'You can't imagine my grief and solitude', Bonnard told Matisse, 'filled with bitterness and worry about the life I may be leading from now on',** The following year, he worked on an illustrated book titled *Correspondences*. It featured a series of fictional letters to and from

his family, including his deceased mother, grandmother and brother. The letters centred on the 1890s, a period of happiness for Bonnard, when he first met de Méligny and began to receive recognition for his work.



The Bath, 1942, signed Bonnard (lower left), gouache, pastel and coloured crayon on paper, 50.2 x 65.4 cm, private collection, Switzerland

- **In the final years of his life** Bonnard continued to return to the female figure and the figure in a bath. It is luminous pinks and yellows and is unusual as it is pastel on paper.
- “Bonnard’s paintings are about the intimacy of contact: the contact made by the eye and the hand, the contact of light as it catches of brushes a surface, the intimacy of the contact between painter and paint” (Sarah Whitfield in her discussion of Bonnard’s art, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, 1998, p. 25).
- The unselfconscious woman is a theme Bonnard, like Edgar Degas and Pierre-Auguste Renoir returned to again and again. **Voyeurism combines with domesticity and intimacy.**



Self-Portrait, 1945, 56 x 46 cm, National Gallery of Australia

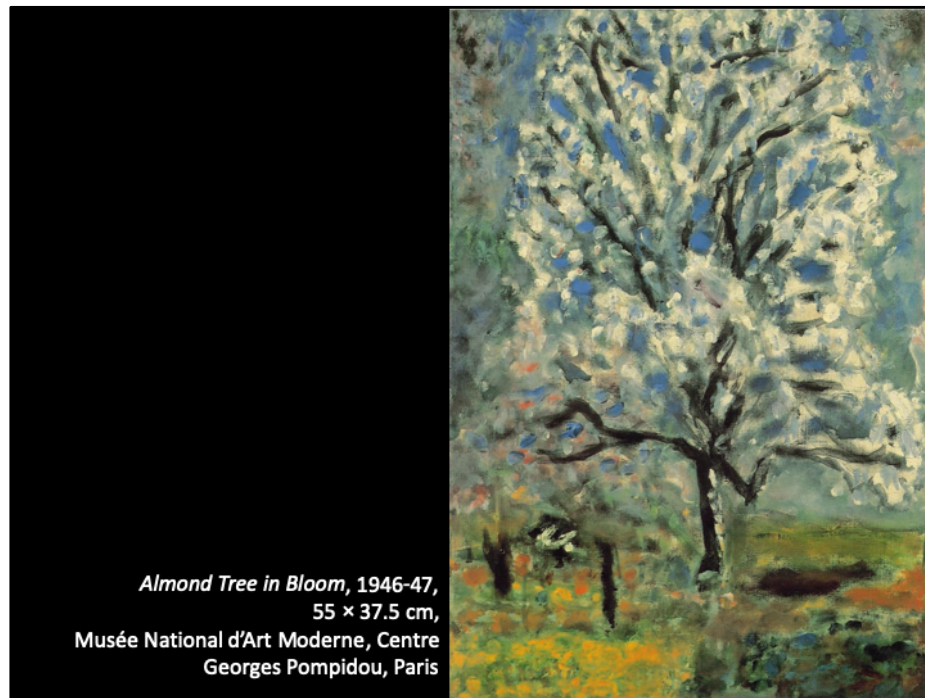
National Gallery of Australia

- Bonnard's self-portraits — most of which stayed in his possession until his death — provide an intensely personal record of his life, from the self-conscious young artist holding his brushes (painted in 1889) to this last image of a frail old man.
- Through his self-portraits Bonnard reveals a developing sense of self-awareness and vulnerability, a baring of his body and soul that is strikingly at odds with the mood of his work as a whole. Bonnard, the observer, is generally describing a benign world of leisure, lushness and intimate detail. In this stark monk-like image, however, we see a man nearing death, resigned to his fate, staring with blank eyes through the mask of his face.
- 'Composition', Bonnard once said, 'is the whole of art, it is the key to everything.' The strong curve of the curtain on the left and the parallel horizontals at the top and bottom are typical of Bonnard's desire to contain the image. Behind him are the blurred remnants of the tiles often painted in his many bathroom images. They compress the space, creating a claustrophobic atmosphere typical of many of his paintings.
- Light from the left hits his shoulder and the side of his face and nose. His dark eyes

are hollow slits, and it is their lifelessness that conveys the sense of despair in this painting. His curved shoulders and drooping mouth add to this effect. The fact that he is not wearing his glasses makes him appear naked; and if he was in fact painting his mirror image, his short-sightedness may have contributed to the foggy nature of this portrait. Seldom did Bonnard paint from life, however, as most of his paintings were created from memory.

Tate Booklet

- **'I am just beginning to understand what it is to paint. A painter should have two lives, one in which to learn, and one in which to practise his art.'**
- Bonnard explored a range of subjects during the war years, particularly landscape. Travel restrictions prevented him from driving freely around France, so he explored the local area closely. Taking daily walks through le Cannel, he captured views of the village rooftops, the Mediterranean Sea and the mountains of Estérel. His approach became more abstract, enriching colour while reducing detail in works such as *Steps in the Artist's Garden* 1942-4 and *Bathers at the End of the Day* c.1945.
- Bonnard maintained his focus on landscape in the final years of his life. One of the most powerful works from this period is *The Studio with Mimosa* 1939-46. In a characteristic interplay between interior and exterior, the mimosa blossoms provide an explosion of vibrant yellow through the studio window. As ever, Bonnard's observation of nature was just a starting point. His heightened combination of colours was guided by what he called 'the first emotion' prompted by the scene. The transcended reality achieved in this painting bears testament to Bonnard's vision.



Almond Tree in Bloom, 1946-47,
55 × 37.5 cm,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris

Almond Tree in Bloom, 1946-47, 55 × 37.5 cm, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

- Bonnard could see the almond tree in the garden at Le Bosquet from his bedroom window. He said, "Every spring it forces me to paint it."
- His last painting. It is said that when he became too weak to paint he asked his nephew to add some yellow to one small patch of green to complete the work.
- Bonnard died in January 1947.
- He wrote, '**I am just beginning to understand what it is to paint. A painter should have two lives, one in which to learn, and one in which to practise his art.**'