

PIERRE BONNARD: DESIGNED BY INDIA MAHDAVI

Artwork labels

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HOME

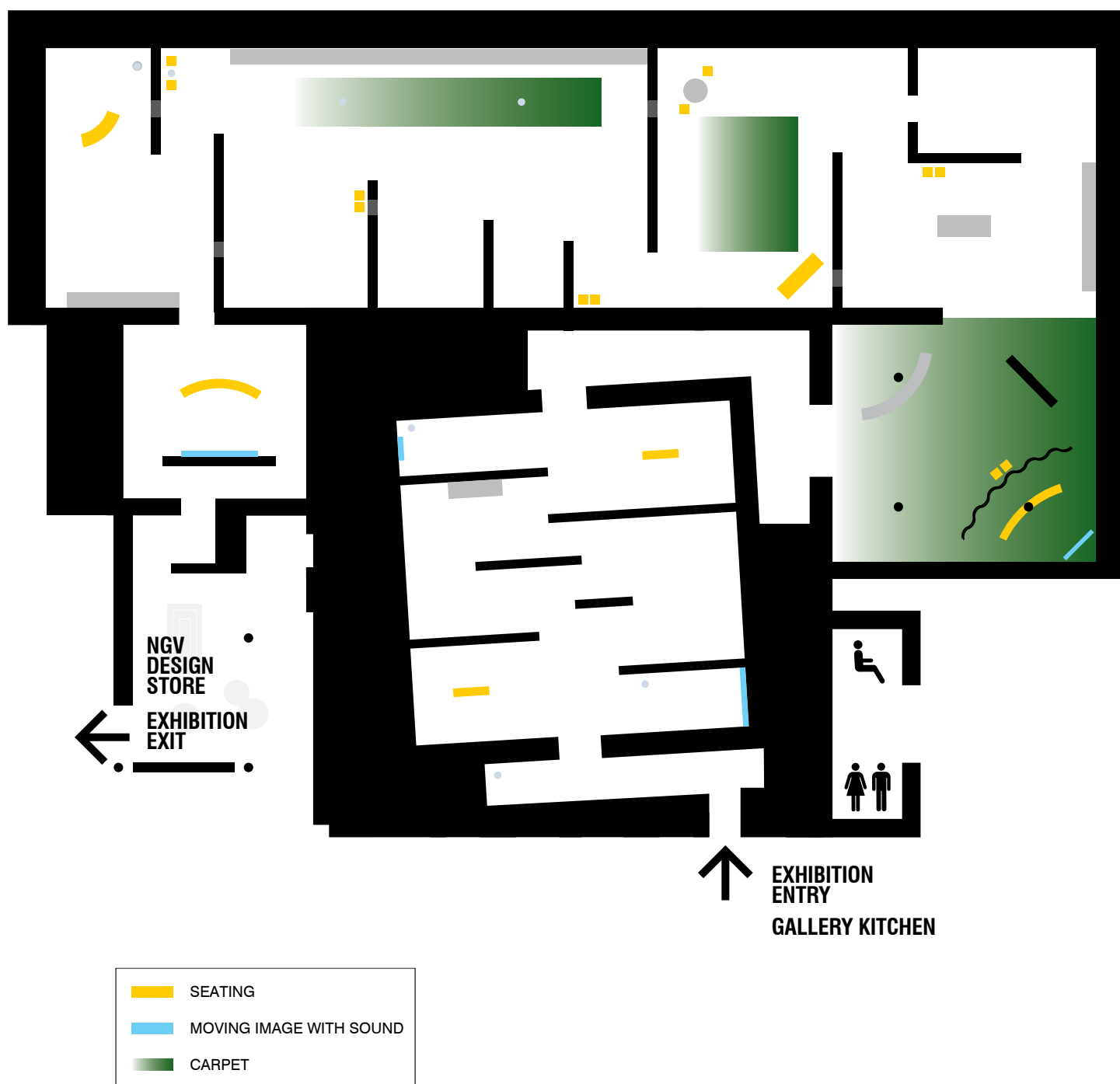
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Exhibition sensory map

The map on the following page shows the locations of audio-visual content, sensory elements and seating and can help people with autism or disability prepare for their visit.

Visit [**ngv.melbourne/access**](https://ngv.melbourne/access) for more resources and information about accessible facilities, events and services at NGV.



Loud music and sound effects are used throughout. The exhibition follows a set path. If you need assistance exiting quickly, please see security team members. Please note video clips used throughout this exhibition include flashes of photography. Gallery spaces are air conditioned and are between 20 and 24 degrees Celsius.

Visit [**ngv.melbourne/access**](https://ngv.melbourne/access) for more resources and information about accessible facilities and services for your visit to NGV.

Room:

Pierre Bonnard:

Designed by India Mahdavi

Room description: Entrance hallway with pastel patterned wall on right leading towards small table and hanging light.



Wall text:

Pierre Bonnard

Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) is justly celebrated as one of the great painters of the twentieth century. Emerging as an artist in Paris in the 1890s among a lively group of intellectuals and artists, Bonnard's early reputation was based on shrewdly observant illustrations and decorative paintings. In the twentieth century, Bonnard pursued painting as it suited his singular vision and in response to personal circumstance, including his move to the countryside with his lifelong companion, Marthe de Méligny. Together, they lived in Normandy and later in the south of France.

Bonnard maintained connection with a few painters, and corresponded

with critics and collectors but, from his early forties, his physical world largely contracted to the walls of his house and studio, and the paths of his garden and neighbouring environs. His position in art history might have been marginal if not for the passionate support of admirers of his work and the legacy of his extraordinary paintings.

Bonnard's art is one of colour, light and feeling. His paintings reflect the human condition and his view of the world. They are representational, but the repetition of identifiable motifs and figures suggests each composition's truth as an evocation of a remembered past, a layered rumination on the emotions and sensations of lived experience. 'Emotion comes in its own time', Bonnard was fond of saying. Entering this

exhibition, you are invited to spend time with Bonnard's paintings, to dwell among his colourful interiors, explore his verdant landscapes and enter his scintillating, vibrating painted world.

Wall text:

India Mahdavi

India Mahdavi (b. 1962) is a French architect and designer widely celebrated for her use of colour, form and texture. Combining these foundational elements of design, she has created immersive environments in restaurants, hotels, retail interiors, art galleries and private homes around the globe.

Born in Tehran to an Egyptian mother and Iranian father, Mahdavi spent her youth in the United States, Germany, France and Iran. After studying architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and product design, furniture design and graphic design at the School of Visual Arts and at the Cooper Union in New York, she embarked upon a

career in interior design and, in 2000, opened her eponymous design studio. Her Paris studio is only 400 metres from the Musée d'Orsay, which, fortuitously, houses the largest collection of Pierre Bonnard's paintings in the world.

For this exhibition, Mahdavi has encountered Bonnard's work anew, seeking to create, in her own words, 'an impression of his world, through my own eyes'. In a scenography that expresses the deep affinity between artist and designer, Mahdavi has shaped the galleries into interiors for Bonnard's art, with furniture, lighting and wallpapers based on elements of her favourite paintings.

Room:

Theatre of the everyday

Room description: Colourful yellow and green patterned wallpaper with seating on the left-hand side as you enter and a small stool placed in front of a screen on the right.



Wall text:

Theatre of the everyday

After finishing school, Bonnard enrolled in law school in Paris in 1885, then began studying art, first at the Académie Julian in 1887 and then at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1889. This was one of the happiest periods of his life. Having lived for a time with his grandmother, he moved into a small apartment close to the Place Clichy. In 1889, he rented a studio in the Batignolles, a working-class district in north-eastern Paris from which he never strayed very far, moving into other studios and apartments in the streets or avenues around Montmartre, over the years.

Bonnard enjoyed mixing with the Montmartre crowds; he watched them,

drew them quickly and then returned to his studio to work. Bonnard's experience of urban Paris in the 1890s was stimulated by daily walks during which he observed what he called the 'theatre of the everyday'. He projected himself into the imagined lives of passers-by, like the *flâneur*, or stroller, evoked by the poet Charles Baudelaire, who wrote in 1863 that 'modernity is ephemeral, transient, contingent'. Bonnard was introduced by his brother-in-law Claude Terrasse to the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière, who pioneered cinema in France – their early films also influenced Bonnard's art at this time.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Place Clichy

c. 1894

oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 8

Bonnard was unique among his artist friends in the way he immersed himself in Paris's street life. He captured the city's rhythms and characters in seemingly unfinished scenes like this, painted in muted tones. The audaciousness of these paintings was not appreciated at first by the Impressionist artists of the previous generation. In 1896, Camille Pissarro called them 'hideous' and

‘a complete fiasco’, claiming that Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet felt the same way. Pissarro later changed his opinion about Bonnard’s art, declaring in 1899: ‘This young artist will go far, for he has a painter’s eye’.

For kids

As a young artist, Pierre Bonnard lived near the Place Clichy in Paris, a vibrant intersection where four arrondissements (districts) meet. Pierre painted this scene of the busy neighbourhood as if he was sitting at a table outside a cafe, and people were moving quickly past him. To see what Pierre saw, take a look at the short films in this room. These were some of the first films ever created, made more than 120 years ago by Pierre's friends – the Lumière brothers.

Think about the busy streets outside the NGV. If you were going to make an artwork about Melbourne, what would you draw or paint (or maybe even film)?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The cab horse
(Le Cheval de fiacre)

c. 1895

oil on wood

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection, 1970

1970.17.4

Bonnard's dynamic evocations of contemporary street life, such as *The cab horse*, reflect his awareness of the then recent films by the Lumière brothers – pioneers of French cinema whom Bonnard knew personally. Nothing escapes his sharp eyes in these dynamic urban narratives, in which the city of Paris itself becomes a living character. At once *flâneur* (stroller), voyeur and documenter, Bonnard makes Parisian street life

his own, creating vivid and immersive images of a type never seen before – the swiftness of his technique capturing the relentless change of the scene observed.

Auguste Lumière

French 1862–1954

Louis Lumière

French 1864–1948

**Leaving the Lumière factory in Lyon
(La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon)**

1895

digital file, transferred from 35 mm,
black and white, silent, 46 secs

**Place des Cordeliers in Lyon
(Place des Cordeliers à Lyon)**

1895

digital file, transferred from 35 mm film,
black and white, silent, 40 secs

© Institut Lumière

The brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière unveiled their Cinématographe motion picture device in Paris on 28 December

1895 in the Indian Room of the Grand Café, a fashionable venue located in the Opéra district. The venue was not large, and a small group of spectators, for the modest price of one franc, was astounded to see ten recordings of animated images shown life-size on a screen, each lasting between forty and fifty seconds. This experiment was immediately a tremendous success, with 2000 people buying tickets to subsequent screenings on 1 and 2 January 1896.

Wall text:

Some Scenes of Parisian Life

From around 1895 Bonnard started to frequent Ambroise Vollard's Paris gallery. It was here that he met several older Impressionist artists who were also selling work through Vollard – Camille Pissarro, Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas. Their influence encouraged Bonnard to explore more open and airy compositions. This is reflected in his *Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris* (*Some Scenes of Parisian Life*), an album of colour lithographs commissioned by Vollard in 1895, and published in 1899. Using a limited palette of between three and five colours per print, Bonnard takes viewers on a rambling tour of Paris as seen from his personal perspective: houses and alleys glimpsed from high

windows, bustling scenes observed at street level by both day and night, and expansive vistas of bridges and boulevards that seem inspired by Pissarro's contemporaneous paintings. 'I learned much about painting proper', Bonnard observed, 'from making lithographs in colour; when one has to establish relations between tones by ringing the changes on only four or five colours, superimposed or juxtaposed, one makes a host of discoveries'.

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Ambroise Vollard publisher

French 1866–1939

Auguste Clot printer

French 1858–1936

Some Scenes of Parisian Life
(Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris)
portfolio

1895–98, published 1899

colour lithograph, edition of 100

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1970

P89.1-1970; P89.6-1970;
P89.2-1970; P89.11-1970;
P89.3-1970; P89.7-1970;
P89.13-1970

Left to right:

Album cover
(Couverture de l'album)
1898

Theatre of the everyday

HOME 24

Boulevard

c. 1896

Avenue du Bois de Boulogne

c. 1898

**Street on a rainy evening
(Rue, le soir, sous la pluie)**

c. 1896–97

**Street corner
(Coin de rue)**

c. 1897

**Square at evening
(Place le soir)**

c. 1897–98

**Street corner seen from above
(Coin de rue vue d'en haut)**

c. 1896–97

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Woman with an umbrella
(Femme au parapluie)
1895

colour lithograph

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Purchased, 1980

2:1373

In 1896, the critic André Mellerio wrote of how Bonnard magically found ‘the unexpected on a street corner, the raised gesture of a Parisian woman crossing the street, the thousand frivolous details of her appearance’, creating ‘spectacles of fleeting grace, which must be grasped, so to speak, on the fly’. *Woman with an umbrella* appeared as a frontispiece in the September 1894 issue of *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*),

the progressive magazine run by Bonnard's friends and patrons, the Natanson brothers. The model was Marthe de Mélny, Bonnard's partner since 1893.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Study of a female silhouette for the
lithograph ‘Square at evening’ from
‘Some scenes of Parisian life’
(Étude d’une silhouette féminine
pour la lithographie: ‘Place le soir’)
c. 1897–98
charcoal on paper**

Musée d’Orsay, Paris

Kept in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Gift of M. and Mme Zadok, 1964

RF 39224, Recto

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Woman seen mid-length, in right
profile, carrying a teapot
(Femme vue à mi-jambes, de profil
à droite, portant une théière)**

1890s

Chinese ink and wash, and pencil
on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Kept in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Purchased, 1979

RF 37089, Recto

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Dogs (Les Chiens) 1893 lithograph

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Virginia and Ira Jackson Collection, 2000

2000.180.2

Bonnard's art is replete with images of domestic animals, especially dogs, who were permanent residents of the Bonnard household. One of four prints Bonnard made in 1893 for the weekly journal *L'Escarmouche* (*The Skirmish*), *Dogs* depicts a cluster of untethered canines cavorting recklessly in a Parisian street. The details of the dogs' friskiness borders on caricature, giving the work an edge that one often finds in the artist's graphic

art of the 1890s. The simplified forms of the dogs here, reflect Bonnard's great love of Japanese woodblock prints during his Nabi years.

Room:

The Nabi years

Room description: Two large geometric feature walls in the centre of the space, a dark maroon octagon and an arch featuring details from a fan design of people and flowers. Back wall on the right decorated with details from a painting of three people and a baby sharing a meal.



Wall text:

The Nabi years

While studying drawing at the Académie Julian in the late 1880s, Bonnard became friends with fellow students Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, Henri-Gabriel Ibels and Paul Ranson. Through Denis, two other artists – Édouard Vuillard and Ker-Xavier Roussel – joined the circle, while budding theatre director and actor Aurélien Lugné-Poe and Swiss painter Félix Vallotton widened the group further in the early 1890s.

They formed an artist's club, encouraging each other to be groundbreaking and transformative in their approach to art, and adopted the name 'Les Nabis' from the Hebrew word navi meaning 'prophet'. The Nabi artists considered themselves

the prophets of a new design-based art that would encompass every sphere of modern life – interior design, furniture, fans and textiles, stained glass, and commercial illustration and advertising. The Nabis were committed to making art relevant to all aspects of everyday life, and were particularly inspired by Japanese aesthetics and the Japanese reverence for the natural world. From the work of Paul Gauguin, they also took the notion of working with pure, non-mimetic colour, using flat surfaces in service to an idea rather than the imitation of nature.

Artwork labels:

Édouard Vuillard

French 1868–1940

**Octagonal self-portrait
(Autoportrait octogonal)**

c. 1890

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Accepted in payment of debt, in homage to Guy Cogeval and his collaboration with Madame Colette Salomon on the Vuillard catalogue raisonné project (1996–2003), 2015

RF MO P 2016 1

Just as Bonnard was dubbed the 'Japanese Nabi', Édouard Vuillard was nicknamed the 'Zouave Nabi' by his fellow 'prophet' friends, due to the brief military service he had undertaken at the end of 1889. In French the word 'zouave' derived from the Zouaoua, Algerian Berber tribesmen with distinctive

blonde or red hair and beards who were recruited into the French army from 1831 onwards. Vuillard also had ash-blond hair and sported a thick red beard as a young man. The octagonal shape of this painting derives from early Christian baptismal fonts, a religious significance suggested to Vuillard by mystically inclined fellow Nabi artists, such as Paul Ranson.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Portrait of Vuillard
(Portrait de Vuillard)
1892
oil on wood panel

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased with the assistance of Philippe Meyer, 1993

RF 1993 7

While not from a wealthy family, Édouard Vuillard won a scholarship that enabled him to study at the prestigious Lycée Condorcet in the ninth arrondissement of Paris from 1879 to 1885. Here, he formed lasting friendships with future Nabi colleagues, artists Maurice Denis and Ker-Xavier Roussel, and the theatre director Aurélien Lugné-Poe. Bonnard, who himself studied at the equally prestigious Lycée Louis-le-Grand in the

Latin Quarter, first met Vuillard in 1889, and the two bonded over the fact that they had both attended classes at the Académie Julian, a private art school. The inverted L shape of this painting echoes sheet-music cover illustrations that Bonnard was designing at this time.

Édouard Vuillard

French 1868–1940

Madame Bonnard and a dog

1907

oil on cardboard on wood panel

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1955

3259-4

Édouard Vuillard painted Marthe de Mélny several times (although Marthe and Pierre didn't marry until 1925, de Mélny was referred to as Madame Bonnard from around 1900). Here, she is shown petting her dog in the apartment at 65 rue de Douai, which was near to the studio Bonnard and Vuillard shared for a number of years. Bonnard himself painted a work with a very similar composition.

Vuillard disliked de Méligny, writing about her jealousy of his friendship with Bonnard in his diary in 1907: 'lunch at Bonnard's, deep talk about painting, like when we were twenty. Marthe peeved'. Some of his animosity perhaps arose from a general snobbery towards de Méligny, who came from a working-class background, within their artistic circle. Vuillard gave this portrait to Bonnard, who kept it all his life.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Marthe with absinthe (Marthe à l'absinthe)

1894

oil on panel

Private collection, Paris

In 1893, in Montmartre, Bonnard met Maria Boursin, a young woman aged twenty-four from Saint-Amand-Montrond in central France. Maria, who was then working for the well-known Trousselier florist business, making silk flowers, preferred to be called Marthe de Mélny. De Mélny became Bonnard's model, and the couple were seldom apart; Bonnard's relationship with her lasted until her death in 1942. Bonnard's family found de Mélny to be controlling,

however, and described her as jealous, stopping anyone from going anywhere near 'her' Pierre. Since Bonnard had affairs with at least two other women, de Méigny's jealousy was not without cause.

Édouard Vuillard

French 1868–1940

The doors (Les Portes)

1894

gouache on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1952

2950-4

In the 1890s Vuillard painted numerous small interiors, such as *The doors*, studies of the artist's family home at 346 rue Saint-Honoré, where Madame Vuillard (his mother) ran a dressmaking business, and which was very much the centre of Vuillard's social life. Vuillard lived with his mother until her death in 1928. At the right stands a woman, probably Madame Vuillard, seen from behind as she enters a kitchen (identifiable from other Vuillard

paintings) through a curtained doorway; to the left, another door opens outward, seemingly onto a courtyard planted with trees or creepers.

Édouard Vuillard
French 1868–1940

**The linen cupboard
(Le Placard à linge)**

c. 1893

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased, 1991

RF 1991 23

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

The checkered blouse (Le Corsage à carreaux)

1892

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Acquired from Charles Terrasse, the sitter's son, 1968

RF 1977 89

The influence of Japanese art on Bonnard's aesthetic was noted by the gifted art critic Albert Aurier, who described him in April 1892 as 'a delightful ornamentist, skilful and ingenious as a Japanese [artist]'. Not surprisingly, this led to Bonnard's nickname among his artist contemporaries as being 'le Nabi très japonard' (the very Japanese Nabi). A few years later, another critic, André

Mellerio, was also to note how Bonnard 'has, without any hint of imitation, some of that Japanese love of checkered fabrics that sing to the eyes'. This love of pattern can be seen in the symphony of squared-off reds and pinks in *The checkered blouse*.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The white cat
(Le Chat blanc)

1894

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased, 1982

RF 1982 74

‘To be a painter! A precious, an essential gift, even in this country where it is traditional. A striking and seductive gift, one which cannot and does not have to explain itself. Everything else can be acquired in life, but this alone cannot be learned. And this title that only a few men deserve in each generation, we cannot hesitate to be the first to give it to Pierre Bonnard ... [due to] the attraction and charm that one savours in front of the

least of his paintings.'

– Thadée Natanson, 'Pierre Bonnard',
La Revue blanche, 1896

Félix Vallotton

Swiss/French 1865–1925

The ball (Le Ballon)

1899

oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Bequest of Carle Dreyfus, 1953

RF 1977 353

This painting is set in the grounds of Le Relais, the country house in north-central France that belonged to Thadée and Misia Natanson (née Godebska), key supporters of the young Nabi artists during the 1890s. The unusual aerial view of a young girl chasing a red ball is believed to have been based on a photograph taken from an upper-storey window at Le Relais. The two diminutive figures in the background might be Misia

and Vallotton's wife Gabrielle, whom he married in May 1899. It has been suggested that Vallotton's sharply divided composition here hints at the gulf that often separates the worlds of adults and children.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Stroll in the garden
(Promenade dans le jardin)
c. 1896
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 11

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Twilight, or The croquet game
(Crépuscule, ou La Partie de croquet)
1892
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris—
Gift of Daniel Wildenstein through the Society of Friends of the Musée
d'Orsay, 1985

RF 1985 8

In April 1892, the critic Charles Saunier wrote in the journal *La Revue indépendante* that: 'M. Bonnard, the most Japanese of all French painters, likes to render the subtleties of lines, to find surprising rhythms in their arabesques. Here we have a garden, at twilight, where figures dressed in light shades stand out against a complex network of trees and plants'. Saunier was describing this painting, a spectacular depiction

of summertime play at the Bonnard family's country estate, where Bonnard's father Eugène, his cousin Berthe, sister Andrée, and brother-in-law Claude Terrasse are shown playing croquet while young women dance on the grass in the background.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Paris boulevard at night
(Vue de Paris, la nuit)
1900

oil on paperboard

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.520

Paris boulevard at night, with its aerial perspective inspired by Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, freezes local residents in a painted snapshot of a specific time and place. Bonnard may have based this painting of the Boulevard de Clichy, in the artists' quarter of Montmartre, on the view from his studio window. Here, he captures the still-novel spectacle of an artificially illuminated night, with trees washed by light from below and shadows

cast in multiple directions. Paris's early adoption of gas and electric light had helped make the city seem the very capital of modernity in the nineteenth century.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Two dogs in a deserted street
(Les Chiens à Eragny)**

c. 1894

oil on wood

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection, 1970

1970.17.3

In 1896, art critic André Mellerio observed, ‘What makes M. Bonnard at heart is his charm, for which he has an innate gift ... He is noteworthy for his characteristically amusing observations of animals – cats, roosters, dogs – which have easily recognizable silhouettes in his work. His intimate understanding of these beings is made manifest through their baroque poses, supple, tense spines, muzzles thrust into the air, and wild

gangly frolicking'. In this composition, the empty architectural background brilliantly foregrounds two dogs caught in the initial overtures of scent-based introduction.

For kids

Pierre loved dogs. He owned many during his life and they had unique names, including Bella, Black, Ubu and Poucette (which means ‘thumbelina’ in French). His friend Thadée Natanson said that Pierre was never seen without a dog. In this painting, Pierre has captured two dogs playing on a quiet street in Paris. All sorts of animals – such as cats, horses and birds – and their animated daily movements fascinated Pierre and inspired him to paint.

What animals share your world?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Paris, Rue de Parme on Bastille Day
(Paris, Rue de Parme, le 14 juillet)**
1890
oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Collection of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon, 1995

1995.47.2

Bonnard recalled how, when in 1890 he saw an exhibition of brightly coloured Japanese woodblock prints, and kakemono (hanging scrolls), 'I understood immediately ... that colour could express all things without needing modelling or relief. It seemed to me then that it was possible to translate light, form, and character with nothing more than colour'. This painting, depicting the street where Bonnard lived with his

grandmother at this time, is a perfect example of Bonnard's absorption and influence of Japanese art, with its vertical kakemono format and perspective, flat silhouetted forms and strong blocks of colour that unite the disparate elements of the composition.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Street scene (Scène de rue) 1899 oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 13

Bonnard's research into the depiction of motion was concomitant with other research on animated images in photography and the new field of cinematography at the time. The composition of his 1890s urban landscapes recalls a snapshot, with blurry areas at the periphery and clearly defined close-ups. Some images have been arbitrarily cut, suggesting out-of-focus areas where one assumes the

scene continues. Focusing on the image from the front is reminiscent of the still frames of the first films by the Lumière brothers, where a stationary camera records the movement taking place in front of the lens, similar to the human eye.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Soldier and blonde woman
(Militaire et blonde)
1892
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 4

‘You have before you an artist who knows how to extract particular meaning from every sight, be it unexpected or familiar. No one can more accurately note the appearance of the street, the silhouettes passing by, spots of colour seen through the fine Parisian haze. No one transcribes more faithfully the childish pantomime, the slender grace of the little girl. A curious drawing in motion, of simian flexibility, captures the fleeting gestures

of the street, quick expressions that come to life and then vanish within a moment.'

– Gustave Geffroy, 'L'Art d'aujourd'hui. Pierre Bonnard', *Le Journal*, 1896

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Intimacy (Intimité)

1891

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Acquired with the assistance of Philippe Meyer by the Foundation for French Museums, 1992

RF 1992 406

From early on in his career Bonnard was committed to the abandonment of the third dimension, believing instead in 'the ability of [his art's] lines and colours to explain themselves' (in the words of his friend, artist Maurice Denis). In this painting, with its juxtaposition of flat planes of colour and pattern, only gradually does the eye separate the wafts of tobacco smoke from the busy arabesques of the background wallpaper,

or discern the silhouetted form of the artist's sister, Andrée, smoking a cigarette in the middle distance, and the artist's own left hand clutching a pipe in the foreground.

Room:

Decoration

Room description: Two large geometric feature walls in the centre of the space, a dark maroon octagon and an arch featuring details from a fan design of people and flowers. Light green wall on left. Back wall on the left decorated with a wallpaper of pink roses on a green background.



Wall text:

Decoration

‘Painting must above all be decorative. An artist’s talent will be revealed in the way the lines are arranged ... I’m not committed to any type of art. I’m only looking to do something personal, and I’m unlearning right now what I had a hard time learning at art school for four years.’

– Pierre Bonnard, *L’Echo de Paris*, 1891

Bonnard’s words reflected the new aesthetic sought by the young artists who formed his circle of Nabi friends, who were committed to treating the surface of a painting as a site for exploration of flat colour and linear design. As Maurice Denis put it in 1890, ‘a painting – before being a workhorse,

a naked woman, or an anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order’. The anti-realist stance of these young men was an act of rebellion against the principles of drawing and painting from life that had been instilled in them at art school. In addition to lending itself to commercial uses for advertising, the Nabis’ emphasis on the decorative also aligned them with anti-naturalist trends in Symbolist theatre staging in the 1890s, and brought them commissions for set, lighting and theatre program designs.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Edward Ancourt printer

France active 1870–98

Edward Ancourt & Cie publisher

France active 1882–93

France-Champagne

1891

colour lithograph

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased with the assistance of Orde Poynton Esq. CMG, 1994

95.79

Bonnard's first breakthrough as an artist came in 1889, when he won a competition to design this poster advertising champagne, which is a tour de force of simplified and exaggerated form, bold use of restricted colour

tones, and deliberate flatness of design. It caught the eye of Félix Fénéon, a progressive young critic who would soon be working for the cultural journal *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*). Fénéon marvelled at how much this new kind of graphic advertising inexpensively beautified everyday life: 'It is an open-air exhibition', Fénéon wrote, seeing these posters in the streets of Paris, 'throughout the year and all along the roads'.

For kids

Before the 1860s, street posters usually featured practical information in black and white, with few or no illustrations. In the 1860s, new techniques were developed to make outdoor advertising more colourful. Soon, eye-catching posters brightened the streets. Pierre's large poster advertising French champagne was one of the first designed by a leading contemporary artist. See how he has made the bubbles overflow from the glass and become part of the woman's dress. When this poster was pasted all over the streets of Paris in the summer of 1891, it must have seemed that the city was awash with champagne!

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Edward Ancourt printer

France active 1870–98

La Revue blanche

1894

colour lithograph

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased, 1978

206.1978

In 1894 Bonnard was commissioned to create a new poster for the Natanson brothers' journal *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*), whose title symbolised an intention to include all colours of thought, synthesised like a spinning colour wheel into a 'white' survey of contemporary art, literature and politics. Bonnard's poster offers a startling image of modernity, bringing together before

a newsstand a fashionable Parisian clutching her freshly purchased issue, a street urchin paperboy and, above him, just discernible by the glistening silk of his top hat, a society gentleman perusing the display of *La Revue blanche* that fills most of the poster's background.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Nannies' promenade, frieze
of carriages
(La Promenade des nourrices,
frise de fiacres)
1895**

screen: colour lithograph on 4 sheets

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1946

1587.1-4-4

One of the proprietors of the journal *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*), Thadée Natanson, was the first owner of a painted screen that Bonnard created in 1894 in emulation of Japanese folding screens, which Bonnard evocatively described in a letter to his parents: 'I'm painting a folding screen ... It shows the Place de la Concorde where we

see a young mother with her children, nannies, dogs and, forming a border along the top, a station of cabs'. Bonnard subsequently reworked his design as lithographs in five colours, editioned at an affordable price, enabling more than 100 others to have these paper folding screens framed for interior decoration.

For kids

Pierre and his friends wanted to create decorative artworks that made everyday life more beautiful. They were especially inspired by the lines and blocks of colour in Japanese art and design. Folding screens, made in the Japanese style with decorative paper panels, were popular in fashionable interiors. Pierre made prints to decorate this screen, depicting a scene of nannies, children and dogs playing in a city park, along with lots of horse-drawn carriages. The nannies are wearing big capes and bonnets.

Can you find two children running with hoops?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Study for a fan: Three rabbits
in a landscape
(Projet d'éventail: trois lapins dans
un paysage)**

1890s
chalk and ink on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Kept in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Purchased, 1981

RF 38834, Recto

In the 1890s, Bonnard found himself experimenting with a variety of formats and techniques. Like his fellow Nabis, he was dedicated to the idea of art and life being united, and considered painting only part of a continuum of the 'decorative'. While painting always remained important for Bonnard, he later recalled how in the early 1890s he

‘wanted personally to make things that would be both popular and practical: prints, furniture, fans, screens, etc.’. In this delightful study for a decorative fan, he has borrowed the motif of fluffy rabbits from Japanese art, where they frequently symbolise good fortune.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Study for a fan with figures
amongst trees
(Projet d'éventail avec des
personnages parmi les arbres)**
1890s
pen, ink, and wash on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Kept in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Purchased, 1984

RF 40982, Recto

Room:

Nabi interiors

Room description: Pink, red and pale green walls with seating in the centre of the room. Green and light pink patterned wallpaper on the far wall.



Wall text:

Nabi Interiors

Along with his friends Vuillard, Vallotton and the other Nabis, Bonnard appreciated the intimacy and quietness of domestic life, and throughout the 1890s he also produced delicate studies situated within the family domain of the dining room and the nursery. In several of his interiors from this period, Bonnard places emphasis upon the manner in which family life is shrunk after dark to the pool of light shed by a central lamp. Beyond its warmth all sorts of danger might lurk, a suggestion not exaggerated for the time, with Paris rocked by anarchist bombings and assassinations.

Analogy has been made between these works and Maurice Maeterlinck's play

Intérieur, staged at Aurélien Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in April 1895, where two actors stood in the dark outside a set that looked into a family's living room illuminated by a hanging lamp; the family's serenity was to be shattered when these observers moved inside to tell the parents of the death of their daughter. Bonnard shared a studio with Lugné-Poe at this time, regularly attended performances at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, and also designed theatre programs for plays produced there.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Lunch by the lamp
(Déjeuner sous la lampe)**

1898

oil on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Philippe Meyer, 2000

RF 2000 8

Édouard Vuillard

French 1868–1940

After the meal (Après le repas)

1893

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased from the artist, 1936

RF 1977 370

In *After the meal* naturalistic rendering and traditional perspective have been replaced by flat planes and dabs of colour. While Vuillard's compositional structure veers here towards abstraction, this small painting seems, like so many of his interiors, to be charged with hidden meaning. Vuillard himself was keenly aware of the manifold associations that could attach themselves to the seemingly mundane realities of one's daily

existence. In 1893 he mused in his diary: 'Why is it that one's soul and sensibility can find such truly new things in everyday places?'

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Under the lamp (Sous la lampe)

1899

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Accepted by the State as a gift of Société Coprex SA, in memory of Joseph

Nash, 1979

RF 1979 15

Under the lamp shows Andrée Terrasse, Bonnard's sister, seated at the table with her second son, Charles, and her maternal grandmother, Madame Frédéric Mertzdorff, in the latter's apartment in 8 rue de Parme, Paris. Claude Terrasse, Bonnard's brother-in-law, stands looking down at the scene. Each family member is engaged in an activity – sewing, studying, reading, playing – but they are united by the lamplight, which acts

as a symbol for home and intimacy.
There is a feeling of silence, yet mutuality.
This quietly powerful work suggests
emotional sustenance and succour in
the anonymous city.

Félix Vallotton

Swiss/French 1865–1925

Dinner by lamplight (Le Dîner, effet de lampe)

1899

oil on cardboard on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased, 1947

RF 1977 349

In 1899 Félix Vallotton married Gabrielle Rodrigues-Henriques, a widow with three children who was the daughter of the prominent art dealer Alexandre Bernheim. Vallotton was open about the financial security this marriage would bring to his career. He did not anticipate, however, the fact that he would not fit comfortably into this ready-made new family. His black silhouette in the foreground here emphasises his isolation within this

intimate portrait of Rodrigues-Henriques and two of his new stepchildren. The deep black background and even the strong barrier-like red stripes on the tablecloth reinforce an atmosphere of strained social tension.

Félix Vallotton

Swiss/French 1865–1925

The poker game (Le Poker)

1902

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of D. David-Weill, 1935

RF 1977 347

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Under the lamp
(Sous la lampe)

1890s

oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 10

Édouard Vuillard

French 1868–1940

Family lunch

(Le Déjeuner en famille)

1899

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Bequest of Mme Lucie Grandjean-Hessel, 2016

RF MO P 2016 9

It has been argued that Vuillard's penchant for intimate interior studies reflects his love of the paintings of seventeenth-century Dutch artists, such as Jan Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch, whose work he had long studied in the Louvre. He encountered further paintings by these artists during a trip to Holland with his friend the painter Ker-Xavier Roussel in late 1892. As with Bonnard's paintings of dimly lit interiors, numerous

commentators have remarked upon the claustrophobic atmosphere that often permeates Vuillard's interior scenes. Highly decorative, mass-produced wallpapers, such as the Nabi artists dreamed of producing themselves, often feature in these paintings.

For kids

Notice the patterns and textures in this painting. There is a lot to look at! The man who created this painting, Édouard Vuillard, was good friends with Pierre Bonnard – they even shared a studio for a few years. Édouard was interested in the home, family and decoration.

Look out for colourful patterns on the walls throughout this exhibition. The exhibition designer India Mahdavi made these wallpapers by taking small details and patterns from Pierre's paintings and modifying them. India is a designer and architect who lives and works in Paris, but transforms the interiors of restaurants, homes, hotels and shops all over the world!

Édouard Vuillard
French 1868–1940

**Conversation at the Natansons'
at Valvins**
**(La conversation, chez les Natanson
à Valvins)**

1896

oil on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2023

2023.6

Alexandre, Thadée and Alfred Natanson were wealthy businessmen who had taken control of *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*), a small art, literary and music publication that had been founded in Belgium in 1889, and relocated it to Paris in October 1891. The new Paris-focused *La Revue blanche* was looking for artists who could represent and

promote its brand, and the Nabis were in the right place at the right moment in cultural history. Thadée Natanson was drawn to the work of Bonnard and Vuillard in particular, and over the years came to amass a large collection of works by both artists.

Maurice Denis

French 1870–1943

On the pale silver sofa (*Sur le canapé d'argent pâle*)

1898

plate 10 from the *Love (Amour)* suite,
published 1899

colour lithograph and transfer lithograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Women's Association with the assistance of Jennifer

Lempriere, 2008

2008.378.11

Maurice Denis's *Amour* suite is acclaimed as one of the greatest achievements of the revival of colour lithography in Paris in the 1890s. It was commissioned by Ambroise Vollard, the avant-garde art dealer and publisher of original prints. The suite was inspired by Denis's courtship with Marthe Meurier, the woman he married in 1893. Meurier is depicted in

various roles in the lithographs, and each is inscribed with an evocative caption taken from the journal Denis wrote during their courtship between 1891 and 1893. Denis was known as ‘the Nabi of beautiful icons’, because of his frequent treatment of Christian subjects in his art.

Édouard Vuillard
French 1868–1940

**Interior with pink wallpaper III
(Intérieur aux tentures roses III)**
1899

plate 7 from the *Landscapes and Interiors*
(*Paysages et intérieurs*) portfolio
colour lithograph, edition of 100

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1948

1845-4

Édouard Vuillard
French 1868–1940

Interior with pink wallpaper II
(Intérieur aux tentures roses II)
1899

plate 6 from the *Landscapes and Interiors*
(*Paysages et intérieurs*) portfolio
colour lithograph, edition of 100

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1948

1844-4

‘Looking more closely at the works of M. Vuillard, one breathes in them the intimate perfume of closed atmospheres. This artist knows how to create infinite horizons within the restricted confines of interiors unseen or misunderstood by others. He likes fabrics sprinkled with dots, or zebra stripes, so fashionable among women today. The silhouettes

of the furniture, the tones of the hangings take on to his painter's gaze an importance almost equal to the beings who move among them – the whole forming a microcosm of soft and refined sensations of calm existences.'

– André Mellerio, *Le Mouvement idéaliste en peinture (The Idealist Movement in Painting)*, 1896

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Ambroise Vollard publisher

French 1866–1939

Auguste Clot printer

French 1858–1936

Child with lamp
(L'Enfant à la lampe)

c. 1898

colour lithograph

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased, 1980

80.2826

While Bonnard and his partner Marthe de Mélny were never to have children, Bonnard observed the magical innocence of childhood through the six daughters and sons of his sister Andrée and her husband Claude Terrasse. Bonnard loved the tendency of children to follow their

own rules, rather than conforming to what adults required of them. His patron and friend Thadée Natanson observed how if Bonnard had had his own children, he would have let them grow wild, like the unruly plants in his garden. Here, Bonnard is fascinated by a small boy's total absorption in playing with toy railway carriages by lamplight.

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Éditions du Journal des artistes

publisher

France active 19th century

Family scene

(Scène de famille)

1893

colour lithograph, edition 98/100

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased, 1985

85.1789

This scene shows Bonnard's sister Andrée Terrasse cradling her first-born child, Jean (born 1892), whose prominent bald head with impish face emerges from a meringue of white cloth. Bonnard distances the composition from any potential 'Holy Family' implications by inserting himself, the young bespectacled

uncle, in the lower portion of the scene, appearing like an awkward and displaced sibling – visually excluded as well, by the grid-like structure of Andrée’s patterned blouse. The year before Bonnard created this lithograph, he had proposed marriage to his cousin, Berthe Schaedlin, but was refused, perhaps quashing hopes of the domestic intimacy he was then witnessing in his sister’s life.

Auguste Lumière

French 1862–1954

Louis Lumière

French 1864–1948

**Mealtime for baby
(Le Repas de bébé)**

1895

digital file, transferred from 35 mm film,
black and white, silent, 42 secs

© Institut Lumière

Filmed by Louis Lumière on 22 March 1895 at the Lumière studio in Lyon, *Le Repas de bébé* features Louis's brother Auguste Lumière, his wife Marguerite and their infant daughter Andrée. Marguerite drinks tea while Auguste indulgently feeds their baby. Praising the Lumière brothers' work in *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* in April 1896, the science

writer Henri de Parville extolled how their 'animated photographs are small wonders. We distinguish all the details ... leaves quivering under the action of the breeze ... It is an unimaginable truth'. The strong wind moving the foliage in the background here astonished audiences at the time.

Room:

Bonnard and photography

Room description: L-shaped corridor proceeding to the right. Light pink patterned wall on left and white wall with framed works on the right.



Wall text:

Bonnard and photography

Bonnard was an early adopter of photography, buying a roll-film hand Kodak camera soon after it appeared on the market in 1888. Many of Bonnard's photographs reflect his delight in the instantaneity of perception afforded by the Kodak, and like the millions who would adopt snapshot photography in the years to follow, he used his camera to capture images of family life. On display here are photographs by Bonnard taken for his family album. Most capture scenes of family holidays at the Bonnard family's country property near Grenoble. Bonnard's self-portraits were made using a shutter release cable.

Many of the photographs show

Bonnard's nieces and nephews, their grandparents, nursemaids and pets, playing in the garden. Capturing the lightness and joy of this family time, Bonnard later drew on the photographs' moments of unexpected movement and impromptu composition when creating his paintings. Also recorded are visits made to the Bonnards by his Nabi artist friends Ker-Xavier Roussel and Édouard Vuillard. Vuillard, like Bonnard, was fascinated by photography, and he is captured here using his own Kodak camera.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Pierre Bonnard smoking a pipe
in the garden at Grand-Lemps**

c. 1906, printed 2023

inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 28 70

For kids

What do you use to take photos? When cameras first became available for purchase (long before mobile phones had in-built cameras) people took pictures with devices like the Kodak box camera. Pierre was one of the first to own one of these cameras. He used it to take photos of his friends, his sister Andrée and her children (Pierre's nieces and nephews), at the Bonnard family home in the French countryside. In these photos, they are doing ordinary things like hanging washing and playing with their pets.

In a few of the photos, Pierre is in the photograph, but still managed to capture the image. How do you think he was able to be in two places at once?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**La Baignade: Vivette in the foreground,
Robert in the background and two
other children**

c. 1903–05, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 27 50

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Robert pushing Renée in a cart
1903–05, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 27

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**A dog walking towards Bonnard's
lens, in the background Robert and
another child contemplate the scene**
1898, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 18

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Andrée Terrasse and Renée
1899–1900, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 26

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Pierre Bonnard seated on the
threshold of his house with Renée,
Charles, Jean and Robert**
c. 1899, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 28 71

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Ker-Xavier Roussel followed by Renée
1900, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Donation with life interest from M. Antoine Terrasse, 1987

PHO 1987 27 19

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Self-portrait

c. 1898–99, printed 2023

inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 28 50 1

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Édouard Vuillard holding his
Kodak camera**
1900, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 27 15

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Édouard Vuillard holding his Kodak
camera, and Renée Terrasse**

1900, printed 2023

inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from M. Antoine Terrasse, 1987

PHO 1987 27 16

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Marcel and Robert in a tub, Renée
seated beside them, a fourth child
cut off by the edge of the image**
c. 1898, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 17

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**A cat jumps on Andrée Terrasse's
dress, Renée and Robert contemplate
the scene**

1898, printed 2023

inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 2

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**On the balcony of the
studio, Paris**

c. 1902–03, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 28 61

Room:

Music and theatre

Room description: Large, carpeted room with beige walls. Curved waist-height display case on the left as you enter with a column behind it. Curtained space with screen and seating in the back right-hand corner and a diagonal dividing wall in the back left-hand corner.



Wall text:

Music and theatre

In 1891 Bonnard moved into a studio at 28 rue Pigalle in the ninth arrondissement, which he shared with Maurice Denis, Vuillard and the young actor Aurélien Lugné-Poe. Through Lugné-Poe's connections, he now became involved in the contemporary experimental theatre scene in Paris. Lugné-Poe's friend Paul Fort founded the Théâtre d'Art in 1890, which he conceived in opposition to the prevailing taste for naturalistic representation in French theatre. Bonnard was to design stage sets and playbills for Fort's Théâtre d'Art productions; and, later, worked for Lugné-Poe's own theatrical company, the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre.

In 1890 Bonnard's sister Andrée had married Claude Terrasse, a composer and music teacher, and Bonnard subsequently collaborated with his brother-in-law on illustrating the latter's musical primer for children, as well as Terrasse's musical scores. In 1896 he worked with Terrasse and Lugné-Poe on the staging of Alfred Jarry's controversial play *Ubu Roi* (*King Ubu*). Bonnard also worked on the Théâtre des Pantins (Puppet Theatre) that he, Terrasse, Jarry, and the poet Franc-Nohain established in 1897 in the garden of Terrasse's residence near Montmartre. Bonnard made some 300 puppets for the Pantins productions, as well as illustrating the sheet music for songs by Franc-Nohain that were scored by Terrasse.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**The composer Claude Terrasse
and his two sons
(Le Compositeur Claude Terrasse
et ses deux fils)**

1902

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gift of Mr and Mrs Charles Terrasse, 1978

RF 1980 2

For kids

The man in this painting is Pierre's brother-in-law, the composer Claude Terrasse, who was married to Pierre's sister Andrée. The two men worked together to create music books for children. In the curved case behind you, look for the pages of lively and colourful sheet music written by Claude and illustrated by Pierre. Pierre has turned the whole notes (semibreves) into little faces! Family, music and theatre were important to Pierre, and he collaborated with Claude and other friends on puppet shows, too.

As you explore this room, look out for Pierre's big painting of the entire Terrasse family.

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Claude Terrasse composer

French 1867–1923

**Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies
(Ancienne Maison Quantin), Paris**
publisher

France active late 19th century

F. Allier Père et Fils, Grenoble printer

France active late 19th century

**Small Musical Primer
(Petit Solfège illustré)**

1893

illustrated book with 30 offset lithographs

Shaw Research Library, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by John and Cecily Adams,
Dr Peter Chu, and Barry Janes and Paul Cross, 2020

In 1891–93 Bonnard collaborated with
his brother-in-law Claude Terrasse on
illustrating *Petit Solfège illustré* (*Small*

Musical Primer), creating thirty delightful designs that enlivened Terrasse's text. Bonnard made dozens of preparatory drawings for this project, which he clearly at times struggled with. The finished product, however, is a tight-knit collection of humorous illustrations guaranteed to hold the attention of young children grappling with music lessons. There are parallels as well, in a number of the *Solfège* images, between Bonnard's designs to illustrate measure and beat in music and his concurrent engagement with designing folding screens and other interior decorations.

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Claude Terrasse composer

French 1867–1923

Crevel Frères printer

French active 1890s

Eugène Froment, Paris publisher

France c. 1885–1922

Familiar Little Scenes (Petites Scènes familiares)

1895

book of musical scores with
20 lithographs

Shaw Research Library, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by John and Cecily Adams,
Dr Peter Chu, and Barry Janes and Paul Cross, 2020

Bonnard and Claude Terrasse
collaborated again in 1895 on an album
of piano music, titled *Petites Scènes
familiales (Familiar Little Scenes)*.

Terrasse and his wife, Bonnard's sister Andrée, were living in Arcachon in south-western France at this time, and this seaside resort provided the setting for a number of Bonnard's whimsical observations of daily life in the town's streets and public squares. Bonnard created a cover design and nineteen illustrations for Terrasse's musical scores, most of which Terrasse dedicated to individual family members and friends. In turn, Claude and Andrée Terrasse and their infant children, and Bonnard's cousin Berthe Schaedlin, featured as his models

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Octave Mirbeau author

French 1848–1917

Louis Fort printer, intaglio

French active 19th–20th century

Émile Fequet printer, letterpress

French active 20th century

Ambroise Vollard publisher

French 1866–1939

Dingo

1924

illustrated book with etchings and
letterpress printed in red and black ink,
edition 30/350

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased, 1983

83.1494.1-60

Octave Mirbeau's last semi-novel *Dingo*,
first published in 1913, opens with the

mysterious delivery to the author's home of a black pine crate, the contents of which are listed in a waybill as 'live dog'. The crate contains a tiny puppy, which turns out to be an infant wild Australian dingo. Throughout the novel, this puppy displays noble but also violent qualities as it matures, and Mirbeau plays with analogies between the animal's antics and human behaviour. This posthumous reissue of Mirbeau's novel provided great scope for Bonnard to depict the occasionally fraught interactions between the dingo, other animals and people.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Dancers
(Danseuses)
c. 1896
oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased, 2013

RF 2013 20

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**The balcony box
(La Loge)**

1908

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Accepted by the State in lieu of inheritance tax, 1989

RF 1989 32

Bonnard was commissioned to paint this group portrait by the brothers Gaston and Josse (Joseph) Bernheim-Jeune, second-generation art dealers who sold, and personally collected, the work of many Nabi artists. The two brothers and their wives (themselves sisters, née Suzanne and Mathilde Adler) are shown seated in their box at the Paris Opéra.

Bonnard used decorative elements of

the scene to experiment with painterly pattern and texture, such as the thin vertical section to the right of the canvas. Here, the carved and gilded edge of the balcony box becomes a flat column that echoes the gilded timber frame the Bernheims would soon place around the canvas.

Wall text:

Ubu Roi

When Alfred Jarry's provocative play *Ubu Roi* (*King Ubu*) was first staged by Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre at the Nouveau Théâtre in Paris in December 1896, an actor walked out onto the stage as a 'king', masked and clad in a grotesquely obese prosthetic outfit resembling a turnip, brandishing a toilet brush as a sceptre and yelling, as his first word to the audience, 'SHITE!'. Jarry's play was a vicious satire of royalty, nobility, politicians and the clergy, filled with obscene language, gestures and situations.

The audience was variously affronted, delighted, scandalised, offended and electrified, and theatre history was made, obscene language and action being

publicly christened on the French stage (although the play's opening night was also to be its closing performance). Such was the tumult that the play's musical score, written by Bonnard's brother-in-law Claude Terrasse, could scarcely be heard. Bonnard helped create the sets and masks for Jarry's play, and also made the puppets when Ubu was revived, as a marionette show, at Terrasse's Théâtre des Pantins (Puppet Theatre) at the close of 1897. Shown here are excerpts from Jean-Christophe Averty's filmed version of *Ubu Roi*, which was screened on French television on 21 September 1965 to an audience of fifteen million French viewers

Jean-Christophe Averty director
French 1928–2017

Ubu Roi
(King Ubu)
1965

film, black and white, 2 mins
(full duration: 95 mins)

© Institut National de l'Audiovisuel

© Jean-Christophe Averty

Alfred Jarry

French 1873–1907

Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry, 10 December 1896

1896

lithograph

Musée Bonnard, Le Cannet

‘A nightmare evening, a hurricane of whistles and boos barely covered by some applause’, as one newspaper put it at the time, was a mild description of the ruckus that ensued when Alfred Jarry’s controversial new play, *Ubu Roi* (*King Ubu*) premiered in Paris in December 1896. Shortly before *Ubu Roi* opened, Jarry had described his character in *La Revue blanche*: ‘He is the perfect anarchist or would be if he did not have traits that prevent him from

ever becoming the perfect anarchist, that is cowardice, filth, ugliness, etc.'. Jarry's poster design for the premiere of *Ubu Roi* shows his character as a malevolent buffoon.

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Claude Terrasse composer

French 1867–1923

Franc-Nohain lyricist

French 1872–1934

Imprimerie E. Dupré printer

France active 19th century

Mercure de France, Paris publisher

France est. 1894

Left to right:

The land of Touraine

(Du pays Tourangeau)

Poor Adèle

(Malheureuse Adèle)

**Velas, or The officer risen from
the ranks**

**(Velas, ou l'officier
de fortune)**

Monsieur Benoît's Complaint

(La Complainte de M. Benoît)
Obscene lullaby
(Berceuse obscène)
Snowscape
(Paysage de neige)

1898

from *Puppet Repertoire (Répertoire des Pantins)* by Franc-Nohain and Claude Terrasse, 1898
lithograph

Musée Bonnard, Le Cannet
Acquired, 2010

D.2010.1.35.4; D.2010.1.35.5
D.2010.1.35.6; D.2010.1.35.1
D.2010.1.35.2; D.2010.1.35.3

Claude Terrasse's Théâtre des Pantins, which opened in December 1897, was set up in a large studio in the garden behind Terrasse's house that provided seating for an audience of around 100, arranged before a puppet theatre constructed by Alfred Jarry. The studio

was painted by Bonnard with silhouette decorations depicting the little theatre's puppets, some 300 of which Bonnard himself designed and carved during the theatre's short lifespan (December 1897 to March 1898). Jarry and the librettist Franc-Nohain were the puppet-masters at the Théâtre des Pantins, while Claude Terrasse and his wife, Bonnard's sister Andrée, provided piano accompaniment. While it is a shame that neither physical nor photographic evidence exists of this enormous amount of theatrical work by Bonnard, these six music sheets survive, for suggestive songs by Franc-Nohain, scored by Claude Terrasse and illustrated with lithographs by Bonnard.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The banjo player
(Joueur de banjo)
1895
oil on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 9

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Strolling singers
(Chanteurs ambulants)
1897
oil on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 12

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Bourgeois afternoon, or The
Terrasse family
(L'Après-midi bourgeoise, ou La
Famille Terrasse)**

1900

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Accepted by the State in lieu of inheritance tax, 1987

RF 1988 50

Thadée Natanson described this painting as the one in which 'Bonnard really began to look like Bonnard'. It belongs to a pivotal period in Bonnard's career, when he began to abandon the decorative tendencies of his early Nabi style. The scene represents the family of the composer Claude Terrasse, the artist's brother-in-law, in front of the

Bonnards' family house near Le Grand-Lemps in south-eastern France, on a sunny afternoon. Bonnard retains here his taste for comic deformations bordering on caricature. Humour is one of the dominant qualities of this group portrait, mischievously titled *Bourgeois afternoon*, which also evokes the spirit of Italian fifteenth-century fresco paintings.

Curious about the music playing in the exhibition?

The piano music you can hear in this room was composed by Pierre Bonnard's brother-in-law Claude Terrasse, and published in his portfolio titled *Familiar Little Scenes*. The pieces are *La Danse* and *Premier Air de Fifi*: some of the sheet music is on display in the nearby case, accompanied by Bonnard's illustrations. The music has been especially recorded for the exhibition, performed by concert pianist Gemma Turvey.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, you can hear more pieces by Terrasse, as well as compositions by Gabriel Fauré, Maurice Ravel and others. Many of the featured composers had personal connections with Bonnard and his circle.

Room:

Large decorations

Room description: Large room with orange and purple walls and red flooring. Dining table with a hanging light above it in the centre and seating placed against back wall on the left-hand side.



Large decorations

[HOME](#)

Wall text:

Large decorations

In 1906, Bonnard entered into a selling agreement with the Bernheim-Jeune brothers, owners of a contemporary art gallery in Paris. Now in his late thirties, Bonnard achieved financial prosperity. With significant commissions for the homes of such influential patrons as Misia Godebska and Ivan Morozov, Bonnard united his talent for the decorative with his interest in large-scale easel painting. Like medieval tapestries, these paintings often featured mythological scenes or idealised landscapes, evoking an Arcadian world.

These idealised subjects featured less as Bonnard's work progressed, and his interest in colour and form took over.

It was at this time Bonnard first experienced the light of the south of France, and his palette soon transformed. Simultaneously, his friendship with renowned colourist Henri Matisse influenced his direction, with Bonnard adopting the principle, recorded in Matisse's 1908 *Notes of a Painter*, that 'the work of art must carry within itself its complete significance'.

Two commissions from art critic and collector George Besson depicting contemporary Parisian life demonstrate Bonnard's success at creating complex pictorial worlds within the frame, independent of their setting. Sensing the significance of his own break from site-specific 'decorative painting', Bonnard later remarked that 'in the future, one will have to know whether one is a painter-

decorator or a painter of feeling'. As for himself, he said 'I float between *Intimisme* and decoration; one can't change how one's made'.

Artwork labels:

Félix Vallotton

Swiss/French 1865–1925

The symphony (La Symphonie)

1897

woodcut, edition 94/100

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1944

1367-4

Swiss artist Félix Vallotton moved from Lausanne to Paris in 1882. Here, he attended classes at the Académie Julian and studied the Old Masters in the Louvre, like the Nabi artists did and with whom he became associated a decade later. While Vallotton was a highly gifted painter, his initial renown came for the manner in which he revitalised

the woodcut medium, creating vibrant images whose immediacy derived from their stark contrasts of black and white. His woodcuts frequently appeared in the Natanson brothers' journal *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*). Here, he pays tribute to Thadée Natanson's wife Misia Godebska, who as well as being an important patron was also a talented piano player.

For kids

This print by Pierre's friend Félix Vallotton shows a woman playing piano for a group of men. They are all in fancy evening clothes. The woman's name is Misia, and she was a very important art collector. She supported many artists, including Pierre, by commissioning them to create beautiful artworks to hang in her home.

Look closely at the white shapes in this print. They form faces, a wallpaper pattern, a lamp and part of Misia's dress. Félix used the woodcut printing technique to create this picture. The white shapes are sections that Félix gouged out from a solid block of wood with a sharp tool. He applied ink to the woodblock, and the black parts of the image represent the flat areas he didn't touch with his cutting tool.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Misia's house
(La Maison de Misia)

c. 1904
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Purchased, 1938

RF 1977 67

This small canvas depicts the summer home of Misia Godebska (1872–1950), a gifted musician and hostess who, with her first husband, the literary editor Thadée Natanson, played an important role as a patron in Parisian creative circles at the turn of the century. Known as the 'Queen of Paris', Godebska had an impressive social network, and was friend and patron of the Nabi artists, and later with those associated with the

Ballets Russes: Sergei Diaghilev, Igor Stravinsky, Jean Cocteau and 'Coco' Chanel, among others. In 1894, Bonnard befriended the couple, who supported him in many ways, from publishing his early graphic works in *La Revue blanche* (*The White Review*), to regularly hosting social gatherings where discussion of the arts was encouraged, and patronage dispensed.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

La Place Clichy

1912

oil on canvas

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne–Centre de création industrielle
On deposit at Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon since 1972.
Gift of Adèle and George Besson, 1963

AM 4224 P (22)

La Place Clichy was one of several 'decorations' Bonnard would produce on commission, and they helped to establish him as a financially and critically successful artist in the early years of the twentieth century. This painting was commissioned by art critic George Besson, to decorate his apartment in Paris, not far from the Eiffel Tower.

Here, Bonnard has painted a bustling Paris intersection from the vantage point

of a brasserie. Waiters in black jackets hover over patrons and tout for trade. Above them, the brasserie's awning creates a golden frame for the top of the canvas. Beyond is a passing parade of mostly women and children, dressed in hats and coats, illuminated in the bright sunshine of a winter's morning.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**The café ‘Au Petit Poucet’,
Place Clichy, in the evening
(Le Café ‘Au Petit Poucet’,
Place Clichy, le soir)**
1928
oil on canvas

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne–Centre de création industrielle
On deposit at Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon since 1972.
Gift of Adèle and George Besson, 1963

AM 4224 P (21b)

Bonnard worked in studios near to the Place Clichy, in Montmartre, for around twenty years, and often used its colourful street life for inspiration. Although this canvas was painted a decade after *La Place Clichy* (hanging nearby), the paintings relate as a pair.

While *La Place Clichy* is composed as

a view from inside looking out, this scene unfolds from a more ambiguous vantage point. Lone figures sit and wait, couples talk, a waiter serves, all within the convivial cafe atmosphere. In this 'see and be seen' context, Bonnard creates a visual puzzle out of mirrored surfaces and transparent glass panes, playing with reflections of the street outside and the cafe awning, all within an infusing golden light.

For kids

Pierre has painted this lively street scene from an unusual perspective. Notice the ladies seated on the left. They are probably reflections in a mirror. Pierre has used mirrors and windows to bring the outside world in. His clever use of perspective makes you, the viewer, feel as if you are a part of the scene depicted – seated inside the cafe, looking out a window and onto the busy streets of Paris.

Pierre often played with perspective by using visual devices, like cropping and distorting figures and forms. Look out for some of these tricks as you make your way through the exhibition.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Pastoral symphony
(La Symphonie pastorale)
1916–20
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of the Fondation Meyer, 2009

RF 2009 14

Bonnard entered a selling agreement with Josse (Joseph) and Gaston Bernheim-Jeune, brothers who owned an art gallery in Paris, in 1906. The brothers commissioned several works from the artist for their private collection including a quartet of panels to decorate the vestibule of their Paris residence, of which *Pastoral symphony* is one.

As with other decorative commissions

received from Misia Godebska and Russian art collector Ivan Morozov, Bonnard intended his decorative scenes to be perceived slowly, within a complex architectural setting. With compositional elements drawn from Flemish tapestries or theatre sets, the panel presents an Arcadian scene in which shepherds and shepherdesses tend animals, children play and all is framed by a curtain of dense green foliage.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

In a boat (En barque) c. 1907 oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Acquired, 1946

RF 1977 73

In 1905, Bonnard accompanied Misia Godebska and her second husband, the banker Alfred Edwards, on a canal cruise in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. His enjoyment of life on the water continued during summers spent in Villennes and Vernouillet, along the banks of the Seine. It was from the stern of a boat on the Seine that Bonnard sketched, and later painted, many versions of this scene in which Marthe de Méligny, two

younger companions and two dogs drift along the river among ducks and lily pads.

Although this was a subject favoured by the Impressionists to convey lightness and transience, Bonnard's canvas has a heavier presence, a tapestry-like quality that connects it back to the decorative pursuits of his Nabi years.

Room:

Early nudes

Room description: Walls patterned with pink flowers and red flooring with a small waist-height display shelf affixed to the back left wall.



Wall text:

Early nudes

Bonnard's artistic career is intimately tied to his personal life with Maria Boursin (1869–1942), who chose to be called Marthe de M  ligny. The pair met in Montmartre in 1893. De M  ligny worked for Trousselier, a company that supplied silk flowers for use in fashionable millinery. Although their different socio-economic backgrounds meant that she was not readily accepted by Bonnard's family and friends, de M  ligny became Bonnard's lifelong companion and, through her regular presence in his paintings, his close collaborator. Her slim body, soft facial features and wavy hair, often arranged in a high bun or later cut short in a bob, help to identify her in many of Bonnard's paintings.

In these early years of their relationship, de Méigny was an inspirational model for Bonnard to experiment with erotically charged intimate scenes, in which there is the implication of passion recently spent. Bonnard would often sketch de Méigny in their small apartment near Montmartre, and they also took nude photographs of each other, posed like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, during stays in the countryside. Whether transformed by Bonnard's pen into a literary character or depicted in paint as herself – his most constant lover and companion – de Méigny's role in Bonnard's artistic career is indelible from this time onwards.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Siesta

(La Sieste)

1900

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1949

2053-4

Siesta belongs to Bonnard's 'realist' period, during which he painted frank scenes documenting his relationship with Marthe de Méligny. At once erotic and naturalistic, the canvas records the image of a nude, sleeping de Méligny stretched across the bed, amid a tangle of strewn sheets and bedclothes.

While exploring the new possibilities offered by photography, Bonnard took a sequence of images of de Méligny at their apartment when sunlight flooded their bedroom, several of which are on display nearby. *Siesta* relates to these images, but not directly, as de Méligny's pose has been reconfigured to evoke *Hermaphrodite*, a famously erotic Roman copy of a Hellenistic sculpture in the Louvre's collection.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Man and Woman
(L'Homme et la Femme)
1900
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Acquired, 1948

RF 1977 76

In the years preceding the turn of the century, Bonnard produced a series of nudes characterised by their explicit eroticism. Unique to this scene is the artist's physical presence: Bonnard stands naked and in shadow, facing the viewer, while Marthe de Méligny casually reclines on the nearby bed playing with two cats, illuminated by an unseen light source. Dividing them is a shadowy vertical form, which on closer inspection

reveals itself to be a folding screen. *Man and Woman* possesses more than a note of the existential angst experienced in the works of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, whose play *A Doll's House* was first performed in France in 1894.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Blue nude
(Nu bleu)
1899–1900
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Max and Rosy Kaganovitch, 1973

RF 1973 9

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Girl with black stockings
(La Jeune Fille aux bas noirs)
1893
oil on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 6

This is one of Bonnard's earliest depictions of Marthe de Méligny, made during the early months of their relationship. De Méligny is pictured sitting on a bed amid a mess of bedsheets, wearing a white underdress and pulling on black stockings. As would become characteristic of Bonnard's nude depictions of his lifelong companion, de Méligny does not look out of the picture; instead her head is bowed,

with her hair covering most of her face. Her identity is further obscured by Bonnard's rough, dappled brushwork, blurring the intimate scene he has captured.

Pierre Bonnard artist

French 1867–1947

Paul Verlaine author

French 1844–96

Ambroise Vollard publisher

French 1866–1939

Auguste Clot printer

French 1858–1936

Tony Beltrand wood engraver
and printer, relief

French 1847–1904

L’Imprimerie nationale printer,
letterpress

France est. 1870

In Parallel

(Parallèlement)

1900

bound book: lithographs, woodcuts and
letterpress, edition 109/200

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased, 1979

1980.258

In 1900, Bonnard collaborated with art dealer, publisher and friend, Ambroise Vollard to produce lithographic illustrations for Paul Verlaine's 1889 book *Parallèlement*. Bonnard's sensual freehand sketches, realised alongside Verlaine's classically printed erotic Symbolist poetry, find their origin in the sequence of small, intimate photographs on display nearby. Taken in the garden of a house they were renting in Montval, in the Loire Valley, these images record Bonnard and Marthe de Méigny naked among the trees. These photographs, suggesting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, or nymphs and shepherds in Arcadia, were used as reference images for Bonnard's commission.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Marthe de Mélny stooping to pick up
a watering can**

1900–01, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

**Marthe de Mélny in profile, facing
the camera**

1900–01, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Donation with life interest from M. Antoine Terrasse, 1987

PHO 1987 27 26;
PHO 1987 27 24

Marthe de Méligny

French 1869–1942

Pierre Bonnard examining the leaves on a tree

1900–01, printed 2023

inkjet print from original negative

Pierre Bonnard in profile, sitting in the grass

1900–01, printed 2023

inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 41;

PHO 1987 30 43

Bonnard and de Méligny took these intimate photographs of one another seven or eight years after they first met. Two settings are captured in this sequence of images: a corner of the bedroom in the Paris apartment they

shared (located next door to Bonnard's studio at 65 rue de Douai), and the garden of a house he rented in Montval, in the Loire Valley, in 1900. These pictures are rare examples of photographs taken by Bonnard that served as inspiration for other artworks, including *In Parallel* and *Siesta*, on display nearby. While Bonnard repeated many of the same themes and motifs throughout his career – de Méigny, their home and garden – he constantly renewed these subjects in different forms.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Marthe de Méligny semi-reclining
on a bed, in profile**

1899–1900, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

**Marthe de Méligny sitting on a bed,
facing away**

1899–1900, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 29;
PHO 1987 30 31

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Marthe de Mélny standing next
to a chair**

1900–01, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

**Marthe de Mélny sitting, her left
hand at the nape of her neck**

1900–01, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 37;
PHO 1987 30 39

Wall text:

India Mahdavi letter

Melbourne, June 5th 2023

Bonjour Monsieur Bonnard,

About painting, you once said 'A small lie for a great truth'. Here, I tell big lies for a bigger truth.

I love your distorted reality and your subjective perception of colour, how you transform the intimacy of everyday life into something sublime. How you invite us into your home, to your table, to share your meal. How you make everything float in colour under the sun.

This encounter enables me to dive into your harmonies, into your geometric and

floral patterns, into your mind.

A pure sensation of colour and space
filtered through memory.

I have made it mine, just this one time.

It was beautiful to converse with you.

And as you say 'It is not about painting
life, but rather bringing life to painting'.

With love,
India

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Self-portrait against the light, floral
wallpaper**

**(Autoportrait à contrejour, papier
à fleurs)**

c. 1923

oil on canvas

Private collection, Paris

From the 1920s until his death in 1947, Bonnard painted more than a dozen self-portraits. In many, Bonnard turns his face ‘against the light’, so that his features are obscured in shadow. They suggest the artist’s gaze turned inward, seeking painterly ways to express and transcend the human condition.

The inclusion of floral wallpaper in this

painting is a reminder of the kinds of spaces in which Bonnard worked. Frequently setting up studio in rented villas or hotel rooms, he had little control over the decoration. However, this seemed to suit him. In 1938 he told a journalist who visited him in his hotel in Deauville, 'I don't like to paint in grand rooms; they intimidate me'.

Room:

Interiors

Room description: Bright orange and green patterned walls with large pink and green rug in the centre. Table and two chairs in the back right-hand corner as you enter.



Wall text:

Interiors

In 1912, there was a major shift in the focus of Bonnard's work. After renting houses along the Seine each spring for several years, Bonnard purchased a house in Vernonnet, a village on the border between the Île de France and Normandy. With de Méigny he lived here for several months each year until the mid 1930s. They named their house Ma Roulotte, meaning 'my caravan'. Ma Roulotte provided the setting for many of the great interiors and landscapes on view here and in adjacent rooms. They left Ma Roulotte regularly, travelling to coastal towns along the English Channel, or south to the Riviera in the winter months. These moves were prompted by de Méigny's health

concerns and need for fresh air and temperate climates.

Bonnard dedicated himself to recording his immediate environment – to his pursuit of ‘the transcription of the adventures of the optic nerve’, as he noted in his 1938 notebook. His renewed focus on still lifes and interiors would continue for the rest of his career and become the hallmark of Bonnard’s art.

The following galleries take the abstracted form of a house, evoking the kinds of interiors that become the focus of Bonnard’s work in his middle and late career: sitting rooms, dining rooms, bath and dressing rooms.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Plate of apples on a table

(Assiette de pommes sur une table)

1910–12

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Accepted by the State in lieu of inheritance tax, 1984

RF 1984 163

Bonnard's still lifes represent some of his most radical experiments with colour and perspective, moving ever closer to abstract forms. *Plate of apples on a table* is one such experiment. Using luminous shades of white to depict the checked tablecloth and create a sheen across the edges of the fruit arranged on the table, Bonnard has drenched the domestic

landscape in natural light. This effect is heightened by the underside of the table, which Bonnard has depicted in relative darkness. This juxtaposition of light and shade dramatically flattens the picture plane, giving the viewer the impression that the plate of apples could tip forward at any moment.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

The table (La Table) 1925 oil on canvas

Tate, London

Presented by the Courtauld Fund Trustees, 1926

N04134

As in many of the interiors, this scene depicts the Bonnard's dining room, probably at Ma Roulotte, with an assortment of plates and dishes arranged haphazardly across the table. Painted in the year of their marriage, Marthe Bonnard appears busy preparing a bowl of food for her dog, just discernible at left. Along the canvas's top edge, a section of the overhead lamp's glass shade is just visible. This painting extends the

motif favoured by the young Bonnard and his Nabis collaborators, of the family gathered 'under the lamp' in the sanctity of the family home. Bluish shadows on the table, contrasting with the bright white of the cloth, suggest the evenness of electric light, which had by now replaced oil lamps.

For kids

Pierre didn't always paint scenes that were directly in front of him. What you see in this painting, and in the other artworks displayed in this room, are things – objects like furniture, teapots and vases, as well as animals and people – that Pierre lived with every day. He would make up his pictures based on his memories of all these things.

If you drew or painted the most familiar objects in your home, what would they be?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The red blouse (Marthe Bonnard)
(Le Corsage rouge [Marthe Bonnard])
1925
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle

Purchased at auction, 1937

RF 1977 66

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Still life: Plate and fruit
(Nature morte: assiette et fruits)
1921
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Bequest of Baroness Eva Gebhard-Gourgaud, 1965

RF 1977 85

The peach appears in many of Bonnard's still lifes and depictions of domestic landscapes. Of the motif, he offered the following description: 'They are so intense and soft, and some of them resemble the setting sun'. Bonnard has replicated this description in this small 1921 canvas. Drenched in the light streaming through a nearby window, the plate of peaches at the centre of this composition has been painted using

a spectrum of deep oranges and reds.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Dining room at Le Cannet
(La salle à manger au Cannet)
1932
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
On deposit at Musée Bonnard, Le Cannet.
Accepted by the State in lieu of inheritance tax, 2009

For kids

Have you noticed the chairs, couches, tables and rugs in this exhibition? The exhibition designer India Mahdavi wanted to create the feeling of a home inside a gallery, reflecting the domestic spaces and daily rituals we share with our family, friends or ourselves. In a home, we eat, sleep, tidy up and spend time with family and friends. If you are like Pierre, maybe you consider your pets to be family members too (like the cat on the chair in this painting).

Take a seat on the couch or at the table in this room. What makes this room different from your home?

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Corner of a table (Coin de table)

c. 1935

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle.

Purchased by the State, 1936

RF 1977 65

In this at once dazzling and puzzling still life, a silver dish with grapes and a wicker basket sit alongside other fruits and vessels on a tablecloth painted in white daubs and dots. A red rhomboid dominates the left side of the composition, appearing as a patch of flat colour but also representing the red felt cloth that covered the table in the dining room at Le Cannel, where Bonnard

regularly painted his still lifes. Beyond the table is a wooden chair back, far too small for logical perspective. French art historian André Fermigier described the motif as ‘one of Bonnard’s most curious inventions, and it is hard to understand in what position the painter could have got himself in order to see it just so’.

For kids

Pierre didn't paint just one picture at a time. He liked to pin a few blank canvases to the walls of his studio and work on each of them over time – sometimes years! He would mix one colour and if he liked it, he might add daubs of that colour to different pictures at varying stages of completion.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**The checkered tablecloth
(Corbeille et assiette de fruits sur
la nappe à carreaux rouges)
1939
oil on canvas**

Art Institute of Chicago
Gift of Mary and Leigh Block, 1988

1988.141.4

Plain woven fabric with a two-tone checked pattern, known as gingham in English and *vichy* in French, has historically been used for utilitarian furnishings and household napery. It has a long history and association with country life, and today conveys a sense of ‘home comforts’. These domestic connotations possibly influenced Bonnard’s regular deployment of

checked fabric in his compositions. The grid created here by the checks must also have appealed to the painter, allowing him to play with the tension between representation and abstraction.

Room: **Still life**

The orange patterned wall from the previous room continues in the left corner. Behind the orange wall, there is an additional small room with mauve checkered wallpaper.



Wall text:

Still life

‘Charm of the instantaneous: the Japanese cup, the Savoyarde plate.’
– Pierre Bonnard, 1938

Bonnard’s painted interiors feature a familiar repertoire of objects that indicate the continuity the painter sought in his surroundings, despite his frequent relocations. Bonnard preferred to paint things he had lived with for a long time, later saying ‘I find it very difficult even to introduce a new object into my still lifes’. These homely objects – such as teapots, baskets and vases – occupy an important place in a complex network of people, animals and things, and suggest the equal importance of animate beings and inanimate objects.

More so than landscapes, to which he returned constantly, still lifes enabled Bonnard to conduct radical pictorial experiments, moving away from representation and closer to abstract forms. Encouraged by his friend Matisse, Bonnard sought a colourful lyricism in paint, with shapes dematerialising under the effect of vibrations of light. Bonnard described his ambition 'to give the impression one has on entering a room: one sees everything and at the same time nothing'. His compositions are often complex and non-hierarchical: iridescent colour makes space recede or project, the entire canvas is like a web in which certain elements – cats, plates, chairs, shadows, people – are captured, held in suspension.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Coffee

(Le Café)

1915

oil on canvas

Tate, London

Presented by Sir Michael Sadler through the NACF, 1941

N05414

Painted in 1915, this canvas depicts a motif embraced by Bonnard throughout his career: the domestic interior populated with people, pets and miscellaneous objects. A checked tablecloth stretches across much of the composition. The tabletop arrangement consists of a teapot, coffee cup and other randomly distributed domestic items.

Still life

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At the table's edge, with her head downcast, Marthe de Mélny sips coffee with one of the couple's dachshunds, seemingly unaware of Bonnard's presence. To the right of the painting, a portion of a wall is cut off. This peculiar use of perspective gives the impression that you, the viewer, are a part of the scene depicted.

For kids

Are you familiar with this red checked pattern? In France, it is known as *vichy*, and in English it is often called gingham. It is a patterned fabric typically used for tablecloths and napkins, and you will see it in many of Pierre's paintings. It was something common to the spaces he shared with his partner Marthe and their pets. In this painting, Marthe is drinking coffee seated next to their dog.

Look out for this pattern when you leave the exhibition. You can find it in a place where visitors like to eat after looking at the art.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Fruit: Light tones **(Fruits: harmonie claire)**

undated

watercolour, gouache and pencil
on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Kept in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Gift of Claude Roger-Marx in memory of his father,
his brother, and his son, who died for France, 1974

RF 35825, Recto

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Woman stroking a cat
(Femme caressant un chat)
c. 1920
pencil on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by the National Gallery
Women's Association, 1984

P82-1984

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Marthe seated eating grapes
(Marthe assise mangeant du raisin)

c. 1923

pen and ink on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 54865

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Dining area at Le Cannet
(Coin de salle à manger au Cannet)
c. 1932
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle.

Acquired by the State, 1933

RF 1977 64

Bonnard preferred to paint subjects drawn directly from his intimate, domestic surroundings. This found frequent expression in vivid, elaborate dining room scenes, including this canvas, which Bonnard painted at Le Bosquet (The Grove), the home he shared with Marthe de Mélny in Le Cannet.

What differentiates Bonnard's many

dining room scenes is his constant reimagining of their contents. For example, de Méigny, who is often shown seated at the table accompanied by a cat or dog, appears to the right of *Dining area at Le Cannet* with her back to the viewer. The focus of the scene becomes the luminous white fireplace and cabinetry, and the vibrant table setting.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Interior (Intérieur)

c. 1920

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Max and Rosy Kaganovitch, 1973

RF 1973 8

The image of Marthe de Mélny seated at the table accompanied by one of the couple's beloved dachshunds was revisited and reimagined by Bonnard throughout his career. Despite being the central focus of the composition, de Mélny's glance is cast downward, obscuring her face from view. Her refusal to meet the viewer's gaze, paired with the unusual framing of the scene, which crops the table and cuts into a passing

figure to the right, results in a highly intimate, everyday scene of the couple's domestic life.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Evening by lamplight
(La Soirée sous la lampe)
c. 1921
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Philippe Meyer, 2000

RF 2000 11

Room:

Inside looking out

Room description: Long room with ankle-height plinth running along the right-hand wall and colourful dividing walls extending perpendicular to the left-hand wall. A yellow and blue rug runs along the right-hand side with seating and small stools placed along it.



Inside looking out

HOME

Wall text:

Inside looking out

‘During my morning walks I amuse myself by defining different conceptions of landscape – landscape as ‘space’, intimate landscape, decorative landscape, etc. But as for vision, I see things differently every day, the sky, objects, everything changes continually, you can drown in it.’

– Pierre Bonnard, letter to Henri Matisse, 1940

The quintessential Pierre Bonnard painting depicts an interior scene and also offers a vista onto the natural world beyond, through a window or open door. Bonnard is credited with inventing a new genre, which some commentators called ‘compound landscapes’, others

‘domestic landscapes’. Frequently incorporating a still life, figures in an interior and a landscape, these complex paintings encourage slow viewing, letting the eye wander across the canvas to take in the many disparate elements. Increasingly, colour becomes the key, unifying each composition.

Domestic landscapes became the focus of Bonnard’s work following his acquisition of Ma Roulotte in Normandy in 1912, increasing as he spent more time in the south of France. In 1926 the Bonnards acquired a small pink villa with a large garden in Le Cannet, on the hillside above Cannes. They called it Le Bosquet, or The Grove, and it was Marthe and Pierre Bonnard’s permanent residence until their respective deaths in 1942 and 1947. The rooms, garden and

surrounding landscapes of Le Bosquet provide the setting for many of Bonnard's late domestic landscapes.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Winter's day
(Jour d'hiver)**

c. 1905

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Musée Calvet, Avignon.

Bequest of Mme Olivier Sainsère, 1923

RF 2428

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Woman's head against the light
(Tête de femme à contre-jour)

1906

oil on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 15

Bonnard enjoyed experimenting with painting subjects *contre-jour*, or 'against the light'. By choosing to backlight his subjects, he plunged their faces into shadow, and enabled a looser, less detailed depiction of facial features – which were never Bonnard's strong suit. Instead, he uses light to literally highlight elements of visual interest – the woman's textured hat, the section of tiled wall or checked upholstery in the background

and, by inference, to suggest the life outside, beyond the frame.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The window
(La Fenêtre)
1925
oil on canvas

Tate, London
Presented by Lord Ivor Spencer Churchill through the
Contemporary Art Society, 1930

N04494

For kids

In 1924, Pierre and his partner Marthe rented a villa in the town of Le Cannet, which is on a hillside overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Le Cannet is in a sunny and warm part of France. Pierre loved the colours of the region so much that he and Marthe bought a house there in 1926.

In Pierre's paintings, views of the garden, town and distant mountains or sea are often seen from inside, framed through an open door or window. Can you spot Marthe on the balcony enjoying the view?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The dining room in the country
(Salle à manger à la campagne)
1913
oil on canvas

Minneapolis Institute of Art
The John R. Van Derlip Fund

54.15

This is one of the most beautiful examples of Bonnard's unique genre of 'domestic landscapes' – paintings that merge interior spaces and natural surroundings, using the device of an open door or window. In the foreground, a dining table is casually set with three dishes. Beside the table are two chairs, each supporting a small cat. Through the nearby door and window, the scene is extended out to a dense and vibrant

garden, in which a crouching figure, likely Marthe de Mélny, adds further to the complexity of the composition. The verdant, almost ethereal landscape beyond, in shades of lilac, pink, yellow and green, suggests the ongoing influence of Claude Monet, who was painting his waterlily canvases between 1897 and 1926, in nearby Giverny.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Dining room overlooking the garden
(The breakfast room)
(Salle à manger sur le jardin)**
1930–31
oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Given anonymously, 1941

392.1941

Between 1927 and 1947 Bonnard produced more than sixty dining room scenes. Often included in these paintings is a woman (usually Marthe de Méligny) seated at a central table laid with food, dishes and other domestic objects, accompanied by a dog or a cat. In this painting, which draws inspiration from the remarkable interior views of the balcony room at Villa Castellamare in Arcachon,

Inside looking out

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where Bonnard lived and worked for six months in 1930, de Méigny's presence to the left of the canvas is almost imperceptible. According to Bonnard, 'A figure should be a part of the background against which it is placed'.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**The open window, yellow wall
(La Fenêtre ouverte, mur jaune)**

c. 1919
oil on canvas

Private collection

Painted in a hotel room in Uriage-les-Bains, Bonnard's composition creates three paintings in one. Within the room we glimpse a still-life vignette on a table; beyond the open window a lush townscape unfolds, glowing with yellow, orange and purple in the late evening light. In the foreground, shadows beneath the window form abstract areas of vibrant colour.

Uriage-les-Bains, near Grenoble,

Inside looking out

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is renowned for its thermal springs. Bonnard and Marthe de Mélny spent time here between 1918 and 1919, and were visited by art critic George Besson, who later commented that '[Bonnard's] true studio is anywhere and everywhere: in furnished villas and hotel rooms with indescribable décor – often a cheap light fixture in the ceiling, always that flowered wallpaper, which the paintings cover over, little by little'.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

White interior (Le Cannet)
(Intérieur blanc [Le Cannet])
1932
oil on canvas

Musée de Grenoble
Acquired, 1933

MG 2682

White interior depicts the small sitting room of Le Bosquet, situated on the upper floor between Marthe de Mélnigny's bedroom and the villa's bathroom, which was reached through the door at the centre left. French doors opened to a balcony overlooking the garden and out to sea. Here, they reveal a flaming sunset. In the foreground, at the corner of a table laid with crockery and flowers, a camouflaged de Mélnigny crouches

down to tend to a cat.

The room's walls were painted Naples yellow, but the mantelpiece, cupboard and door were white. In choosing his palette, Bonnard emphasises light reflecting off the door, the radiator and the window: 'the white is supposed to make the brightly coloured patches appear luminous', he explained.

For kids

Look closely at the lower right side of this painting. Do you see a figure crouching down? This is Pierre's partner Marthe. You will have encountered many paintings and photographs of Marthe in this exhibition so far – she was his favourite person to paint. Pierre and Marthe shared their lives for almost fifty years.

Pierre painted from memory, so often the people and animals in his paintings have their faces or parts of their bodies hidden from view, and they seem unaware of his presence. This can make them hard to spot! Keep an eye out for more hidden figures (and pets) in Pierre's paintings.

Room:

Landscapes

Room description: Small room with wallpaper featuring pink flowers on a blue and green background.



Wall text:

Landscapes

‘Colour, the key to each painting.’

– Pierre Bonnard, 1934

Bonnard’s art is full of scenes of nature and outdoor life, including farmyards, seascapes and rural vistas. The artist sketched his observations on regular walks wherever he happened to be, whether the Bonnard family property in the Dauphiné region near Grenoble, the various seaside towns where he and de Méigny spent considerable time, or the two houses that most shaped Bonnard’s vision: Ma Roulotte in Normandy and Le Bosquet in Le Cannet, on the French Riviera.

Ma Roulotte was close to Giverny, where

Claude Monet created his late Impressionist masterpieces. Between 1914 and his death in 1926 Monet painted around forty large-scale panels of his garden around the lily ponds, which he described as his grandes décorations. Monet's creation of his great late works was possibly influenced by dialogue with younger painters such as Bonnard and Vuillard, who both visited Giverny. In return, the older artist's radical experimentation influenced Bonnard. He soon replaced the dark colours common in his early works with lighter, fresher tones. Verdant riparian landscapes began to fill his canvases. Sometimes, the small figure of a woman, camouflaged among the vegetation, can be discovered in the scene, providing scale and a sense of proximity to home.

Artwork labels:

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Vétheuil

1879

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1937

406-4

Vétheuil, a farming community on the river Seine, midway between Paris and Rouen, had only 622 inhabitants when Claude Monet moved there in April 1878. Throughout 1878 and 1879 Monet painted many views in and around Vétheuil, observing the town's various aspects across the changing months, as seasonal light brought differing effects to its architecture and setting. Monet's

virtuoso manipulation of shimmering, iridescent hues imparts a summery, lyrical feel to this quintessentially Impressionist painting.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Lake in the Dauphiné
(Lac dans le Dauphiné)**

c. 1916

oil on canvas

Collection Fonds Glénat, Grenoble

Throughout Bonnard's childhood, his family spent their holidays in the Dauphiné region in south-eastern France, at his grandparents' country house, Le Clos near the village of Le Grand-Lemps. This was a haven for Bonnard, and often served as inspiration for the idealised and cloistered world he portrayed in the paintings he produced as an adult, including this small canvas painted around 1916. Utilising vivid blues and greens, Bonnard has transcribed the lake

and plains surrounding Le Grand-Lemps in the same chromatic intensity that characterises his late landscapes made in the south of France.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**The painter's garden at Le Cannet
(Le Jardin du peintre au Cannet)**

1946

pencil on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 54887, Recto

When he acquired Le Bosquet in 1926, Bonnard also took possession of an orchard of orange trees. A year later, he acquired an adjoining piece of land on which grew an almond tree. Bonnard painted the tree several times while it was in blossom. Overgrown with mimosa (acacia), peonies, olives, palms, figs and bougainvillea, Bonnard's garden was a source of ongoing inspiration for the painter, its vegetation, fruits and flowers

filling his canvases.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Three women with a dog in a garden
(Trois femmes dans un jardin avec
un chien)**

undated
pencil on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 54834

Bonnard filled small journals with drawn notations during his daily walks, and kept up a regular habit of sketching throughout his life. 'You must drawn continually', he said to his nephew Charles Terrasse, 'so as always to have a repertory of forms to hand'. Such brief sketches were sufficient to later jog his memory of scenes that he found visually appealing, many of which later appeared

in his canvases.

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Basket of apples and apple tree
(Panier de pommes et pommier)**

c. 1923

pencil on paper

Collection of the Reverend Ian Brown

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Woman in a garden with a basket
on a table**
(Jardin, femme et table avec corbeille)
undated
ink and pencil on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 54820

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Study of a river landscape, with
a barge and a boat with smoking
chimney stack
(Étude de paysage fluvial, avec
péniche et bateau avec cheminée
fumant)**
undated
Chinese ink on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Kept in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Gift of M and Mme Zadok, 1964

RF 39225, Recto

Having first studied drawing at the Académie Julian in the 1880s, Bonnard had to 'unlearn' the lessons he was taught regarding the primacy of drawing to the formation of the composition. Academic art education in France had historically emphasised drawing,

and the representation of the subject through skilful linework, shading and foreshortening. In loose sketches such as this, we can imagine Bonnard's pleasure in playing with the rapid movement of the brush and the loose lines of ink, which evoke the fluidity of the river landscape but do not represent it in a conventionally naturalistic way.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Landscape with tugboat
(Paysage au remorqueur)
1930
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle.

Acquired from the artist by the State, 1937

RF 1977 72

For kids

Remember the busy city streets that you saw earlier? They have been replaced by vibrant green gardens. In 1912, Pierre bought a house near the Seine River in northern France, where he and his partner Marthe would spend several months each year. Neither Pierre nor Marthe were very keen on gardening, so they were often surrounded by overgrown plants and trees.

Sometimes the details in Pierre's paintings reveal themselves to you over time. Can you spot the woman in the garden? What about the boat on the river?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Dog on the terrace
(Chien sur la terrasse)
1917
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 22

Ma Roulotte, the house Bonnard acquired in Vernonnet, Normandy, in 1912, was relatively modest, with a distinctive balcony of diagonally arranged lattices that inspired several painting compositions over the ensuing years and into the 1920s. It is also the point of origin for several landscapes that reveal glimpses of the Seine River. Here, a table laid for tea provides visual interest in the foreground, and draws the eye

to the middle ground where a dog lies snoozing. Beyond this, a meandering river is glimpsed through lush riparian vegetation, a thick band of green, yellow, blue and purple hues.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Banks of the Seine
(Bords de la Seine)**

c. 1918

oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Acquired from the artist by the State, 1921

RF 1977 63

Bonnard's purchase of Ma Roulotte in 1912 and his subsequent friendship with Claude Monet, brought a new engagement with landscape to his art practice. Despite forging this new and important artistic connection, Bonnard resisted the call of pure Impressionism. Instead of setting up an easel before nature and working in the outdoors, he nailed unstretched canvases to a wall indoors and worked on them for long

periods away from the source subject matter. It was through this process of returning to the canvas over time that paintings such as *Banks of the Seine* become a layered tapestry of memory and sensation.

Room:
Intimacy

Room description: Large room with blue hatched wallpaper and two chairs on the left-hand side below a window.



Wall text:

Intimacy

Marthe de Méligny was commonly referred to as Madame Bonnard from around 1900, although the couple did not officially marry until 1925. Bonnard employed professional life models on occasion and had at least two affairs with other women whom he depicted in some paintings, but de Méligny became the painter's most consistent collaborator through her role in their domestic intimacy.

This intimacy was more accentuated because it was so rarely alleviated. In 1932, Bonnard wrote to Berthe Signac that Marthe refused 'to see anyone anymore, not even her old friends, and we are condemned to complete solitude'.

It is hard not to see evidence of their complex relationship, and its aspects of dependency, restlessness and isolation, in Bonnard's paintings.

The works in this room date from the period following the Bonnards' occupation of Ma Roulotte in Normandy, during which the couple also regularly visited seaside resorts and spa towns. Marthe Bonnard's habitual bathing, which increased in frequency as she grew older, is thought to have been in response to a tubercular illness. It provided Bonnard with a subject favoured by generations of painters before him. However Bonnard's choice of active and transitional poses, in which his model is washing, drying or shifting her weight, distinguishes him from many predecessors who painted the motif of the woman bathing in classical poses.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Marthe grooming herself
(Marthe à sa toilette)**

1919

oil on canvas

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne–Centre
de création industrielle

On deposit at Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon since 1972.

Gift of Adèle and George Besson, 1963

AM4531P

In Bonnard's many scenes of Marthe *à sa toilette*, she has the distinctive figure of her youth, with a hairstyle influenced by early twentieth century fashions. Even if her figure remained slim and 'girlish' as she lived through her fifties and sixties (she was around seventy-three when she died in 1942), the inevitable impact

of age and ill health never seem to enter Bonnard's vision. Even in his late series of nudes lying in the bath, painted from 1925 onwards and generally accepted to represent Marthe Bonnard, she appears eternally young.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Nude crouching in a tub
(Nu accroupi au tub)
1918
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 23

This painting's subject, likely Marthe de Méigny, appears before us in a position that is at once unusual and natural. Crouching in an old-fashioned galvanised iron tub, she pours water from a jug into a basin in preparation for washing. Seemingly unaware of Bonnard's watchful presence, her head is tilted, obscuring her face from view. *Nude crouching in a tub* is one of only a few paintings by Bonnard that directly

references a photograph (on display nearby). Bonnard's engagement with photography decreased substantially from the early 1920s onwards, when he began to paint de Méligny and their domestic surrounds only from memory.

For kids

Imagine what bathing was like before the modern shower. Nowadays, for many of us, we turn a tap and warm water comes out. In Pierre's day, not everyone had access to indoor plumbing and running water. In this painting, his partner Marthe is washing herself indoors using a jug and a large basin of water set within a wide tub. Lots of artists have painted women bathing; for Pierre, it was also something he observed a lot in everyday life as Marthe was very fond of bathing and did it often.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Marthe in the bath
c. 1908, printed 2023
inkjet print from original negative

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Donation with life interest from Charles Terrasse's children, 1987

PHO 1987 30 47

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The bath (second version)
(Le Bain [deuxième planche])

c. 1924

lithograph, edition of 525, second
of two states

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased, 1974

74.134

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Marthe with a washer
(Marthe au gant crin)**

c. 1920

pencil on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
The Poynton Bequest, 2003

2003.347

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

Toilette

1927

drypoint

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Ian Brown, 2017

2017.642

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Nude with blue glove
(Nu au gant bleu)
1916
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Zeïneb and Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière, 2011

RF 2011 20

The nude woman in the domestic interior is an essential theme in Bonnard's painting. He repeatedly engaged with and modernised the subject throughout his career, resulting in canvases that transcend the reality of a simple bathroom. Here, by superimposing several layers of translucent and vibrant colours, he created a shimmering effect that extends over the whole canvas. This is enhanced by his integration of bright

wallpapers and bathroom accessories and, in the case of *Nude with blue glove*, a nearby window through which natural light streams and a pastel blue sky can be glimpsed.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Woman in front of a mirror
(Femme devant un miroir)

c. 1908
oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased, 1998

98.129

The distinctive floral upholstery of the day bed in this painting appears in other works by Bonnard, including *Nude against the light*, c. 1908 (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels; not on display). In this latter painting, the nude has been identified as a professional model called Anita Champagne. Its composition also includes a large metal bathtub, and a dressing table with a ‘skirt’ of floral fabric, similar to that seen in the

photograph of Marthe de Mélingy and its related painting, on view nearby. Lived experience and a constellation of visual elements, such as wallpaper patterns, furniture and even nude models, stored in Bonnard's memory, supplied him with a repository of inspiration from which to draw on over many years.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Pink nude, head in shadow
(Nu rose, tête ombrée)

c. 1919
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Philippe Meyer, 2000

RF 2000 10

Room:

In the studio

Room description: Orange walls with red flooring and a curved couch on the right as you enter.



Wall text:

In the studio

Bonnard was a notoriously slow painter. He would tack his unstretched canvases to the walls of his studio and work on several paintings at once. Preferring not to predetermine the edges of his composition, he maintained space to extend as he worked on each canvas. When it was time to move on, Bonnard would roll the canvases up, take them to the next house, and so continue working on them for months and sometimes years.

He made notes and sketched with pencil and gouache while 'on location': still lifes on the dining room table, nudes in the bathroom and self-portraits in the bathroom mirror, and scenes of village

or harbour life on his morning walks. But Bonnard painted his canvases from memory, and their forms and colours built up over time. At Le Bosquet, he worked in a studio added to the northern side of the house, with large windows facing the garden and the mimosa bush that burst into colour each spring. He habitually held a rag in one hand and a brush in the other, so that he could erase and rework as he went. When he had mixed a particularly appealing colour on his palette, he would approach several canvases around the house and add dabs of paint where it pleased him.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Studio with mimosa
(L'Atelier au mimosa)**

1939–46

oil on canvas

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre
de création industrielle

Purchased from Charles Terrasse, 1979

AM 1978 732

Studio with mimosa records Bonnard's Le Cannet studio and the natural splendour beyond its walls, including flowering mimosa (acacia) trees and the distant bay of Cannes. Central to the composition is Bonnard's beloved motif of the open window vista, blurring the boundary between the interior and exterior landscape. The richly textured,

luminous composition also exemplifies an important shift in the artist's use of colour from this late period, as described by art historian Ursula Perucchi-Petri, 'away from the mimesis of nature toward the transfiguration of reality in an ever richer and more luminous tapestry of colour'.

For kids

The yellow flowering tree in this painting is native to Australia, where we know it as acacia, or wattle. In Europe it is known as mimosa. Joséphine Bonaparte – who was crowned Empress of France alongside her husband, Emperor Napoleon I, in 1804 – grew mimosa at her home Malmaison, near Paris. Explorers who travelled the world seeking new discoveries for France brought home exotic botanical specimens, and many were planted in Josephine's garden. Later, mimosa became common in gardens all along the south coast of France.

Look around this room for more flowering wattle in Pierre's paintings.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

The boxer (Self-portrait)
(Le Boxeur [Autoportrait])

1931

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Gift of Philippe Meyer, 2000

RF 2000 12

An overhead electric light illuminates Bonnard's bare torso while casting deep shadows across his head and forearm. Adopting the pose of a champion boxer in his bathroom mirror, Bonnard's bony chest and pink fist suggest a flailing struggle rather than great strength. Whether sparring intellectually with critics who called for abstraction in modern painting, or battling with personal anxieties, Bonnard engages us in his

silent struggle. With continued looking, patches and undercurrents of multiple colours emerge within the overall yellow theme. A flat column painted in blues and greens and bordered in black, at the right edge of the canvas and perhaps indicating a doorway, creates a sense of enclosure or frame, drawing attention to the painting's flat surface

For kids

Although Pierre painted in bright colours, not all of his paintings are happy. In this painting, Pierre is posing in his bathroom mirror with his fists raised like a boxer. Compare this painting to the other self-portrait in this room. Do you notice that in each artwork Pierre's face is hidden in shadow? Pierre might have been feeling sad, and painting might have helped him feel better.

Pierre once said, 'he who sings isn't always happy'. When you are feeling sad, what do you like to do?

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Self-portrait
(Autoportrait)**

c. 1938–40
oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased, 1972

6.1972

On 6 November 1940, Bonnard wrote to his friend Henri Matisse, 'My work is not going too badly, and I dream of seeking the absolute'. This late self-portrait, in which the artist's shadowy features float against a shimmering yellow background, creates a dialogue of simultaneous intimacy and distance – the artist probing his psyche relentlessly, yet separated from the viewer by being reflected in a mirror behind a bottle and glasses. The

somewhat rigid pose of his raised fists suggests Bonnard's struggle with self-perception, and recalls the earlier self-portrait, *The boxer*, on display nearby.

Room:

Le Cannet

Room description: Pink walls with red flooring. Ankle-height plinth on furthest wall, with a door to the next room on the far left.



Wall text:

Le Cannet

‘In the light of the Midi, everything is illuminated and the painting vibrates.’

– Pierre Bonnard, 1946

Bonnard became fully aware of the aesthetic power of ‘le Midi’ (the south of France) after 1906 and several visits to the region in the company of painters Paul Signac, Henri Manguin and Henri Matisse. Writing to his mother following his 1909 visit, Bonnard had enthused: ‘I felt as if I were in the palace of *A Thousand and One Nights*; the sea, the yellow walls, reflections as colourful as the lights themselves’.

When Pierre and Marthe Bonnard moved into their house in Le Cannet in 1927,

Bonnard was sixty years old. He practised a daily routine of early morning walks along nearby paths overlooking the terracotta-tiled roofs of the town of Le Cannet and beyond to the coastline. His overgrown garden brought its own revelations, such as the golden yellow of the flowering mimosa, which contrasted perfectly with the olive trees' grey foliage that glistened silver after rain.

From 1925 until 1946, Bonnard carried a small journal with him in which he sketched and jotted notes. Often these notes reveal his keen observation of and appreciation for the natural beauty around him. On 7 February 1927, for example, Bonnard rendered his own version of a haiku:

‘Violet in the grey.

Vermillion in the orange shadows,
on a cold but fine day'.

Artwork labels:

Pierre Bonnard

French 1867–1947

**Almond tree in bloom (L'Amandier
en fleurs)**

1946–47

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle.

Gift of Mr and Mrs Charles Zadok, 1964

RF 1977 87

This painting is considered Bonnard's last completed work and records the almond tree in the garden of Le Bosquet. Visible from his bedroom window, the tree in blossom was a motif he felt compelled to return to: 'every spring it forces me to paint it', he said. One of the few canvases tacked to his studio wall over the last

year of life, Bonnard worked on it until his death in January 1947. In his last weeks, when he was too weak to hold the brush unaided, he enlisted his nephew, Charles Terrasse, to help him apply final touches. Asking him to bring the canvas to his bedside, he sought to correct the colour, noting 'this green, on the ground – there – it's not right. It needs some yellow'.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Landscape at sunset, Le Cannet
(Paysage au soleil couchant,
Le Cannet)
c. 1926
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
On deposit at Musée Bonnard, Le Cannet.
Gift to the State by the Fondation Meyer, 2006

RF 2006 25

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Stairs in the artist's garden
(L'Escalier dans le jardin)**

1942–44
oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

1970.17.11

Bonnard spent time in his garden each day, although he was not a gardener as such. Art historian John Rewald, who visited the artist shortly before his death in 1947, wrote: 'Bonnard's pink house at Le Cannet, shrouded by greenery, dominates a hill down which orange, olive and almond trees cascade in terraces to the Mediterranean. The painter was particularly fond of mimosas. He would not tolerate the hand of man

in nature, and as a result his garden was overgrown, its narrow paths almost choked with wild plants and flowers'. This painting suggests the solace Bonnard found in nature following Marthe de Méligny's death in January 1942.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

Southern landscape: Le Cannet
(Paysage méridional: Le Cannet)
1929–30
oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

On deposit at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle.

Acquired from the artist by the State, 1933

RF 1977 69

In the foreground of this painting, a steep road descends towards a lush vista of Le Cannet and distant mountains. The double-track road is a reminder of Bonnard's interest in motoring, and the frequency with which he would drive cross-country, shuttling between the different homes and hotels he and Marthe de Mélny occupied, and also the dedicated motoring trips he

undertook during the early 1900s. Around 1930, Bonnard's love of the open road was tested when rolled-up canvases he'd tied to the roof rack of his car fell off somewhere between Normandy and Paris. These canvases, bearing paintings in progress that would have been continued when they reached their destination, were never seen again.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

**Terrace in the South of France
(Terrasse dans le Midi)**

1925

oil on canvas

Collection Fonds Glénat, Grenoble

From 1922 onwards, Bonnard began to spend most of his time in Le Cannet. The strong light and lush vegetation of the region were a source of constant inspiration. This is reflected in *Terrace in the South of France* and other paintings from the 1920s, which he flooded with warm and rich shades of orange, red, yellow, green and blue to transcribe the southern climate onto canvas. He also began to play representation and abstraction against each other, as is

the case in this composition, with its flat yellow and blue horizontal layers punctuated with foliage and people basking in the summer sun.

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

View of Le Cannet
(Vue du Cannet)

c. 1927

oil on canvas

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne–Centre de création industrielle.

On deposit at L'Annonciade, Musée de Saint-Tropez

Bequest of M. Georges Grammont, 1959

AM 3841 P

Pierre Bonnard
French 1867–1947

View of Le Cannet
(Vue du Cannet)
1927

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
On deposit at Musée Bonnard, Le Cannet.
Gift to the State by the Fondation Meyer, 2008

RF 2008 52

Bonnard painted this monumental canvas not long after settling into Le Bosquet. This shift to the south led Bonnard to apply pure colour to his canvases with what he described as a 'new chromatic intensity'. He was struck by how the 'light of the Midi' altered his perception of the colours in objects, shadows and reflections. To construct this mosaic-like, receding view of the southern landscape, Bonnard applied bright, pure

colours to the surface of his canvas – from the orange-roofed houses and their white square facades to deep greens and blues of the dense vegetation that borders the scene.

Room:

Le Bosquet

Room description: Rainbow pixelated wallpaper with a horizontal dividing wall featuring a large screen in the centre. Curved seating in the centre of the room facing the screen.



Wall text:

Le Bosquet

This short film takes us to the places Pierre Bonnard inhabited during the last two decades of his life. From the Mediterranean Sea, we travel from Cannes up the hill to Le Cannet, arriving at Le Bosquet (The Grove), an apricot-pink villa surrounded by lush gardens. Bonnard shared Le Bosquet with his wife Marthe (until her death in 1942), and their many furred companions, including a series of dachshunds called Poucette ('Thumbelina' in French) and Ubu. It was in his home studio that Bonnard painted many of his great late works, including those in the previous room.

Soon after moving into Le Bosquet in 1927, Bonnard began sketching in small

diaries, a practice he maintained until 1946. While on his daily rambles, he made note of the weather (for example, *beau*/fine; *couvert*/cloudy; *pluvieux*/rainy), jotted aesthetic observations alongside mundanities, and sketched small vignettes – still lifes, animals, landscapes and, most consistently, Marthe in their bathroom – capturing moments of daily life that profoundly influenced his work and sustained his memory.

Alongside contemporary footage of Le Cannet and Le Bosquet, this film includes sketches from these diaries along with photographs of Bonnard by Henri Cartier-Bresson, who visited the now internationally famous artist in 1944.

End

Thank you for visiting!