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PIERRE BONNARD'S WORK  
IN HIS SOCIAL CONTEXT

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Everyday life and the people he came in contact with provided Bonnard with the subject matter for his art work.

In the first Chapter, I will give a short account of his artistic career with an outline history of his social background which must be investigated if we are to understand what his artistic output was about.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss his paintings with reference to his subject matter and his attitude to life at that time in the context of his social surroundings. A very important subject for him was the portrayal of women. I will also discuss his approach to the nude figure, with reference to 'Olympia', by Manet, as it is an important milestone in the context of the nude.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss Bonnard's graphic art. Printmaking was the basis of his early art work and he learned a great deal from this process. The subject matter of his graphic work deals with busy street life, Parisian ladies and working class people.

Japanese prints were readily available in Paris at the time and influenced a great many artists. We will see how Bonnard adapted the Japanese style to produce images that were uniquely his own.



## CHAPTER I

"Bonnard makes his own everything that nature can offer to his pictorial genius.....He understands, loves and expresses everything he sees."

- Signac. [1].

Pierre Bonnard was born on October, 3rd., 1867 at Fontenay-aus-Roses, near Paris. His father was a high-ranking official at the War Ministry.

Bonnard had a commendable record at school and decided to study art. He was registered at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian where he came in contact with many influential artists, including Vuillard, Maurice Denis and Vollotton.

He spent some time as an apprentice in a lawyer's office but decided to abandon his legal studies after he designed his first poster, which was highly successful.

At this time, Impressionism was still generally popular in artistic circles but new ideas were emerging.



Bonnard, Vuillard and their friends were strongly impressed by Gauguin's art and, under the further influence of the Symbolists, they broke with Impressionism and formed a group known as the Nabis, 'the prophets, or the enlightened'

Bonnard made it clear that he intended to remain independent of any set of rules that might restrict his freedom. He once said: 'I am of no school; I am looking to do something personal'. (Ives, 1989, p.11)

[2]

In his years in Paris, Bonnard developed an interest in Japanese prints. In Japan, prints were being produced in such large numbers that they were not always highly valued. They were sometimes used to wrap goods for export and thus became familiar to many who were outside artistic circles.

In the spring of 1890, in Paris, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, an exhibition was held, showing over 1000 Ukiyo-e woodcuts, (Japanese prints). Bonnard bought some of these prints. He later commented:

I've covered the walls of my bedroom with this naive and gaudy imagery ... It seemed to me that it is possible to translate light, form and character with nothing but colour, without resorting to shading.

(Ives, 1989, p.14). [3]

The influence of Japanese print is evident in his work, in his use of flat areas of colour without shading and in his use of decoration or texture to give interest to open areas of colour.

Two small lithographs by Bonnard bear the common title Family Scene, (Fig.1), which illustrate his attraction to Japanese print. He uses the same format found in so many Japanese works.

Watercolours and paintings on silk were art-forms that flourished in Japan because the flimsy buildings, constructed to suit a country which was prone to earthquakes, were not suited to huge murals or oil-paintings.

Japanese art was concerned with images that had been stored in the memory, rather than with drawings from nature. It was treated more like poetry, where 'emotions, recollected in tranquillity' were expressed in the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. The beauty of the brushwork and the gracefulness of line and touch were features to be sought after in a country where calligraphy was a fine art.

In the 17th. century, the Ukiyo-e style of painting came into being. The Ukiyo-e painted the passing scene, fashionable clothes, virtues and vices. This style was adapted to woodcuts. These prints became widely available in book illustration and, later, in separately issued broadsheets. In these prints, the flowing line takes precedence over likeness or character.

Artists like Hokusai and Hiroshige presented the most ingenious inventions of composition, with unusual viewpoints and modified shapes. Their dispensing with inessential detail, and their bold synthesis of natural seemed very strange and new to the artists of Europe when they first saw their prints in the nineteenth century. The high view point of the Japanese artist had a very strong impact.

The theory that art should be based on nature, rather than tied to nature, which became popular in Europe at this time and especially among the Impressionists, undoubtedly had its origin in the East. The influence of the Ukiyo-e can be seen in the works of Degas, Monet, Gauguin, Lautrec and Bonnard among others.



In their graphic work, in particular, both Lautrec and Bonnard showed that they owed much to the expressive lines and restrained design of the Japanese print.

Bonnard designed his first poster France Champagne, (Fig.2) for a wine merchant. It was the poster that launched him as a graphic artist. Incidentally, it was Bonnard who introduced Toulouse-Lautrec to the printer Edouard Ancourt, from whom Toulouse-Lautrec learned lithography, thus giving the world some of the most celebrated posters ever.

Bonnard made a living from selling his graphic work. He produced lithographs for sheet music, book covers, advertisements, playbills and magazine illustrations for contemporary writings such as Daphne and Chloé. He made lithographs for Parallèlement, a book of poetry by Verlaine.

In these lithographs, he often used classical themes and subjects and showed his figures in classical poses. Many of the aspects of his models can be seen echoed in that of Greek statues. In his paintings, he also used classical poses with the significant difference, however, that he transformed the whole scene to the

to the every day setting of his own surroundings. He also used perspective as it suited himself, using several view points in the same picture. The multiple view point was as much his as that of the Cubists.

Bonnard's posters showed interiors, gardens and street scenes. In his earlier lithographs he used large areas of solid black combined with one or two subtle tints of colour, but in his later prints he used a greater variety of colours and textures. In his graphic work, Bonnard learned a lot about colour techniques through the process of printing.

Years after his busiest period of lithographic activity, he stated:

I've discovered a lot that applies to painting by doing colour lithography. When you have to judge tonal relationships by juggling with four or five colours, superimposing them or juxtaposing them, you learn a great deal.

(Ives, 1989, p.25)[4]

This illustrates that working in the medium of print can be an enriching experience for an artist, because the technical variations that are possible in print may give inspiration for art work in other media.

The inventiveness and imagination that one must use to solve the problems caused by the limitations of the print process can heighten creativity. The discipline needed to produce accurate work for multicolour prints can be a restraining influence on the artist who might be tempted to let free-expression-work run riot. Print is a form of discipline in one sense, but it can be a process of learning which can be beneficial in other forms of art.

During Bonnard's early artistic life, Impressionism was the dominant mode of art, although, towards the end of the nineteenth century, styles began to change. The younger painters of the 1880s began to reject Impressionism and Realism and began to adopt a thoughtful interest in abstract form and colour. Impressionism was one of the last movements in Modern Art to take an active interest in the social life of the bourgeoisie.

To come to terms with Bonnard's work and its subject-matter, it is necessary to have a general understanding of the social background to his work and to learn about everyday life in Paris and in France at the time.



There had been a revolution in France in 1848, which resulted in the Second Republic being set up. Louis-Napoleon staged a coup-d'etat in 1851, taking the title Napoleon III, and a new constitution was set up, which greatly restricted the power of elected members and the freedom of the press. This caused unrest and protest, and in spite of liberal reforms later, by Louis-Napoleon, he was ousted and a Third Republic was established in 1871.

The result of these events, was a system in which people of all backgrounds, agricultural, industrial, and trade had a political say, but the business people saw to it that the Republic kept a conservative bias.

Under Napoleon III, France became active in foreign trade. Industry increased its output and there was an economic boom. Political life, for the most part was dominated by conservative government, acting in the interests of the middle classes.

Paris was completely changed. The urban poor that worked in factories were moved out of the capital to shanty towns on the outskirts of Paris. This evicting of the poorer classes was largely the work

of Baron Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine, to facilitate the 'modernisation' of the city. Many historical buildings were destroyed. New residential apartments, elegant shops, theatres, restaurants and street cafés, laid out on wide pavements, made a grand setting for the rich bourgeoisie, who took advantage of the booming economy. All of this change was bound to have an effect on the art of the time.

Paintings that were previously bought by the aristocrats were now bought by the bourgeoisie. The pictures purchased reflected their own values and what they wanted to see surrounding them in their own houses.

From the 1860s, the railway had a considerable effect on the life-style of Parisians, especially the petite bourgeoisie, who now rubbed shoulders with the proletariat as they went out into the country on a Sunday, though each class despised the other.

The painters, of course, were not to be left out of the new trend. The pictures that they painted, however, were often populated by the 'tourists' from Paris, who often looked oddly out of place in those rural settings.

A graphic account of one of these visits to Bougival, on the Seine, is give in the journal of a family called Goncourt:

We went to the country with Saint-Victor, like shop assistants .....Saint-Victor came across an acquaintance of his among the willows: it was some stockjobber or other. Finally, we found a corner where there was no landscape painter, sitting at his easel and no slice of melon left behind. (Clark,1985,p.148) [5]

Many resented this invasion of the countryside by city dwellers who did not understand it and did not belong there. Because they could not adapt to the rural setting, they tried to adapt the setting to themselves. Some of the Parisians brought the city atmosphere with them to the country, building villas surrounded by lawns and creating an artificial setting there.

Robert Caze, in 1885, wrote about a painting by Jaques-Emile Blanche, which depicted a lady sitting on a lawn:

Oh! the poor little Parisienne, bewildered and bewildering in the midst of this imitation nature — the nature of Sèvres and Ville d'Avray..... These lawns brought in from England on the Dover or Southampton boat, arriving each morning on the fish train.  
(Clark,1985, p49). [6]



In the city of Paris, many of the artists ignored the new modern unromantic streets and buildings, and when, eventually, some got round to painting the modern street scenes, they endeavoured to camouflage the angular buildings with trees and crowd scenes, as Monet and Renoir did.

The cafés, theatres and nightclubs continued to provide material for the artist. Railway stations and steel bridges were now subject matter for the artist, and the pavement tables placed outside cafés, with their variety of customers, inspired many fine paintings.

The middle classes, who were patrons of these cafés, became patrons of the arts, having sufficient funds to purchase the paintings and sufficient understanding of the subject matter to appreciate the art work.

Family portraits were regarded as status symbols among the upper and middle classes, but when photography was invented, in 1837, by Louis-Mandé Daguerre, many thought that handpainted portraits would be less in demand. This, however, did not become the case. The photographic portrait had several drawbacks

in spite of its realism. Its very realism was one of these drawbacks because many sitters found the stark realism of the photograph to be very unflattering. There was the fact that photographs were in monochrome and also that the scale of the photograph was limited by the nature of the process and equipment. Therefore, in spite of the novelty of photography, the portrait painter retained his popularity among the wealthier members of society.

The traditional family, at this time, was under attack. The Paris of Louis-Napoleon, with its modern development, caused much comment, especially by visitors to the great fair, the 1867 exposition, in Paris. An American visitor, James McCabe, estimated that as many as 30,000 people attended theatres in the city each night and that an additional 24,000 attended café-concerts, circuses and other indoor entertainments.

The population of Paris had increased rapidly as the economy flourished. Many foreign-born people, as well as people from all over France, became residents.



The quiet family life was becoming unstable and the married couple, who were both professional people, emerged. By the year 1885, among married couples, 323 per 1000 had no children. There was a steady increase in the divorce rate so that by the same year, the ratio of divorces to marriages was twelve times as high in Paris as in the rest of the country.

Henry Tuckerman, another visitor to the Paris exposition, in comparing American and British life with that of Paris, described Paris as:

... a kind of metropolitan encampment  
requiring no domicile except a bedroom  
for seven hours in the twenty-four.

(Herbert, 1988, p.60) [7]

He went on to say that all of the waking day was spent in public places, in pursuit of 'superficial enjoyment and essential deprivation.'

The 'deprevation' he mentions, refers to the moral laxity that prevailed in many parts of Paris, where certain cafés on the boulevards became bazaars of prostitution, and overindulgent police turned a blind eye to illicit exhibitions.



The Impressionists documented the cultural and social changes that France went through in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Bonnard emerged near the end of this movement, but was not considered to be an Impressionist. He portrayed all aspects of life in Paris, including Parisian nightclubs, theatres, cafés and race-courses as well as family life. Bonnard, whose background was upper middle class, understood the attitudes of the bourgeoisie, but he never sought to be a portrait painter. Instead, he preferred the more intellectual challenge of composition and design in his experimental work. He was interested in all new ideas, and took photographs, which he later used in his paintings.

His work was new and fresh. He was concerned with colour and with capturing light. Though the influence of the Impressionists can be detected in his work, he did not abide by their rules, but used more abstract forms which he combined with expressive colour to his own personal pleasing.

Bonnard took a great interest in theatre and puppetry, designing stage sets and sculpting marionettes.

Many of his paintings are reminiscent of the shallow stage, while some of his view points suggest the view from the high galleries of the theatres as can be seen in his Paris street scenes.

Having obtained some knowledge of Bonnard's social background and the influence of his friends, the Nabis, with their symbolist ideas, we will consider some of Bonnard's major paintings in the next chapter.

Bonnard was a very prolific artist and therefore we can only touch on a small section of his art works.





Fig. 1.  
Family Scene  
 Japanese Print

Papa, Maman le (Marie), 1885.  
 Bonnard, Lithograph  
 360 x 280mm.

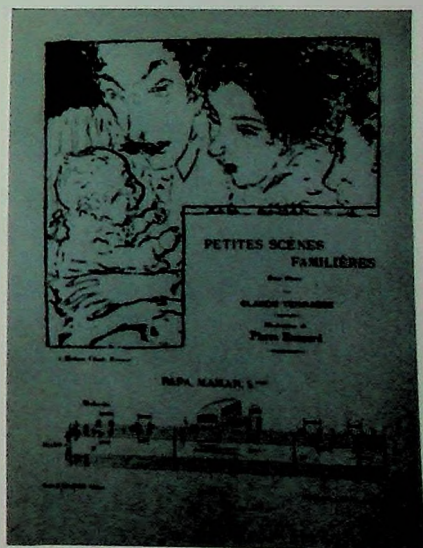






Fig. 2.

France-Champagne, 1889 - 91

Bonnard, Colour Lithograph, 180 x 500mm.



Fig. 2.

France-Champagne, 1889 - 91

Bonnard, Colour Lithograph, 180 x 500mm.

## CHAPTER II

Bonnard was widely recognised, in his early career, as an Intimist painter. He painted domestic scenes, featuring families at table, children, parents and even household animals, his work being influenced by Impressionism and Symbolism. In his mid-career, however, he began to develop a new form of expression which was his own personal style.

The Impressionists had fallen from favour among artistic groups, but Bonnard had taken a keen interest in their work, during his youth, especially that of the older generation of the Impressionists. He had experimented with the language of anti-naturalism, but on going back to the Impressionists, he found a liberty and promise that gave him a new direction. Bonnard was undoubtedly aware that his own efforts at interpreting a subject would be subject to further interpretation, by viewers of his work. Like other members of the Nabis, he had taken an interest in the philosophy of Bergson, who was considered to be the leading philosopher of his day, though it had been argued that Bergson simply utilised ideas that were in general circulation at the time.



Bonnard was closely associated with the Symbolists in all the arts, including theatre, writing and poetry.

Symbolism may be defined broadly as a movement away from the naturalist concern for reproducing the physical world and toward a more indirect, a more allusive or 'musical' expression, one that reveals the artist's subjective states and expresses content of universal rather than specific import. (Giambruni, 1990, p.39). [8]

The poets Verlaine and Mallarmé and playwright Maeterlinck were all symbolists. Mallarmé considered that objects in the environment could be depicted so as to comment on human existence and that the emphasis on the portrayal of human beings could be shifted to the environment and objects in the environment. The memory could modify and interpret the images presented, so as to produce an emotional experience. The choice of subject matter and the manner of its presentation could have multiple layers of meaning. This fitted in with the philosophy of Bergson.

Maeterlinck believed that people could not grasp reality but could only touch its surface leaving them always essentially separated from each other.

The Nabis held that it was not the motif but the feeling of the artist about it that constituted the subject of a painting. They maintained that the preexisting associations of the viewer with the subject matter could become an obstacle to the artist's efforts of communication. They considered that a viewer might evaluate a two-dimensional image on its own merits, without the distorting influence of previous experiences.

Although Bonnard was influenced by Symbolism, his work did not generally contain symbolic images like his fellow-artists, Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis; he chose, for his subject matter, the ordinary everyday scenes. Crépuscule, (Twilight), 1892, (Fig.3), which he painted in Le Clos, is an example of one of his Symbolist works. In the foreground, the artist's brother-in-law, Claude Terrasse, his father, sister and cousin play croquet amid the greenery, while behind them, a group of young girls dance in a circle under a golden sky. Abstract shapes and areas of strong textured colour reflect the Japanese and Nabis influences. This is one of the few paintings in which Bonnard uses imaginary figures. It was inspired by contemporary poetry.

The painters of the period had a keen interest in literature, poetry, music and all forms of intellectual activity. They had a special interest in Bergson's philosophy regarding perception, as it applied to their own work.

Bergson emphasized that our consciousness is always dependent on emotional states, so that there is no one perpetual reality. Not only is our immediate experience permeated and coloured by the memory of emotions attendant upon related previous experiences, but every succeeding experience will be different still, for tomorrow's memories will be modified by today's psychological and physiological states. (Giambruni, 1989, p. 86).

[9]

Bonnard was impressed by Bergson's ideas that human perception of the world was influenced by the critical, transforming function of memory, which meant that people interpreted events (and paintings), in the light of memories of earlier events. It was not only the viewer to whom this idea applied. Bonnard believed that the creative artist's first impression of a subject influenced his treatment of that subject later. He advised:

To begin with, one is stirred by the first impression. Later, work from the model or from memory; everything should converge on and nourish it. (Russoli, 1969, p. 3). [10]



If we examine some of Bonnard's works in the light of that comment, we may gain a new insight on his art.

The interior had been a recognised subject in French Art through a long tradition, from Chardin to the Impressionists. In his 'intimist' work, Bonnard used food, light and shadow to suggest the home as source of shelter. His works, however, suggest ambiguity, through showing a picture of home life which suggests security, while in contrast, showing interaction among adults in the same painting to be almost non-existent.

Bonnard's atmosphere is one of silence, inwardness and separateness, where the figure is alone and melancholy. This theme can be seen in his works on the interior, the figures in complete isolation to each other.

This idea of isolation is evident in the painting, (1924), Before Dinner, (Fig.4), where the two figures are completely detached from each other. A maid- servant stands behind the table, her hands joined, while the

other figure, Marthe, sits facing directly to the left, with her back to the table and to the maid.

Through paintings like these, Bonnard poses many questions to the viewer. Why is there a feeling of isolation, of tension, of anticipation or of waiting for something to happen? Is it because there is a class distinction between maid and mistress which inhibits any interaction? Bonnard uses the elaborate setting of the table to indicate the affluence of the household, but it also serves to divert our attention from the two figures. The maid awaits orders from Marthe, and Marthe waits, perhaps, for a visitor. Nevertheless, there is no communication between them. They are alienated, each in her own world.

An examination of this painting can serve to demonstrate the validity of Bonnard's philosophy on perception being affected by experience. Have we not memories of dinner parties that were ruined by the non-attendance of a guest? Such an experience can affect our interpretation of a painting such as this.

The sense of uneasiness, typical of such occasions is evident in this painting. The seated Marthe, is

immobile, with drooped shoulders, hands over her knees in disappointment and resignation.

The maid, not knowing what to say or whether she should say anything, may feel concern for her mistress, but the rigidity of the bourgeois custom does not allow such intimacy in spite of the fact that these paintings were classed as 'intimate'.

As if to emphasise the idea of multiple interpretations, Bonnard uses the device of multiple view-points: the table and plates are obviously viewed from a very elevated point, but the bottle of wine, which is half-empty, is seen from the side, at a lower level. We look down on the seated figure, but the figure behind the table is higher in our line of vision, and though this figure should be smaller, by normal perspective rules, we find the opposite to be the case. It would be interesting to find out what event in Bonnard's caused him to pose his models as he did.

One of Bonnard's favourite models was marthe, whom he met on the streets of Paris in 1893. She was probably a seamstress or an errand girl in a shop. Such workers were very poorly paid, and were on a



lower level, socially, than workers such as milliners.

Her name, Marthe de Méligny, was an assumed one, as her real name was Maria Boursin. She became his model, his helper, his mistress and his wife.

For many, she was symptomatic of the social dissolution that seemed imminent as the twentieth century approached. Marthe entered Bonnard's life in 1893 and was to remain at the centre of his art thereafter.

(Newman, 1989, p.158) [Ref.11]

That she was the centre of his art is obvious from the huge number of paintings, drawings and prints in which she is featured.

In the bourgeois society, the men were able to take advantage of a mobility within the class structure, which was not granted to bourgeois women. A man might associate with women of a different class from his own without causing comment, but it was considered improper for a bourgeois woman to associate with males of the lower classes.

The painting, Before Dinner (Fig.4), may have been painted as a comment on the fact that women of the

bourgeois were confined to the home, to be mothers and obedient wives, while their husbands went out to work, or in search of entertainment.

Another painting, which shows a group of people, not in an interior, however, but in a garden, is the (1900) L'Après Midi Bourgeois, (Fig.5). Here, again, the figures are in much the same situation as in Before Dinner. There is not much interaction between the figures, except where the children are concerned.

It shows a formal gathering of several people at his sister Andrée's house. They are arranged rather formally at various tables and seats in the garden. On the left, lying lazily on a chaise longue, is Claude Terrasse, Andrée's husband. He seems to be completely disinterested, while his son, seated next to him, sits bolt upright, like a stone statue. Andrée, herself is playing with a little kitten at her feet, as if to conceal her boredom.

On the right, is M.Prudhomme, fat and contented, with his pipe. His wife, equally well-nourished, is seated at a table which is laden with fruit, wine-bottles

and glasses, talks to a little girl, who, politely stands attentively facing her. The nurse, painted in a less three-dimensional manner, echoes Mme. Prudhomme's action, but with a kindlier attitude and a more caring gesture.

Mme. Bonnard and her granddaughter make their way indoors, and a figure, probably a servant, looks out at the scene from an upstairs window. Other children, dogs, cats and chickens are scattered around the scene.

Bonnard deliberately emphasises the rigidity of the group arranged across the picture to draw attention to the formality of the occasion. He is, in fact, showing the absurdity of the whole scene which would have been much more natural had it been only the intimate family group. Even the cat, in the foreground, appears to be posing especially for the occasion. Bonnard's sense of humour is evident in this painting, though his attitude appears to have become more serious in his later years.

This comic sense is demonstrated in his depiction of the children in the painting. The little girl in the foreground, being spoken to by the nurse, is



undoubtedly being advised on how to behave towards the lady visitor behind her. The other little girl, standing beside the visitor, is in the process of being talked to, or interrogated. The girl going into the house with her grandmother has had her ordeal over but the boy next to his father dreads the confrontation.

In his paintings, Bonnard shows the life of the bourgeoisie, how they lived and how they had to live up to the rules of society and the formality of having visitors to tea. In this painting, everyone seems to be totally uninterested in what is happening. Bonnard is making a critical statement about bourgeois life. He shows how people wear masks to please society, but that people do not always hide their true feelings which can be seen in the expressions on their faces. They cannot conceal that they are there against their will, just for the sake of appearances.

A new awareness of modelling is noticeable in this painting. The figures appear more rounded and the play of light on the surfaces is clearly indicated. There is still some use of flat pattern in the foreground to add interest but the use of flat pattern seen in his earlier work is much curtailed.

Bonnard returns, again and again, to the same subject matter, so that we may find him painting an interior many years after he painted the first version of it. A theme, much repeated by Bonnard, was that of the interior of a room, with a table prominently featured in the foreground, with dishes of food placed on the table. One or two figures, an animal or two appear near or behind the table and the whole interior is set against an outdoor scene, which is visible through a door or window.

One such interior was La Porte ouverte, 1909. It shows a round table in the centre foreground at which is seated a young woman. The open door centrally behind her gives an extensive view of the garden. The light from outside illuminates the whole interior.

Salle à manger à la campagne, 1913, (Fig.6), is an interesting picture especially when examined in conjunction with the earlier La Porte ouverte. In Salle à manger à la campagne, he not only introduces the landscape as seen through the door but also through the window. The round table holds its place in the foreground but is no longer central and the woman has been placed outside the window. The orange wall

on the left, is cleverly broken by the positioning of a small sideboard and the rectangles of red wall seen through the glass panels of the door.

This painting demonstrates a considerable change in Bonnard's thinking, over a period of four years.

Just before he did this painting, he had gone to live at Vernonnet, where Monet was a neighbour of his.

He told his nephew, Charles Terrasse:

Colour has led me astray, and almost unconsciously, I sacrificed form for it. But it is indeed true that form exists... Thus it is drawing that I must study... Then composition which should be balanced will come. A well-composed painting is half done. (Newman, 1984, p.122). [12]

Though the interior is solidly geometric, the background landscape has a hazy, dreamy atmosphere which gives the effect of shimmering light. This light permeates the whole scene, illuminating the interior of the room which is a haven of serenity. There is little or no suggestion of movement from the girl at the window or from the two small cats which are placed in such a way that they are barely noticeable, as if they are reluctant to disturb the tranquility.



More than ten years later he executed another painting of the same room, La Salle à manger, Vernon, 1925.

Again he places the round table in the foreground taking up about a third of the painting. The open door is to the extreme right which reduces the view of the garden significantly and emphasises the intimacy of the scene. The picture is highly organised, with two figures on the left balanced on the right by the sweeping curve of the table, and a subtle use of counterchange in tone and colour to make a dynamic composition.

Bonnard returned once more to address the same subject in 1932, when he painted Intérieur blanc (Le Cannet), (Fig.7). The room looks similar to the one in Salle à manger à la campagne, but as indicated by the title, was painted at Le Cannet, overlooking the bay of Cannes, which can be seen through the open door and window.

Bonnard explained why he used so much white in some paintings, as he did in Intérieur blanc, (The white interior) at Le Cannet: 'The white is supposed to make the brightly patches appear luminous'. (Newman, 1984, p.202). The interior appears to be brighter than outside the door. The peaceful atmosphere of the earlier

paintings of interiors still prevails but there is something disturbing about the busy foreground with its double perspective of the table. It is only after careful examination of the painting that we notice a woman behind the double table, and the tiny cat over which she is bending. The stripes of her garment resemble the markings of a cat. As always, Bonnard engenders feelings of ambiguity and doubt with the contradictions and half-hidden images in his painting. This painting was chosen in 1933, in Paris, as a new addition to the municipal collection.

Women featured strongly in almost all of Bonnard's major paintings. This is not surprising, because women were likewise featured in most of the work of the Impressionists, who had so much influence on Bonnard. The difference in treatment of the female by these various artists is worth examining. Degas, who appears to have hated women, or at least despised them, rejoiced in depicting their ugliness or embarrassments, while Renoir saw them as mother-figures or idealised emblems of sexuality. Bonnard, through his long career, was preoccupied with the female form, from the very first drawing of a girl, offering

champagne (and by implication herself), in the poster which brought his name to prominence on the streets of Paris.

He had seen and studied, at first-hand, some of Gauguin's paintings and zincographs at the exhibition at the Café Volpini, in June, 1889, and had been 'fired with enthusiasm'. With the subtle mixture of yellows, laid flat between patterns of black lines, he demonstrated the theory of Morris Denis that art could communicate through 'the ability of its lines and colours to expalin themselves'. (Ives, 1989.p.95).

The Salon exhibition was held in Paris annually or biannually from the beginning of the eighteenth century and was very influential. The acceptable types of paintings were placed in order of importance, with history paintings considered to be the most important.

History paintings could be religious, allegorical or of some historical event, with human figures, painted on the scale of life. The nude figure was justified in these paintings because of the use of a mythical setting, and because the paintings were intended to be viewed by the aristocracy, who 'understood' these things



In sixteenth century Italy, for example, Titian painted many erotic nudes that were made acceptable by such titles as 'Reclining Venus'. Such paintings were associated with the upper classes and were symbols of social status.

After the industrial revolution, in France, the middle classes took over the role of patrons of the arts. Because of the financial powers of the bourgeoisie, both Louis Philippe and Napoleon III had allowed the status of the bourgeoisie to increase. These new rich, were not as well educated as many of the old aristocracy and the art works that they favoured reflected this. Landscapes, flower paintings and sentimental genre scenes were popular with many of them.

The nude however did not go out of favour. Boucher, in the eighteenth century, had blatantly erotic nudes for the king of France, with little pretence of their being classical goddesses. Ingres, in later years, justified his nudes with titles like 'Bathers Disturbed'. The figures depicted in these paintings are idealised forms with flowing lines that emphasise sensuality.

To paint nude goddesses, it was necessary to follow academic convention, which meant producing stylised figures. This was demonstrated, in 1867, when the Salon turned down a painting entitled Diana, (Fig.8), by Renoir. Though Diana holds a hunting bow and has a quiver full of arrows, a dead deer lying at her feet, she herself is too solidly real, and is obviously a model from the studio.

Bonnard found that many of his commissions, especially illustrations and posters, demanded the portrayal of the female. His La Revue blanche, 1894, (Fig.9), which was a cover lithograph for the magazine of that name, shows a Parisienne looking coyly out from the frills of her Paris-fashion coat and holding a copy of La Revue blanche.

In a lithograph of 1893, Dans l'intimité, (Fig.10), the girl getting ready for bed, in her black stockings, could be the embodiment of innocence or perhaps a slovenly slattern trying to rouse herself from a drunken sleep. He became very involved with drawings of the nude, when engaged in the work on Parallèlement, the book of poetry which he illustrated.

He also took an interest in current thinking about the role and status of women; at one time, the wearing of black stockings was the trade-mark of a prostitute, but later became fashionable for young girls.

There was a blurring of the status of women. One writer, Uzanne, wrote that on the streets of Paris, one found those who could detect

the discreet invitation, the mere insinuation of an advance..... I am not speaking, observe, of obvious harlots. I take merely those whose bearing is modest, whose manner is virtuous, and whose composure is all but middle class. (Newman, 1989, p.155). [13]

Therefore the nude could be a virtuous lady or otherwise.

Bonnard often poked fun at the bourgeoisie and pointed out their hypocrisy when they refused to acknowledge that they themselves were largely responsible for the existence of the many brothels. Bonnard took a keen interest in the status of women and, in particular, their sexual role. He did many studies of Marthe, both clothed and nude, indoor and outdoor. Many of the paintings showed the figure viewed from a very elevated position, reminiscent of Japanese prints. The high view point would also indicate that the painter had a dominant position over the figure



and would imply that males are dominant over the female, an attitude which was regarded as the norm.

The sexual role of women was sensationally brought to the attention of the public by Manet. In 1863, his painting, La Déjeuner sur l'herbe, (Fig.11), and another painting Olympia, (Fig.12), painted the same year, but exhibited in 1865, caused much protest, as both were seen as satirical attacks on the establishment.

Other forms of art had their function in drawing attention to the hypocrisy and double standards prevailing in Parisian society. Jaques Offenbach made his own critical comments through his music. In his Orphée aux enfers of 1858, his woman-chasing Jupiter was seen as Louis Napoleon and his jealous wife Juno, as Eugénie. Jupiter's supporting chorus was aptly labeled 'public opinion', which hinted at the manipulation of the populace by Louis Napoleon's regime. Offenbach continued his attacks on the establishment with La Belle Hélène, in 1864, and La Vie Parisienne and La Grande-Duchesse de Gerolstein in 1886 - 1867.

Siegfried Kracauer acknowledged Offenbach's ability to poke fun at authority when others were silent:

At a time when the bourgeoisie were politically stagnant and the Left was impotent, Offenbach's operettas had been the most definite form of revolutionary protest. It released gusts of laughter, which shattered the compulsory silence and lured the public towards opposition, while seemingly only to amuse them. (Herbert, 1988, p. 61)

[14]

In the visual arts, social satire could be detected. Manet painted Déjeuner sur l'herbe, (Fig. 11), in 1863, showing two seated men in contemporary attire in a rural setting, with two women, one of whom was nude. The poses are said to have been taken from an engraving after Raphael's Judgement of Paris. Manet's painting was rejected by the Salon's official jury in 1863, but it was exhibited at the Salon des Refusés, where it caused much controversy. It was probably recognised as a satirical comment on the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. The model for Déjeuner sur l'herbe was Victorine Meurent, an artist's model. Artist's models were believed to be of easy virtue but that was not what alienated the viewers.

Her thickened body is too arrestingly real, and her frank stare fixes the onlooker's eye. At the same time, her very boldness, like that of Olympia, thwarts any male expectations of sexual submissiveness.

(Herbert, 1988, p. 173)

[15]

One might ask what was so wrong with Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe to arouse such hostility.

Compared with the voluptuous nude Venus in Cabanal's Birth of Venus, shown at the Salon in 1863, Manet's nude seemed reserved. The Birth of Venus was lavishly praised and was purchased by the Emperor. Perhaps Manet was punished for being honest.

Manet's other painting, which caused a major scandal, was his Olympia, (Fig.12), which was mentioned earlier. Olympia was painted in 1863 and was accepted by the jury of the 1865 Salon. It was immediately attacked by critics and public alike. The people, no doubt, had got accustomed to Offenbach's bawdy gods being associated with French royalty and those in authority. When they saw Olympia, the goddess, made to look like a courtesan, they considered the painting to be a commentary on their bourgeois society.

For a nude to be acceptable, certain conventions had to be observed:

...the woman's body had to be arranged in precise and definite relation to the viewer's eye. It had to be placed at a distance, near enough for seeing, far enough for propriety. It had to be put at a determinate height, neither so high that the woman became inaccessible and merely grand, nor so low that she turned into matter for scrutiny of a clinical or prurient kind. (Clark, 1985, p.133)



In Olympia, several of these rules had been disregarded: the figure of Olympia was not placed 'far enough for propriety' and if her nearness allowed 'prurient scrutiny' her cold, defiant stare still kept her 'inaccessible'. Anédée Cantaloube, in *Le Grand Journal*, acknowledged Titian's Venus as Manet's source, but he described Manet's nude as 'a sort of female gorilla' and faulted the left hand which was 'flexed in a sort of shameless contraction'. Another comment by Pierrot in *Les Tablettes de Pierrot*, described her as ,

... a woman on a bed, or, rather, some form or other.... a sort of monkey making fun of the pose and the movement of the arm of Titian's Venus, with one hand shamelessly flexed. (Clark, 1985, p.94). [17]

The position of Olympia's left hand enraged many because they saw it as casting doubt on her femininity. There was also the convention that classic nudes and goddesses had beautiful hair, but in the case of Olympia, her hair is hardly noticeable, being obscured by the dark brown background. There is no little dog to symbolise faithfulness. Instead, a black cat sits on the end of her couch.

One critic, Jean Ravenel, writing in L'Epoque, had enough individualism to voice an opinion on the painting, as a piece of art, in 1865:

Olympia is a very crazy piece of Spanish madness, which is a thousand times better than the platitude and inertia of so many canvases on show in the exhibition.

(Clark, 1985, p.139).[18]

(Manet had earlier visited Spain and studied the works of Goya and Valazquez).

Though Olympia was based on Titian's Venus of Urbino, the model for Olympia was obviously a prostitute. There was nothing particularly immodest in her pose, but her hard bold stare at the spectator infuriated many. Critics of the time felt that they had not sufficiently insulting language to describe the painting. With this painting, however, Manet explored and expanded new frontiers in visual art. It took years for this painting to get due recognition but it now rightly considered to be a superb work of art. We know from his correspondence with his friend, Baudelaire, that Manet was very upset by all the criticism and abuse he received after Olympia, but he emerged triumphant. After Olympia, the painting of the nude would never be the same again.

More than thirty years after Manet painted Olympia, Bonnard produced a painting of a nude, which he called Siesta. There was no uproar like what happened with Olympia. Peoples attitudes were changing. Around this time in Paris, the intellectual set were intrigued by all aspects of sexuality. After the fall of the Second Empire, in 1871, the censorship laws were repealed. Discussions took place on the position of women in the home and in the work place and their challenge to male supremacy. On the one hand, the feminist press got more freedom, but this was counter-balanced by anti-pornography demonstrations led by morality police which were organised by Senator René Berger.

In the popular literature of the 1890's, there appeared the 'homesse' or 'man-woman' with a dual sexual identity. People became fascinated by sexual inversion and lesbianism and the ancient Greek hermaphrodite. (Hermaphroditos, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, became joined in one body with a nymph, when bathing, and therefore had both male and female characteristics.)

Bonnard was intrigued by ambiguity. His Dans l'intimité, which was mentioned earlier, is one illustration of



this. He also explored the notion of exchange of sexual identity, and had photographs of himself transformed into portraits of Marthe.

Siesta, 1899, (Fig.13), is one of his most extraordinary paintings of the female nude. There is a Roman copy of a Hellenistic statue in the Louvre, which Bonnard certainly knew. He probably drew and studied it as a student. It is known as The Sleeping Hermaphrodite, (Fig.14) (200 - 150 B.C.). The hermaphrodite lies on a mattress in a tangle of sheets, simultaneously man and woman. In Siesta, Bonnard places his sleeping nude in the same pose, complete with mattress and crumpled sheets, with the left leg similarly bent. Bonnard delighted in poking fun at the modern ideas of his time. The clever use of the historical figure is put to good effect in a modern setting, but with a completely different concept because the drowsy nude in Bonnard's painting is definitely not a hermaphrodite. The girl in Siesta looks completely relaxed and natural, the setting providing further information in

the explicit and voluptuous tangle of the bedclothes, the attention to the details of the coverlet and mattress ticking, and the sense of a male presence just momentarily departed. (Newman, 1984, p.110)

Instead of the cat, which Bonnard generally included in his paintings of nudes, he places a small dog in foreground. This is probably another homorous reference, by Bonnard, to eighteenth century nudes that were regularly shown accompanied by their little dogs, the symbols of loyalty. The nude in Siesta, however, can, herself, be likened to a sleeping cat.

Bonnard went to live in Le Cannet in 1925 and married Marthe, who had been his helpmate for almost thirty years. She had been his inspiration and his model and continued to be such all her life. At Le Cannet, he did several paintings of her in the bath. The first of these, The Bath, 1925, (Fig.15), which is now in the Tate Gallery, in London, shows Marthe from a very elevated view point, lying full-length in the bath-water, with her head rested against the end of the bath. She looks down towards her feet.

He next painted Nu dans la baignoire, (Fig.16), probably in the same year. This was a revolutionary departure from his former work. The bath is viewed from directly above. Only the woman's legs are visible, jutting in from the bottom right, more than half-way through the painting as they float in the clear water of the

bath. They are erotic but disturbing, cut off suddenly at the hips. The painter himself unexpectedly appears in the left upper corner of the painting, carrying his palette. It looks as if this painting is not his view of the scene, because he stands in the wrong place. If we refer back to The Bath, (Fig.15), we can imagine that the view in Nu dans la baignoire is what Marthe sees herself. Bonnard never ceased to make his paintings ambiguous and, therefore, the more we study the picture, the more aspects of it we see. As if to remind us of the different view points, Bonnard, here again, uses several perspectives in the painting.

Nu dans le bain, 1936,(Fig.17), is yet another version of the nude in the bath. The woman lies full-length as seen in The Bath, 1925.(Fig.15),but seen from a different angle. Bonnard had in his collection, a nude by Maurice Denis. Bonnard did a painting, La Chimiée, in 1916, which shows a nude reflected in a mirror. Behind her, in the background,featuring prominently, is the nude by Denis. This was Bonnard's way of paying tribute to Denis.



The Nu dans le bain, (Fig.17), is directly related to Denis' painting. The straight stiff body, the bent arm, the position of the head, are very similar. To all this, however, Bonnard added his own genius.

Although Denis' nude provided the initial stimulus, Bonnard's later women in the bath evolved into something wholly original and are among the greatest nudes painted in the twentieth century.....The woman is enclosed, as if in a shell or a womb. She floats in the water which surrounds her, in the manner of a Monet waterlily or a drowning Ophelia. She is not of this world, nor a part of the continuum of time as we know it. (Newman,1984,p.212) [20]

Bonnard returned to this theme again and again, and was intrigued by it. All the 'nude in the bath' paintings have a very high view point. The Japanese influence was partly responsible for Bonnard's use of this elevated view point, but it also serves to reinforce the idea of the male superiority, his dominance over the female.

Bonnard subscribed to the ideas of Victor Jozé, for whom Bonnard designed a book-cover:

Let woman remain what nature has made her:  
an ideal female, man's companion and lover,  
mistress of the home or bacchante. Let her  
not pose as a virago, the role does not  
become her.....No eunuchs, no androgynes!  
(Newman,1989.p.157) [21]

As we can see from the foregoing examples of his work, Bonnard had a special tenderness for women and never treated them as harshly as did Degas, for example. He had a lively sense of humour, which can be seen in his paintings. His paintings can indicate irony or sarcasm but he never painted to humiliate. While he often hit out at the rich and powerful, he was charitable to the weak and inoffensive. We will see a further demonstration of these traits in his graphic work.



Fig. 3.

Crépuscule, (Twilight), 1892.

Bonnard, Oil on Canvas, 130 x 162mm.





Fig. 4

Before Dinner, 1924.

Bonnard, Oil on Canvas, 902 x 1067mm.



Fig. 5.

L'Après Midi Bourgeois, 1900.

Bonnard, Oil on Canvas, 1390 x 2120mm.



Fig. 6.

Salle à Manger à la Campagne, 1913.

Bonnard, Oil on Canvas, 164 x 205mm.



Fig.7.

Intérieur blanc (Le Cannet), 1932

Bonnard, Oil on Canvas, 109 x 156mm.





Fig. 8.

Diana, Auguste Renoir.  
1878.

Oil on Canvas.



Fig. 9.

La Revue blanche, 1894.

Bonnard.

Colour lithograph

800 x 630mm.





Fig. 10

Dans l'intimité, 1893.

Bonnard.

Lithograph 288 x 127mm.



Fig. 11

Dejeuner sur l'herbe, 1863.

Manet, Oil on Canvas,



Fig. 12.

Olympia, 1863.

Manet, Oil on Canvas.





Fig. 13.

Siesta, 1899 Bonnard.

Oil on Canvas, 1090 x 1320mm.

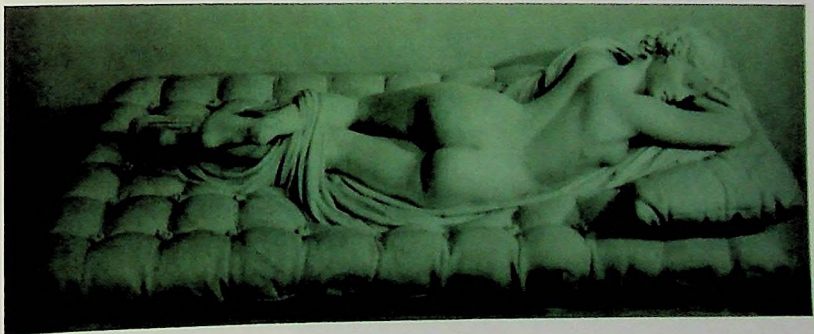


Fig. 14.

The Sleeping Hermaphrodite,

200-150B.C. Marble, L.1480mm.





Fig.15.  
The Bath, 1925, Bonnard.  
 Oil on Canvas.



Fig. 16  
Nu dans la baignoire, 1925.  
 Bonnard, Oil on Canvas,  
 101 x 63mm.

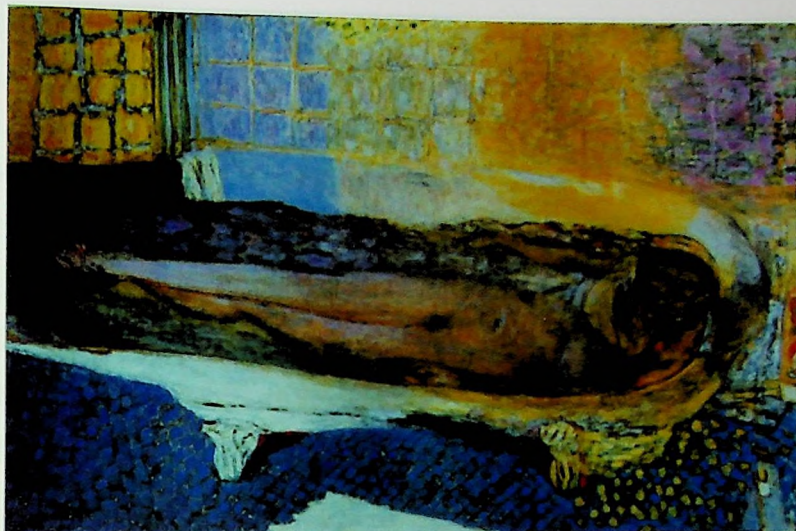


Fig. 17.

Nu dans le bain, 1936

Bonnard, Oil on Canvas, 93 x 147mm.

## CHAPTER III

Two artists can be identified in Bonnard. There is Bonnard the painter, and there is Bonnard the graphic artist, who was poster designer, print-maker and illustrator. Although he was, by nature, a private man, he got great satisfaction from the public display and success of his art work.

His work for the printing press, in which he mastered graphic expression, in both black-and-white and colour, frequently brought out new ideas. He had a keen wit, and the power to concentrate narrative and emotion in compact imagery, often revealing a lyrical spontaneity. In these graphic projects, we are often able to trace a continuity between the precise abstractions of Bonnard's youth and the painterly scenes of his maturity. Bonnard practised and expanded the full range of his art through the process of print-making. He wove the graphic art into the entire fabric of a long painting career. Incidentally, his friends Vuillard, Denis and Vallotton, who were members of the Nabis, also produced prints.



Bonnard printed designs to advertise and to illustrate or ornament publications, in which he collaborated with many of the avant-garde poets, novelists musicians and dramatists of his day.

After he produced the poster France-Champagne, 1889, which gave a successful start to his career, he completed lithographs for Paul Verlainé's 'Parallèlement', in 1900, and 'Daphnis et Chloé', in 1902, a French version of Longus' pastoral, as well as 'Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris'.

The poster France-Champagne, (Fig. 2), is remarkable in that a virtual beginner could turn out such a sophisticated piece of art. It is also remarkable that a print, a form of art thought to be inferior to painting, should become so well-regarded.

Jules Chéret, a highly successful commercial artist, who won the Exposition Gold Medal, showed a pretty girl dancing through the 'Enchanted Garden', which was being advertised in the poster. The female, who appeared so often in Jules Chéret's posters, was called 'chérette' by Parisians.

Bonnard, also showed a pretty girl, but this time, communicating directly with the viewer, as if speaking out of the poster. She is starry-eyed, and raises a toast to the viewer. The champagne-bubbles overflow from the glass to envelop a large area of the poster with its effervescence. The girl, herself, echoes this effervescence with her frilly skirt, her carefree smile and her provocative, low-cut dress.

Bonnard skilfully combined the Japanese style of line and colour with the colour theories of Gauguin, to produce an exuberant poster that concealed its careful design. He transformed Chéret's good-time girl into something more daring, using the Japanese influence. He used distortion and caricature, his lines becoming more sinuous and, in consequence, more sensuous than those of Chéret, with his Rococo illusions.

Rather than a pastel-sweet neo-Fragonard dainty offering a drink as a covert pretext for sex, Bonnard's inebriated cocotte, turning complicitously toward the viewer/consumer as she waves a glass of champagne, offers the sex up front. In overthrowing a canon of beauty that reinforced Third Republic notions of sexual stability,.....Bonnard transformed Chéret's use of the Rococo and initiated his attack on the positivist world of the middle class. (Newman,1989,p.149) [22]

Bonnard insisted on exposing hypocrisy all his life.

'La Revue blanche' was a literary and art journal published by the Natanson brothers in Paris. Bonnard contributed more than 35 images to this journal, between 1893 and 1903. The celebrated poster, now known as La Revue blanche, 1894, (Fig. 8 ), was commissioned by Thadée Natanson who wrote a biography of Bonnard. Thadée Natanson had married his young bride, Misia, the year before, and Bonnard used her as his model for the poster.

The poster has not got the bright cheerful colour of France-Champagne but its strong images in solid black are very striking. A dark-eyed Parisienne holds a copy of the magazine in one hand. She has an umbrella in the other hand and the point of the umbrella fills the 'V' of the word 'Revue', having neatly slotted through the 'a' of the word 'la'. The use of so much black was a feature of Japanese print. Bonnard used black extensively. At one time, the editor in charge of 'La Revue blanche' called Bonnard 'Bonnard très Japonard'. It is clear that such a strong composition would only be weakened by the use of several colours and therefore, Bonnard used his colour sparingly.



In this poster, the frills of the girls coat form a cocoon from which she looks out beguilingly. She has been likened to a cat:

...her pointed face so like the cats that Bonnard loved to draw. The animality is more hidden here, feline rather than serpent, but it lurks in the cast of her eyes, in her sharp nose, and in the set of her chin within the ruff formed by the many capes of her coat. This correspondence between human and animal amused Bonnard.  
(Newman, 1989, p.150).[23]

This cat-like appearance is seen again and again in Bonnard's portrayal of women, especially his Parisiennes. Misia's large hat, with its flowers and ribbons, and her slender figure make her a typical Parisienne. This style of dress, is evident in many of Bonnard's drawings and paintings and in the works of other artists of the time as it was Paris high fashion.

A top-hatted figure, in black silhouette, fills a large area of the background. The figure of a man in silhouette, often accompanied 'chérettes' in posters. By way of contrast, a newspaper boy, with a flamboyant neckerchief and a cheeky attitude, shouts at us directly from the poster, as he cocks his thumb at the magazine in the ladies hand. At first glance, we may not notice that all the available non-black

space of the background is taken up by copies of 'La Revue blanche' and that the silhouetted gentleman is bending over to pick one up.

Bonnard and his friends of the Nabis always endeavoured to convey more than one message in their art work.

In La Revue blanche we can see that Bonnard is probably making a comment on the new attitudes of the working classes by showing the impertinence of the news-boy who is not afraid to demand attention from the viewer, with little regard for 'his betters'.

Bonnard's first 'Parisienne' was an ink and watercolour sketch, executed in 1889, and simply called The Parisienne. Thereafter, it became an integral part of Bonnard's Paris scenes. In 1893, he produced a lithograph, Parisiennes, which shows two girls wrapped in furs and wearing large hats. The drawing indicates rapid sketching as if to hurry them along on their way. There is a strong sense of movement in the picture. The composition is reminiscent of the quick snapshot, but all the essential character of the Parisienne is there. There is a very indefinite line in the most of the picture, with much scraping out and fuzzy outline.

Woman with an Umbrella, 1894, (Fig.18), is a lithograph which is quite different from Parisiennes. The woman stands as if she were daintily tip-toeing over some obstacle or, perhaps, negotiating a wet spot after the rain, and her figure is almost totally in silhouette. Bonnard's large areas of black convey the idea of simplicity of design. We know that this apparent simplicity is the result of careful preparation, as several studies for Woman with an Umbrella are still in existence, one of which is reversed. This was probably done by tracing, because Bonnard regularly used tracings in his preparation work. The outlines of this lithograph are much more definite than those of Parisiennes and the feline features of the model resemble those of the model in La Revue blanche.

Around 1895, Bonnard became fascinated by Japanese screens. He produced several works that had a narrow, upright format like a screen panel. One of these, a lithograph, is The Schoolgirls Return, 1895, (Fig.19). Here again we have the 'Parisienne', proud and statuesque, matching the rigidity of the door but softened by the decorative frills and flounces. In contrast is the miserable schoolgirl, bowed down by the weight of her schoolbag and 'all that education'.



There is an element of the comic cartoon about this witty picture. We can observe how the lithograph evolved by studying the mixed media preparatory sketch in Fig. 20.

Le Petite Blanchisseuse, 1895, (Fig. 21), was the first of the colour prints which Vollard commissioned Bonnard to do. It shows a little laundry girl, in silhouette, trudging awkwardly along a deserted street. She looks rather comic with her black umbrella as she meets a small stray dog which is out for a walk. Bonnard treats her with sympathy by the childlike innocence of his drawing, which in turn gives her an appearance of innocence. The black blot that is the little laundress contrasts with the pure white of the cover of her laundry basket. She may be humble but she produces perfection. This contrasts again with the fashionable Parisienne, seen on the streets of Paris, swinging her umbrella and walking her dog, leaving such as the little laundress to clean up after her. He did several preparatory watercolour and pencil sketches before he had the design sufficiently simplified for this lithograph, which almost certainly was based on the Ukiyo-e silhouette produced in a French periodical, 'Le Japon Artistique' in 1891.

In 1895, Bonnard's continued interest in Japanese screens led him to an ambitious undertaking, the production of a full-size lithographic screen, Promenade, (Fig.22). He painted the original design in distemper, (Fig.23), which was his usual method for painting stage sets. The subject chosen was a street scene. Large areas are left empty so as to emphasise the busy group in the foreground. These are counterbalanced by a row of nannies who stand in the background. There is a marvellous frieze of horse-drawn cabs decoratively placed along the top. The panels were very large, being 1499 x 479mm.each. With these lithographic screens, Bonnard brought the Paris street scene into the living-room.

The following year he produced another lithograph of a street scene, Narrow Street Viewed From Above, 1896, (Fig.24), which resembles a screen panel. The street is crowded, and almost all the figures in it are black. The influence of the Japanese artist, Hiroshige, is evident here.

Probably in the same year, he produced a street scene, Boulevard, 1896, (Fig.25), which is also crowded. Black silhouetted people are in the foreground, and

the background is a bustle of activity. The format of the picture is horizontal, being more than twice as wide as it is high. Colta Ives, in describing this lithograph, says:

....he managed to translate a moment in the heavily trafficked life of the street into a composition with something of the enduring power of a classical frieze. (Ives, 1989, p.128)

Street at Evening in the Rain, 1896-97, (Fig.26), is a lithograph of a wet street with the ubiquitous Parisienne being buffeted by the rain and the wind, and the lights from the shop doors and windows reflected in the wet street. Its colour is wonderfully restrained but it glows with a magical luminosity.

A later lithograph, Street Corner, 1897, (Fig.27), shows a crowd of people, with those at the back hazily sketched to add to the feeling of distance. The figures of several Parisiennes are seen in the foreground, their elegant dress and upright bearing in severe contrast to the workers and the poorer classes in the background. Consciously, or subconsciously, Bonnard has made a further telling comment about the social inequality in Parisian life.



Bonnard was one of the most imaginative artists of his time, a pioneer and innovator, who produced a vast body of high quality art. He was one of the artists who brought the printing process to prominence so that the print can be considered as much a work of art as an oilpainting.

He was a social commentator and was never afraid to bring unpleasant realities to the attention of the public, nor was he afraid to criticise the establishment. This is evident, especially in his street scenes and in his painting of the Parisienne.

His Graphic images, gave people a new perspective on art and on themselves. His handling of colour in his oilpaintings was reminiscent of the Impressionists. His treatment of the female form, and especially the nude, was new and daring. He was a worthy successor to Manet in this regard.

For many years, Bonnard has been ignored and left in relative obscurity, but a new awareness of his work is emerging. I think he should be considered to be one of the major artists of the twentieth century.



Fig. 18.

Woman With an Umbrella, 1894.

Bonnard, Colour Lithograph. 260 x 130mm.



Fig. 19

The Schoolgirl's Return

1895

Bonnard, Colour Lithograph.

260 x 130mm.



Fig. 20

The Schoolgirl's Return

1895.

Bonnard, Mixed Media

273 x 115mm.



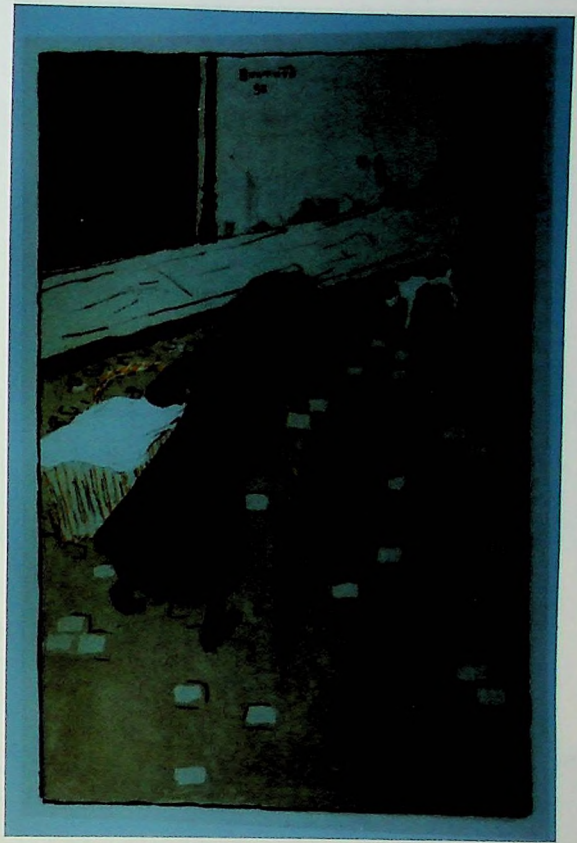


Fig. 21.

Le Petite Blanchisseuse, 1895-96

Bonnard, Colour Lithograph, 294 x 200mm.

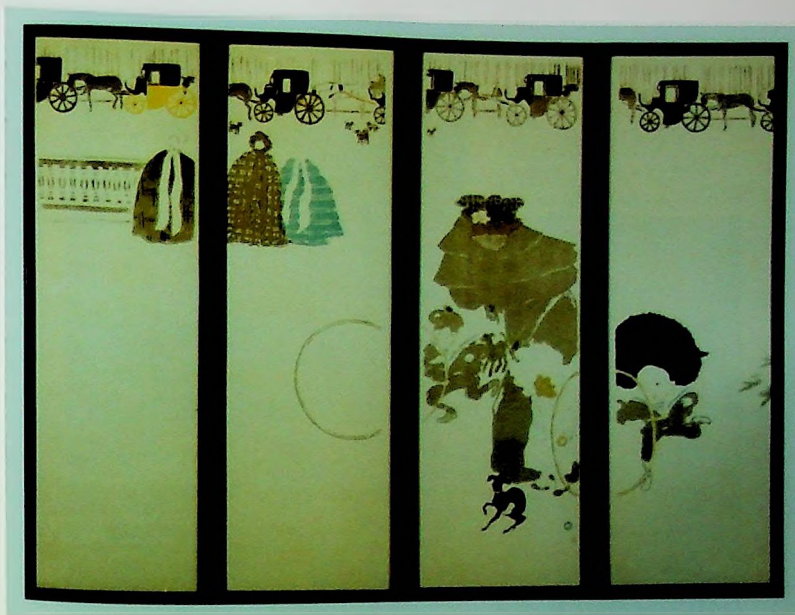


Fig. 22.

Promenade, 1895.

Bonnard, Screen, Colour Lithograph.

Each panel 1499 x 479mm.



Fig. 23.

Promenade, 1894.

Bonnard, Screen, Distemper.

Each panel 1470 x 450mm.



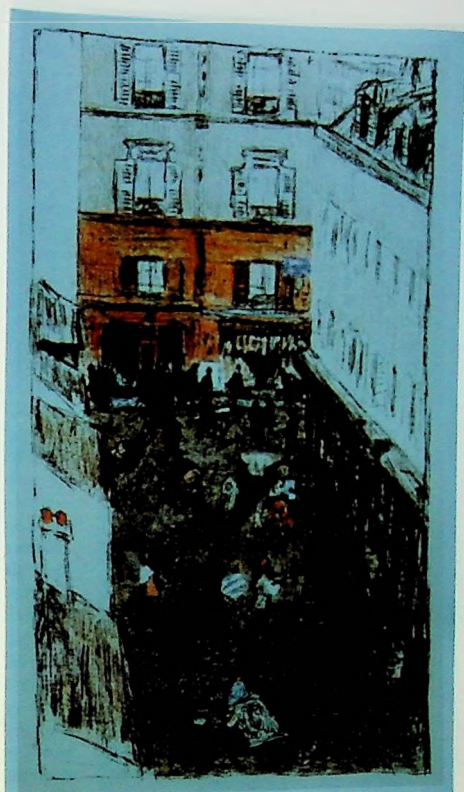


Fig. 24.  
Narrow Street Viewed  
From Above. 1896.  
 Bonnard,  
 Colour Lithograph.  
 368 x 210mm

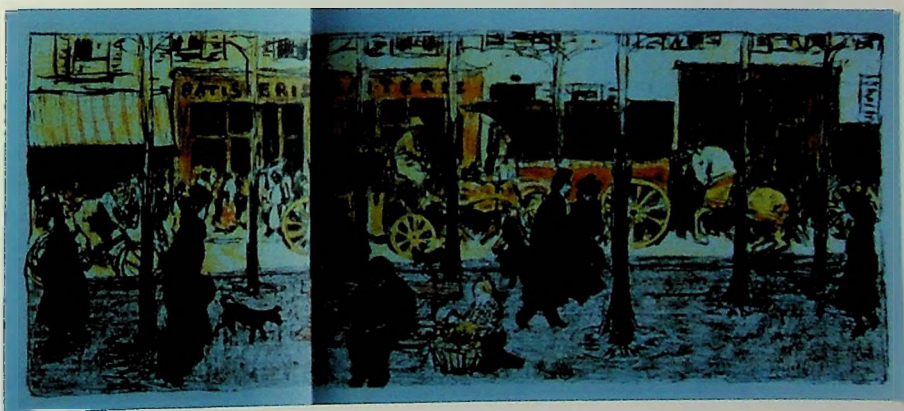


Fig. 25.  
Boulevard, 1896. Bonnard.  
 Colour Lithograph, 173 x 45mm.



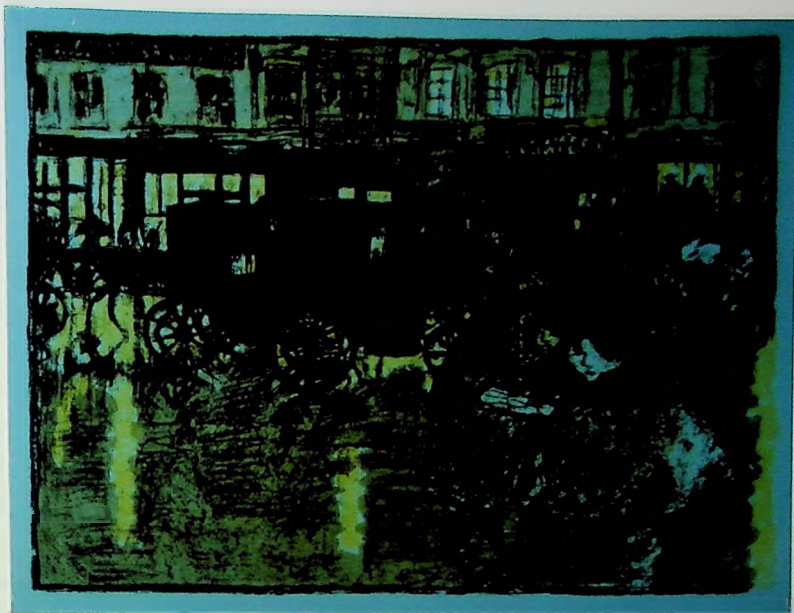


Fig. 26

Street at Evening in the Rain, 1896-97

Bonnard, Colour Lithograph. 257 x 355mm.



Fig.27.

Street Corner, 1897. Bonnard.

Colour Lithograph, 270 x 355mm.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig.1      Family Scene, Japanese Print.  
            Papa, Maman, le (Marie), Bonnard, 1885.
- Fig.2      France-Champagne, Bonnard, 1889-91.
- Fig.3      Crépuscule, (Twilight), Bonnard, 1892.
- Fig.4      Before Dinner, Bonnard, 1924.
- Fig.5      L'Après Midi bourgeois, Bonnard, 1900.
- Fig.6      Salle à Manger à la Campagne, Bonnard, 1913.
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- Fig.8      Diana, Auguste Renoir, 1867.
- Fig.9      La Revue Blanche, Bonnard, 1894.
- Fig.10     Dans l'intimité, Bonnard, 1893.
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- Fig.15     The Bath, Bonnard, 1925.
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- Fig.18     Woman with an Umbrella, Bonnard, 1894.
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- Fig.21     Le Petite Blanchisseuse, Bonnard, 1895-96.
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- Fig.26     Street at Evening in the Rain, Bonnard, 1896-97.
- Fig.27     Street Corner, Bonnard, 1897.

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