

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



PIERRE BONNARD

1867 Fontenay-aux-Roses – Le Cannet 1947

Nature morte à la table sur une terrasse

Gouache and watercolour over pencil on paper, c.1939.

Stamped lower right with the monogram (Lugt 3887).

175 x 282 mm

PROVENANCE: Estate of the artist – Antoine Terrasse – J. P. L. Fine Arts, London – Private collection, Japan – Washburn Gallery, New York – Jill Newhouse, New York – Collection of Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason

Many of the works that Pierre Bonnard painted through the late 1930s feature the terrace and balcony of the house at Vernonnet, in the Seine valley between Normandy and the Île de France. Purchased in 1912, the small home he called *Ma Roulotte* (my caravan) served as a country retreat for Bonnard and his wife Marthe throughout the 1930s [Figs. 1 and 2].

This still life was probably painted at Vernonnet. It is one of a series of drawings in gouache and watercolour that Bonnard made towards the end of his life. His decision to work in this media was prompted by his patron Arthur Hahnloser (1870-1936), who provided Bonnard with materials while he was convalescing following hospitalization in 1930. He first tried painting in watercolour but found its fast-drying components unsympathetic to his slow working routine.¹

The table with its grey-and-pink chequered cloth fills almost the entire surface of the image, which is framed at the left by a green garden chair and the greenish floor of the terrace. The tablecloth is more than a background, and the objects placed on it play a complementary role. Its coolish tones contrast with the warmer tones of the fruit, bread and jar. Towards the end of his life Bonnard approached abstraction, increasingly subordinating the subject in order to obtain the desired effects of colour and light.

Bonnard, according to David Sylvester, “painted whatever belonged to his personal life, and he painted it the way he saw it in the ordinary course of events: one cannot imagine him arranging a still life on a table in order to make a picture of it; he would have painted the still life that happened to be there, re-arranging it on the canvas, perhaps, but not interfering with the actual things – just as, in fact, he didn’t cultivate his garden but let it grow as it would.

All the things in the paintings are only incidentally what the paintings are about. What they (the paintings) are really about is seeing, the process itself of seeing. Which is why the principal actor in Bonnard’s scenes is light – the light that irradiates things, meaning possession, the light that disintegrates them, meaning loss.”²

¹ Dita Armory, *Pierre Bonnard. The Late Still Life and Interiors*, exhib. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27 January – 19 April 2009, p. 121.

² David Sylvester, 1966, pp. 137, 139. The article appeared in the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, 6 February 1966 on the occasion of an important retrospective at the Royal Academy, London, cited in Jacqueline Munck, ‘The Cat Drank All the Milk: Bonnard’s Continuous Present’, in Dita Amory, op. cit., p. 62.

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This gouache comes from the collection of the American painters Emily Mason (1932-2019) and Wolf Kahn (1927-2020). Both artists were second-generation Abstract Expressionists. Kahn, a German-born refugee from World War II, and Mason, herself the daughter of an artist, were married for 60 years. Mason died in December 2019; Kahn died just a few months later. Over the course of their six-decade relationship, they collected works by a large number of artists including Pierre Bonnard, who was a major inspiration for both Kahn and Mason.



Fig.1: *Decor at Vernon [The Terrace at Vernonnet]*, c.1920-39
oil on canvas, 148 x 194.9 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 68.1)
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Fig.2: *The Wild Garden [The Terrace]*
[The Large Terrace (My Roulotte in Vernonnet)], 1918
oil on canvas, 159.4 x 249.6 cm.
The Phillips Collection, Washington DC (inv. 0177)
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