

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## The Phillips Collection Presents *Bonnard's Worlds*

**An early champion of French artist Pierre Bonnard, The Phillips Collection hosts a major exhibition that explores how the painter's quiet and private life fueled his creative practice.**



WASHINGTON, DC—The Phillips Collection presents *Bonnard's Worlds*, the first major exhibition on French artist Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) in Washington, DC, in 20 years. Co-organized by The Phillips Collection and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, *Bonnard's Worlds* brings together 60 of the artist's celebrated paintings throughout his career from museums and private collections across the world, including several rarely seen by the public. Governed neither by chronology nor geography but by measures of intimacy, *Bonnard's Worlds* examines the larger domains in which Bonnard lived to the most private interior spaces of his dwellings and his thoughts. The Phillips Collection's presentation echoes the personal spaces depicted in Bonnard's paintings, encouraging guests to explore the sensory realms of the artist's experiences. ***Bonnard's Worlds* is on view from March 2–June 2, 2024.**

"The Phillips Collection, an early champion of Bonnard in the United States, is delighted to present this landmark exhibition. Bonnard's sensuously colored, expressive paintings have long held a special place at the Phillips, where they have and continue to serve as an inspiration to generations of artists. We can't help but be seduced by his quiet, intimate paintings, which invite us to find beauty in the details of our everyday lives," says **Vradenburg Director & CEO Jonathan P. Binstock**. "The intimate setting of the Phillips creates a special ambiance to linger with Bonnard. Our founder Duncan Phillips aptly declared, 'With us Bonnard is at home.' We're immensely excited for guests to experience the joy of looking at Bonnard's pictures in a space where he was welcomed and felt at home."

As a painter, Bonnard did not develop along a linear path, nor did he fit within a given movement or style. A founding member of the Post-Impressionist group of avant-garde painters Les Nabis, Bonnard is known for the decorative qualities of his paintings and his bold use of color, which served as a vehicle for emotional expression. Bonnard was a contemporary and close friend of Claude Monet and Henri Matisse and is viewed as a bridge between Impressionism and Modernism. He often suggested the world beyond the edge of the frame by painting scenes in which people and objects appear on the periphery of the composition. In this way, Bonnard activated his surfaces with dynamic all-over patterns of color that sought to capture the immediacy of what he called the “first sensation.” He created a mobile vision that flows organically from one scene to the next, in which viewers are reminded of where the artist has been—both physically and stylistically—and how he would return to those moments.

Representing the full breadth of Bonnard’s long career, the exhibition features views of the places Bonnard lived in Paris, Normandy, and the French Riviera, painted between the 1890s and the 1940s. Moving from the landscape to the garden, paintings from Bonnard’s decorative beginnings prelude his poetic and increasingly expressionist vision of nature. In this presentation, scenes depicting terraces near his dwellings give way to verdant landscapes inspired by his daily walks. In several of the painted interiors, Bonnard includes a view of the outdoor world through a window or door, suggesting the symbiotic relationship between his internal and external worlds.

Bonnard also explored spaces devoted to social encounters, from the dining room to the parlor, where a sense of stillness is punctuated by an intensity of feeling. Most private are the images of the artist’s bedroom and bath, often featuring Bonnard’s longtime partner and muse, Marthe de Mélny Bonnard, with whom Bonnard lived for most of 50 years. In these carefully constructed compositions, Marthe is seen sleeping, at her toilette, or bathing; the artist’s presence implied. A series of paintings of her in the bathtub from 1936–1946 are featured in the exhibition, which are some of Bonnard’s most celebrated depictions of the subject.

“The Phillips Collection has been a leader in the presentation of Bonnard’s work, including a recent exhibition drawn from the collection of Roger and the late Vicki Sant that explored the artist’s relationship with the Nabi. *Bonnard’s Worlds* draws us into the artist’s expressive artistic language through which he translates his sentient responses to the world,” says **Phillips Chief Curator Elsa Smithgall**. “Like a moving picture, his compositions unfold before your eyes, surprising and awakening you with each new detail. The poetry of Bonnard’s worlds calls forth its interior sounds.”

Bonnard would revisit his paintings and subjects over the years, deriving compositions from his imagination and memories. He began working on *Young Women in the Garden* in 1921 but did not finish it until 1946. The painting shows two women, identified as Marthe de Mélny and Renée Monchaty, a young woman who was the subject of many of Bonnard’s paintings during their affair. Bonnard married Marthe in August 1925, and less than a month later, Renée Monchaty took her own life. Bonnard retouched *Young Women in the Garden* after Marthe’s death in 1942, revisiting the composition and his relationships with Marthe and Renée, whose smiling face is turned toward the viewer (and to the painter), as he neared the end of his life. Bonnard’s contemplations on his private existence are also reflected in a group of self-portraits that conclude the exhibition. Later self-portraits, depicting the artist through mirrors in his bath or dressing room, are powerful renderings of the artist’s psyche.

Museum founder Duncan Phillips was an early advocate of Bonnard, having bought his first two paintings by Bonnard in 1925, *Woman with Dog* (1922) and *Early Spring* (1908), and hosting the artist’s

first solo museum exhibition in 1930. This launched a major collection that grew to over 30 works by the 1950s and what now stands as one of the largest, most diverse collections of Bonnard's work in a museum outside of France. The Phillips's promised gift of [The Nabi Collection of Vicki and Roger Sant](#), which includes 13 works by Bonnard, will further expand the museum's holdings. Bonnard's sensibility and personal expressiveness embody Phillips's vision of his museum as an "intimate" collection that promotes art's "restorative" power.

#### EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The exhibition is co-organized by The Phillips Collection and The Kimbell Art Museum and curated by Elsa Smithgall, Chief Curator of The Phillips Collection, and George Shackelford, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of The Kimbell Art Museum.

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#### CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue co-published by The Kimbell Art Museum and The Phillips Collection in association with Yale University Press. The catalogue features contributions by the exhibition curators Elsa Smithgall and George Shackelford, as well as noted international Bonnard scholars: Isabelle Cahn, Curator Emeritus Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Cyrille Sciama, Director, Musée des Impressionismes Giverny; and Véronique Serrano, Chief Curator, Musée Bonnard, Le Cannet. Available at the museum gift shop and online at [shopphillipscollection.org](http://shopphillipscollection.org).

#### THE BONNARD SALON & COMPLEMENTARY EXHIBITIONS

To accompany *Bonnard's Worlds*, The Phillips Collection presents the Bonnard Salon, an intimate space where guests can more deeply engage with artist Pierre Bonnard. Archival materials, including written correspondence, historic photographs, posters, newspaper clippings, and other ephemera showcase The Phillips Collection's special relationship with Bonnard and give insight into how Bonnard paintings were acquired and exhibited over time. The salon will host workshops inspired by the artist, such as journaling with Jenni Bick Custom Journals, making paper flowers with Massallery Design, exploring the Dupont neighborhood with Building Bridges Across the River THEARC farm, and engaging with Post-Impressionist painting techniques with artist Sydney Vernon. Bonnard Salons take place Friday, March 8 through Friday, May 24, 2024, from 12–1 pm. Reservations required.

The Phillips will also host events centered around the exhibition, including Phillips after 5 takeovers and a special film screening in partnership with the Embassy of France in Washington, DC. Two complementary exhibitions will be on view: [Jennifer Bartlett: In and Out of the Garden](#) (February 10–April 30, 2024) at The Phillips Collection and *Sydney Vernon @THEARC* at Phillips@THEARC. In *Sydney Vernon @THEARC*, artist Sydney Vernon draws from familial relationships that explore the shared histories, identities, and interior thoughts of the Black femme experience through a personal lens. Vernon's multilayered works integrate family photographs with painting, drawing, and collage to capture universal community experiences. *Sydney Vernon @THEARC* is on view from March 6–June 6, 2024.

**IMAGES:** Pierre Bonnard, *The Garden*, 1937, Oil on canvas, 50 x 39 3/8 in., Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Purchased from the artist, 1937, © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Pierre Bonnard, *The Open Window*, 1921, Oil on canvas, 46 1/2 x 37 3/4 in., The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, Acquired 1930, © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Pierre Bonnard, *Coffee*, 1915, Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 41 7/8 in., Tate, London, Presented by Sir Michael Sadler through the Art Fund, © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

#### IMAGE GALLERY

High-resolution press images are available upon request. Please contact [lcantrell@phillipscollection.org](mailto:lcantrell@phillipscollection.org).

#### NEW HOURS OF ADMISSION & BAG POLICY

Beginning Tuesday, December 26, The Phillips Collection will operate under new hours of admission: 10 am to 5 pm, Tuesday through Sunday (closed Mondays). Exceptions are Phillips after 5 (first Thursday, 5–8:30 pm) and Third Thursdays (5–8 pm). Pay-What-You-Wish admission will be offered the last hour of the day.

The Phillips Collection has introduced a new bag policy that applies to backpacks, totes, purses, large bags, and bulky items: all bags larger than 11 x 15 x 5 in. must be checked at the secured coat check (with exception for medical or diaper bags). All bags are subject to search. For more information, visit [www.phillipscollection.org/visit](http://www.phillipscollection.org/visit).

#### ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of modern art, was founded in 1921. The museum houses one of the world's most celebrated Impressionist and American modern art collections and continues to grow its collection with important contemporary voices. Its distinctive building combines extensive new galleries with the former home of its founder, Duncan Phillips. The Phillips's impact spreads nationally and internationally through its diverse and experimental special exhibitions and events, including its award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; renowned Phillips Music series; and dynamic art and wellness and Phillips after 5 events. The museum contributes to global dialogues with events like Conversations with Artists and Artists of Conscience. The Phillips Collection values its community partnership with THEARC—the museum's satellite campus in Southeast DC. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

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