

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY

RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF PIERRE BONNARD, LARGEST EVER SHOWN IN THE UNITED STATES.

A large retrospective of the work of the late French painter, Pierre Bonnard, will open at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, on May 12 and will include more than 150 oils, gouaches, water colors, drawings, prints and illustrated books. This great modern master, who was a figure in the art world for nearly 60 years, appeals not only to those who are familiar with his work but also to the many who like colorful interpretations of the intimate details of daily life painted with gaiety and often with humor. The exhibition, planned in collaboration with the Cleveland Museum of Art, is by far the largest Bonnard collection ever shown in the United States. It will occupy the entire third floor of the Museum and will be on view until July 25. One half of the works to be shown have been brought from foreign countries for the exhibition. Foreign lenders include both private and public collections in France, England, Holland, Switzerland, etc., and the artist's estate.

The exhibition is being directed by Mr. John Rewald, author of numerous books on modern French art including the recent History of Impressionism, and by Monsieur Charles Terrasse, Curator of the Fontainebleau Museum and nephew of Pierre Bonnard. In 1946 the Museum of Modern Art obtained permission from the artist to hold this exhibition in October 1947 to celebrate Bonnard's eightieth birthday anniversary. But Bonnard died in January 1947. After his death, the French art authorities decided to recognize his genius in a memorial exhibition at the Orangerie in Paris, and the present show had to be delayed in order to include the paintings from the artist's estate on view in the French exhibition. However, by far the majority of important works from European and American collections shown here were not in the Paris exhibition last year, nor have they been exhibited previously in this country.

The exhibition includes such famous works as Bonnard's early Bourgeois Afternoon, depicting the family of his brother-in-law, the composer Claude Terrasse, on the lawn before the ancestral Bonnard home in Dauphiné. This large canvas, overflowing with lively details

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of a charming, narrative quality, would appear to be the apotheosis of French family life at the turn of this century. The Terrace, the largest canvas in the exhibition, with its almost exotic exuberance of color and triumphant unfolding of a happy imagination, was lent through the courtesy of the French Embassy in Washington. The Phillips Memorial Gallery has lent the finest among its paintings by Bonnard, such as The Palm, sent by Bonnard to a Carnegie Exhibition from which it went straight to the Washington museum. From the artist's estate came one of Bonnard's last works, the strange Circus Horse, which seems to indicate a new departure toward decorative pattern, bold design and new color harmonies.

From his earliest, incredibly delicate and sensitive oils, from the posters and lithographs through which he first attracted attention, to the glowing splendor of his last canvases painted during the Occupation, Bonnard's evolution can be followed closely in this exhibition where every phase of his development, every aspect of his genius, every medium used by him can be studied through the most significant and carefully selected works.

Mr. Rewald has written the first book ever published in English on Pierre Bonnard, to be released at the time of the opening of the exhibition. This definitive book, another of the outstanding monographs published by the Museum, surveys all phases of the artist's work and contains 109 black and white plates, 5 plates in full color, a complete chronology and an extensive bibliography. Regarding the period and the work of this important master, Mr. Rewald says:

"The Paris of the Gay Nineties apparently deserves the reputation it enjoys, inasmuch as some of its frolicsome unconcern is reflected even in the artistic life of those years. It was this Paris which saw Pierre Bonnard become an artist. He was seventeen when Redon, Seurat and some others founded the Salon des Indépendants, nineteen when Seurat exhibited his Grande Jatte, twenty-three when van Gogh committed suicide. The Eiffel Tower was still new and Queen Victoria already very old.... Whatever he touched he infused with his gentle fantasy. Whatever caught his fancy seemed to reveal, and to him alone, an intimate smile full of tenderness. His paintings reflected his delight with the most innocent, the most ordinary, the most inconspicuous things.

"Bonnard set out to capture in his work what no other painter of his time had observed: the little incidents of Parisian life, the things of which nobody seems to be aware because they repeat themselves continually and constitute in their endless repetition the common elements of daily life. It took the eye of a poetic explorer to be attracted by what everybody saw and eventually even ceased to see because it was neither new nor unusual. His sensibilities were stirred by the awkward grace of a girl carrying a laundry basket through an empty street, by the tired look of a cab-horse on a busy boulevard, by the patter of children's feet hurrying to school, by reddened faces under umbrellas in a snow-drift, by people browsing before an antique shop, by the characteristic movements of women bustling across a street. Cobblestones and monotonous facades, huddled roofs and old walls contributed their delicate coloration, their hidden poetry; broad avenues, busy street vendors, cafés on sidewalks offered him their intricate patterns, their noisy agitation. There was always a child-

like gaiety in his approach, as if he discovered for the first time something completely new; and in a way that was exactly what he did.

"André Gide once remarked, 'Whether he paints an omnibus, a dog, a cat, a stool, his very touch is mischievous, quite independent of the subject.'

"Throughout the years, despite the evolution of his art, Bonnard remained the same. His art always sprang less from things he had learned than from his ability to absorb the spectacle of nature and to re-create it according to the logic of his imagination. He achieved the power of those who devoted all their abilities to a unique goal, and the serenity that eventually crowns single-minded effort. Bonnard gradually extended the gamut of his colorations while at the same time he carried his forms closer to abstraction."

The following oils have been added to the exhibition since publication of the catalog:

The Coffee Pot, 1937. Oil on canvas. Private collection, N.Y.

Return from the Market, 1904. Oil on canvas. Mr. Sam Salz, N.Y.

Terrasse de Cafe, 1898. Oil on cardboard. Mr. Alexander Ginn, Cleveland.

The Terrace, 1937. Oil on canvas. Collection Louis Carré, Paris, courtesy French Embassy, Washington.

Loans from the following collections are included:

Jean and Henry Bernheim-Dauberville, Paris; Louis Carré, Paris; Ludwig Charell, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin, New York; Miss Etta Cone, Baltimore; Henry Decoin, Paris; Mrs. William M. Elkins, Philadelphia; Mrs. John Work Garrett, Baltimore; Mr. and Mrs. Leo Glass, New York; Jean Goriany, Lima, Peru; Marcel Guiot, Paris; Mrs. Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler, Winterthur; Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Cleveland; Mrs. S. Kaye, England; Dr. and Mrs. David M. Levy, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Sam A. Lewisoyn, New York; Jacques Lindon, New York; Wright Ludington, Santa Barbara, Calif.; George Lurcy, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Marx, Chicago; Mrs. Saidie A. May, Baltimore; Captain Edward Molyneux, Paris; Mrs. Duncan Phillips, Washington; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr.; St. Louis; Raoul de Ricci, Paris; Mr. and Mrs. Laurence S. Rockefeller, New York; Jacques Rodrigues-Henriques, Paris; Sam Salz New York; Mr. and Mrs. James Thrall Soby, Farmington, Conn.; Louis E. Stern, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Terrasse, Fontainebleau; Miss Renée Terrasse, Paris; Benjamin Weiss, New York; E. Weyhe, New York; Georges Wildenstein, New York; Mrs. Emily M. Wilson, Rectortown, Va.

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Baltimore Museum of Art; Kunstmuseum, Berne; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; Musée de Grenoble; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.; Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris; The Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass.; The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington; Kunstverein, Winterthur; The Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Mass.

French Art Galleries, Inc., New York; Kleeman Galleries, New York; Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York; Paul Rosenberg and Co., New York; Jacques Seligmann and Co., New York.