



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

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REFERENCES Dini and Dini 2002, vol. 3, p. 218, no. 388, ill.; Panconi 2002, p. 237, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel (0.8 cm thick) with a slight convex warp, with the grain running vertically. The reverse has chamfers 1.9 cm wide along the edges, vertical hand-planing marks, and two deep holes whose purpose is unknown. The back is also coated with a red wash of paint. The picture was at least partially cleaned, as there is solvent abrasion in the woman's bodice, and less varnish in the figure than in the background, as seen in ultraviolet light. The woman may once have had elbow-length brown gloves, which were either partially removed by the artist or damaged in cleaning. There are several scratches, some possibly original, as if the picture were carelessly handled while wet. Evidence of past flaking or erupting of paint along cracks is found in the upper right corner, and wrinkled paint on the piano and several other locations. There are small gray splashes in the lower left foreground. The thick, glossy, discolored varnish has vertical cracks along the wood grain. Two or more brush coats are visible in ultraviolet light, with some pooling of varnish in the center. The fluorescence is denser across the background in general, especially in the lower left and upper right dark areas. Retouchings below the upper varnish are seen in the upper left background, along the woman's proper left arm, and in scratches through the woman's figure. Some areas may have been reworked by the artist.

The ground is an off-white layer with a smooth surface. In infrared light, part of the center section reflects brighter, and the X-radiograph shows a white area below the piano, which may be an extra ground application to seal a knot in the wood. Examination with a microscope reveals lower colors beneath the upper portion of the image, suggesting that the panel may have been reused and a second layer of ground applied to the center. The X-radiograph reveals the scoring lines created during the chamfering of the panel's reverse, along with a change at the figure's side. There is a light underdrawing, possibly in charcoal, in the principal figure, as well as in the outline of the piano. In the drawing phase there may have been a small framed picture on the wall just behind the woman's face. There may be a warm brown sketch below the paint, which remains as part of the final image in some locations. The paint is fluidly applied in multiple layers of scumbles and glazes interlaced with thick varnish, and the artist may have used his fingers to apply or move paint around. Black ink is also apparent in small details. The brown band down the left side of the picture was applied after the rest of the paint had dried.

1. Museo Giovanni Boldini, Ferrara, inv. 1591.
2. DD 387.
3. DD 389.

Pierre Bonnard

French, 1867–1947

28 | *Women with a Dog* 1891

Oil and ink on canvas, 41 x 32.5 cm

Lower right: PBonnard [PB in monogram] / 1891
1979.23

Women with a Dog was painted when Bonnard was twenty-four and closely allied with the group of young artists who named themselves the Nabis, or prophets. The decorative aesthetic that the Nabis followed drew in large part from the work of Paul Gauguin and from Japanese graphic art for their simplified forms, non-naturalistic color, and flattened pictorial space. The concept of the decorative, an idea that combined formal principles with ideological content, was central to the work of the Nabis, as well as that of other French artists in the 1890s. It arose from numerous sources, including the academic tradition, which called for large-scale murals to decorate public spaces, and a resurgent interest in the decorative arts as both an artistic and an economic expression of national strength. Artists' interest in embellishing domestic interiors also corresponded to a concurrent emphasis on the value of private life, a turning inward that often focused on spirituality. Although *Women with a Dog* is quite small, unlike the murals and folding screens the Nabis created specifically to decorate collectors' rooms, it exemplifies some of the possibilities for decorative painting that Bonnard explored at the beginning of his career.

Bonnard worked out the composition of the painting in a preparatory drawing that shows virtually every aspect of the image, including the cropped edges, as they appear in the final work (fig. 28.1). Perhaps more strikingly, the painting itself still bears visible marks of ink and pencil. The primary figures are almost fully outlined in deep blue ink that may have been made with a pen rather than a brush (see Technical Report). These lines are integral to the finished composition, lying on top of the paint surface in several places. In addition, multiple graphite lines on the right side of the central figure's arm are also drawn over the surface, and seem intended to make the painted image conform more closely to the slimmer outline of the preliminary drawing. A similar impulse to modify the painted work may also account for the graphite lines at the bottom center



of the composition. Here, a large green leaf is painted over the point where, in the drawing, the woman's hand meets the dog's paw. The additional lines suggest that the artist attempted further modifications of an area he may have found problematic.

Bonnard combined drawing and painting in this way in several other early works, a practice that might suggest a still-developing skill in the medium of painting. In fact, Bonnard was initially better known for his graphic work, attracting public recognition with a color-lithograph poster of 1891 advertising champagne.¹ But the way he constructed space in *Women with a Dog* demonstrates his facility with an innovative, non-perspectival technique. Other artists such as Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) and Émile Bernard (1868–1941) had used outlined figures and large areas of unmodulated color to create shallow pictorial spaces. The insistent flatness of the main figure's checked dress in *Women with a Dog*, however, calls particularly strong attention to the picture plane, situating the foreground figures at the surface of the image. Furthermore, Bonnard almost entirely omits traditional Western perspectival recession; the distance between the foreground and background figures is not represented but only implied by the secondary figures' smaller size and higher placement on the surface of the painting. Space in the painting is thus largely compressed into a single plane.

Japanese woodblock prints undoubtedly supplied one of the sources for this conception of pictorial space. Popular among French artists since the 1860s, Japanese art gained even greater prominence following an exhibition of prints in the spring of 1890 at the École des Beaux-Arts, where Bonnard was studying. Bonnard remarked of the Japanese prints that he collected and hung on his studio walls, "It seemed to me that it was possible to translate light, form, and character with nothing but color, without resorting to values."² The large areas of pattern and color in this painting, within which forms are defined almost exclusively by drawn outlines rather than by modeling, indeed recall printed portraits of Japanese actors that employ similar techniques. More specifically, a print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861) of a theater scene, once owned by Bonnard's friend and fellow Nabi Maurice Denis, closely parallels *Women with a Dog*. The poses and relation of the two main figures, the patterning of their clothing, and even the secondary figures at the upper left, are all echoed in Bonnard's image.³



Fig. 28.1. Pierre Bonnard, *Women with a Dog*, c. 1891. Pencil on paper. Location unknown (reproduced from Terasse 1996, p. 22)

As he did in many of his works, Bonnard used members of his family as models. The woman at the left is Andrée Bonnard Terasse, the artist's sister; at the right is Berthe Schaedlin, his cousin; and the dog toward whom they direct their attention, Ravageau, belonged to his sister. Each is identifiable by characteristics visible in other paintings. Although the precise nature of their surroundings, indicated only by flowers and greenery, is uncertain, the figures are probably in a private garden similar to the one more clearly depicted in a related work. *Twilight (The Croquet Party)* (1892; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) shows the same two women and several other relatives in the garden of the Bonnard family house in Le Grand-Lemps, in the Dauphiné region of France, likewise immersed in dense foliage. As in *Women with a Dog*, the flat patterns of the cro-

quet players' clothing define the foreground, while a group of unidentifiable figures marks a more distant point in space. Bonnard's depiction of family members reinforces the sense of intimacy created by his densely patterned canvases that make outdoor scenes resemble interiors. Further, though it is lighthearted in mood, the busy, design-filled surfaces and confined spaces of *Women with a Dog* prefigure the sometimes claustrophobic nature of much of Bonnard's subsequent family-centered imagery. SL

PROVENANCE Olivier Sainsère, Paris; sale, Musée Galliéra, Paris, 19 June 1963, no. 1, as *Femme au chien*; Philippe Durand-Ruel, Paris (1963–65); [Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, in 1965]; Mr. and Mrs. Lowell S. Dillingham, Honolulu (1965–73, sold to Hirschl & Adler, 1 Dec. 1973); [Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, 1973–79, sold to the Clark, 24 July 1979]; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1979.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1956, no. 2, as *La femme au chien*; Mannheim 1963–64, no. 39, ill., as *Frau mit hund*, lent by Durand-Ruel; New York 1973, no. 8, ill., as *Woman with Dog*, lent by Dillingham; New York 1974a, no. 5, ill., as *La femme au chien*; New York 1977a, no. 2, ill., as *Femmes au chien*; New York 1978, not in cat.; Birmingham 1979, no cat.;⁴ London 1979–80, no. 28, ill.; New York 1981, pp. 47–48, no. 1, fig. 1; Williamstown 1982a, no. 3, ill.; Williamstown 1983c, no cat.; Zurich–Frankfurt 1984–85, pp. 37–38, 79, no. 6, fig. 9; Houston 1987, pp. 118, 138–39, no. 43, ill.; New York–Houston–Boston 1989–90, pp. 70–71, no. 8, fig. 97; Tokyo and others 1991, pp. 120–21, 141, no. 1, ill., and ill. on cover; Zurich–Paris 1993–94, pp. 39, 41, 116, no. 6, ill.; Munich 1994, no. 4, ill.; Washington–Denver 2002–3, pp. 29, 84–85, no. 6, ill. (exhibited in Washington only).

REFERENCES Besson 1956, p. 11; Nice-Matin 1956; Seurière 1956, p. 11; *Apollo* 1963, pp. 247–48, fig. 11; Dauberville and Dauberville 1965–74, vol. 1, p. 97, no. 20, ill.; Perucchi-Petri 1972, pp. 76–77, fig. 12; Perucchi-Petri 1976, pp. 55–57, fig. 16; GBA Suppl. 1980, pp. 44–45, ill.; Perucchi-Petri 1980, pp. 270–71, fig. 7; Giambruni 1983, pp. 69, 259, fig. 45; Terrasse 1988, p. 28, ill.; Cogeval 1993, pp. 46–47, no. 2, ill.; Düsseldorf 1993, p. 15, fig. 4; Kern et al. 1996, pp. 126–27; Terrasse 1996, pp. 22–23, ill.; *Antiques* 1997, p. 530, pl. 20; Chicago–New York 2001, p. 66, fig. 2; Satullo 2002, p. 39; Cahill 2005, pp. 72–73, ill.; Billeter 2005, pp. 295–96, fig. 279; Wolsk 2009, pp. 64–68, ill.; Wuppertal 2010–11, pp. 53–55, fig. 9.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a commercially primed, medium-fine-weight linen, on a five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. Several irregular horizontal threads are visible through the thin paint in the upper right quadrant. The stretcher crossbar bears a partial colorman's stamp for Hardy-Alan, Paris. The artist added a second, whiter ground

layer over the thin off-white commercial priming; the second layer ends at the fold-over edges and is visible throughout the design. The painting is wax lined to a heavy double-weave linen and retains its original tacking margins. The picture shows no evidence of a previous coating or solvent damage due to cleaning, suggesting that it was not originally varnished, although it was apparently coated at the time of lining. The surface is quite glossy and also has oil retouches along the edges, some slightly off in color. The retouches along the left edge extend 1.3 cm onto the original paint, which may suggest that the left side of the picture was less finished by the artist.

The picture is a combination of extremely thin blue ink line-work and thin to moderately thick oil paint. Under magnification there appear to be charcoal deposits beneath the upper ink and paint in some locations, although this underdrawing may not be extensive. The blue lines display characteristics typical of a fine double-pointed pen nib. Ink lines were added or reinforced after the paint was applied in some areas, and were clearly meant to remain an integral part of the final image. The blue ink may also be the principal colorant of the deepest blue in the upper right costume. Examination in infrared light revealed few drawing changes that cannot be seen in normal light. One possible change occurs near the bottom, where unused lines along the woman's arm suggest that her hand may have initially been placed on the dog's paw. Multiple graphite lines at the changed arm angle and near the elbow of the central figure's dress lie on top of the dried paint. Other paint changes occur where the blue dress extends over the shape of the chair at the left edge, and where the central figure's hair was expanded to its top and left. Sgraffito work through the two orange flower heads reveals dark paint below.

1. *France-Champagne* (1891). See Bouvet 1981, pp. 12–13.
2. Quoted in Terrasse 1967, p. 10: "Il m'apparut qu'il était possible de traduire lumière, formes et caractère rien qu'avec la couleur, sans faire appel aux valeurs." In Paris–Tokyo 1988, p. 311, Geneviève Lacambre briefly describes Bonnard's collection, citing works by Hiroshige, Toyokuni, Kunisada, Kuniyoshi, and Yoshimura.
3. This print was first cited in relation to the painting in Perucchi-Petri 1976, pp. 55–57. For a more recent discussion, see also Wuppertal 2010–11, pp. 53–55, fig. 10.
4. The painting's inclusion in both New York 1978 and Birmingham 1979 is known only through labels removed from the back of the painting.