

The current exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria of Rembrandt and Bonnard are both very good but can make you feel exhausted at the end. The Bonnard exhibition was exceptional in that the display mirrored the works.

I find it fascinating to contemplate by how much did technology limit expression? For example, painters could not use oil paint outside until the metal paint tube was invented in the mid 1840s. Until then it was water colours or pastels. Photographers were tied to the darkroom and a lethal array of chemicals until the invention of the dry plate, followed by the flexible film base.

So there were not too many painters taking photographs until the beginning of the 1890s and cine film could not happen until then either. Not until the late 1940s and 50s did the picture move away from being taken at waist level, with the invention of the Leica and the SLR. Bonnard would have used a 'looking down to the viewfinder' camera, so the viewpoint was from the waist. I think that this viewpoint transferred to his paintings as some of his paintings appeared to have been 'taken' with a wide angle lens!

In all my times in Paris, I have not come across a decent kitchen in a flat; they are sufficient for a breakfast and maybe a bread and cheese type evening meal. You are forced to go out to eat. Family places would be different. So, you get to meet people and if you're lucky they might speak English. In Bonnard's time, people talked; ideas were exchanged, debated, resolved leading to experimentation. Unlike now where knowledge is a commodity, so without a degree in economics taxation can't be discussed in depth! The lack of depth in any subject is governed by our 10 second news grab. Bonnard and company would have talked for days over colour. His *Marthe in the Bath* series is about colour. He was also fascinated by the ordinary. I think that it takes a lot of intellectual discipline to see something different in things we see everyday. Again, this is encouraging depth of involvement

My only criticism of the exhibition is that his photos were digitally enhanced and enlarged to about A4. This is great for us, the passing viewer but we should have seen what he may have taken to the bistro, the equivalent of a 620 contact print with all its fuzziness. I could rave on!! He is worth the effort.

There are similarities with Rembrandt. Along with Caravaggio, he is one of those pivotal artists. He does have two layers: his commissioned portrait paintings which were done for profit and his other stuff! I used to start with Rembrandt when teaching portrait photography because of his use and exploration of artificial light. In his landscapes, remembering that his country is very, very flat, he explored distance and the subtle glimpse. Like Bonnard, he seemed to think that the ordinary was worthy of note. His

craft is exceptional and it does take some effort on the part of the viewer to become immersed in that craft.

Also like Bonnard, he didn't soften reality. If a body had lumps, he rendered lumps. His painting of Bathsheba was once used to raise our awareness of breast cancer, although it is now debated whether his second 'wife' Hendrickje Stoffels, had cancer. She actually died of the plague in 1663, one of the thousands so affected in Amsterdam that year.

The catalogues of both exhibitions are good but neither has an index. That is just laziness! Too many of Bonnard's paintings are interrupted by the gutter and that is very annoying. Nothing wrong with turning the page sideways.

I did run out of time. I recommend seeing the exhibition, reading the catalogue and going back to look again. That's how it should be done.

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