

The Dallas Morning News

ARTS & LIFE SUNDAY

SECTION E | DECEMBER 10, 2023



MASTER OF ARTS

French artist Pierre Bonnard's paintings brim with color and vitality in a new show at the Kimbell. **By Benjamin Lima, 6E**

THEATER

Broadway touring season is heating up. Here's a roundup of what's coming to Dallas.
By Manuel Mendoza, 4E



ARTS ACCESS

Transformed public space in Pleasant Grove is a shining example of vision, creativity and dedication.
By Elizabeth Myong, 12E

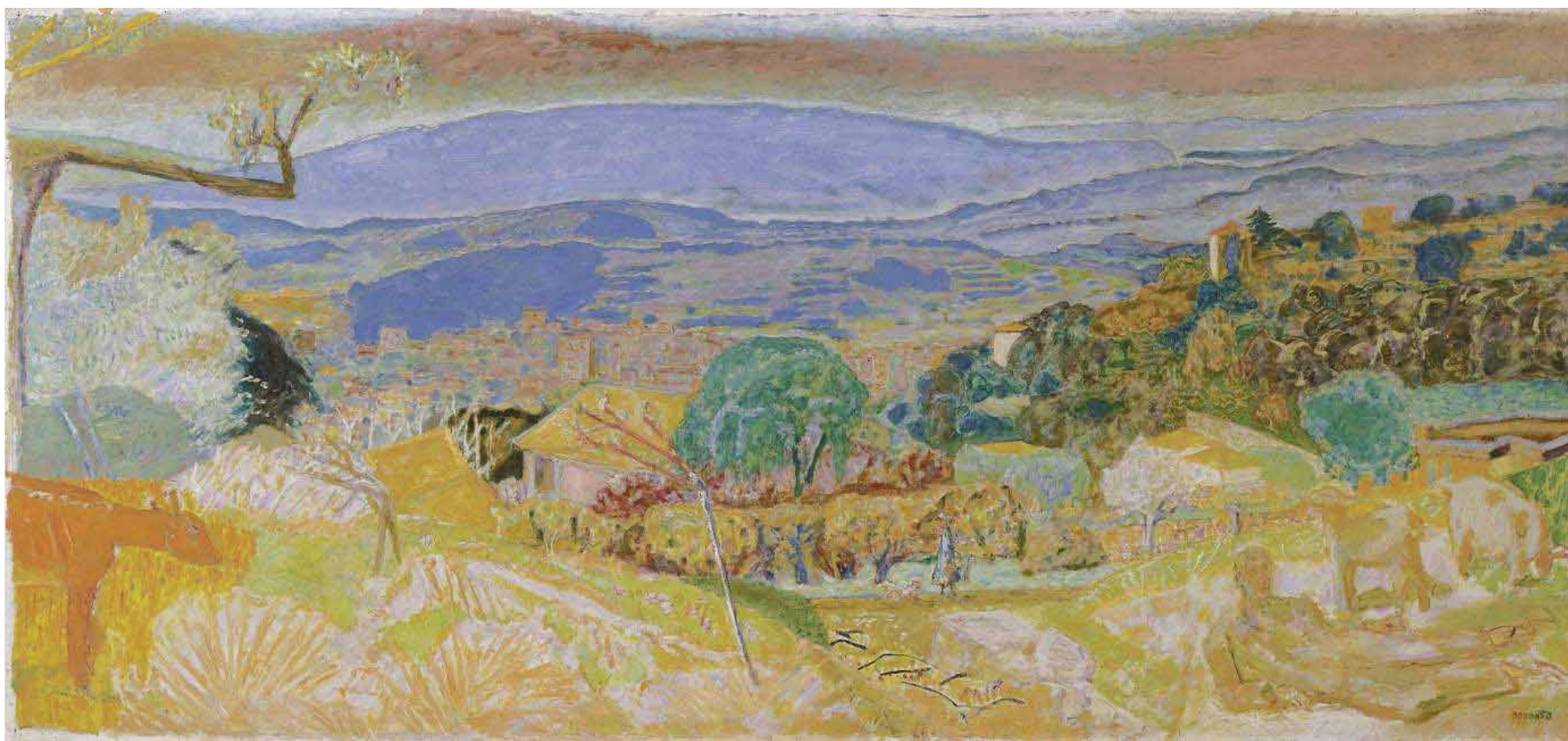
CLASSICAL MUSIC

Bernstein biopic captures the composer's genius and the sometimes messy life behind it.
By Scott Cantrell, 5E



Artists Rights Society, New York

In Fort Worth, the "Bonnard's Worlds" exhibition showcases 70 works by French artist Pierre Bonnard, including *Dining Room in the Country* (1913, above).



Artists Rights Society, New York

Landscape at Le Cannet (1928)



Artists Rights Society, New York

The Lamp (circa 1899)



Artists Rights Society, New York

Twilight (The Game of Croquet) (1892)

VISUAL ART

IN LIVING COLOR

Pierre Bonnard's paintings brim with vitality in Kimbell exhibition

FORT WORTH — Escaping the winter chill with an hour's pleasurable immersion in the warm light and color of France is reason enough — although by no means the only reason — to visit the Kimbell Art Museum's exhibition of 70 paintings by Pierre Bonnard.

Bonnard — whose long career lasted from the late 19th century until his death in 1947 — was known for his intense, saturated color, which is on vibrant display in the Kimbell's Piano Pavilion. Like the 19th-century post-impressionists Gauguin and Van Gogh, Bonnard exploited color's subjective, emotional aspect. His vibrant gardens and voluptuous bathtub scenes teem with vital energy; looking at them is like peering into a rainforest or sauna that radiates the heat and light of life.

The paintings' colors are so punchy, in fact, that it is easy to overlook another fine aspect of Bonnard's work: his genius for composition. Each picture is filled with carefully arranged details that reward close attention.

The paintings' corners and edges, for example, are often enriched with small bonus figures that provide a counterpoint to the main subject, such as the cat at the bottom of *The Open Window* (1921) and *Fruit and Fruit Dishes* (1930). The unity and graceful balance of each composition also make it easy to overlook just how many disparate elements the artist has integrated into the overall scheme. Try to count, for example, how many different plants are visible in *The Garden* (1937), or how many different buildings are rendered in the townscape of *The Palm* (1926).

The seed of the present exhibition was planted when the Kimbell acquired *Landscape at Le Cannet* (1928) in 2018. This grandly panoramic, 9-foot-wide painting inspired curator George Shackelford, the Kimbell's deputy director, to put together a show celebrating Bonnard, whose talents have often been overshadowed by more ostentatious artists like Picasso or Matisse.

Shackelford has organized the exhibition not by chronology or geography but by the different spaces, or "worlds," that Bonnard evoked on canvas. Each gallery in the exhibition is devoted to a particular kind of space, beginning with the most public (the landscapes of Paris, Normandy and the French Riviera) and ending with the most private (bedrooms, bathrooms and self-portraits).

Although the organization makes it a challenge to keep track of where, geographically, each painting originated, it shows how strikingly consistent Bonnard's vision was. All the different landscapes have been assimilated to the artist's aesthetic, yet without losing their detail.

Like so many modern painters, he turned away from grand subjects of history or mythology in favor of direct personal experience. The results are powerful, but it can be unsettling to realize that neither World War I nor World War II, whose battles raged not far from Bonnard's homes, made any evident impact on his work. For such reasons, Bonnard and painters like him have occasionally been accused of escapism.

The journey from public to private also highlights the psychological aspect of Bonnard's work. His scenes tend to have a certain amount of ambiguity, even hints of mystery. For all the wealth of color and detail in his settings, Bonnard can be reticent about the personal details of the people we find in them — details of identity, context and personality.

For example, Marthe de Méigny was Bonnard's model and life partner for almost 50 years. (They married in 1925, halfway through that period.) De Méigny is present throughout the show, and her iconic nude figure dominates the stage in its penultimate, highly intimate section. Yet her personality remains hidden.

This hiddenness gives an ironic twist to the term "intimism," coined to describe the aptitude for interior scenes shown by Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard. Although viewers are shown the most private places in the artist's home, the souls of those who live there remain closed off. The last section of the show, devoted to a few careful self-portraits, modifies, but does not entirely dispel, this impression.

"Bonnard's Worlds" will be seen only in two cities: Fort Worth and Washington, D.C., at The Phillips Collection, whose founder Duncan Phillips was among Bonnard's first American champions. The exhibition's quality is a reminder that the Kimbell's prowess extends well beyond the Old Masters into the field of modern art, and that it is well worth a trip to visit.

Benjamin Lima is a Dallas-based art historian and the editor of Athenaeum Review, the University of Texas at Dallas journal of arts and ideas.

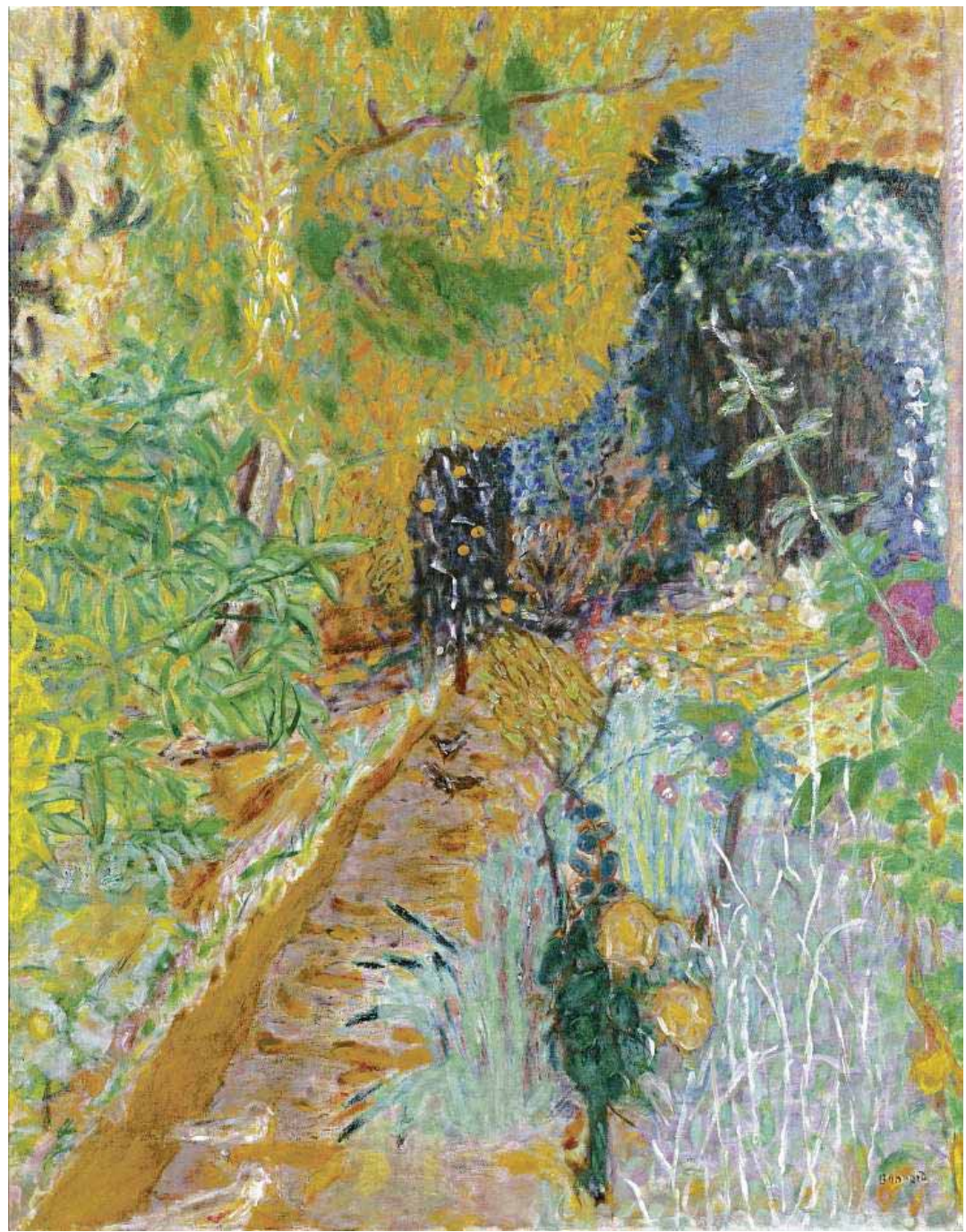


**BENJAMIN
LIMA**

artslife@dallasnews.com

Details

"Bonnard's Worlds" continues through Jan. 28 at the Kimbell Art Museum, 3333 Camp Bowie Blvd., Fort Worth. kimbellart.org.



The Garden (1937)

Artists Rights Society, New York



The Open Window (1921)

Artists Rights Society, New York

The paintings' colors are so punchy, in fact, that it is easy to overlook another fine aspect of Bonnard's work: his genius for composition. Each picture is filled with carefully arranged details that reward close attention.