

PHILLIPS

Buying & Lending Bonnard

The Personal Correspondence
of Duncan Phillips

Bonnard Salon

Furniture and accessories are
generously provided by

Room&Board

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Part 1

Buying Bonnard

In 1926, two milestones shaped both Duncan Phillips's interests as a collector and the direction of his burgeoning Phillips Memorial Gallery. Early in the year, Phillips acquired his first two paintings by Pierre Bonnard. In September, he hosted the artist for a visit to the gallery. Then in the months that followed, Phillips was eager to collect even more works by Bonnard, whom he later described as his favorite living artist.

While Phillips failed to reach a deal with Bonnard's representation at Bernheim-Jeune for a third painting, he successfully negotiated with F. Valentine Dudensing of New York for two interior scenes. In 1927, both *The Lesson* (1926) and *Children and Cat* (1909) came to Phillips through Dudensing's gallery, once hailed as a "temple of modernism."

The following is a collection of correspondence between Phillips and Dudensing written throughout 1927. Their letters make it clear that these were not typical business transactions. Both men strongly wanted Phillips to own these works and to continue to bring attention to Bonnard's work in America.

As you read, consider the power these men held. How did they exert their influence on each other in these transactions? What was the impact on the greater art world?



The Lesson, 1926

Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in., The Phillips Collection,
Acquired 1927 © 2024 Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Telegram

from Duncan Phillips to
F. Valentine Dudensing

MARCH 8, 1927

CLASS OF SERVICE DESIRED		CLARENCE H. MACKAY, PRESIDENT		RECEIVER'S NUMBER	
FAST TELEGRAM		TELEGRAM TELEGRAMS TO ALL AMERICA  CABLEGRAMS TO ALL THE WORLD			
DAY LETTER				CHECK	
NIGHT TELEGRAM				TIME FILED	
NIGHT LETTER				STANDARD TIME	

The sender must mark an X opposite the class of service desired; otherwise the telegram will be transmitted as a fast telegram.

Send the following Telegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to.

Form 2

March 8, 1927

Mr. Valentine Dudensing,
43 East 57th Street,
New York City

If you will send Bonnards The Lesson on approval please send it at once as we are going south on the twentieth and I wish plenty of time to consider it.

Duncan Phillips

Paid. Charge account Phillips Properties Inc.
1218 Conn. Ave

Handwritten letter*

from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

MARCH 15, 1927

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
43 East 57th St. ☎ 36.rue de l'Arcade
NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII

March 15, 1927

My dear Mr Phillips -

I trust the Bonnard
reached you as promised and
it was in good condition.
Should you decide to
return it may I ask
that you give instructions
that it be sent on
March 21st. I haven't shown
it to anyone and as
you know my season
does not last much longer.

Every advice I receive
from Paris indicates that
Bonnard is taking a firmer
and firmer position as one
of the best of the moderns.
I am glad I have this
picture and should you
decide to keep it I am

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
43 East 57th St. ☎ 36.rue de l'Arcade
NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII

certain you will always
be pleased you did so.
Very sincerely
F. Valentine Dudensing

“

“I trust the Bonnard reached you as promised and it was in good condition.”

“

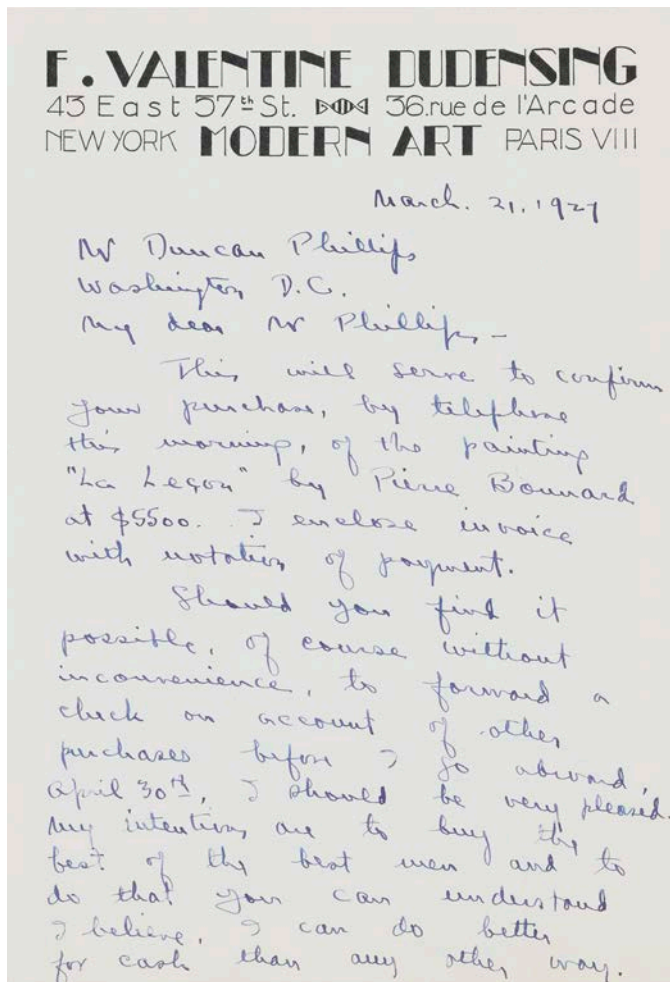
Every advice I received from Paris indicates that Bonnard is taking a firmer and firmer position as one of the best of the moderns.”

* Transcriptions of all handwritten letters can be found on pages 24-27.

Handwritten letter

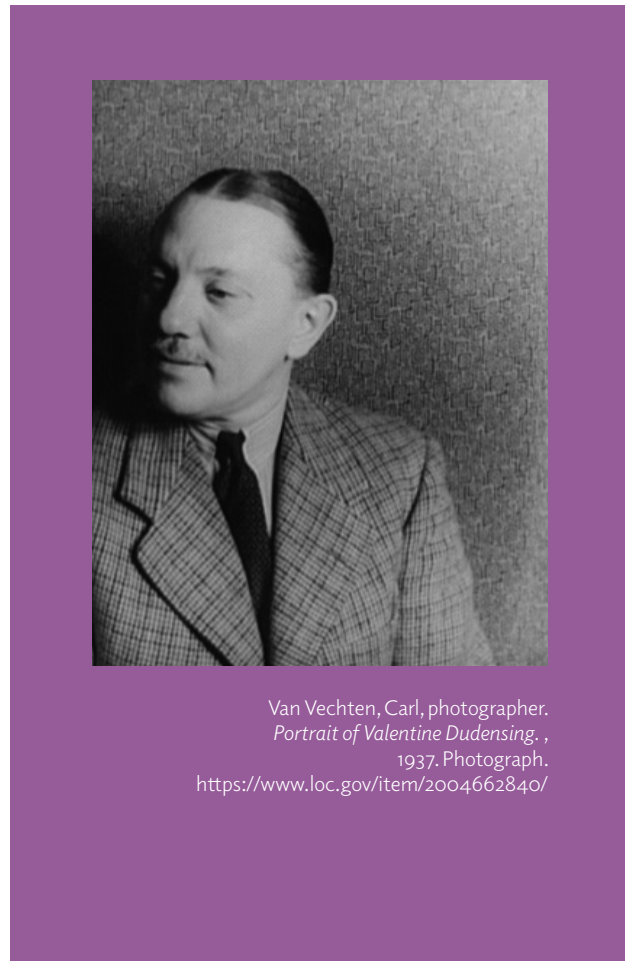
from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

MARCH 21, 1927



“

“This will serve to confirm your purchase, by telephone this morning, of the painting “Le Leçon” by Pierre Bonnard at \$5500.”



Van Vechten, Carl, photographer.
Portrait of Valentine Dudensing, ,
1937. Photograph.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2004662840/>

Telegram and Letter from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

MARCH 21, 1927

POSTAL TELEGRAPH - COMMERCIAL CABLES		CLARENCE H. MACKAY, PRESIDENT	
CLASS OF SERVICE DESIRED	TELEGRAM	RECEIVER'S NUMBER	
FAST TELEGRAM		CHECK	
DAY LETTER		TIME FILED	
NIGHT TELEGRAM		STANDARD TIME	
NIGHT LETTER			

Send the following Telegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to.

March 21, 1927

Mr. Valentine Dudensing,
43 East 57th Street,
New York City

I will keep the Bonnard if you will lower the price. Letter follows.
Had hoped to sell an important picture to raise funds for this purchase
but sale not yet completed.

Duncan Phillips

PAID. CHECK ACCOUNT PHILLIPS PROPERTIES INC.
1216 Conn Ave.

March 24, 1927

Mr. Valentine Dudensing,
43 East 57th Street,
New York City.

Dear Mr. Dudensing:

I was surprised to receive your letter inclosing a bill for the Bonnard entitled The Lesson, for the full amount of \$5500. I thought I had made it clear both by telegram and telephone that I would have to get lower terms and that my purchasing it at all depended upon a sale which was hanging fire and had not been put through. I understood you to say, over a bad telephone wire to our office, that I was to make an offer. This I have intended to do and have been waiting for definite word about the sale before complying with that suggestion of yours. I sold the picture only yesterday but for less money than I had asked and therefore I must at least make some deduction from the full price on the Bonnard. \$5000 would seem to me a large enough price for a picture which is characteristic of Bonnard's playfulness and daring modulations of red, but which is, in a way, a temperamental expression which leaves one baffled unless one happens to be in exactly the same mood the artist was in when he conceived the fancy. I enjoy this phase of Bonnard's art and I really love this picture, so I hope that you will meet my request for a reduction on it as I would not want to give it up for all its queerness.

I am sending you a Bulletin of our Tri-Unit Exhibition with my expression of embarrassed regret for my carelessness in proof-reading which resulted in your partner Pierre Matisse receiving credit for the pictures painted by his distinguished father. This was so obviously a slip that it seemed useless to re-call the edition which was late in coming out owing to uncertainty up to the last moment as to what pictures we would hang. Except for that mistake the little Bulletin is an interesting and handsome publication and it commemorates a great exhibition which you and Mr. Matisse should make every effort to see before the end of April. I will try to meet your request for as large a payment on our purchases as possible before you go away for the summer. As soon as the Bonnard matter is closed, please send a new bill itemizing all the pictures together. Unfortunately I cannot find the photograph of the Bonnard which you wish me to return. I shall keep looking for it and send it as soon as it turns up.

Sincerely yours

DP:H

“

I was surprised to receive your letter inclosing (sic) a bill for the Bonnard entitled The Lesson for the full amount of \$5500

“

\$5000 would seem to me a large enough price for a picture which is characteristic of Bonnard's playfulness and daring modulations of red but which is, in a way, a temperamental expression which leaves one baffled unless one happens to be in exactly the same mood the artist was in when he conceived the fancy.”

“

“I enjoy this phase of Bonnard's art and I really love this picture, so I hope you will meet my request for a reduction on it as I would not want to give it up for all its queerness.”

Handwritten Letter

from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

MARCH 25, 1927

“

“Very sorry we misunderstood each other over the telephone. It was a poor connection and that accounts for my mistake.”

“

“I want you to have the Bonnard because I feel you understand what a fine thing it is.”

“

“I will accept the \$5000 you suggest for two reasons. First, as I said, I am pleased that you have it. Second, the sentence in your letter saying you will try to send a payment on account of other purchases before my sailing.”

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
43 East 57th St. 36.rue de l'Arcade
NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII

March. 25, 1927

Mr Duncan Phillips,
Washington, D.C.
Dear Mr Phillips—

Very sorry we misunderstood each other over the telephone. It was a poor connection and that accounts for my mistake. I want you to have the Bonnard because I feel that you understand what a fine thing it is. I will accept the \$5000 you suggest for two reasons. first, as I said, I am pleased that you have it, second, the sentence in your letter saying you will try to send a payment on account of other purchases before my sailing. I am enclosing a statement as requested.

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
43 East 57th St. 36.rue de l'Arcade
NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII

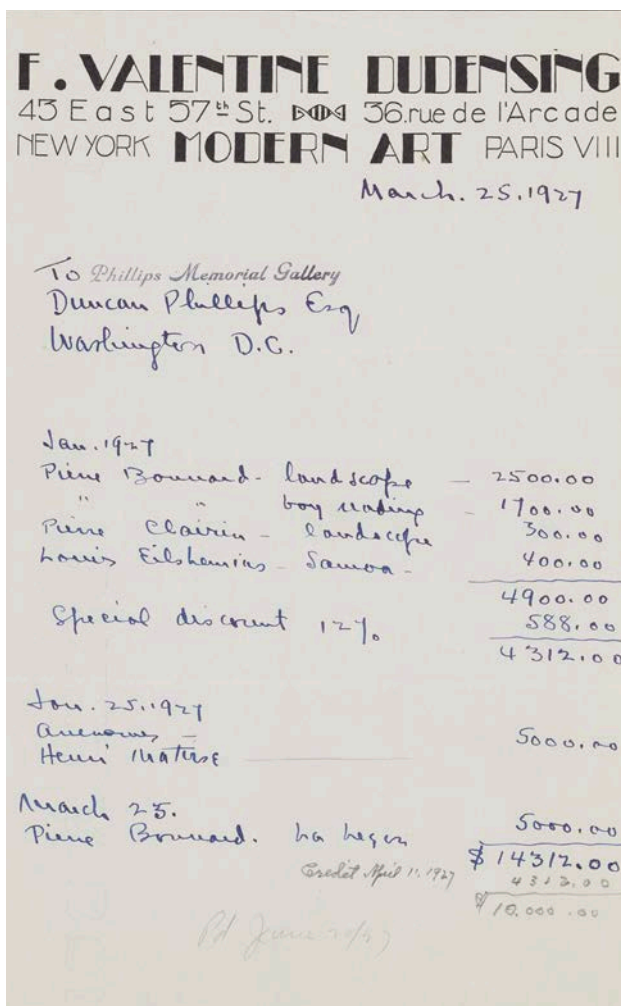
I will be pleased to get the Bulletin you speak of. I have heard that the exhibition is very fine and I do wish I could see it. If I happen to have the slightest excuse I shall go to Washington.

It is too bad about the error in credit to Pierre Matisse of Henri Matisse's picture but I do believe the readers will understand.

Sincerely yours
F. Valentine Dudensing.

Handwritten List of Paintings from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

MARCH 25, 1927

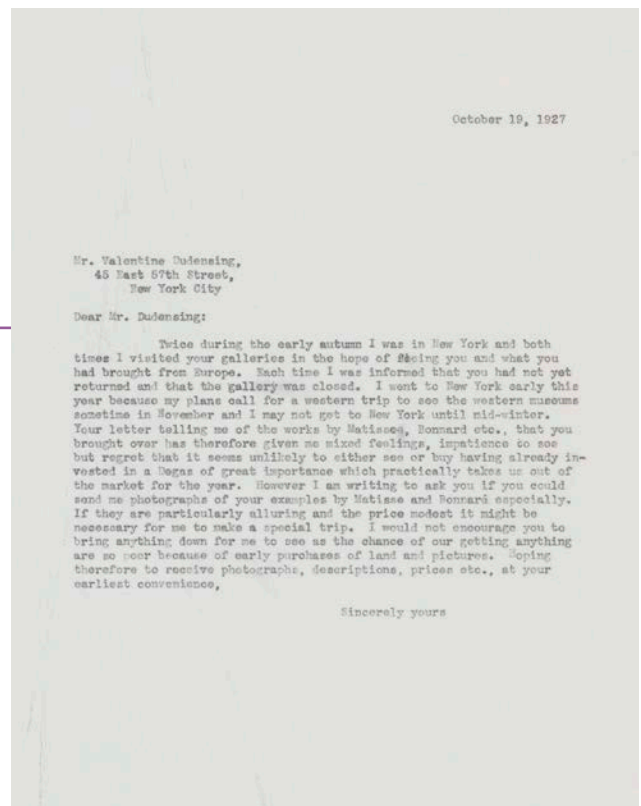


“

March 25
Pierre Bonnard Le Leçon 5000”

Typed Letter from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

OCTOBER 19, 1927



“

“Your letter telling me of the Matisse, Bonnards, etc, that you have brought over has therefore given me mixed feelings, impatience to see but regret that it seems unlikely to either see or buy having already invested in a Degas of great importance which practically takes us out of the market for the year.”

“

“However, I am writing to ask you if you could send me photographs of your examples by Bonnard and Matisse especially.”

Handwritten Letter

from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

NOVEMBER 5, 1927

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
 43 East 57th St. ☎ 36 rue de l'Arcade
 NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII
 November 5th 1927.

My dear Mr Phillips -
 as promised, I have figured
 and combined as many combinations
 as I could imagine to arrange
 that you get the pictures I
 sent you at the fairest and
 most convenient way. I submit
 the following for your consideration,
 and ask you to believe I have
 done my very best to make it
 possible for you to acquire these
 pictures at prices lower than I
 can hope to replace them for, and
 at terms I hope you will find
 possible to accept.

Proposition #1.		Spot cash
Matisse - \$ 8000	}	\$15500-
Segonzac 4500		7000
Bonnard 3500		8500
Blaminc 1500		
\$ 17500		

Proposition #2		Spot cash \$ 18,000.
Matisse - 8000	}	1/2 Nov - 9000
Segonzac - 4500		1/4 May 1 4500
Bonnard - 3500		1/4 Aug 1 4500
Blaminc - 1500		18000.
Braque - 3000		
\$ 20,500		

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
 43 East 57th St. ☎ 36 rue de l'Arcade
 NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII

I would appreciate having
 your decision as soon as
 possible. Should you decide to
 turn back a Matisse, or the two
 of them, would you send with
 the Segonzac so I would receive
 the case no later than Friday,
 November 11th.

Last news I have from
 Paris, received today, prices continue
 to rise and first class pictures
 not to be found. I hope you
 decide to keep all as I never
 will be able to offer such fine
 things and certainly not at
 the prices quoted.

Very truly,
 F. Valentine Dudensing

“

“I have done my very best to
 make it possible for you to
 acquire these pictures at prices
 lower than I can hope to replace
 them for and at terms I hope
 you will find possible to accept”

Proposition III		
Matisse 8000		
Segonzac. 4500		
Bonnard 3500		
Blaminc 1500		
Braque. 3000		
<hr/>		
20500	17500	
Less 2 Matisse 7000	7000	
\$ 13500	10500	5250
<hr/>		
1/2 Cash - 6750		\$ 5,250 Cash
1/4 May 1st 3375		\$ 5250 May 1st
1/4 Aug 1st 3375		
<hr/>		
\$ 13500		

Duncan Phillips ultimately
 accepted proposition IV

Typed Letter

from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

NOVEMBER 10, 1927

November 10, 1927

Mr. F. Valentine Dudensing,
43 East 57th Street,
New York City

Dear Mr. Dudensing:

I will retain the Matisse of "Poppies and Mirror", the Bonnard "Children and Cat" and the Segonzac landscape of river and bridge, sending back the Braque, the Vlaminck and the two Matisse pictures, purchased from you last year, to be credited to our account at a margin of profit to us. If you will give us credit for \$2500 on the Matisse figure and \$5500 on the "Anemones" so that the three Matisse pictures cancel each other at \$8000 in an even trade, I will see what we can do about paying half of the balance of \$8000 in cash or at least before January first 1928, and the other half by May 1928. I cannot promise this however as I have been so much occupied with other matters since my return that I have not yet gone over our financial situation with my treasurer to ascertain whether funds will be available so soon. However I can promise an arrangement that will be satisfactory to you if our expense does not exceed \$8000 for the three pictures. We part with the two Matisse of last year with great reluctance. It seems however to be necessary as only thus can we even consider the other pictures. With best regards,

Very truly yours

DP.E

“

“I will retain the Matisse of “Poppies and Mirror”, the Bonnard “Children and Cat” and the Segonzac landscape of river and bridge, sending back the Braque, the Vlaminck and the two Matisse pictures purchased from you last year”

Handwritten itemized list from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

NOVEMBER 22, 1927

F. VALENTINE DUDENSING
 43 East 57th St. 36.rue de l'Arcade
 NEW YORK MODERN ART PARIS VIII

November, 22, 1927

Kindly send histories of all pictures purchased.

Also receipted bill.

To
 Duncan Phillips Esq
 Washington D.C.

Paintings

Hemi Matisse - 1921-22	\$	8000.00
* Poppies & Mirror		
Denoyer de Segonzac - 1927		
* Village on Marine		4500.00
Pierre Bonnard -		
* Children and cat		3500.00
will verify date.		
		<u>16000.00</u>

Returns

Matisse "Auenoues"	\$ 5000	
Matisse - Girl in Chair	2500	
	<u>\$ 7500</u>	7500.00
		<u>\$ 8500.00</u>
		4% discount
		8,070

Five per cent for cash.
 \$500 - return when Matisse "Auenoues"
 is sold by me.

F. Valentine Dudensing

Payment received Nov. 28, 1927.
 F. Valentine Dudensing

Dudensing indicated works by Matisse and Segonzac as purchased by Phillips. Their two paintings named in the transaction are no longer part of The Phillips Collection while Children and Cat remains.



Children and Cat, 1909

Oil on canvas, 21 1/2 x 27 3/8 in., The Phillips
Collection Acquired 1927 © 2024 Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Part 2

Lending Bonnard

The Bonnard Unit continued to grow at Phillips Memorial Gallery during the 1930s. Marjorie and Duncan Phillips found joy in exhibiting these works in their home and in welcoming others to visit and converse among them. They found it difficult to part with works by Duncan’s “favorite living artist” and included Bonnards among the works they brought with them to their summer home in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania.

Despite his attachment, Duncan authorized a generous loan of 11 paintings—including *The Lesson* and *Children and Cat*—to Smith College Museum of Art in 1932. The Art Institute of Chicago was also interested in borrowing from the Phillips’s collection, which became the exhibition *Paintings and Prints by Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard* in 1938.

The following correspondence—with Smith College Museum of Art Director Jere Smith Abbott and Art Institute of Chicago Director Daniel Catton Smith—chronicles the loans to these institutions and highlights Marjorie and Duncan Phillips as champions of Bonnard in America. Duncan wrote: “I realize how much the American public needs to wake up to the importance of Bonnard and, as we have the largest collection of his pictures in the country, I am aware of a certain responsibility in the matter of making him better known to our people.”

Letter

from Jere Smith Abbott to Duncan Phillips

OCTOBER 5, 1932

SMITH COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART
NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS

October 5, 1932

Mr. Duncan Phillips
Phillips Memorial Gallery
Washington, D.C.

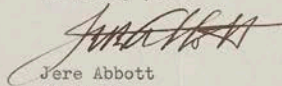
My dear Duncan Phillips:

I hardly feel at home, as yet, at my new task here at Smith. As you know I do not feel too enthusiastic about the average exhibitions which go the rounds to colleges. We cannot afford to run large exhibitions of first class quality here at the Museum, but we can show the students from time to time important pictures (worth more it seems to me than any number of exhibitions) from private and public collections. These single pictures are to be shown in a small room in our gallery and students' attention directed especially to these pictures. Insofar as possible I shall try to cooperate with the teaching department in showing examples which they use.

You doubtless know my fondness for the Bonnards, and I am writing to ask you whether you would be willing to lend us a few of them to show the students here? They would be exhibited in a special gallery in our Museum. Bonnard is practically unknown here, and I should like very much to do this. We would, of course, insure them and pay the expense of shipping. As you know the gallery here is fire-proof and guarded. I should like very much to hear your reaction on this idea of mine, and I hope that you may be willing to lend us some of the Bonnards to show in this way.

Kindly remember me to Mrs. Phillips.

Sincerely yours



Jere Abbott
Director

“

You doubtless know my fondness for the Bonnards, and I am writing to ask you whether you would be willing to lend us a few of them to show the students here?”

“

Bonnard is practically unknown here...”

Letter from Duncan Phillips to Jere Smith Abbott

OCTOBER 19, 1932

October 19, 1932

Mr. Jere Abbott, Director
Smith College Museum of Art,
Northampton, Massachusetts.

My dear Jere Abbott:

I have delayed answering your letter of October 5th because I have not found it easy to promise an exhibition of Bonnard, my favorite living artist, at a time when we have so many walls, both of house and gallery, where we have come to depend upon him in all our rearrangements. For several years Mr. Harche has been begging me for a Bonnard exhibition in the Chicago Art Institute but he did not want a small group. He wanted as many as he could get and our most important examples. I could not spare them except in summer and even then we like to indulge ourselves with Bonnard in our country house where we have most time and leisure to enjoy and study his works. I realize how much the American public needs to wake up to the importance of Bonnard and, as we have the largest collection of his pictures in the country, I am aware of a certain responsibility in the matter of making him better known to our people. Of course he is a speciality of our museum and here he can be seen in all his glory. It would never be for us to strip our public exhibitions of all his canvasses at any one time since our Bonnard Unit is one of the features of our collection which give it a special character. This year we have been compelled as a measure of economy, to discontinue, for the present, our educational work, lectures, etc., and to open our doors only on Saturdays. The time then seems to be better than usual for a sacrifice of Bonnard on behalf of another locality and I am eager to cooperate with you on your proposal for a Bonnard exhibition at Smith College.

The fact that you spoke of wanting only a few pictures for a small room makes it the more possible for us to talk business. The questions then are how many canvases do you want, at what date, and for how long? Our gallery hanging would be seriously disarranged without the big masterpiece The Palm and our drawing room at home stands in need of those two most enchanting pictures, "The Open Window" and "Early Spring". I expect to have many appreciative visitors all season who would miss Bonnard if they did not find him both in our house and gallery. Although I realize that I would be withholding three of the best examples of his art nevertheless there are enough left to make a very comprehensive

“

...have not found it easy to promise an exhibition of Bonnard, my favorite living artist... we have come to depend on him in all of our rearrangements...”

“

I realize how much the American public needs to wake up to the importance of Bonnard...”

Mr. Abbott 2 October 19, 1932

Bonnard exhibition. I enclose a list of the pictures by Bonnard which would be available for Smith, twelve in all, and they are arranged in a chronological order with approximate dates. The group will contain at least one outstanding masterpiece, "The Riviera", and two or three items of exquisite and unique quality. Perhaps you would not even need as many as these twelve and I suspect that the "Moulin Rouge", which is very dark and oily, might not hang well with the rest most of which are very colorful. I am off to New York today but expect to be back early next week and by that time if you could let me know which of the pictures you want and at what time we could come to a decision.

Smith College is to be congratulated on getting you as Director of its art museum and we certainly wish you success in your work there. It was a great disappointment not to be in Washington when you came down here to lecture, and Lav Watkins has told me what a hit you made with your audience and how stimulating and instructive was your talk. With best regards,

Sincerely yours

D.P.P.

Mr. Abbott 3 October 19, 1932

Bonnard
~~Proposed~~ list of Bonnard's in *WPA's 15th*
loaned to Smith College *at 100.00 dollars.*

Moulin Rouge	1896	8500.	
Movement of the Street	1900	2600.	
Near the Sea	1905	1600.	
Children and Cat	1908	3500.	
Little River	1912	6000.	
Woman and Dog	1918	6500.	
<i>500. The Lesson 1920</i>	<i>Pinocchio and Papilio</i>	1920	
<i>12,000. The Palm 1928</i>	<i>Intimate with Boy</i>	1922	
Woods in Summer	1922	2400.	
Grape Harvest	1926	3800.	
Mississipi	1928		
Strawberries	1930	2000.	

Letter

from Jere Smith Abbott to Duncan Phillips

NOVEMBER 26, 1932

“I want to tell you how much we are enjoying the Bonnards here at Smith”

SMITH COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART
NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS

November 26, 1932

Mr. Duncan Phillips
Phillips Memorial Gallery
1600-Twenty-first Street
Washington, D.C.

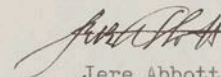
Dear Mr. Phillips:

I want to tell you how much we are enjoying the Bonnards here at Smith. The gallery looks very well as they are hung, and I have given them plenty of breathing space.

Under separate cover, I am sending you a marked copy of the Smith College Weekly, which gives an account of the opening written by one of the undergraduates.

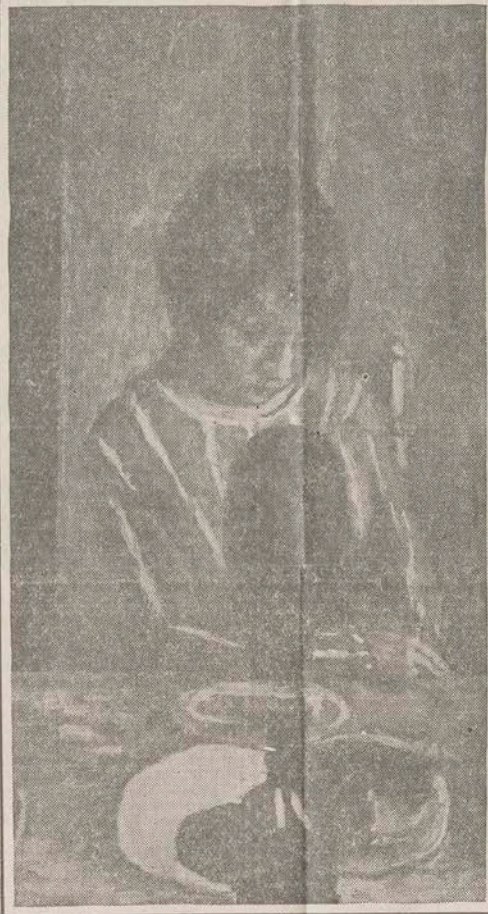
It's very generous of you to help us in this way, and we are all most appreciative.

Yours very truly



Jere Abbott
Director

First Bonnard Exhibit Held In Connecticut Valley



"WOMAN and DOG," 1918

Not since the fall of 1930 when collections of his painting has been



"CHILDREN and CAT," 1908

them relatively little known to the American public. In the autumn of the same year, art critics and the public had an opportunity to view eight canvases by Bonnard in another exhibition—a show in which Bonnard shared honors with his two life-long companions, Vuillard and Roussel.

The Smith college museum has been fortunate in securing a dozen paintings by Pierre Bonnard, 11 of which have come from the well-known Phillips collection, the 12th from a private collection in New York. The group will remain on view through December 14.

As to Bonnard's position in the art world of today, we quote from the

escapes our attention. Of such is the painting of Pierre Bonnard."

Those who are familiar with the career (perhaps too imposing a term!) of Bonnard may know that one of the 1930 exhibitions was assembled partly at the request of the three friends, Bonnard, Vuillard and Roussel, all of whom are now well along in years. Bonnard was born in 1867. With the other two, Bonnard studied at the famous Academy Julian in Paris, first under the fashionable Bouguereau and later under Robert-Feury. But like all the spirited younger painters he soon broke with the academy, and, more fortunate than some, went to paint for a

over some characteristic (from another artist) but forces it to an extreme. His adaptation of the discoveries of others has a brilliance and a charm in the very imaginative illogic of its use. 'How right!' we exclaim when we observe his curious juxtaposition of the 'wrong' colors. The palette of 'The Palm,' 1924 (which may be seen reproduced in the rotogravure section of this issue) borrows from Renoir and the earlier impressionists; but in the unorthodox combinations of its color, in the complicated abstraction of its design, it has a beauty which the impressionists, bending their minds to the problems of light, could

The Springfield Massachusetts Republican chronicled the exhibition and included reflections from Abbott:

"If we mark his art as too personal, as too much beauty felt only by Bonnard, as too intimate, we are only the losers."

Typed Letter

from Daniel Caton Rich to Duncan Phillips

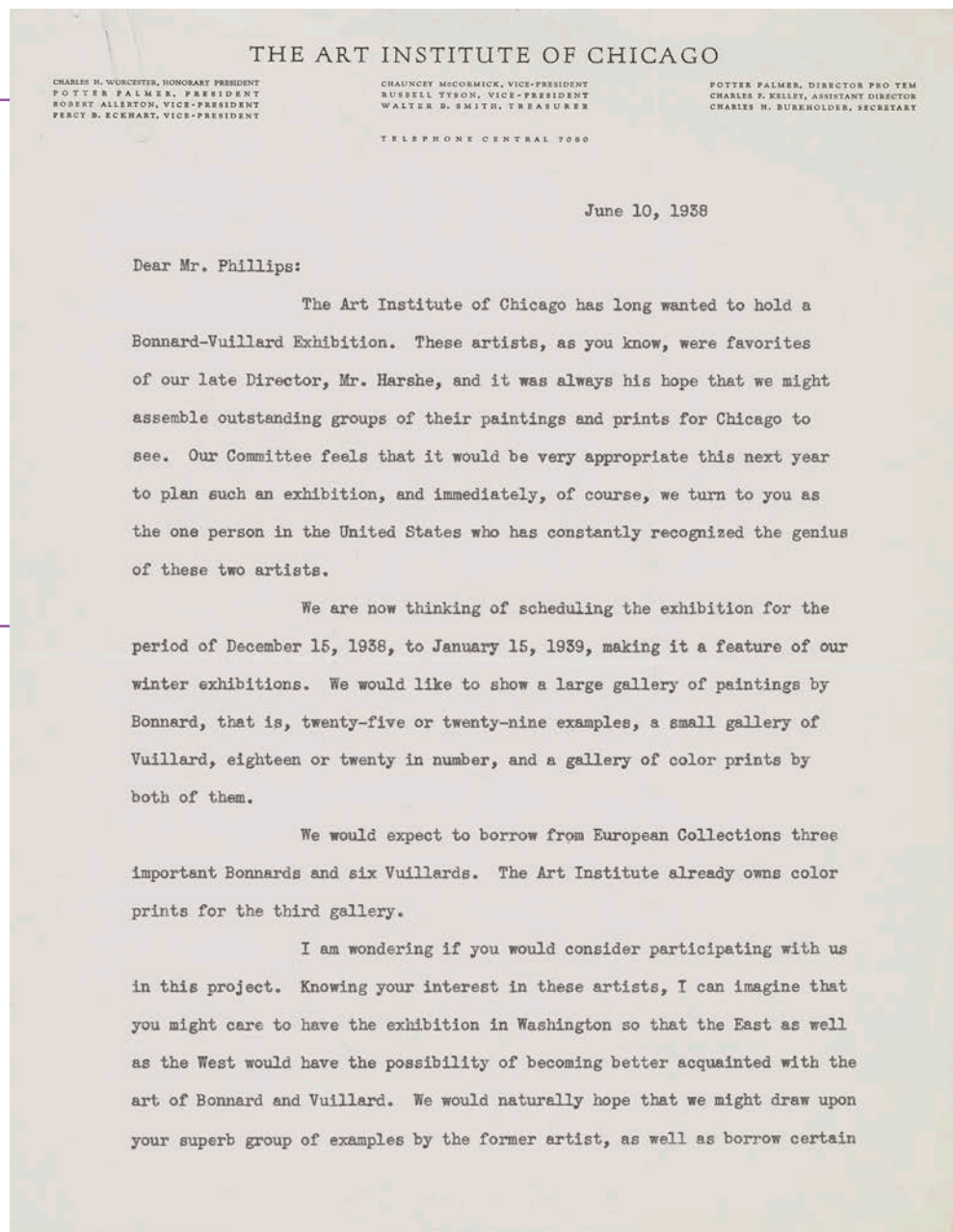
JUNE 10, 1938

“

The Art Institute of Chicago has long wanted to hold a Bonnard-Vuillard Exhibition.

“

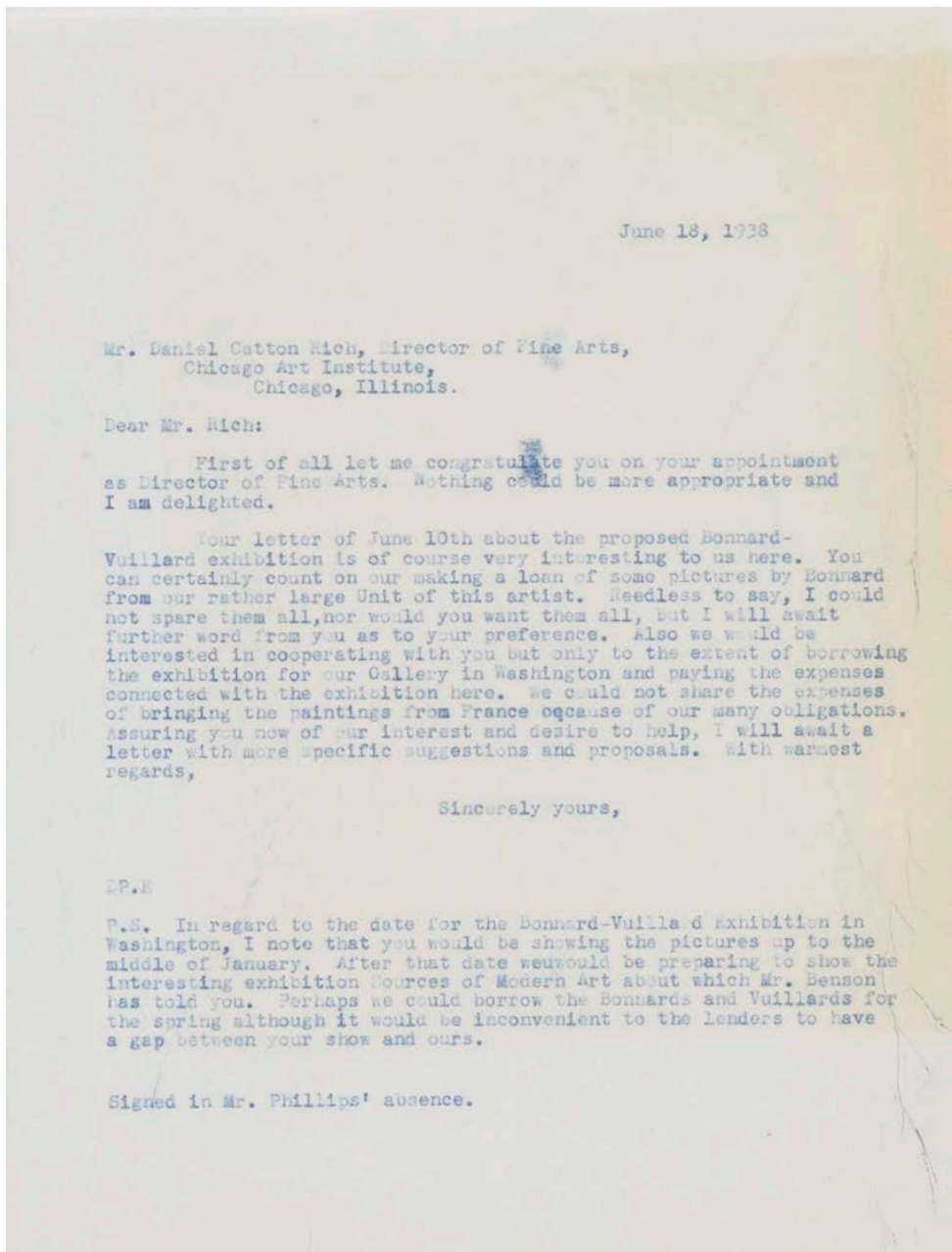
...of course, we turn to you as the one person in the United States who has constantly recognized the genius of these two artists.



Letter

from Duncan Phillips to Daniel Catton Rich

JUNE 18, 1938



“

“You can certainly count on our making a loan of some pictures by Bonnard from our rather large Unit of this artist”

Insurance valuations of paintings on loan to Chicago Art Institute.
December-January 1938-39.

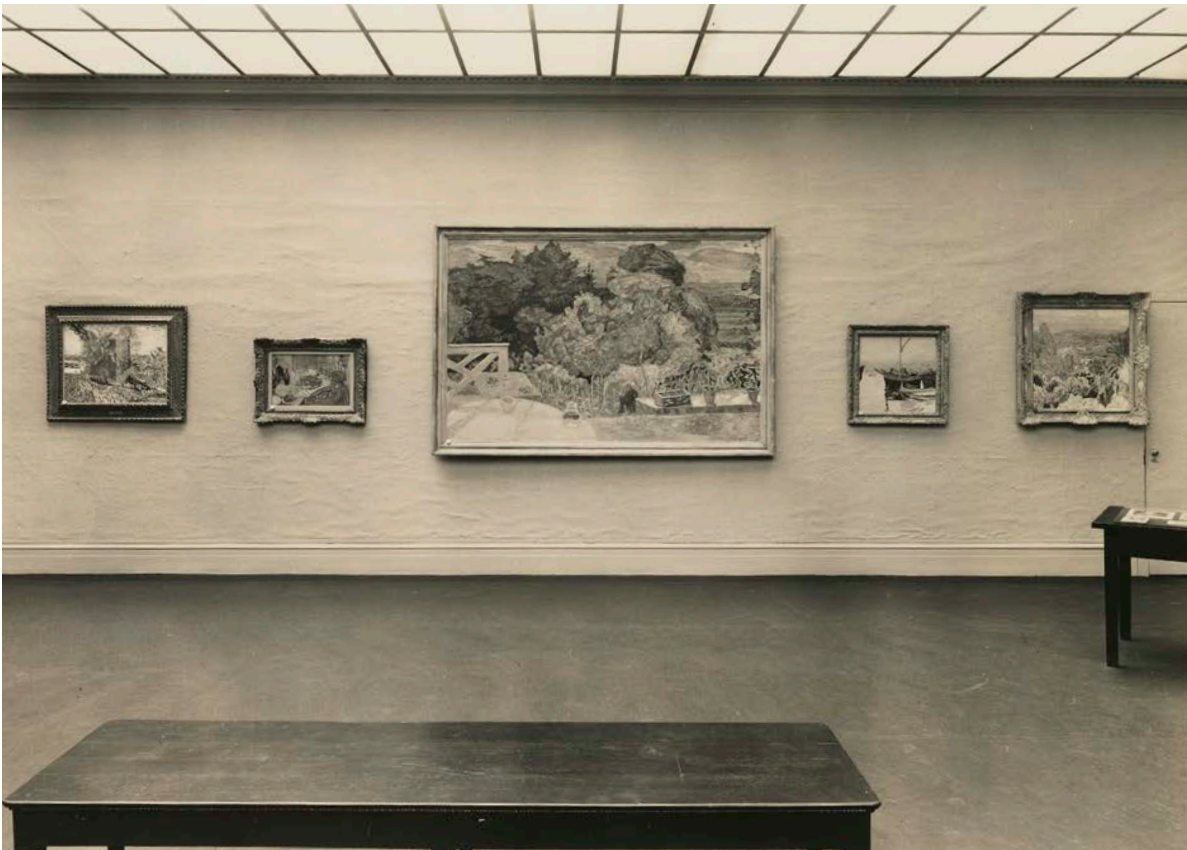
BONNARD	
Movement of the Street	\$2600.
Children and Cat	3500.
Early Spring	5500.
Girl and Dog	5500.
The Open Window	11000.
Interior with Boys	1500.
The Palm	13000.
Niviera	10000.
The Terrace	13000.
VUILLARD	
The Newspaper	6000.
Intimacy	3000.

Insurance valuations of paintings on loan to Chicago Art Institute, December-January 1938-39,” November 3, 1938

Installation Photographs



at The Art Institute of Chicago



Installation views of *Paintings and Prints* by Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard, Art Institute of Chicago, ca. 1938-1939

PAGE 5

March 8, 1927, Telegram from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

If you will send Bonnard's *The Lesson* on approval please send it at once as we are going south on the twentieth and I wish plenty of time to consider it.

PAGE 6

March 15, 1927, Handwritten letter from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

My dear Mr Phillips

I trust the Bonnard reached you as promised and it was in good condition. Should you decide to return it may I ask that you give instructions that it be sent on March 21st. I haven't shown it to anyone and as you know my season does not last much longer.

Every advice I receive from Paris indicates that Bonnard is taking a firmer and firmer position as one of the best of the moderns.

I am glad I have this picture and should you decide to keep it I am certain you will always be pleased you did so.

Very sincerely,
F. Valentine Dudensing

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March 21, 1927, Handwritten letter from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

My dear Mr Phillips

This will serve to confirm your purchase, by telephone this morning, of the painting "*La Leçon*" by Pierre Bonnard at \$5500. I enclose invoice with notation of payment.

Should you find it possible, of course without inconvenience, to forward a check on account of other purchases before I go abroad April 30th, I should be very pleased.

My intentions are to buy the best of the best men and to do that you can understand I believe, I can do better for cash than any other way.

Thanking you, I am

Very sincerely,
F. Valentine Dudensing

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March 21, 1927, Telegram from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

I will keep the Bonnard if you will lower the price. Letter follows. Had hoped to sell an important picture to raise funds for this purchase by sale not yet completed.

March 24, 1927, Letter from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

Dear Mr. Dudensing

I was surprised to receive your letter inclosing a bill for the Bonnard entitled *The Lesson*, for the full amount of \$ 5500. I thought I had made it clear both by telegram and telephone that I would have to get lower terms and that my purchasing it at all depended upon a sale which was hanging fire and had not been put through. I understood you to say, over a bad telephone wire to our office, that I was to make an offer. This I have intended to do and have been waiting for definite word about the sale before complying with that suggestion of yours. I sold the picture only

yesterday but for less money than I had asked and therefore I must at least make some

deduction from the full price on the Bonnard. \$5000 would seem to me a large enough price for a picture which is characteristic of Bonnard's playfulness and daring modulations of red, but which is, in a way, a temperamental expression which leaves one baffled unless one happens to be in exactly the same mood the artist was in when he conceived the fancy. I enjoy this phase

or Bonnard's art and I really love this picture, so I hope that you will meet my request for a reduction on it as I would not want to give it up for all its queerness.

I am sending you a Bulletin of our Tri-Unit Exhibition with my expression of embarrassed regret for my carelessness in proof-reading which resulted in your partner Pierre Matisse receiving credit for the pictures painted by his distinguished father. This was so obviously a slip that it seemed useless to re-call the edition which was late in coming out owing to uncertainty up to the last moment as to what pictures we would hang. Except for that mistake the little Bulletin is an interesting and handsome publication and it commemorates a great exhibition which you and Mr. Matisse should make every effort to see before the end of April. I will try to meet your request for as large a payment on our purchases as possible before you go away for the summer. As soon as the Bonnard matter is closed, please send a new bill itemizing all the pictures together. Unfortunately I cannot find the photograph of the Bonnard which you wish me to return. I shall keep looking for it and send it as soon as it turns up.

Sincerely yours
DP.E'

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March 25, 1927, Handwritten letter from F. Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

My dear Mr Phillips

Very sorry we misunderstood each other over the telephone. It was a poor connection and that accounts for my mistake. I want you to have the Bonnard because I feel that you understand what a fine thing it is. I will accept the \$5000 you suggest for two reasons. First, as I said, I am pleased that you have it. Second, the sentence in your letter saying you will try to send a payment on account of other purchases before my sailing. I am enclosing a statement as requested.

I will be pleased to get the Bulletin you speak of. I have heard that the exhibition is very fine and I do wish I could see it. If I happen to have the slightest excuse, I shall go to Washington.

It is too bad about the error in credit to Pierre Matisse of Henri Matisse picture but I do believe the readers will understand.

Sincerely yours
F. Valentine Dudensing

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March 25, 1927, Handwritten list of paintings by F. Valentine Dudensing for Duncan Phillips

To Phillips Memorial Gallery
Duncan Phillips Esq
Washington D.C.

Jan. 1927		
Pierre Bonnard	landscape	2500.00
" "	boy reading	1700.00

"DP.E" is a typographical indicator that the letter was composed by Duncan Phillips (DP) and typed by his secretary, Elmira Bier (E). Bier was hired in 1923 and went on to direct the music concert series beginning in 1941. When asked to describe her role, music critic Paul Hume wrote that "she ran the place." Former registrar John Gernand said that her versatility was amazing. Learn more here: "Women's History at The Phillips: Elmira Bier" (March 13, 2013) <https://blog.phillipscollection.org/2013/03/13/womens-history-phillips-elmira-bier/>

Pierre Clairin	landscape	300.00	
Louis Eilshemius	Samoa	400.00	
		<hr/>	
		4900.00	
		special discount 12%	
		588.00	
		<hr/>	
		4312.00	

Jan 25 1927

Anemones

Henri Matisse

5000.00

March 25

Pierre Bonnard

La Leçon

5000.00

14312.00

Credit

April 11, 1927

4312.00

10000.00

October 19, 1927

Typed letter from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

Dear Mr. Dudensing

Twice during the early autumn I was in New York and both times I visited your galleries in the hope of seeing you and what you had brought from Europe. Each time I was informed that you had not yet returned and that the gallery was closed. I went to New York early this year because my plans call for a western trip to see the western museums sometime in November and I may not get to New York until mid-winter.

Your letter telling me of the works by Matisse, Bonnard etc., that you brought over has therefore given me mixed feelings, impatience to see but regret that it seems unlikely to either see or buy having already invested in a Degas of great importance which practically takes us out of the market for the year. However I am writing to ask you if you could send me photographs of your examples by Matisse and Bonnard especially. If they are particularly alluring and the price modest it might be necessary for me to make a special trip. I would not encourage you to bring anything down for me to see as the chance of our getting anything are so poor because of early purchases of land and pictures. Hoping therefore to receive photographs, descriptions, prices etc., at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely yours

D.P.E

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November 5, 1927, Handwritten letter from Valentine Dudensing to Duncan Phillips

My dear Mr Phillips

As promised, I have figured and combined as many combinations as I could imagine to arrange that you get the pictures sent you at the fairest and most convenient way. I submit the following for your consideration and ask you to believe I have done my very best to make it possible for you to acquire these pictures at prices lower than I can hope to replace them for and at terms I hope you will find possible to accept.

Proposition #1			
Matisse	\$8000	spot cash	
Segonzac	4500	\$15500	
Bonnard	3500	7000	[written in pencil]
Vlaminck	1500	<hr/>	
		8500	[written in pencil]

\$17500

Proposition #2

Matisse	\$8000	1/2	cash	\$18,000
Segonzac	4500	1/4	now	9000
Bonnard	3500	1/4	May 1	4500
Vlaminck	1500		Aug 1	4500
Braque	3000			<hr/>
				18000

\$20500

Proposition III

Matisse	8000
Segonzac	4500
Bonnard	3500
Vlaminck	1500

Trade back either the small Matisse at \$2500 or the Anemones at \$5000.

\$17500	\$17500
2500	5000

15000 \$12500

1/2 cash now

1/2 May 1st

Proposition IV

Matisse	8000		
Segonzac	4500		
Bonnard	3500		
Vlaminck	1500		
Braque	3000	[crossed out]	[written in pencil]
		<hr/>	
		20500	[crossed out] 17,500
Less 2 Matisse	7000		7000
		<hr/>	10500
		\$13500	5250
1/2 cash	6750		5250 cash
1/4 May 1st	3375		5250 May 1st
1/4 Aug 1st	3375		
		<hr/>	
		\$13500	

I would appreciate having your decision as soon as possible. Should you decide to turn back a Matisse, or the two of them, would you send with the Segonzac so I would receive the case no later than Friday, November 11th.

Last news I have from Paris, received today, prices continue to rise and first class pictures not to be found. I hope you decide to keep all as I never will be able to offer such fine things and certainly not at the prices quoted.

Very truly,
F. Valentine Dudensing

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November 10, 1927, Typed Letter from Duncan Phillips to F. Valentine Dudensing

Dear Mr. Dudensing:

I feel that I should write to you at once even though I cannot come to any decision so quickly about the paintings you sent nor the proposition you make in your letter of November 5th. I am going to Pittsburgh to

see the Carnegie International and will need some time after I return to think over the latter carefully so that I will make no mistake. Meanwhile remembering that you wish the Segonzac for your exhibition I am sending it to you for that purpose but definitely reserved for us. It is one of the two pictures which you sent I am almost certain to keep. In fact if it were not so very much like the one I bought from Kraushaar in subject and color there would be no question about it. Even as it is the picture is so superb a landscape that I would not have the heart to lose out on it. The other picture which we want is the Bonnard "Children and Cat". I have not yet decided about the Vlaminck nor have I decided whether I wish to trade our two Matisse pictures for the larger one of "Poppies and Mirror". The Braque is definitely out of it. The shipment therefore which will go out tomorrow will contain the Braque, the Segonzac for your exhibition but ours for future settlement, and finally the Matisse figure painting which we bought from you last year and which I have determined to give up for credit on new purchases. Thus far I have been unable to decide between the two flower pictures of Matisse but I do think they are too much alike to keep them both. If I keep the new one my proposition will probably be to suggest an even trade of the two Matisse for the one, and an offer on whatever other pictures we wish based on the advantage to you of cash payment if we find we can manage it.

Very sincerely yours
D.P.E

PAGE 13
November 22, 1927, Handwritten itemized list from F. Valentine Dudensing

Kindly send histories of all pictures purchased. [Typed at top center]
Also receipted bill. [Typed at top center]

To Duncan Phillips Esq.
Washington DC

Paintings

Henri Matisse 1921-22			
Poppies and Mirror	—————	\$8000.00	
Dunoyer de Segonzac - 1927			
Village on Marne	—————	\$4500.00	
Pierre Bonnard			
Children and Cat	—————	\$3500.00	
will verify date			
			16000.00
Return			
Matisse "Anemones"	\$5000		
Matisse Girl in Chair	2500		
		—————	
		\$7500	\$7500.00
			—————
			\$8500.00
	425. discount		[written in pencil]
		—————	
		\$8075	[written in pencil]

Five per cent for cash.
\$500 - return when Matisse "Anemones" is sold by me.
F. Valentine Dudensing
Payment received Nov. 28, 1927
[signature]

PAGE 16
October 5, 1932, Letter from Jere Smith Abbott to Duncan Phillips

My dear Duncan Phillips:

I hardly feel at home, as yet, at my new task here at Smith. As you know I do not feel too enthusiastic about the average exhibitions which go the rounds to colleges. We cannot afford to run large exhibitions of first class quality here at the Museum, but we can show the students from time to time important pictures (worth more it seems to me than any number of exhibitions) from private and public collections. These single pictures are to be shown in a small room in our gallery and students' attention directed especially to these pictures. Insofar as possible I shall try to cooperate with the teaching department in showing examples which they use.

You doubtless know my fondness for the Bonnards, and I am writing to ask you whether you would be willing to lend us a few of them to show the students here? They would be exhibited in a special gallery in our Museum. Bonnard is practically unknown here, and I should like very much to do this. We would, of course, insure them and pay the expense of shipping. As you know the gallery here is fire-proof and guarded. I should like very much to hear your reaction to this idea of mine, and I hope that you may be willing to lend us some of the Bonnards to show in this way.

Kindly remember me to Mrs. Phillips.
[signature]
Jere Abbott
Director

PAGE 17
October 19, 1932, Letter from Duncan Phillips to Jere Smith Abbott

My dear Jere Abbott:

I have delayed answering your letter of October 5th because I have not found it easy to promise an exhibition of Bonnard, my favorite living artist, at a time when we have so many walls, both of home and Gallery, where we have come to depend upon him in all our rearrangements. For several years Mr. Harshe has been begging me for a Bonnard exhibition in the Chicago Art Institute but he did not want a small group. He wanted as many as he could get and our most important examples. I could not spare them except in summer and even then we like to indulge ourselves with Bonnard in our country house where we have most time and leisure to enjoy and study his works. I realize how much the American public needs to wake up to the importance of Bonnard and, as we have the largest collection of his pictures in the country, I am aware of a certain responsibility in the matter of making him better known to our people. Of course he is a specialty of our museum and here he can be seen in all his glory. It would never to [sic] for us to strip our public exhibitions of all his canvases at any one time since our Bonnard Unit is one of the features of our Collection which give it a special character. This year we have been compelled as a measure of economy, to discontinue, for the present our educational work, lectures, etc., and to open our doors only on Saturdays. The time then seems to be better than usual for a sacrifice of Bonnard on behalf of another locality and I am eager to cooperate with you on your proposal for a Bonnard exhibition at Smith College.

The fact that you spoke of wanting only a few pictures for a small room makes it the more possible for us to talk business. The questions then are how many canvases do you want, at what date, and for how long? Our Gallery hanging would be seriously disarranged without the big masterpiece "The Palm" and our drawing room at home stands in need of those two most enchanting pictures, "The Open Window" and "Early Spring". I expect to have many appreciative visitors all season who would miss Bonnard if they did not find him both in our house and Gallery. Although I realize that I would be withholding three of the best examples of his art nevertheless there are enough left to make a very comprehensive Bonnard exhibition. I enclose a list of the pictures by Bonnard which would be available for Smith, twelve in all, and they are arranged in a chronological order with approximate dates. The group will contain at least one outstanding masterpiece, "The Riviera", and two or

three items of exquisite and unique quality. Perhaps you would not even need as many as these twelve and I suggest that the "Moulin Rouge", which is very dark and oily, might not hang well with the rest most of which are very colorful. I am off to New York today but expect to be back early next week and by that time if you could let me know which of the pictures you want and at what time we could come to a decision.

Smith College is to be congratulated on getting you as Director of its art museum and we certainly wish you success in your work there. It was a great disappointment not to be in Washington when you came down here to lecture, and Law Watkins has told me what a hit you made with your audience and how stimulating and instructive was your talk. With best regards,

Sincerely yours
D.P.E

[typed and handwritten, with handwritten annotations and prices]
Suggested Revised List of Bonnards for Nov 15th
promised to Smith College Northampton Mass

Moulin Rouge	1896	\$3400.
Movement of the Street	1900	2600.
Near the Sea	1905	1600.
Children and Cat	1908	3500.
Little River	1912	6000.
Woman and Dog	1918	5500.
Piazza del Popolo	1920	
The Lesson	1926 [handwritten]	5000.
Interior with Boy	1922	
The Palm	1928 [handwritten]	12,400.
Woods in Summer	1922	2200.
Grape Harvest	1926	3800.
Riviera	1928	
Strawberries	1930	2000.

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November 26, 1932, Letter from Jere Smith Abbott to Duncan Phillips

Dear Mr. Phillips:

I want to tell you how much we are enjoying the Bonnards here at Smith. The gallery looks very well as they are hung, and I have given them plenty of breathing space.

Under separate cover, I am sending you a marked copy of the Smith College Weekly, which gives an account of the opening written by one of the undergraduates.

It's very generous of you to help us in this way, and we are all most appreciative.

Yours very truly
[signature]
Jere Abbott
Director

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June 10, 1938, Typed Letter from Daniel Caton Rich to Duncan Phillips

Dear Mr. Phillips:

The Art Institute of Chicago has long wanted to hold a Bonnard-Vuillard Exhibition. These artists, as you know, were favorites of our late Director, Mr. Harshe, and it was always his hope that we might assemble outstanding groups of their paintings and prints for Chicago to see. Our Committee feels that it would be very appropriate this next year to plan such an exhibition, and immediately, of course, we turn to you as the one person in the United States who has constantly recognized the genius of

these two artists.

We are now thinking of scheduling the exhibition for the period of December 15, 1938, to January 15, 1939, making it a feature of our winter exhibitions. We would like to show a large gallery of paintings by Bonnard, that is, twenty-five or twenty-nine examples, a small gallery of Vuillard, eighteen or twenty in number, and a gallery of color prints by both of them.

We would expect to borrow from European Collections three important Bonnards and six Vuillards. The Art Institute already owns color prints for the third gallery.

I am wondering if you would consider participating with us in this project. Knowing your interest in these artists, I can imagine that you might care to have the exhibition in Washington so that the East as well as the West would have the possibility of becoming better acquainted with the art of Bonnard and Vuillard. We would naturally hope that we might draw upon your superb group of examples by the former artist, as well as borrow certain Vuillards from the Phillips Memorial Gallery. I am under the impression that Chicago collectors owning fine canvases, would reciprocate in sending their things on to you. Naturally we could work out the sharing of expense, which might allow us both to make the exhibit a more important one than if each museum was organizing it separately.

Please let me know frankly your reaction to this suggestion.

Emanuel Benson is here and tells me of his interesting exhibit, "Sources of Modern Art," in which I believe you are also participating.

We are counting very much on hoping to be able to show Bonnard and Vuillard to the public of the Middle West, since aside from a few excellent examples their work has never been exhibited in this part of the world.

Very sincerely yours
[signature]
Daniel Catton Rich
Director of Fine Arts

PAGE 21
June 18, 1938, Letter from Duncan Phillips to Daniel Catton Rich

Dear Mr. Rich:

First of all let me congratulate you on your appointment as Director of Fine Arts. Nothing could be more appropriate and I am delighted.

Your letter of June 10th about the proposed Bonnard-Vuillard exhibition is of course very interesting to us here. You can certainly count on our making a loan of some pictures by Bonnard from our rather large Unit of this artist. Needless to say, I could not spare them all, nor would you want them all, but I will await further word from you as to your preference. Also we would be interested in cooperating with you but only to the extent of borrowing the exhibition for our Gallery in Washington and paying the expenses connected with the exhibition here. We could not share the expenses of bringing the paintings from France because of our many obligations. Assuring you now of our interest and desire to help, I will await a letter with more specific suggestions and proposals. With warmest regards,

Sincerely yours,
D.P.E

P.S. In regard to the date for the Bonnard-Vuillard Exhibition in Washington, I note that you would be showing the pictures up to the middle of January. After that date we would be preparing to show the interesting exhibition Sources of Modern Art about which Mr. Benson has told you. Perhaps we could borrow the Bonnards and Vuillards for the spring although it would be inconvenient to the lenders to have a gap between your show and ours.

Signed in Mr. Phillips' absence.

PHILLIPS