



Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

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**Fwd: [Test] September Newsletter**

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To: Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

Tue, Sep 20, 2022 at 2:58 PM



GREENWICH  
*Decorative Arts*  
SOCIETY

Windows:  
Art During a Pandemic  
September, 2020

“Set wide the window. Let me drink the day.”

*Edith Wharton*



Childe Hassam, *The Goldfish Window*, 1916

One of a series of Hassam's 'window' paintings featuring a light-filled curtained or open window, which he painted in his Connecticut years

Have you spent a lot of time looking out your window during the pandemic?

COVID-19 took away the speakers we had so looked forward to hosting at GDAS, the tea-time which offered the social touch that warm our days, the contact with people who offer intellectual stimulation as well as casual chit-chat and relaxed conversation, friends who share interests and give assurance of connection and belonging.

It altered everything. Some members were comforted by being quarantined with family. Others did not know when they would see family again. As individuals, we have all had

to make changes to our daily lives.

In the first weeks I hardly went outside. Sometimes I would feel immobilized, just looking out my window.

In fact, looking out the window replaced former pleasures, now unavailable, as I watched the slow unfolding of the garden, the activities of the birds, the twice daily rise and fall of the tides, which in their ebb and flow mirror life itself.





Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, *The Artist's Two Daughters*, 1852

I began to think about windows in art.

As I researched I remembered the MET had an exhibition "Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century" which I had seen almost ten years ago.

And here's the thing: at that show, I saw it was dedicated to my Professor of Art at Stanford University, the one person who above all influenced and shaped how I look at art, Dr. Lorenz Eitner.



Casper David Friedrich, *View from the Artist's Studio, Window on the Left, Window on the Right*, 1805-06

Moreover, it was dedicated to the *memory* of Lorenz Eitner. He had died at the age of 89, two years before the show. Now in my mind, in the way in which you freeze people in time when you do not see them anymore, I still pictured him as he was when I was a

graduate student, still teaching. I felt a sense of loss, because in retrospect, I realized that he had given me more than I understood at that time.



Professor Eitner was born in the Czech Republic in 1919 and spent his childhood in Germany and then Brussels until his family immigrated to South Carolina in 1935. He

was educated at Duke University and earned a doctorate at Princeton. He was head of the research section in the Office of Chief Prosecution for the Nuremberg Trials. He wrote dozens of books on art and was a world-renowned authenticator of Gericault paintings. His work on 19th century art remains a classic text for students.

His art scholarship combined a universality of thinking with great taste in connoisseurship. He loved art and objects and always carried Greek coins in his pocket and discussed them with anyone who was interested. He was the founding spirit behind the Stanford Museum and Art Department. He was a distinguished scholar and a committed teacher, a giant in his field and a legendary professor and human being.

I reflected on his teaching as I looked at the paintings I want to share with you. I find these window paintings timeless and haunting and they reflect many of the emotions I have felt in quarantine, in the time of COVID, looking out my window.







Johannes Vermeer, *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window*, c. 1656

Let's start with Vermeer. Who can use light and space to convey the sacredness of an ordinary human experience like he can?

Vermeer is titled the "Master of Light." Pay attention to the way the light from the open window falls on skin and fabrics and strongly illuminates the letter. The reflection of the girl in the window pane forms a spatial triangle which emphasizes the importance of the letter. The letter ~ what is in it? ~ becomes the psychological axis of the painting.

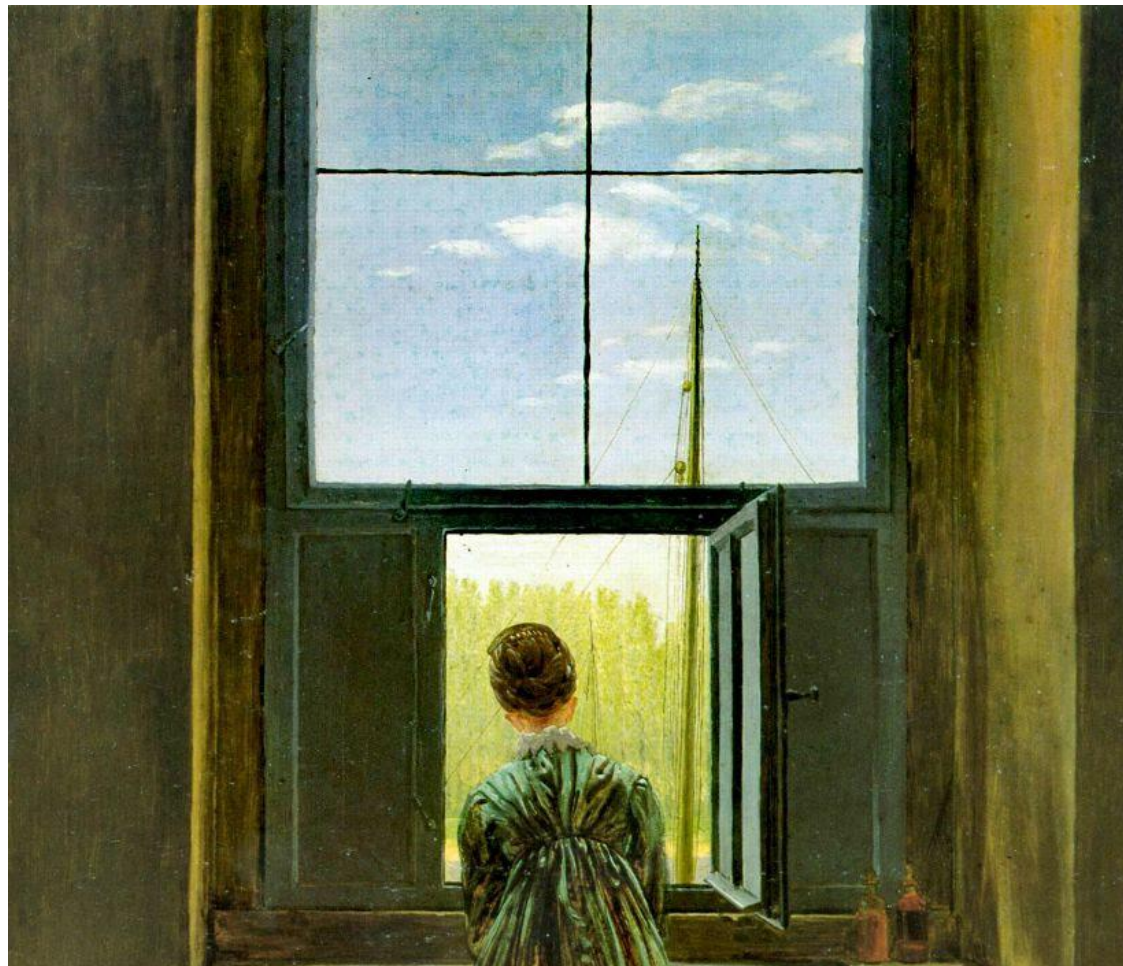
The angle of the girl's forearm parallels the fruit bowl and her green sleeve echoes the green curtain. The more you look at this painting the more you feel its visual rhythms.



We know from x-rays that Vermeer had originally painted a cupid on the wall, which would have made it clear that the nature of the letter is an amorous one. Scholars now think it was painted over not by Vermeer but by an unknown party decades after his death.

But nothing distracts us from the intense moment of reading the letter and the idea of communication from an absent loved one.

You, the viewer, are as absorbed in this painting as the girl is in her letter. Such is the power of Vermeer to hold our attention in a painting of 364 years ago.







Caspar David Friedrich would have seen Vermeer's painting. His painting of his wife Caroline in *Woman at the Window*, 1822, has evoked many interpretations - the longing for freedom and escape from confinement, the happy contentment of a mother expecting her second child, the waiting of a wife for her beloved husband.

The enigmatic motifs - the sunlit exterior and the darkened room, the shape of the window's crossbars, the mast of the sailing ship, have inspired many different interpretations. I find that my own are influenced by the time of COVID in which these paintings evoke both safety and longing, confinement and a yearning for connection.

What are yours?



Martinus Rørbye, *View from the Artist's Window*, 1825

In Rørbye's painting once again ships are in view. The industry of shipbuilding is highlighted in the distance and the harbor motif suggests a gateway to faraway places. This is a view from Rørbye's parents' home in Copenhagen. The young artist was about to leave this home (he became an ardent traveler) and I sense an almost nostalgic reverence for these familiar items.

As a gardener I immediately notice the cutting in the glass tube on the right, beside a silver cup and a tiny container of seed. To the left are a hydrangea, an agave and a globe amaranth. A cast of a youth's foot is in front of a cast of an adult foot. A book and paper lie on the varnished table, which reflects the light.

My eye is drawn to the tiny birdcage where I can make out a small bird, but I am mystified as to how the birdcage is hanging. It must be hanging from the upper window frame, but it seems to be hovering in midair. Is the artist about to make his escape from the cage and fly away?

One hundred years later the young James Joyce sees flying birds and feels a sense of fear of the unknown as well as joy and peace. He asks himself - is it an augury of good or evil, a symbol of departure or loneliness? This window is painted by an artist about to leave all that is familiar and loved. The warm afternoon sun enhances this engaging scene. It's a remarkable picture which invites contemplation.





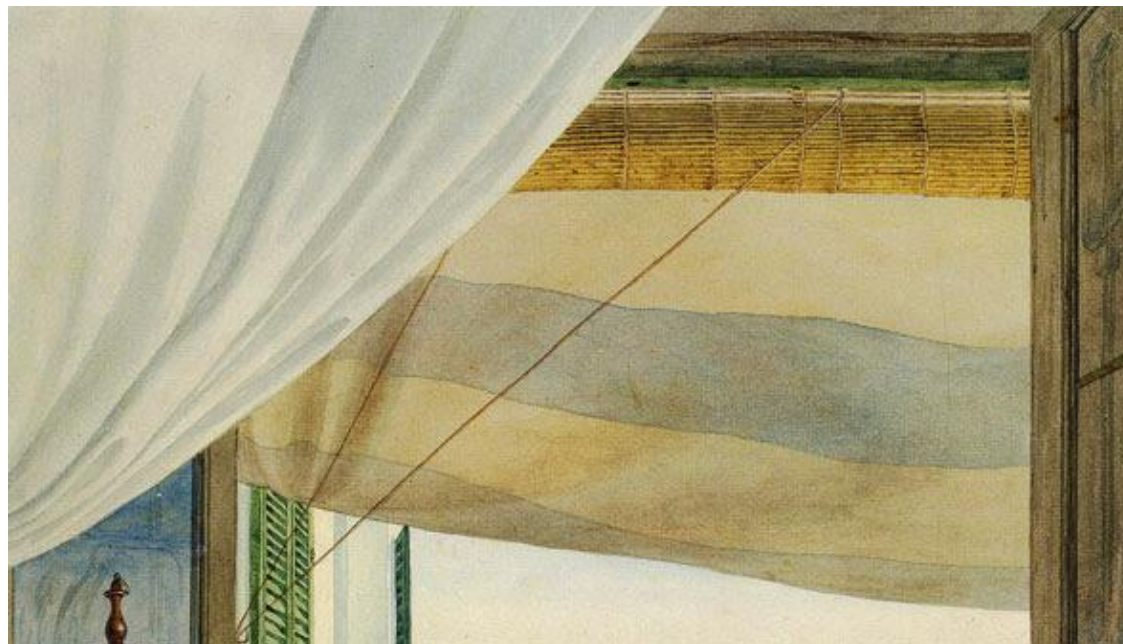
Giovanni Battista de Gubernatis, *The Artist's Studio in Parma*, 1812

Gubernatis painted this view from his room in Parma when he found out he would be transferred from Italy to France. He was an official in the Napoleonic administration and in his spare time he painted landscapes - some nine hundred watercolors.

Like a photo would be, this painting is a memory of what he was about to leave behind. It is his last minute iPhone snapshot as he leaves a place he will not see again. Today he might post it on Instagram. Its ambience contains the poignancy of leaving things behind, a place you have loved. The wooden shutters are open, the light flows into the room, the artist's tools are at ready.

As my husband and I made the heart-wrenching decision to sell our home of 30 years, I could understand Gubernatis' need to record for forever a place he had loved.

In a letter from 1817, Gubernatis expressed his deep attachment to this room:  
"Oh, my apartment in Parma, my books, my things."







Carl Wilhelm Götzloff, *A Balcony Room Overlooking the Gulf of Naples*, 1826

The German painter Götzloff painted this view of his patron's room in Naples where he had settled, making a living painting landscapes. The ancient Greek vessels have been identified as vases which now exist in collections in London and Berlin. Although the occupant of the room is undocumented, scholars have determined that two of the vases belonged to Austrian Baron Franz von Keller, who lived in Naples at this time.

The cupola seen through the balcony railing has been identified as Santa Maria della Vittoria, which enabled scholars to identify the room as being on the top floor of the Palazzo Sessa (don't you appreciate the sleuthing of careful scholarship!?)





Scholars have been so focused on the connoisseurship of the vases, that no one I read mentioned the African grey parrot in the cage. (Although they did mention the pigeons on the terrace!)

Of course my eye flows to that at once because I have a 28 year old African grey parrot, Max. He has a vocabulary of about 200 words and does not just mimic, but responds with comments appropriate to a situation. He talks in context and is very attuned to people's emotions.

The grey parrot with his striking red tail feathers may be understated in his plumage but he is a captivating and intelligent companion.

This is a lovely room with French doors leading to a terrace, a blue and white awning giving shade and a sophisticated collection to admire. The owner is also discerning in his choice of parrot.



Our African grey parrot Max whom I hand fed as a baby bird with an eye dropper. Grey parrots are complex, highly sensitive, a little demanding, charming and brilliant. We have spent a lot of time together during the quarantine and have been writing down all that he says.



The Palazzo Sessa houses the Goethe Institute today. Can't you picture the Baron on the top floor with his grey parrot and a view of the shimmering sea?





Anton Dieffenbach, *Window in Sunlight*, 1856

" The pure window-view is a romantic innovation - neither landscape, nor interior, but a curious combination of both. It brings the confinement of an interior into the most immediate contrast with an immensity of space outside, outdoors, a space which need not be a landscape, but empty sky. It often places the beholder so close to the window that little more than an enclosing frame of darkness remains of the interior, but this is sufficient to maintain the suggestion of a separation between him and the world outside. He is actually put in the position of the 'figure at the window.' " *Lorenz Eitner*





Adolph Menzel, *View from a Window in Marienstrasse*, 1867

The real subject of this painting is not the rather ordinary view but the window itself, in a room which the painter remembered lovingly from memory. The panes reflect patches of sky and trees and a tiny sparrow sits on the window sill.

Some of you have described the way you watched birds in the pandemic, and the way they nested very near your doors and windows, and how you worried whether the eggs would hatch or a predator would take the baby chicks. So this sparrow seems realistic to me, a bird the artist had seen and watched over time.



John Singer Sargent, *Bedroom Window*, 1909

In 1909 Sargent exhibited eighty-six watercolors in New York City, eighty-three of

which were bought by the Brooklyn Museum. In his long career he painted more than 2000 watercolors.

He tended to focus on objects bathed in light and color rather than broad, panoramic views. This painting dazzles with sunlight and dappled light. The outside beckons but how could you leave this room. I think you are safe and cheered there.

"To live with Sargent's water-colors is to live with sunshine captured and held, with the luster of a bright and legible world, 'the refluent shade' and 'the Ambient ardors of the noon.' " *Evan Charteris*

"Sunshine captured and held"! I love that.



Andrew Wyeth, *Love in the Afternoon*, 1992

I was very excited to have engaged Dr. Joyce Hill Stoner, preeminent Wyeth family

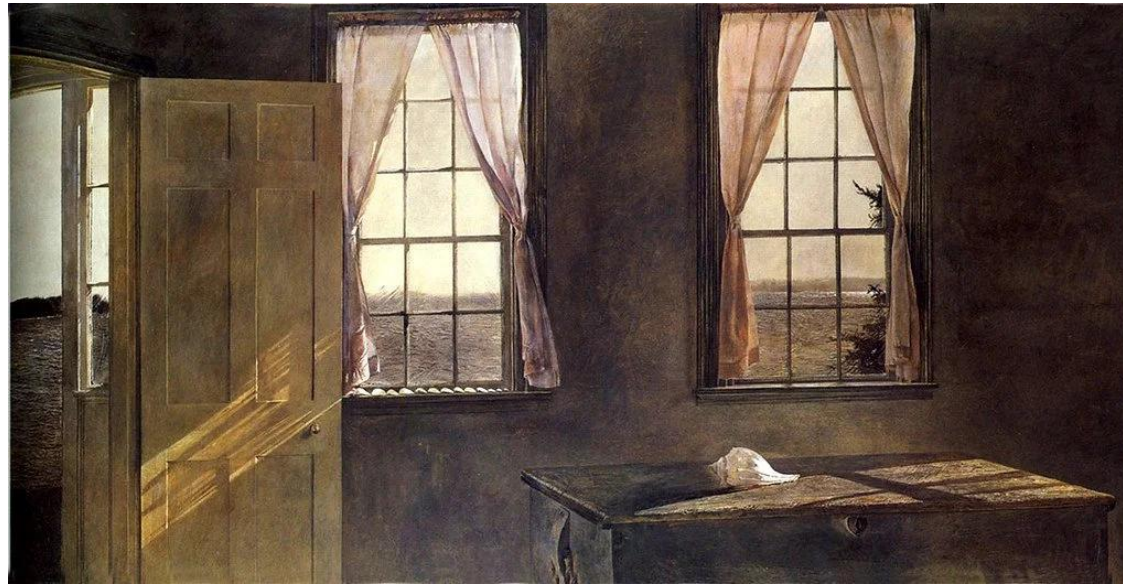
scholar, to speak to us last May. For 42 years, Dr. Stoner has been an art restoration consultant and art conservator for the Wyeth collection, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library. She directs one of three fine art graduate conservation programs in the country.

We exchanged phone calls and emails and I couldn't wait to meet her. We had to cancel and then Andrew Wyeth's wife Betsy died at age 98 on April 26, 2020. What an interesting lecture Dr. Stoner would have given! She is cited in [Betsy Wyeth's obituary](#), and she wants to give her lecture to us at the Bruce Museum when the virus is over.

I will leave the analysis to Joyce Stoner, but I wanted to include two Wyeth paintings of windows because no one summons up loss, solitude and unspoken emotion like Andrew Wyeth.

He died at age 91 in 2009, so when he painted this he was 74. Was it then a memory of "Love in the Afternoon"? He had painted Helga Testorf, a married mother of four, for some 15 years, for much of that time unbeknown to his wife. When his wife Betsy was asked what the Helga paintings were about, she simply responded "Love."

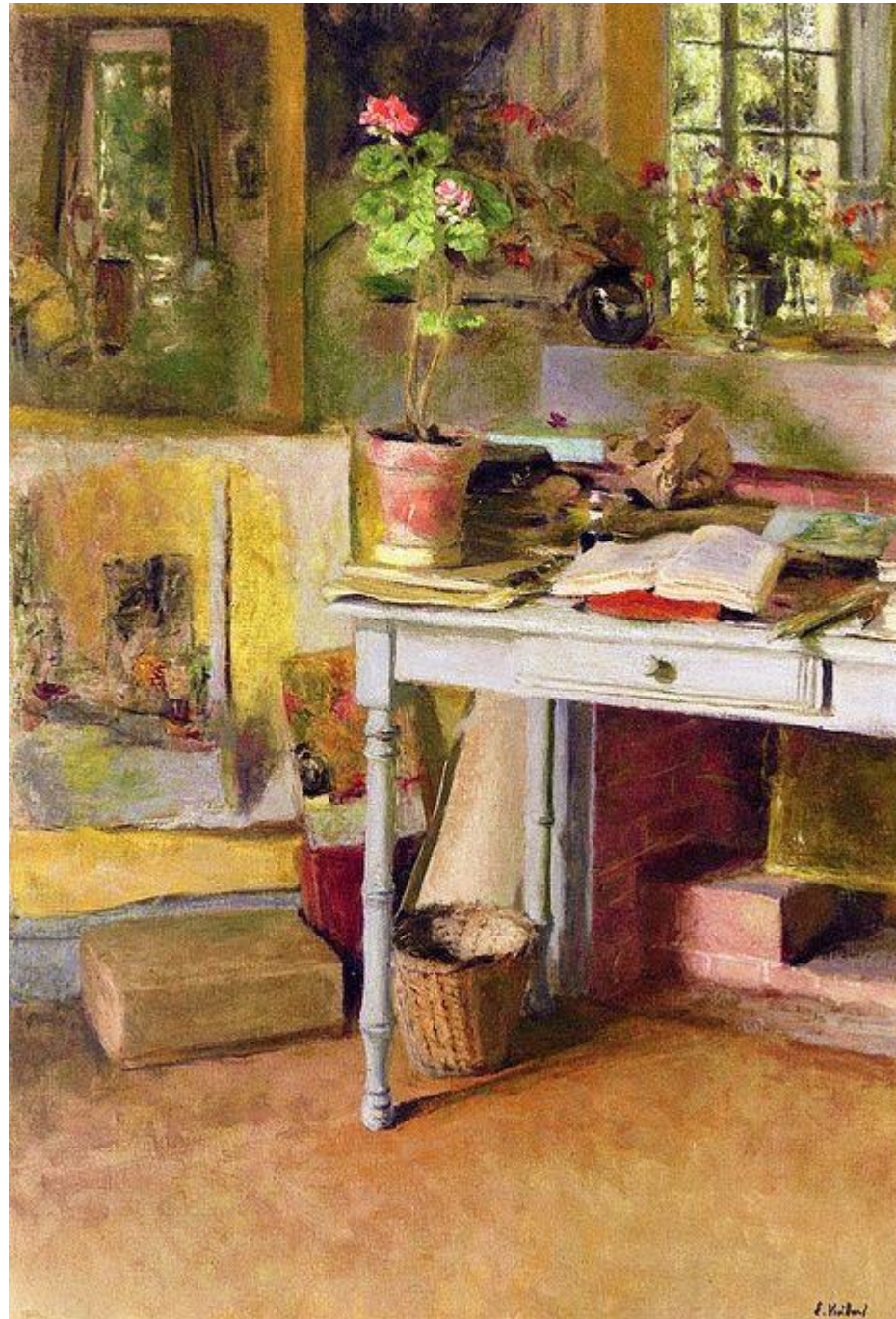




*Her Room* is a portrait of the artist's wife, Betsy, the “her” in *Her Room*. Set inside the living room of the Wyeths' Cushing, Maine home, Betsy's minimalist aesthetic is lovingly depicted alongside the carefully composed objects that she selected for their home. The seashells, arranged in ascending order, rest on a window sill beneath pink taffeta curtains Betsy sewed herself. The conch shell's mythical symbols allude to strength and fortitude.

The chest's simple lines and its heart-shaped keyhole escutcheon speak to a love and respect for the New England work ethic and the history of the Maine coast where she has spent summers for most of her life. The two windows, side by side, could be a metaphor for husband and wife - she met him when she was just 17. Their marriage spanned nearly seven decades.





Edouard Vuillard, *At Clayes, Geranium on a Blue Table in Front of the Window*, 1932

Edouard Vuillard, along with Pierre Bonnard, belonged to a group who saw themselves as prophets of a new art movement. The Nabis, who took as their name the Hebrew word for prophet, believed in the revelatory power of the artist's personal vision.

The principal belief of this 'new art' was that above all, art is decoration, and they wanted to convey the artist's emotions and sensations as well as the scene itself. Often described as 'intimist', Vuillard's evocative domestic scenes convey an expressive affection.

Château des Clayes, a fourteenth-century manor house owned by his closest friends, the Hessels, not far from the Palace of Versailles, was to be Vuillard's last country refuge and his major source of inspiration in the last twelve years of his life.

This work reflects his impressionistic attitude that there should be no division between the artist's studio and the life that exists around it. I enjoy the way our eye takes in the artist's canvases (one of which contains a window) on the yellow wall, the blue table with books and art materials, the geranium in its pot, the flowers in their vases and out the window to greenery and light.





Mary Cassatt, *Lilacs in a Window (Vase de Lilas a la Fenetre)* 1880-83

The dark aubergine vase of lilacs is placed on the sill of what might be a greenhouse with the window propped open. Given her love of gardens and flowers, it is not

surprising Cassatt would choose this pleasingly simple subject.

In early spring I put lilacs from my garden in a vase at the kitchen window while reflecting that no visitors would see and enjoy them. Our time of carefree entertaining with friends and our summer Camp Handal with family ended with COVID.

This lovely painting can be seen at the MET ~ when we go again.



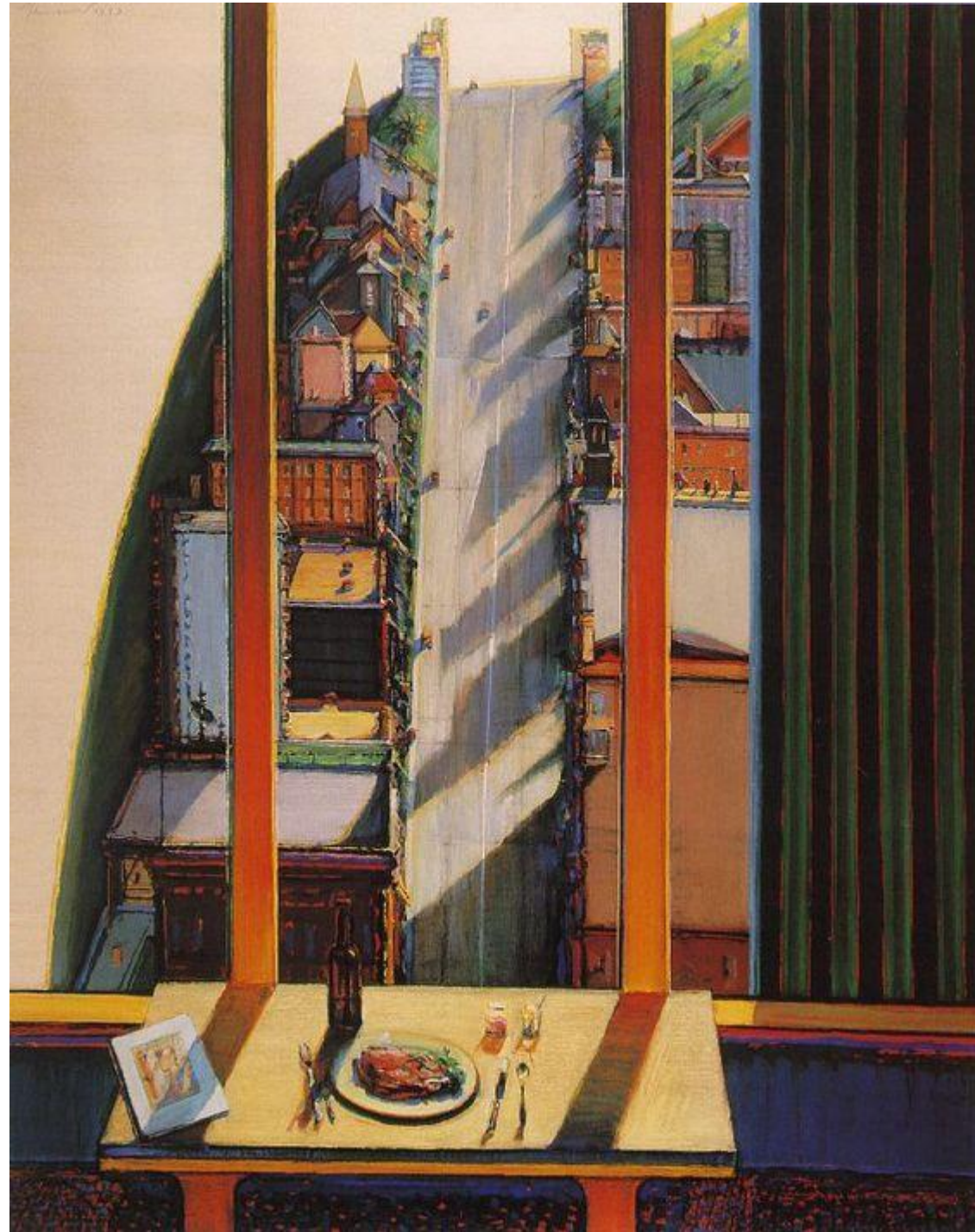
Henri Matisse, *Open Window, Collioure*, 1905

Matisse's *Open Window, Collioure* is an icon of early modernism. A small but explosive work, it is celebrated as one of the most important early paintings of the so-called fauve school (the 'wild beasts' who liberated color). The startling palette of saturated and



complementary colors shocked early viewers.

The open window (and the painting-window metaphor) would subsequently become a central motif in Matisse's oeuvre. The light-filled scene is vibrant and inviting. Blue-hulled boats float on pink waves below a sky banded with turquoise, pink, and periwinkle. Living on Greenwich Cove, we have looked out to boats, a happy sight, as is this joyful painting.



Wayne Thiebaud, *Apartment View*, 1993

I must include a work by Wayne Thiebaud as I am an admirer of his work and because he will turn 100 November 15, 2020. He still paints everyday.

He says he doesn't want to limit himself as he approaches 100. "I would like to feel that I can paint anything, any day, anytime I want to. Painting is one of the most difficult things to do we've ever tried," he adds. "We often think of it as sort of a hobby, but I think it's a very compelling part of what makes us and reminds us of our humanity."

This vertiginous view out of a window in a San Francisco apartment building conveys a precipitousness you feel in the pit of your stomach. The plunging drop and exaggerated rise of the steep hill and the falling off of the hillside to the left create a certain precarious tension.

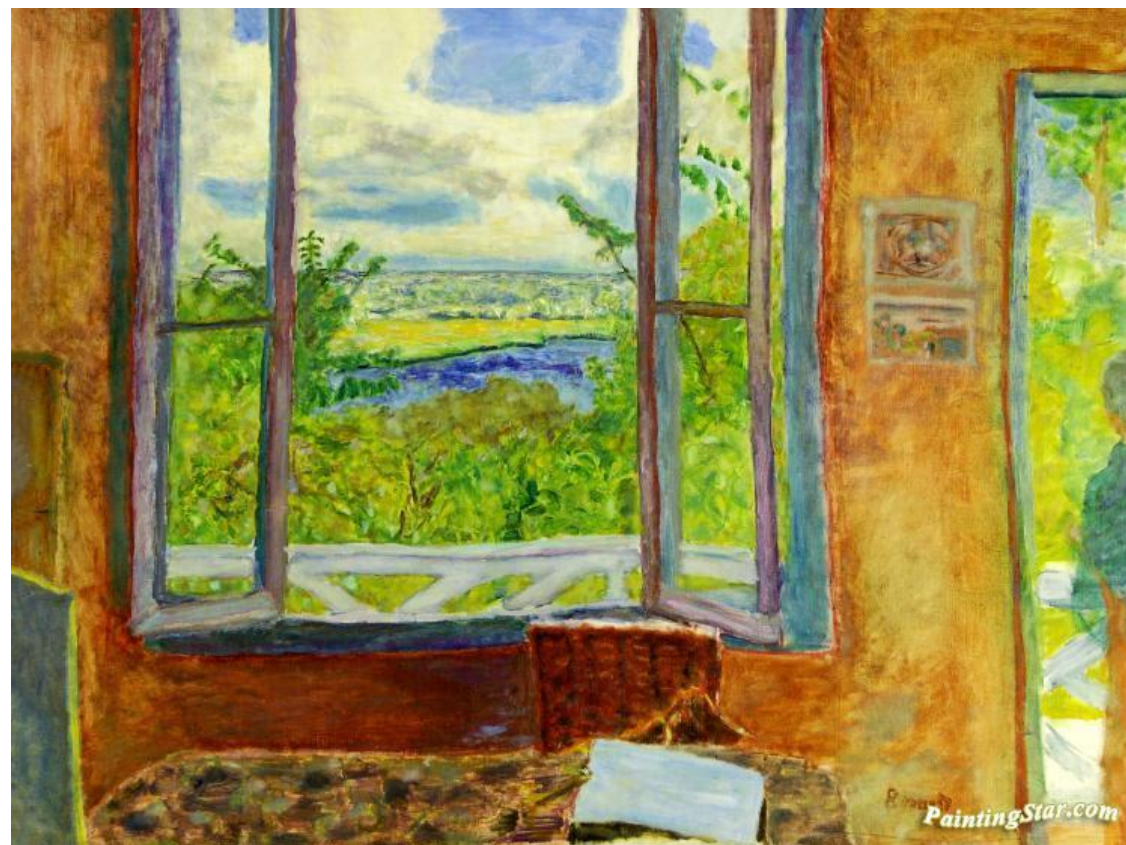


Yet the solo diner has set the table to enjoy this view, presumably without fear of vertigo. This diner will enjoy a nice dinner with a bottle of beer, perhaps, and a book to read afterwards. The sun casts long deep purple shadows from the buildings and the window grilles.

The rejection of conventional landscape perspective (the street does not narrow into the distance, but parallels the curtains) causes an enigmatic impression. The painting makes a dramatic statement about the steep slope, which dwarfs the observer and the tiny cars.



The viewer - who seems to be *you* - is on the edge of the earth, as it were. We could slide off! Yet we are carefully preparing to enjoy a meal with a view out the window.



Pierre Bonnard, *Open Window Toward the Seine*, 1912

I will end with the paintings of Bonnard because I have always been drawn to his paintings. Sometimes why you like a painting is a personal affinity you cannot explain. With Bonnard there are the warm colors and that beautiful light. Bonnard painted many windows! I had a hard time narrowing it down to four. His paintings are visions into another world and a means of bringing the outdoors inside.



Pierre Bonnard, *The Dining Room, Vernon*, 1925

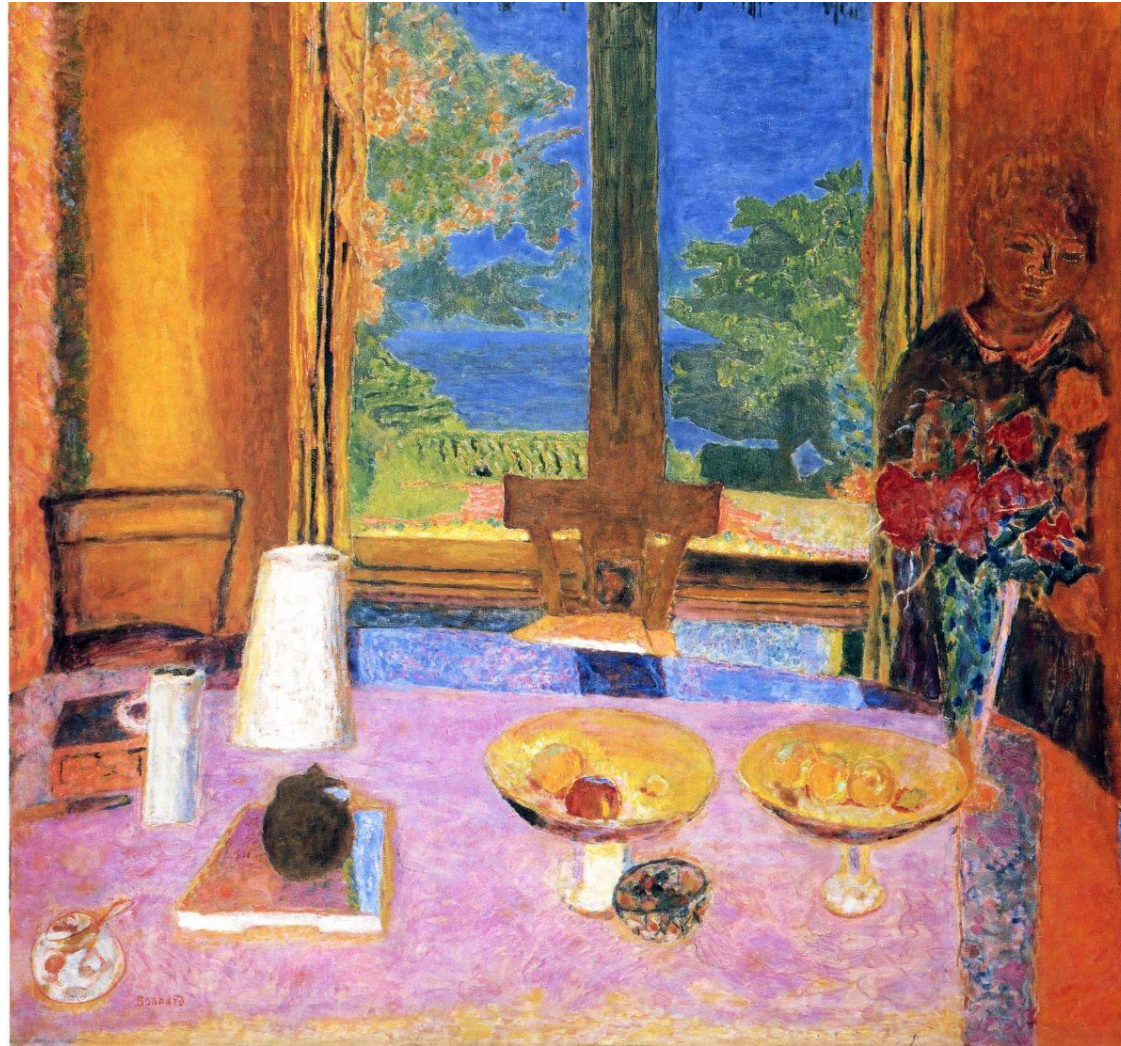
Curator of the Tate Modern's 2019 exhibition "Bonnard: The Color of Memory," Matthew Gale says Bonnard has been known as "the painter of happiness," but he is also "a restless, inventive artist with profound existential questions about time and space."

The more you examine a Bonnard painting, Mr. Gale says, "the more you see that he's raising questions around perception, around our place in the world, and to some degree, more profound existential questions about where we see ourselves in relation to time and space."

Take, for instance, *The Dining Room, Vernon*. "OK, we understand this painting—that's your first reaction," says Mr. Gale. "But the more you look at it, the more complicated



it becomes. How big is that table in relation to the room? Where are the people in relation to each other? What's happening with this strange reflection in the doorway of another person—is that the painter? Where are we, hovering in midair above the table?"



Pierre Bonnard, *Dinner on the Garden*, 1934 - 35

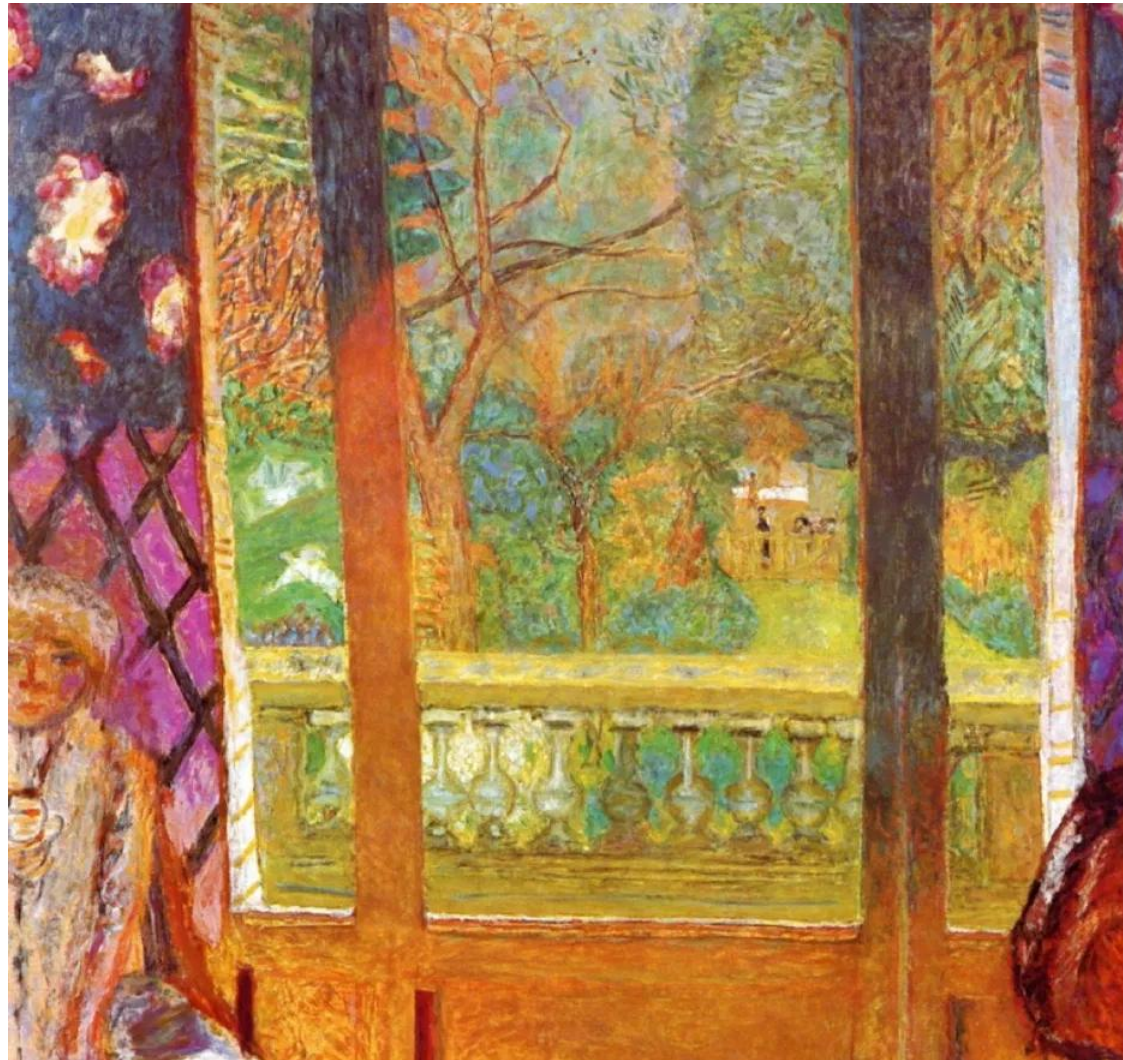
*Dinner on the Garden* uses rich and resplendent colors. Bands of horizontal and vertical hues guide the eye from the table top to the inviting world outside the window. The



complex layers of colors - lavenders, blues, oranges, reds are sumptuous. What is the ghost-like configuration of light to the left?

Bonnard often has spectral figures in the corners of the painting. His personal life involved two muses, but it is a long story which would require another newsletter!

There's a dialogue between indoors and outdoors, bursts of light and blurred hues, those who are present and those who are absent. His paintings have a hint of mystery.





Pierre Bonnard, *The Breakfast Room*, 1930  
(Dining Room Overlooking the Garden)

There is another factor in Bonnard's paintings which scholars call equiluminance. It is a way of blurring outlines and suggesting motion with color contrasts. The painting seems to vibrate with energy.

Bonnard's luminous light and color generate an ambiguous, haunting quality. He has come to be regarded as a colorist of extraordinary originality, and one who reshaped pictorial space as a vehicle for psychologically complex emotional states.



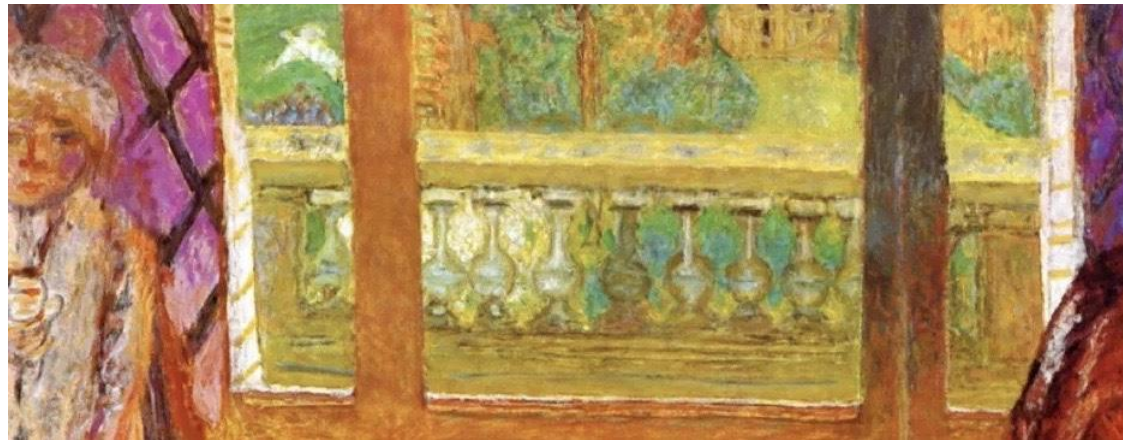


When I pondered the Bonnard paintings, I found them an evocative expression for a pandemic. Even with the fear of COVID, we could look to nature. Despite what threats exist in the outer world, inside meals go on, food is prepared, tables are set.

Outside the window may have beauty, yet danger as well. Thoughts of loneliness and isolation may pass over our countenance even as we go on with the rituals of living.

During the pandemic I thought often of members of my family, now gone, and wondered what they would say about all that was happening.

The quarantine made time for reflections on the past and on absent loved ones. They were in my home as spirit-figures hover in Bonnard's paintings.



"The window is like a threshold and at the same time a barrier. Through it, nature, the world, the active life beckon..." writes Lorenz Eitner. "This juxtaposition of the very close and the far-away adds a peculiar tension to the sense of distance, more poignant than could be achieved in pure landscape."

"Poignant" is a key word here, as life seen outside our windows during the pandemic has taken on a touching intensity, whether it is watching birds build a nest, flowers unfold or clouds drift across the sky.



I hope you have enjoyed pondering how the artist can pour many emotions into these window paintings - longing, yearning, wonder, contemplation, reverence, appreciation, mystery, memory and hope.



The GDAS Program Committee headed by Betty Johnson has put together an extraordinary schedule of speakers for this year. The new Board under the direction of President Cyndy Anderson and First Vice President Nancy Cooper has dedicated a lot of time preparing for Zoom presentations with the help of Administrator Sally Saunders. Organizations that resist digital change in this time may not survive, and we look forward to GDAS continuing for a long time!

I want to thank GDAS and the Board for the beautiful Simon Pearce Revere Bowl which Cyndy presented to me, and I gave her the presidential gavel, in a social distancing tête-à-tête in her garden. This classic and timeless bowl will always remind me of our special experiences together. I am honored to be asked by the Board to continue this newsletter as it is my pleasure to give to a society which means so much to me.

Thank you for supporting GDAS as we adapt and accommodate until times will normalize. I join our new board in looking forward to more adventures in art with you through Zoom - our "window" until we meet again.

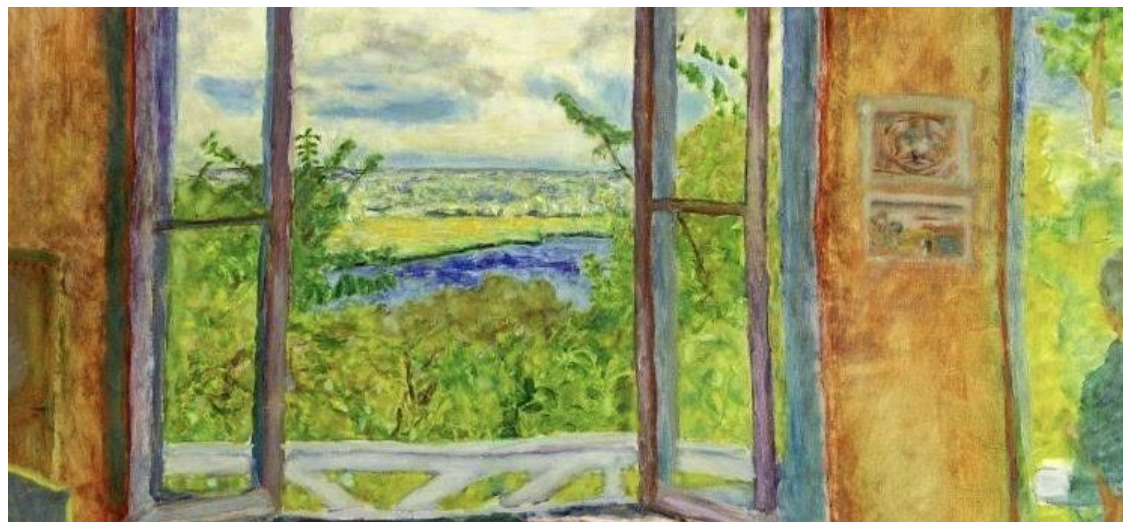
Karen Handal

*Musings on the Decorative Arts*

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Greenwich Decorative Arts Society

September, 2020



*Thank you*

~ Lorenz Eitner, "The Open Window and The Storm-Tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism"

~ Sabine Rewald, *Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century*, MET Exhibition

~ Kate Brown, "A Long Lost Cupid Is Revealed Under One of Vermeer's Greatest Paintings," Art World

~ Andrew Wyeth: *Her Room Exhibition*, Farnsworth Art Museum

~ James Joyce, *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*

~ Evan Charteris, *John Sargent*

~ Lane Florsheim, "The Wisdom of Wayne Thiebaud," Wall Street Journal

~ Cody Delistraty, "You'll Never Know Yourself: Bonnard and the Color of Memory"

~ MET Associate Curator Dita Amory: "Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors "-  
Curatorial Talk

~ Susan Delson, "An Artist in Time and Space: Pierre Bonnard, The Color of Memory  
at the Tate" Wall Street Journal

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