The Blush of the World: Bonnard’s Nudes and the Disembodied Look

Peter de Bolla is Professor of Cultural History and Aesthetics at the University of Cambridge where he took both his BA and doctorate.

He taught for five years in the English Department at the University of Geneva before returning to Cambridge in 1986.


He is an occasional contributor to radio and the London Review of Books.

Image: Pierre Bonnard, The Red Checkered Tablecloth or The Dog’s Lunch, 1910, oil on canvas, Private Collection

‘The Blush of the World: Bonnard’s Nudes and the Disembodied Look’ sets out to provide a framework within which one might begin to look at Bonnard’s canvasses depicting his wife, Marthe, in the rituals of washing and bathing.

It suggests that the most common way of understanding Bonnard’s depiction of his wife’s face – in ‘contre jour’ or shadow – fails to attend to something more obviously somatic: the blush.

Peter will argue that Bonnard was deeply immersed in a looking technique that was implicated in the world. In effect the sighted viewer is placed in a reciprocal optical relationship with the seen object.

When one begins to look with Bonnard the world feels the presence and pressure of our looking and Bonnard’s depictions ask us to acknowledge that.

This lecture is part of a longer project on Bonnard and in the time for discussion and conversation Peter hope to introduce some of its other themes and interests. In particular to be able to show some of what he calls ‘Bonnard’s ghosts’, the effects of pentimenti in Bonnard’s painting practice which Peter thinks comprise one of the most profound acts of looking and painting in the history of Western art.

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Details:
Date: Wednesday 7 August, 2013
Time: 6pm for welcome drinks
Lecture begins at 6.30pm
Venue: Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts Building
Ground floor, room G22
(at rear of the Cullity Gallery)
RSVP by Friday 2 August 2013 via admin-alva@uwa.edu.au
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