

DIANE DE POLIGNAC

# BERNARD BUFFET (1928-1999)

Bernard Buffet is one of the most important Post-War figurative painters. Early genius, Bernard Buffet painted ceaselessly. His colossal body of work embraces all major pictorial themes, from History paintings to trivial topics.



Bernard Buffet at Constant's, rue de Seine in 1948.  
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## BIOGRAPHY

### BERNARD BUFFET: AN EARLY PAINTER'S YOUTH AND TRAINING

Bernard Buffet was born on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1928 in Paris. In 1943 at just 15 years old – an exceptional case – he entered the Paris École Nationale des Beaux-Arts, where he stayed for three years. A young prodigy, the artist Bernard Buffet exhibited for the first time in 1946: at the Salon des Moins de Trente Ans (Salon for the under thirty), organized in the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He was just 18 years old.

### THE DAZZLING RECOGNITION OF THE YOUNG PAINTER BERNARD BUFFET

From the following year, exhibitions followed at a fast pace: Bernard Buffet participated in the Salon des Indépendants (1947 and 1948), at the Librairie des Impressions d'Art (1947), again at the Salon des Moins de Trente ans (1947), at the Salon d'Automne and at the Salon de Mai (1948). In 1947, the Musée National d'Art Moderne de Paris (now known as the Pompidou Centre) bought one of his paintings, *Nature-morte au poulet* (Still Life with Chicken); he was barely twenty years old. In 1948, Emmanuel David of the Galerie Drouant-David, offered him an exclusive contract. The exclusivity was later shared with Maurice Garnier. The same year, the painter Bernard Buffet won the prestigious Prix Critique of the Galerie Saint-Placide, jointly with the painter Bernard Lorjou. In February 1949, his first solo exhibition was held at the Galerie Drouant-David.

From 1950 to 1958, the artist painter Bernard Buffet was in an intimate relationship with Pierre Bergé. At that time, and thanks to his friend Jean Giono, he had a cabin in Manosque, and then moved to Nansé in the same region, where he lived in an old barn and painted three large paintings *Horreur de la guerre* (Horror of War) (1954).

During the 1950s, Bernard Buffet created several drypoint illustrations: the *Les chants de Maldoror* by the Comte de Lautréamont (1952), *Recherche de la Pureté* by Jean Giono (1953) and on this occasion, Louis Aragon published *Lettres Françaises* an article "Le paysage a 4 siècles et Bernard Buffet 24 ans" (Landscape is 4 centuries old, Bernard Buffet, 24 years old). Buffet also provided drypoint illustrations for Jean Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine* (1957).

From 1952, the painter Bernard Buffet exhibited annually at the Galerie Drouant-David and with Maurice Garnier at the Galerie Visconti, choosing a theme each year. From 1957, these thematic shows were concentrated at the Galerie David et Garnier – the two dealers were partners for 11 years, and then from 1968, he was with the Galerie Maurice Garnier. A large number of subjects were

chosen, such as *Les Nus* (Nudes) (1954 and 1980) *Horreur de la guerre* (Horror of War) (1955), *Le Cirque* (The Circus) (1956), *Paysages de Paris* (Landscapes of Paris) (1957), *New York* (1959), *Portrait d'Annabel* (Portraits of Annabel) (1961), *Ecorchés* (Skinned) (1965), *La Corrida* (1967), *Les Plages* (Beaches) (1968), *Les Folles* (The Mad Women) (1971), *Le Japon* (Japan) (1981), *Les Clowns Musiciens* (Clown Musicians) (1992), *Mes Singes* (My Monkeys) (1999)...

Bernard Buffet exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1952 and again in 1956, when a room was devoted to him at the French pavilion.

In 1955, the painter came first in the referendum organized by the magazine *Connaissance des Arts* to designate the ten best post-war painters.

In 1958, a first retrospective about the painter Bernard Buffet's work was held at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, he married Annabel Schwob, a singer, actress and writer in Ramatuelle, who then became Annabel Buffet. They adopted three children: Virginie, Danielle and Nicolas Buffet.

The artist Bernard Buffet also worked in the dramatic arts, and painted models for stage sets and costumes for several ballets: *La Chambre* (The Bedroom) in 1955 (lyrics by Georges Simenon, music by Georges Auric) for the Ballets de Paris Roland Petit, *Le Rendez-vous manqué* in 1958 (lyrics by Françoise Sagan, directed by Roger Vadim), *Patron* in 1959 (lyrics by Marcel Aymé, music by Guy Béart) again for the Ballets Roland Petit and *Carmen* in 1962 (music by Georges Bizet, directed by Louis Ducreux) for the Opéra de Marseille. Later, in 1967, for the Opéra de Paris, he painted a model of the stage curtain, the sets and costumes for *Le grand cirque* (The Great Circus) (music by Aram Khachaturian, choreography by Serge Lifar), and models for the sets and costumes for *Istar* (music by Vincent d'Indy, choreography by Serge Lifar).

In his home at Château l'Arc near Aix-en-Provence, Bernard Buffet made a group of paintings on the Life of Christ for the decoration of the castle's chapel in 1961. Ten years later, asked to do so by Monseigneur Pasquale Macchi, the secretary to Pope Paul VI, Bernard Buffet will donate these paintings to the Vatican Museum.

In 1962, he was given the award of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. The same year, he created 16 etchings for an illustrated book of Charles Baudelaire's poem *Saint-Cast, souvenirs d'enfance* (Saint-Cast, Childhood memories).

### BERNARD BUFFET'S INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The following year, a retrospective exhibition of Bernard Buffet's work was held in Japan, at the Museum of Modern Art of Tokyo and the Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto.

During the 1960s-1970s, the artist continued to create illustrations: india ink drawings for *Toxique* by Françoise Sagan (1964), colour lithographs for *Herbier* by Louise de Vilmorin (1966), and created new illustrated books: *Mon Cirque* with 44 colour lithograph illustrations (1968), *Jeux de Dames*, with twenty lithographs and poems by Verlaine, Rimbaud and Baudelaire (1970), and *L'Enfer de Dante*, with eleven drypoint engravings (1976).

During the 1970s, Bernard Buffet received many honours: he was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1971, which was presented to him by Maurice Druon. In 1973, the Bernard Buffet Museum, entirely devoted to the painter's work, was opened at Surugadaira in Japan, founded by M. Kiichiro Okano, a banker and great connoisseur of Bernard Buffet's work. In 1974, he was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts; he was barely 45 years old.

At the end of the 1980s, he moved to his domain at La Baume near Tourtour in Provence.

Major retrospectives regarding Bernard Buffet's work were held abroad during the 1990s: in Russia at the Pushkin Museum and the Hermitage in 1991, in Germany at the Documenta-Halle in Kassel in 1994, in Japan with a travelling retrospective (Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Akita, Hakodate and Obihiro) in 1995.

Suffering from Parkinson's Disease, no longer able to paint, the artist Bernard Buffet committed suicide on 4th October 1999 at the dawn of the new millennium.

In February 2000, the Galerie Maurice Garnier, exhibited the final theme of Bernard Buffet's work: La Mort (Death).

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Translation: Jane Mac Avock



Bernard and Annabel Buffet at the Maurice Garnier gallery during the exhibition of the New York series. Paris, 1959.

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## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Annecy, Musée-Château  
Clermont-Ferrand, Musée d'art Roger-Quilliot  
Grenoble, Musée de Grenoble  
Higashino, Musée Bernard Buffet  
Marseille, Musée Cantini  
Nantes, Musée d'arts  
Paris, Centre national des arts plastiques  
Paris, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou  
Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris  
Rennes, Musée des beaux-arts  
Saint-Étienne, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain  
Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Musée Estrine  
Villeneuve-d'Ascq, LaM

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

*Paintings by Bernard Buffet*, Los Angeles County Museum, 1955  
Niveau Gallery, New York, 1957  
*Cent tableaux de 1944 à 1958 par Bernard Buffet* (Hundred paintings from 1944 to 1958 by Bernard Buffet), Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1958  
*Les Voyages fantastiques de Cyrano de Bergerac* (The Fantastic Journeys of Cyrano de Bergerac), Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, 1958  
*Bernard Buffet*, Institut français, Berlin, 1958  
*Bernard Buffet*, National Museum of modern Art of Tokyo, National Museum of modern Art of Kyoto, 1963  
*Bernard Buffet, Radierungen* (Etchings), Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1968  
*Bernard Buffet*, Musée Unterlinden, Colmar, 1969  
Sapporo Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, 1978  
*Bernard Buffet*, Musée postal, Paris, 1978  
Travelling retrospective of lithographed works in Japan, 1980  
Pouchkine Museum, Moscow; Ermitage Museum, St. Petersburg., 1991  
*Bonjour Monsieur Buffet !*, Musée Gustave Courbet, Ornans, 1993  
*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea), Musée départemental de l'Oise, Beauvais, 1993  
*Bernard Buffet*, Château de Chenonceau, 1993  
*Bernard Buffet retrospective*, Documenta-Halle, Kassel, 1994  
*Bernard Buffet*, Odakyu Museum of Art, Tokyo; Takashimaya Museum of art, Kyoto ; Nara Sogo Museum, Nara ; Akita Senshu City Museum, Akita ; Hakodate Public Museum, Hokkaido ; Obihiro, Public Museum, Hokkaido, 1995  
Jeanne d'Arc, Palais de Justice, Rouen, 1997  
*Bernard Buffet*, Palais Bénédicte, Fécamp, 1998  
*Sogo Museum*, Yokohama, 2000  
*Bernard Buffet*, Musée Paul Valéry, Sète, 2003  
*Bernard Buffet : een omstreden oeuvre*, Gemeentemuseum, La Haye, 2006  
*Bernard Buffet et la Bretagne*, Musée département breton, Quimper, 2007  
*Bernard Buffet Maler*, MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, 2008

*Bernard Buffet*, Centre de la Vieille Charité, Marseille, 2009  
*Bernard Buffet et Annabel*, Sogo Museum of Art in Yokohama, 2009  
*Bernard Buffet*, Meguro Museum, Tokyo, 2010  
*Post 1958 : une symphonie de couleur en plus* (Post 1958: a symphony of colour in addition), Musée du Touquet-Paris-Plage, Le Touquet, 2014  
Government Exhibition Hall, Andorra, 2014  
*Bernard Buffet*, Hydar Aliyev Center, Bakou, 2014-2015  
*Bernard Buffet Rétrospective*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 2016-2017  
*Bernard Buffet, Intimement*, Musée de Montmartre, Paris, 2016-2017  
*Bernard Buffet / Roger Dutilleul : A travers l'œil d'un collectionneur* (Bernard Buffet / Roger Dutilleul: Through a collector's eye), Galerie Diane de Polignac, Paris, 2017  
*Bernard Buffet Aujourd'hui (Bernard Buffet Today)*, Galerie Diane de Polignac, Paris, 2020

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Jean Giono, *Bernard Buffet*, Paris, Éditions Fernand Hazan, 1956  
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Charles Sorlier, *Bernard Buffet lithographe I*, Paris, Éditions Michèle Trinckvel, 1979  
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Georges Durand, *La divine comédie de Bernard Buffet*, Paris, Éditions Desclée de Brouwer, 1986  
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Stéphane Laurent, *Bernard Buffet, le peintre crucifié*, biography, Paris, Éditions Michalon, 2000  
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Annabel Buffet and Jean-Claude Lamy, *Bernard Buffet, secrets d'atelier*, texts, photographs by Luc Fournol and Benjamin Auger, Paris, Éditions Flammarion, 2004



Lydia Harambourg, *Bernard Buffet et la Bretagne*, Quimper, Éditions Palantines, 2006

Henry Perier, *Bernard Buffet et la Provence*, Quimper, Éditions Palantines, 2007

Brigitte Camus, *Buffet ou la psychanalyse en signature*, Paris, Éditions de l'Épure, 2007

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Jean-Clause Lamy, *Bernard Buffet, le Samourai*, biography, Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, 2008

John Sillevs, *Bernard Buffet*, monograph, Quimper, Éditions Palantines, 2008

Lydia Harambourg, *Bernard Buffet*, Fonds de dotation Bernard Buffet, Quimper, Éditions Palantines, Quimper, 2013

*Bernard Buffet*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris from 14 October 2016 to 26 February 2017, Paris, Éditions Paris Musées, Paris, 2016

*Bernard Buffet, Intimement*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Musée de Montmartre-Jardins Renoir from 18 October 2016 to 5 March 2017, Paris, Somogy éditions d'art, Paris, 2016



Bernard Buffet works on his series *The French Revolution*, Villiers-le-Mahieu, 1977.

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