

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts  
University of Birmingham

**Maman. Vuillard & Madame Vuillard.**

Édouard Vuillard painted his mother more than 500 times throughout his career. Striving to establish himself among the French avant-garde, Vuillard lived and worked in modest apartments shared with his mother and other members of their family in Paris. He lovingly portrayed Madame Vuillard as carer, housewife and businesswoman, running a dress-making business from her dining room. Small wonder Vuillard is quoted as having said: '*Ma Maman, c'est ma muse*'.

Marking the 150th anniversary of the artist's birth in 1868, this exhibition – the first ever to explore this subject – centres on the first decade of Vuillard's career, when his small-scale, highly appealing work, with its domestic subject matter, prompted one critic to dub him an 'intimist'. It features immensely attractive paintings, pastels, prints and photographs lent by collections in Britain and Europe, including the National Galleries of Scotland, Tate, the British Museum, the Archives Vuillard, the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée National Picasso, Paris.

from: The Barber Institute of Fine Arts (2018) *What's On September - December 2018*

**Vuillard, Edouard** (1868–1940)  
French painter, one of the founders of the \*Nabis. Deeply attached to his widowed

mother and at home amid her couture work (he never married, but formed attachments to society ladies who were also his patrons), Vuillard developed a subtle art of patterns and interacting colours that can 'embody the way we live now, that can legitimize our given, everyday world, however tawdry, as the material of art' (Timothy Hyman). He studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and then in the Académie Julian in Paris. In the early 1890s he produced large decorative panels for the apartments of well-to-do friends and was involved, with them, in the exhibitions and the journal, initiated in 1891, *La Revue Blanche*, for which he also produced posters. Those panels were mostly outdoor scenes; his typical paintings are small and domestic: keenly observed, rigorously designed interiors, noted in soft touches of \*oil, \*tempera and/or \*pastel to form a visual tapestry in which people coexist visually with furnishings and other objects. For a time he accepted many commissions for portraits, adopting some of the methods of \*Impressionism, but his finest and most intense works are those in which he realized, on canvas or card, a motif or scene that mattered to him personally in terms of colour and flat design.

from (for example) *In Bed* (1891; Paris, Pompidou) to himself seen in a mirror, *The Artist with Spectacles* (1932). He began to exhibit in 1891 with the Nabis; in 1938 a comprehensive retrospective was organized with his help and shown at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. He was known internationally from around 1900 for his lithographs and etchings, some of them done for magazines and thus widely disseminated. His recognition as one of the masters of modern painting is much more recent.

from: Langmuir, e. & Lyon, N. (2000) *The Yale Dictionary of Art & Artists*

The Nabis (meaning 'prophets' in Hebrew), a secret brotherhood of Paris art students unhappy with academic conventions, keenly followed Synthetism, inspired by its bold, simplified aesthetic. Like Gauguin and Bernard, the Nabis took influence from the pared-down styles of Japanese prints and medieval stained glass. The most productive members were Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard; the latter two are the best known today, although their work in the 20th century was to depart from Synthetist art and draw more and more from domestic life.

from: Phillips, S. (2012) ... *isms. Understanding Modern Art.*

**Vuillard: Maman**  
**Barber Institute, Birmingham,**  
**to 20 Jan**

The art of Edouard Vuillard is a refined study of middle-class pleasures in Paris at the dawn of the 20th century. His sensitive eye for everyday life in parks and drawing rooms evokes the same civilised world that Proust wrote about. This exhibition reveals his lifelong dedication to his mother. She supported his artistic ambitions and he portrayed her repeatedly. An unusual feminist take on art history.

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