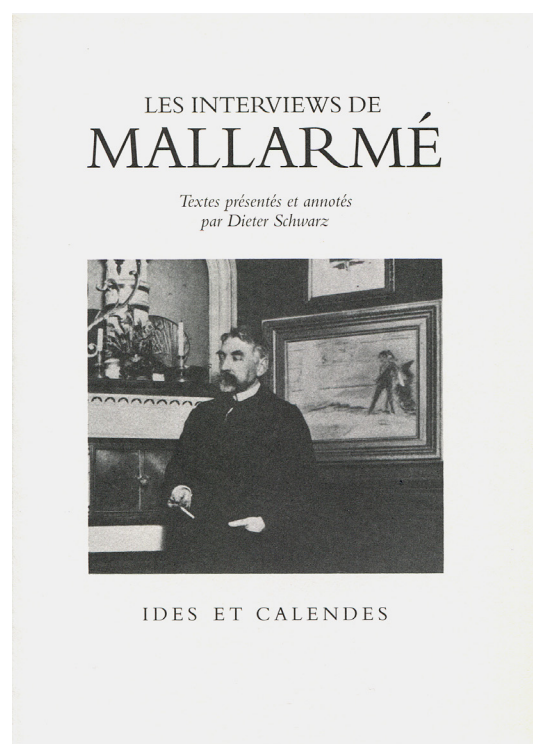


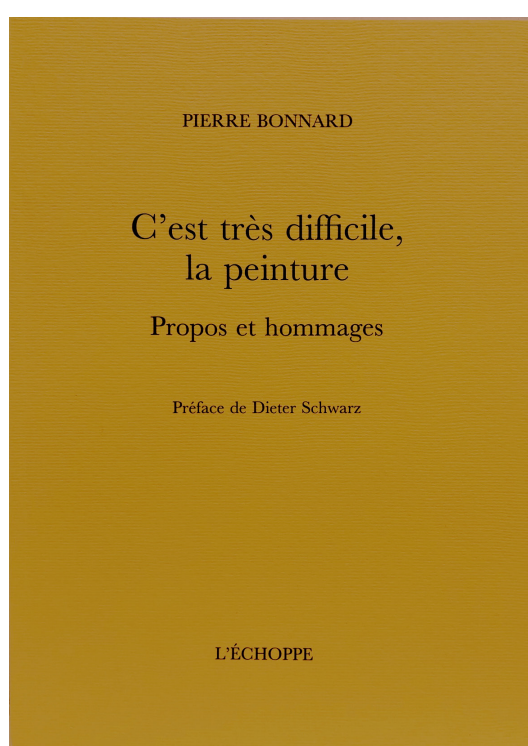
On revient toujours à ses premières amours

In October 1972 I met Marcel Broodthaers on a trip to the Rhineland and had two long conversations with him. I remember that he advised me to read Mallarmé – that will enable you to comprehend everything, he said. I took him seriously, spent a lot of time to this end, and one result was a compilation of Mallarmé's interviews with a commentary. The book was published by Éditions Ides et Calendes, Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in 1995. The interview as a medium was a journalistic innovation of Mallarmé's epoch; the press discovered literature and fine art in the 1890s and included



these genres in current affairs. For the first time, poets and artists were asked about aesthetic and political issues and were obviously fascinated at being able to participate in the developments of their times. The literature and arts pages were relegated to news of the day. As Mallarmé put it ironically, "nul n'échappe décidément au journalisme" ("no one can really escape journalism"). As yet there were no sound recordings, so every purportedly spoken word had to be written down. Broodthaers must certainly have been aware of this when in 1974 he wrote the interview for the catalogue of his retrospective in Brussels with all the questions and answers formulated by himself.

When I took over the directorship of Kunstmuseum Winterthur in 1990 Mallarmé proved essential for understanding the works of Bonnard and Vuillard in the collection; likewise to grasp Braque, Arp and Mondrian. In 2004 the Museum presented a Bonnard exhibition with works from Swiss collections. In the catalogue I published the interviews and conversations with the painter that had appeared in journals during his lifetime – little known but valuable testimonies. Later I suggested to Patrice Cotensin in Paris that his publishing house L'Échoppe print the original French texts. He was immediately taken with the idea, but a series of practical problems delayed publication. In 2017 we took up this project again, adding some more recently discovered texts; I provided a preface and now the book has been published as "Pierre Bonnard: C'est très difficile, la peinture" (ISBN 978-2-84068-314-8).



Bonnard hardly ever expressed himself in writing. So the texts gathered together in this book are almost always by journalists and art critics written for the journals that commissioned them, mainly in the 1930s and 1940s. Clearly, there was a growing awareness at the time that this painter, whose work did not fit neatly into any common categories and appeared to some to be divorced from his age, was still hard at work. Various writers set off to Le Cannet, ascended the steps up to the Villa "Le Bosquet" and visited Bonnard, who was leading a secluded life in his studio. The reports are much the same: they describe his modest, indeed frugal wartime lifestyle, given that there was a shortage of everything, including palettes and paint – and the artist's unwavering silence. If he did speak, then it was not about the past, but about his daily painterly practice and about how he never managed to complete a picture without weaknesses and leaving areas empty. Not all visitors realised that Bonnard was not a bland post-Impressionist, rendering the world through the charm of colour, but that he constructed his pictures without a fixed system of rules, without any kind of certainty, comparable perhaps only to Matisse. An approach that can be compared with Mallarmé's roll of the dice into the void. What Bonnard was speaking to his visitors about was not a subjective problem, it was the problem of painting in its essence – "Basically I always work on things that haven't worked, because they throw up questions that I find intriguing."

Dieter Schwarz

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