

The Theory of Line

Frank Zupet



OPERA GALLERY

Exhibition September 11 - 30, 2015

Mon. - Sat. 11 am - 8 pm

Sun. & Public Holiday 11.30 am - 5.30 pm





Buffet

Preface

An inimitable artist, Bernard Buffet is one of those rare creators who held steadfast to his own style throughout the changing, and often antagonistic, landscape of postwar painting. Fiercely impactful and remarkably timeless, Buffet's signature style of dry, straight lines indicated a psychological and symbolic declaration against the obscurity of abstraction. Communicating a sense of stability in the wake of widespread ambiguity, Buffet's strength of line suggested a permanence, reliability and safety craved by the postwar society that was consciously avoided by producers of the abstract.

As one of the largest supporters and promoters of Bernard Buffet's works in Asia, Opera Gallery is pleased once again to showcase a new selection from the artist's extensive oeuvre. A growing global interest in Buffet's work continues to shed light on the artist's illustrious five-decade career, revealing a diversity, transformation and drama that resonates as much today as it did fifty years ago. It is our hope that with continued discovery through exhibition and exposure we can carry on elevating this artist to the status he deserves as one of Europe's most fascinating, challenging and humanist postwar artists.

Gilles Dyan
Founder and Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

Shirley Yablonsky
Director
Opera Gallery Hong Kong

Buffet

“Rusty silence and poetry. There I saw accusation of and provocation against the devastated postwar French society. His paintings instilled a ray of hope in the void and stupor oppressing our generation after the defeat. France, a country which repeatedly had been a battlefield, which suffered the Occupation, and where fellow citizens killed each other. I was awed by the fact that a young genius with such sensibility and ability had been born in the apocalyptic context of World War II. His art undoubtedly was a new dawn, which overcame the melancholy in my mind.”

Kiichiro Okano, collector and inaugurator of the Bernard Buffet Museum in Surugadaira, Japan in 1973, describing the first time he saw Buffet's work.

Few artists in history are as polarizing as Bernard Buffet, the eminent young painter whose startling early success was marred by the derision of the French elite in the late 1950s and until his death in 1999. Touted as a genius by his admirers and a poser by his denigrators, Buffet's early cult status as the “young millionaire painter” in 1956 may have been the very thing that turned the art elite against him. Despised by Picasso, who resented his rival's meteoric rise to fame, and glaringly opposed to the agenda of cultural figures such as André Malraux, one of the most influential art critics at the time, a close friend (and advisee) of Picasso, and the first Minister of Culture from 1959, Buffet's stark realism and unapologetic presence challenged the calculated pretension of postwar France and cast him into the purgatory of kitsch.

Ironically, André Malraux theories argued that art lives on through a process of metamorphosis and resuscitation, stipulating that a work would fall into obscurity in order to be resurrected and transformed into meaning. “In a world in which everything is subject to the passing of time”, Malraux had declared in a television appearance in 1975, “art alone is both subject to time and yet victorious over it.” Indeed today, removed from the critical eye of postwar France, Buffet's work is in a position to be judged by fresh eyes within a different cultural context; one that embraces diversity and seeks comparisons between historical movements in order to better understand representations of a historical experience. The postwar Western world was damaged and fragmented, an ambiguity that could be pacified somewhat by delineating fixed ideas of good versus bad forms of artistic expression. Buffet's disturbing projections and tedious misery was too much to stomach for many of the art critics of the 1950s, who viewed his serial productivity and celebrity status with contempt, disdain, and perhaps a tinge of guarded envy. Buffet sold well and lived ostentatiously. At twenty he was awarded the “Prix de la Critique”, the Critics Award, which gained him immediate popularity. By thirty he had amassed a fortune and acquired a lover in Pierre Bergé, the man who would later become the life and business partner of fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent - a relationship that gained Buffet significant support from the influential homosexual cultural elite. A spat

with Bergé over his burgeoning friendship with Saint Laurent ended the relationship, and when Buffet took up with Annabel Schwob, the charming nightclub singer who would soon after become his wife and lifelong muse, he promptly lost the opportunity for a potential reconciliation with the art establishment as well as the support from several powerful gay figures in the art world.

In December 1949, when Buffet was 19, he held his first solo exhibition at the gallery-bookshop Impression d'Art in Paris. In the catalogue preface, his friend and liberal art critic Pierre Descargues argued that Buffet's portrayal of a bleak and impoverished world stripped his art of pretense, painting only “what he sees, what industry has produced to that we can eat, drink, have light, sleep, exist: a gas ring, jugs, coffee pots, salad shakers, bottles”. Scarcely furnished backgrounds and sullen characters confronted the viewer with a cold hostility, mirroring a bitter postwar disillusionment that pervaded Europe at the time. As opposed to the lyrical abstractionists, who sought to eradicate the figure in favour of pure emotional expression, Buffet, Descargues and their like-minded supporters saw realism as a political tool that returned art to the people through a tone of truth, a stark contrast to the deeply individualized obscurity of the abstract, whom they believed exacerbated the dehumanization of war.

Buffet's adherence to the realist tradition contradicted the seduction of abstraction. Angular atmospheres of anguish, monochromatic compositions and an emptiness glowering through an eradication of depth and volume asserted him as an entirely original stylist, an artist who dared to address and communicate the perils of humankind through his canvas. Buffet's depictions of the bleak, impoverished world suggested a sincerity that many 'ordinary' art lovers could not find in the abstract painters, but who did find in Buffet's razor-edged finishes and resolute stoicism a reflection of their own agitation in the delicate aftermath of war.

Buffet's paintings disclosed a private anguish. Stripped of blatant allegory, his work served as a system of purification; a sort of purging of an existential anxiety that saw art as a universal language of familiar objects rather than an alienation of form. Early on he provided his buyers with an escape from the fear of the modern flux, a fluency that hurled him into early fame and fortune and catapulted his market demand. Yet the young painter's rapid metamorphosis into a celebrity turned him into the whipping boy for a critical art elite, who struggled to find signs of authenticity in his later

works and resented the vulgarity of his extravagant lifestyle.

Buffet's rapid decline in the eyes of the French intelligentsia speaks more to a homogenous coterie of art world politicians than to the quality of the art itself, a subject that has resurfaced in recent years by critics eager to demonstrate an anti-abstract paradigm indicative of a fluctuating retrospective idea of Modernism. In the past decade in particular, Buffet has been re-evaluated and celebrated as viable rebel against the tenets of the avant-garde, an academic as well as historical revelation that renders Malraux's theories caustically applicable. With climbing auction prices and a steady interest in this disputed artist, it is becoming increasingly clear that the contemporary trend sees Buffet as a venerable cultural figure, today enjoying a revitalization of both commercial and critical success.

Gili Karev

Art critic



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Buffet

Nature morte au pain et au fromage, 1949

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 49'
(upper right)

Oil on canvas

65 x 92 cm - 25.6 x 36.2 in.

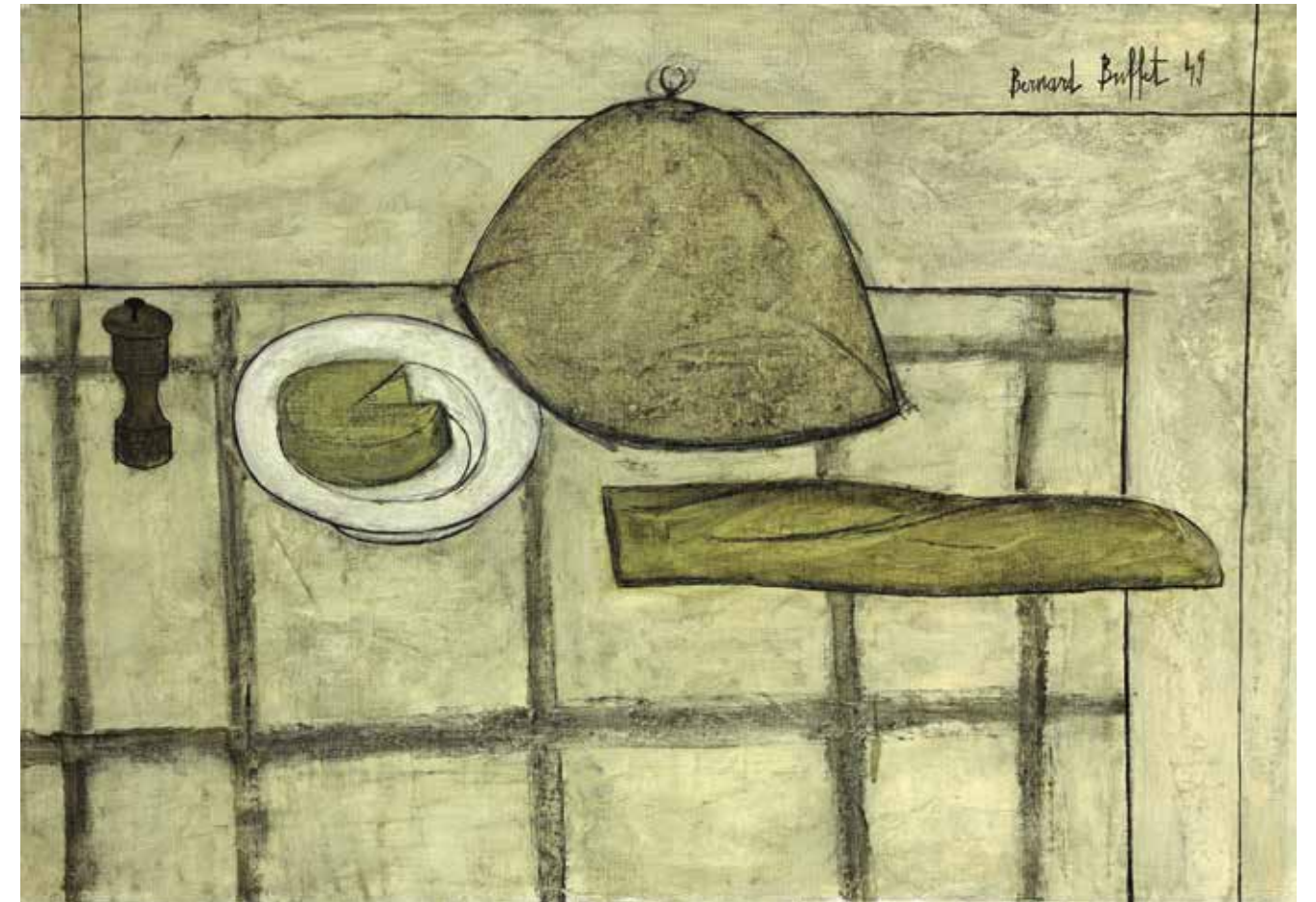
Price on request

Provenance

Sale: Sotheby's, London, 1 April 1987, lot 235
Gallery Miyabi, Fukuoka, Japan
Private collection (acquired from the above, 1989)

Certificate

Ida Garnier & Jacques Gasbarian have confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Jacinthe dans un pot, 1952

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 52'
(centre right)

Oil on canvas

65 x 46 cm - 25.6 x 18.1 in.

Price on request



Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris

Private collection, New York

Galerie Rienzo, New York (acquired from the above)

Private collection, Texas (acquired from the above, April 1999)

Certificate

Maurice Garnier has confirmed the authenticity of this work

Buffet

Compotier et vase de fleurs, 1954

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 54'
(centre right)

Oil on canvas

60 x 73 cm - 23.6 x 28.7 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris

Private collection, New York

Galerie Rienzo, New York (acquired from the above)

Private collection, Texas (acquired from the above, June 2003)

Exhibited

New York, Galerie Rienzo, Bernard Buffet Annual Exhibition, June 2003

Certificate

Maurice Garnier has confirmed the authenticity of this work



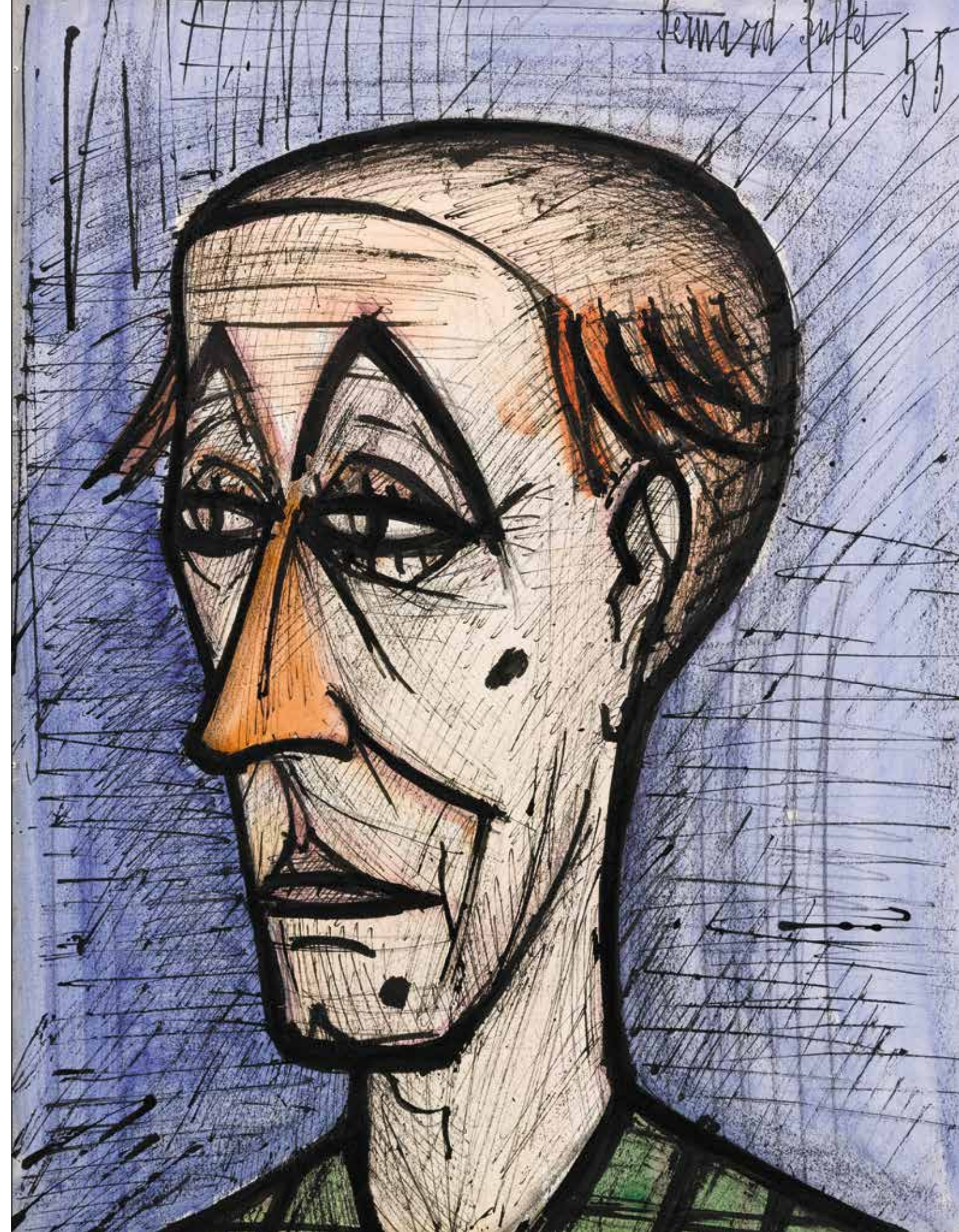
Buffet

Tête de clown, 1955

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 55'
(upper right)

Watercolour, gouache and India ink over
pencil on paper affixed to board
65 x 50 cm - 25.6 x 19.7 in.

Price on request



Provenance

Private collection, New York
Private collection (acquired from the above, by descent)

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier

Buffet

Les Baigneurs, 1956

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 56'
(lower right)

Oil on canvas

130 x 97 cm - 51.2 x 38.2 in.

Price on request

Provenance

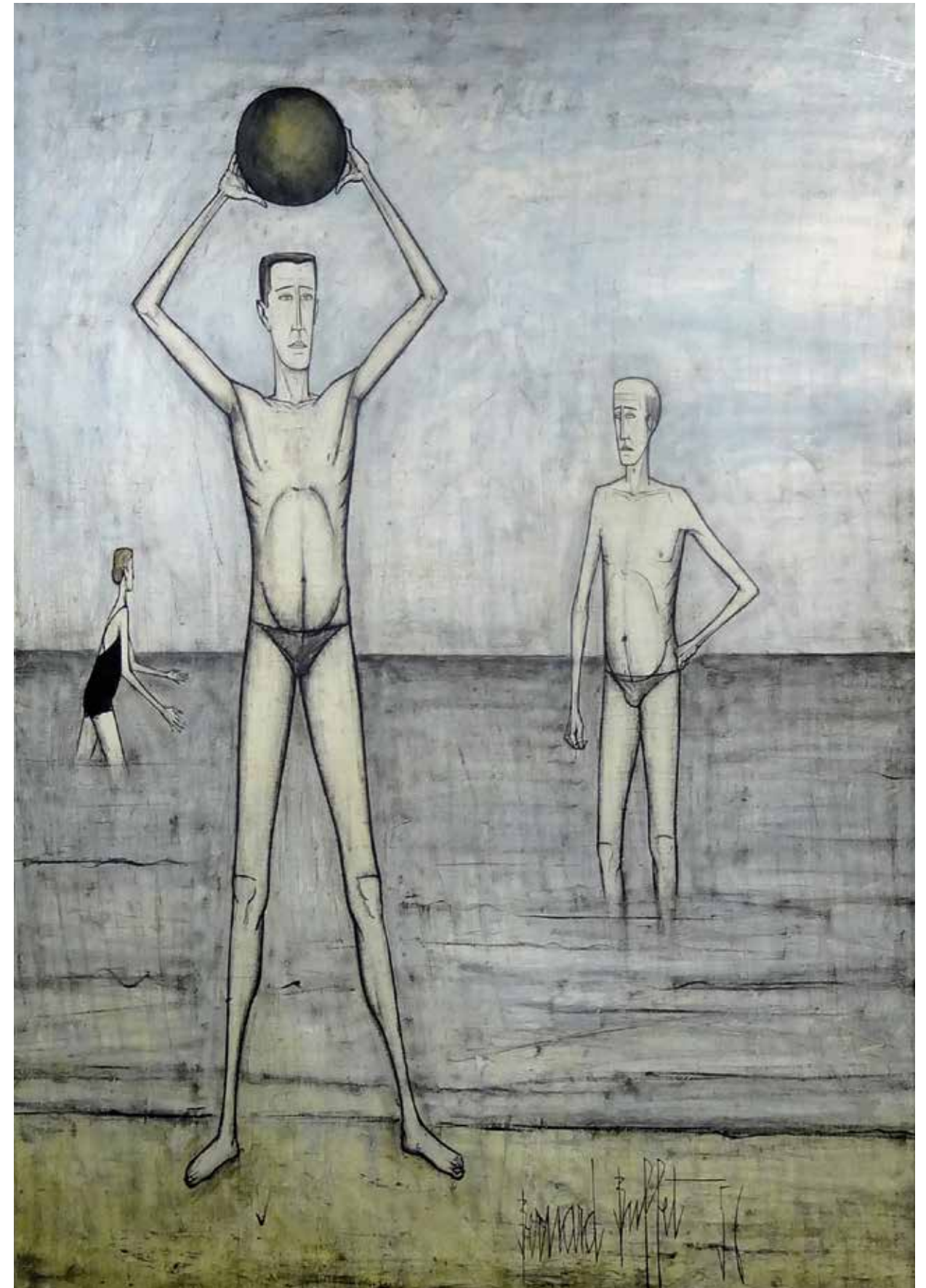
Galerie David, Paris
Galerie David & Garnier, Paris
Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Private collection (acquired from the above)

Exhibited

Bordeaux, Les Peintres témoins de leur temps, 1956
Tokyo, Odakyu Museum, Bernard Buffet, April - May 1995, No. 31, ill. p. 61
Kyoto, Grand Hall at Takashimaya, Bernard Buffet, May - June 1995
Nara, Nara Sogo Museum of Art, Bernard Buffet, June - July 1995
Akita, Akita Senshu Museum of Art, Bernard Buffet, July - August 1995
Hakodate, Hokkaido Hakodate Museum of Art, Bernard Buffet, August - October 1995
Obihiro, Hokkaido Obihiro Museum of Art, Bernard Buffet, October - November 1995

Certificate

Ida Garnier & Jacques Gasbarian have confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Le Panier de fruits, 1957

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 57'
(upper right)

Oil on canvas

54 x 65 cm - 21.3 x 25.6 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie David & Garnier, Paris
Private collection, New York

Sale: Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 5 December 1962, lot 63
Private collection, New York (acquired at the above sale)
Private collection (acquired from the above, by descent)

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Marseille, le vallon des Auffes, 1957

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 57'
(upper right)

Oil on canvas

97 x 130 cm - 38.2 x 51.2 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Private collection, New York (acquired from the above, *circa* 1957)

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Bouquet de fleurs, 1959

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 1959'
(lower right)

Oil on paper laid down on canvas
62 x 47 cm - 24.4 x 18.5 in.

Price on request

Provenance
Galerie Maurice Garnier
Sale: Rémy Le Fur

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Dahlia, 1961

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 61'
(centre left)

Oil on canvas

100 x 65 cm - 39.4 x 25.6 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Wally Findlay Galleries, New York
Private collection (acquired from the above, *circa* 1965)

Certificate

Ida Garnier & Jacques Gasbarian have confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Maison près de l'étang, 1964

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 64'
(lower centre)

Oil on canvas

82 x 130.5 cm - 32.3 x 51.4 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Wally Findlay Galleries, New York

Private collection, Menlo Park (acquired from the above, 13 November 1964)

Private collection, Menlo Park (acquired from the above, 1975)

Private collection (acquired from the above, by descent)

Private collection, Los Angeles

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Paysage, 1964

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 64'
(upper centre)

Oil on canvas

98 x 129.5 cm - 38.6 x 51 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Wally Findlay Galleries, Palm Beach

Private collection, New York (acquired from the above)

Private collection, New York (acquired from the above, by descent)

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Le Terre-neuvas, 1965

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 65' (upper right); inscribed 'Bateau St Malo' and dated '10 Juillet 1965' (on the reverse)

Oil on canvas

116 x 80 cm - 45.6 x 31.5 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Private collection, 1980s

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Clown, 1968

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 68'
(centre right)

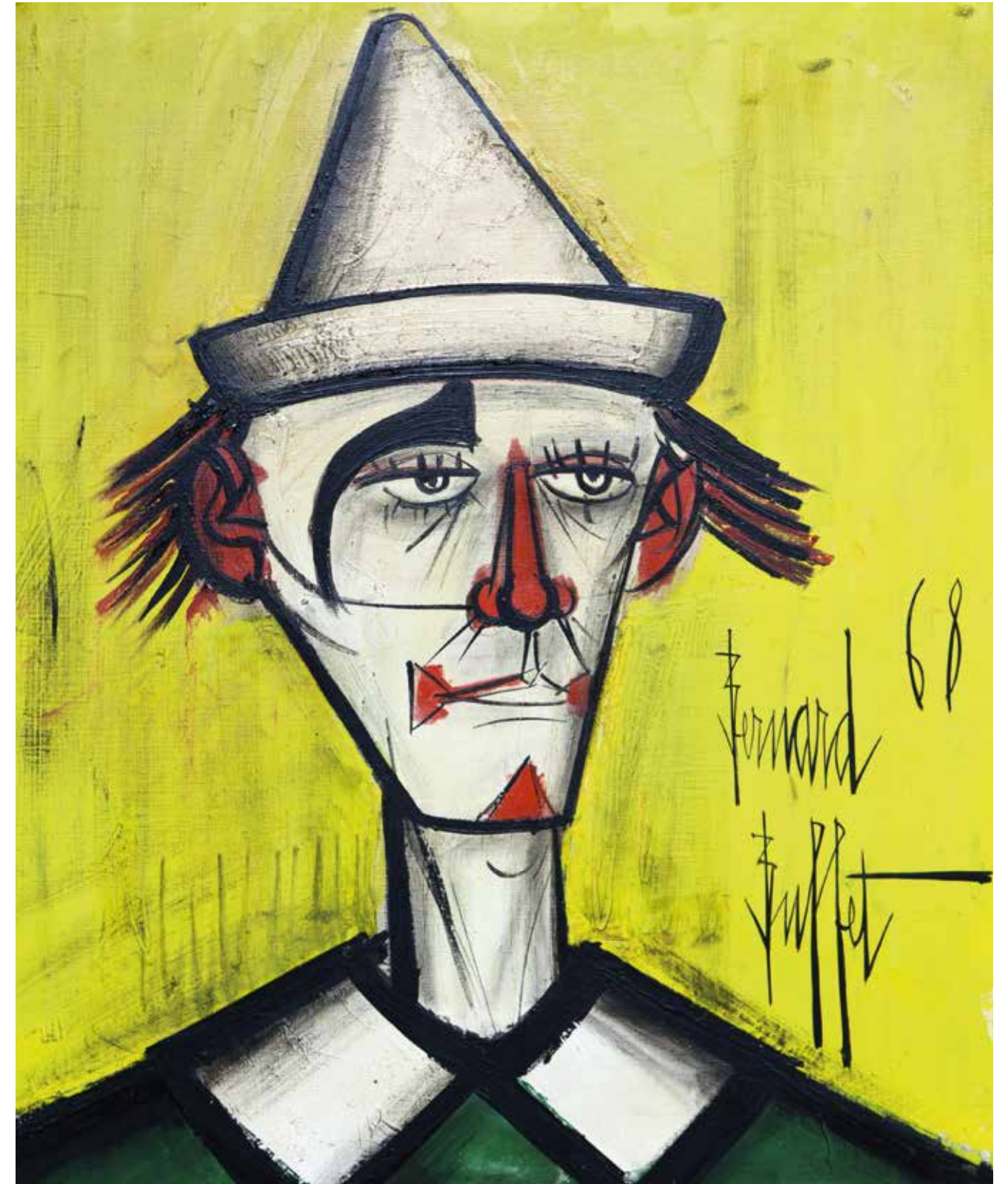
Oil on canvas

73 x 60 cm - 28.7 x 23.6 in.

Price on request

Provenance
Galerie du Château, Auray, France
Private collection, Italy

Certificate
Ida Garnier & Jacques Gasbarian have confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Le Service à café, 1980

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper left)
and dated '1980' (centre right)

Oil on canvas

60 x 92 cm - 23.6 x 36.2 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Sale: Sotheby's, New York, 26 February 1990, lot 176
Private collection (acquired at the above sale)

Certificate

Ida Garnier & Jacques Gasbarian have confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Nature morte à la casserole rouge, 1982

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper centre)
and dated '1982' (lower left)

Oil on canvas

65 x 81 cm - 25.6 x 31.9 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Private collection (acquired from the above)
Private collection, South America

Certificate

Maurice Garnier has confirmed the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Torero en bleu, 1987

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper left)
and dated '1987' (upper right)

Oil on canvas

146 x 97 cm - 57.5 x 38.2 in.

Price on request



Certificate

Maurice Garnier has confirmed the authenticity of this work

Buffet

La Sainte-Chapelle, 1988

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper right)
and dated '1988' (upper left)

Oil on canvas

195 x 114 cm - 76.8 x 44.9 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Galerie Taménaga, Tokyo
Manhattan Gallery, Tokyo
Private collection (acquired from the above, 1994)

Certificate

Ida Garnier & Jacques Gasbarian have confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Le Métro aérien et le boulevard Rochechouart, métro Jaurès, 1989

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper left) and dated '1989' (upper right);
titled (on the reverse)

Oil on canvas

113.5 x 145.7 cm - 44.7 x 57.4 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris

Galerie Taménaga, Tokyo

Private collection, Japan (acquired from the above, 1994)

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Saules près de l'étang, 1990

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper left)
and dated '1990' (upper right)

Oil on canvas

89 x 130 cm - 35 x 51.2 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris

Certificate

A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Villa normande, 1991

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper right)
and dated '1991' (upper left)

Oil on canvas

81 x 116 cm - 31.9 x 45.7 in.

Price on request

Provenance

Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris
Private collection, Paris

Certificate

Maurice Garnier has confirmed
the authenticity of this work



Buffet

Le Château fort rose, 1998

Signed 'Bernard Buffet' (upper right)
and dated '1998' (upper left)

Oil on canvas

50 x 65 cm - 19.7 x 25.6 in.

Price on request

Provenance
Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris

Certificate
A certificate will be provided by the Galerie Maurice Garnier



Buffet

Escamillo (Green Costume), 1967

Signed and dated 'Bernard Buffet 67'
(upper left)

Lithograph

105 x 71.7 cm - 41.3 x 28.2 in.

Price on request



André
DUPONT

Les deux sœurs (Mon Cirque), 1968

Lithograph

68.8 x 48 cm - 27 x 18.9 in.

Price on request



Hubert

Le Jongleur (Mon Cirque), 1968

Lithograph

68.8 x 48 cm - 27 x 18.9 in.

Price on request



André
Maret

Le Cheval (Mon Cirque), 1968

Lithograph

68.8 x 48 cm - 27 x 18.9 in.

Price on request





Biography

July 19, 1928 Born in Paris, France

1943 Expelled from secondary school for criticizing the academic structure. Begins evening classes to study drawing. Enters the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts where he studies for two years.

1945 Leaves university to travel to Brittany with his mother. After she unexpectedly dies, he settles in the south of Paris. His works from this time depict emaciated figures painted in dark, muted colour tones, reflecting despondency of postwar mentality.

1946 Had his first painting, a self-portrait, shown at the Salon des moins de trente ans at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts.

1947 First solo exhibition at the Art Impressions book shop in Paris. Becomes a member of the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne. He reveals his first angular characters that classify him as a "Miserabilist". Meets writer Pierre Descargues, a liberal writer and critic who becomes one of Buffet's most ardent supporters and writes the catalogue preface for his exhibition.

1948 Signed exclusive contract with Emmanuel David Gallery, shared with Maurice Garnier, an alliance that leads to international exposure. Awarded the Critic's Prize at the Galerie Saint-Placide in Paris.

1949 Pierre Descargues published Bernard Buffet at the Presses Littéraires de France. First Galerie Drouant-Garnier exhibition is held. Joins a group of painters entitled "Homme-Témoin", the Witness-Man, dedicated to the common man.

1950 Begins exhibiting in New York City.

1951 Moved to a small house in Manosque where he lived for a short while before renting an ancient bergerie in Nansé, near Reillanne. He worked there until 1954.

1953 Louis Aragon wrote an article in Les Lettres Françaises entitled "Le Paysage Français a quatre siècles et Bernard Buffet 24 ans" (Four Centuries of French Landscape Painting and the 24 Years Old Bernard Buffet).

1955 Named first in Ten Best Postwar artists by the magazine *Connaissance des Arts*. Met Georges Simenon who became his close friend. Bought a property in Domont, near Paris, that he left the following year to live at Château l'Arc near Aix-en-Provence, which was to be his main residence until 1964.

1958 Age 30, the first retrospective of his work was held at the Galerie Charpentier. The *New York Times* named Buffet as one of "France's Fabulous Young Five", among peers that include Yves Saint Laurent. Marries Annabel Schwob, essentially shunning himself from the gay art elite. Around this time Buffet's technique changes drastically, incorporating more colour and depth, using the beautiful and slightly androgynous Annabel as his primary muse.

1961 Produces series of paintings depicting the life of Jesus Christ for the purpose of decorating Château l'Arc. These paintings are now at the Vatican Museum on permanent exhibition. At that time he also produced a series of emaciated figures evocative of war tragedies, echoing the grievances of WWII. With popularity on the rise in Japan, many of the works related to the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

1962 Birth of first daughter, Virginie.

1963 Birth of second daughter, Danièle.

1965 - 1971 Lives between Brittany and Paris.

1971 Named Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. Birth of son, Nicolas.

1973 Bernard Buffet Museum inaugurated by Kiichiro Okano in Shizuoka, Japan.

1974 Elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts and the Légion d'Honneur.

1978 Designs a stamp depicting l'Institut et le Pont des Arts at the request of the Postal Administration.

1980 Buys a manor in Normandy, which he left in 1986 to live at the Domaine de la Baume, near Tourtour in the Haut-Var. Living a heavy alcohol-ridden lifestyle with Annabel, many of Buffet's works in this decade feature signs of hedonism: alcohol and cigarettes litter many stark and sullen still-lives.

1986 Annabel publishes *D'amour et d'eau fraîche* at Sylvie Messinger editions; and Georges Durand published *La Divine Comédie de Bernard Buffet* at Desclée de Brouwer editions.

1988 A large extension to the Bernard Buffet Museum inaugurated in Japan.

1989 Alin Alexis Avila publishes Bernard Buffet, edited by Nouvelles Editions Françaises aux Editions Casterman.

1999 Afflicted with Parkinson's disease and no longer able to paint, 71-year-old Bernard Buffet takes his own life.

SELECTED MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Tate Gallery, London, UK
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, USA
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, USA
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, USA
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
National Museum of Modern Art, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Bernard Buffet Museum, Shizuoka, Japan

MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

1996 Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung City, Taiwan
1995 Odakyu Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
1994 Documenta-Halle, Kassel, Germany
1993 Musée Gustave Courbet, Ornans, France
1991 The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, Russia
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia
Gallery Hyundai, Seoul, Korea
1987 Odakyu Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
1985 Réfectoire des Jacobins, Toulouse, France
1983 The Seedamm Cultural Centre, Pfäffikon, Switzerland
1978 Musée de La Poste, Paris, France
1977 Museum de Wieger, The Netherlands
1969 Musée Unterlinden, Colmar, France
1963 The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan
1959 The French Institute, Berlin, Germany
Casino Knokke-Le-Zoute, Belgium
1958 Galerie Charpentier, Paris, France



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