

# Rudolf Bonnet

beauty remains



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Dr. H. de Roever-Bonnet

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## Introduction Maria Hofker

My husband and myself met Rudolf Bonnet in Amsterdam in 1937. Writing all this about Rudolf nowadays, Rudolf is coming in my mind to life again. I don't know very well what to say about him, but one thing is clear. I want to honour the person of Rudolf Bonnet.

For forty years in good and bad times in all parts of the world our friendship grew and intensified. It was Rudolf who opened the enchanting doors to fascinating Bali for us and helped us to appreciate both the invisible and untouchable side of its beauty. Thus he also brought us to Italy in 1951 and shared his admiration for Italian art and nature with us. In Anticoli we saw the places where the talent of young Rudolf developed.

His social circle was huge and appreciation for his life and work continues for ever.

Maria Hofker-Rueter  
1991



Bonnet with Willem and Maria Hofker in front of San Marco's Basilica, Venice, 1951.  
Hofker archive, S. Hofker.

# Foreword

In the book *Verlaat Rapport Indië*, Mrs. J. de Loos-Haaxman pointed out how little interest there is in the Netherlands for Dutch artists who worked in the East. Nor did interest develop after the exhibition which the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam devoted to these artists in 1972.

Rudolf Bonnet belongs to this group. He lived and worked in Indonesia for thirty years. Although he had a considerable reputation in the Netherlands initially, based on exhibitions of his work, he had made in Italy in the 1920s, this fame gradually dissipated after his departure for the Dutch East Indies. However, this is not the case in Bali, where there is still great interest in him.

Bonnet was a many-sided artist, who not only left a large oeuvre, but undertook many other activities as well. For example, in Bali he dedicated himself to the development of modern Balinese art. He thus acquired great fame in certain circles.

The Rudolf Bonnet Foundation was the first to propose having a book written about him. I should like to add a word about the foundation at this point. When Bonnet was living in Bali, he took the painters of Batuan under his wings in order to persuade them to return to their own Balinese style. He also designed an exhibition hall for them, but this plan was never implemented. After his death some of his Dutch friends set up the Rudolf Bonnet Foundation in 1982 in order to complete this work of his. These friends were Ph. J. Hamers from Kortenhoeve, Z. Schoute from Hilversum and J.C. Steenbeek from Coevorden. Thanks to the help of this foundation, the painters in Batuan succeeded in completing their building, and in a few years they had it successfully realised. The foundation now wishes to concentrate on activities to promote interest in the life and work of the painter Rudolf Bonnet. There is a sister organisation in Bali, also founded in 1982, called



Bonnet in his studio, Ubud, December 1955.  
Archive Louis Nagelkerke.



A Sawah, Bali, 1941, pastel on paper, 36 x 54 cm.

the Bonnet Foundation Bali. This was set up by Anak Agung Made Djelantik, Cokorda Gde Putra Sukawati (son of Cokorda Gde Agung Sukawati), Ida Bagus Tilem, Arie Smit and Suteja Neka. It is chaired by professor I Gusti Ngurah Bagus. The first and last mentioned are also on the committee of the Dutch foundation. It is thanks to this foundation, among other things, that Bonnet is still remembered in Bali.

Bonnet was a brother of my father's, and thanks to that I knew him well. I was the executor of his will and the archive he left behind came into my possession. This consisted of a chaotic mass of letters, photos and all kinds of other papers. It took quite a while to realise some order into this and not all the items were complete. Apart from this it was still possible to speak with people who had known him personally. It was, therefore, natural for me to write this book. I am very much aware that it expresses my personal vision of the artist. Probably not everyone will agree with it. So be it! The biographer

has to choose from among the facts available to her. In a biography of limited size, what must she include, or exclude? Even if she tries to work as objective as possible, there will still arise a certain personal flavour.

I have divided this book in such a way that it falls, roughly speaking, into three parts. The first part treats the early history, in which Bonnet's youth is the main subject. In the second part Bonnet is portrayed as a member of the society in which he lived and worked. In the third section the artist and the man himself comes to the fore with his art playing an important role.

This book is the first publication in which facts about the artist Rudolf Bonnet are arranged chronologically, and which includes a brief discussion of his work. I have tried to account carefully for the source of the data, which means that a somewhat dry summarization cannot always be avoided. However, I have not done this in the form of a long list with notes, as that would make a book like this utterly boring.



Bonnet at elderly age, Bali, 1975.

I have received much cooperation from a number of people, for which a word of thanks is not misplaced. Mrs. G. Bonnet-Boersma, my mother, Mr. J.D. Voskuil, journalist and good friend of Bonnet, Mr. C.J. Bonnet, the artist's nephew, and Mrs. J.M. Welcker, a niece of Mrs. van Wessem, made their archives available to me without any restrictions. Of those who provided me with information I would like to mention Mrs. Maria Hofker-Rueter, who with her husband was among Bonnet's best friends, Mrs. D. Zweers, librarian of the Rietveld Academy, who tracked down the minute books of teachers' meetings of the Rijksschool voor Kunstnijverheid (National School of Arts and Crafts) for me, Mr. J.D. Heins, trustee of the Jaap Kunst Archive, Mr. E.G. Spruyt, staff member at the Royal Tropical Institute, who was able to answer my many questions about Indonesian matters, Mrs. Pattipilohy, who translated a number of pieces from Indonesian, and finally the many owners of Bonnet's work, who showed it to me and allowed me to photograph it. With pleasure I think back to the many talks with Mr. Ch. J. Grader and his wife, which produced so much useful information. Mrs. A. Rijtma and Mrs. M.B. de Roever both read the manuscript and I am very grateful for their comments. I owe many thanks to Mrs. H.R.N. Hinzler, lecturer in the Southeast Asian department of the University of Leiden, who provided much criticism of the part about Indonesia, and to Mr. J. Stowell, lecturer at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, who often passed on relevant information to me. The Perdeck family, children of a sister of Bonnet, donated me a collection of postcards which contained interesting information. At the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) I consulted



Resting Farmers, Bali, 1940, pastel on paper, 63 x 82 cm.

a file with a number of newspaper cuttings. Monique Rours finally typed out the manuscript.

In writing this book I have attempted to show Rudolf Bonnet as man and artist. His life was rich in good things and it was lived in the service of beauty. I have named him a Sunday's child, thinking of the children's rhyme:

'The child who is born on the Sabbath Day Is bonny and happy, and good and gay.'

Dr. H. de Roever-Bonnet  
Amsterdam, August 1991

## From the publisher

My career started at the Zeeuws Veilinghuis more than 20 years ago. Soon I came into contact with the work of Rudolf Bonnet. I remember the first time I saw his work in old auction catalogues very well. I became fascinated with it. What accuracy and quality! The exoticism in his work also attracted me. It reminded me of my visits to Southeast Asia a few years earlier.

Over the years, our auction house has grown into a global player in the field of Indonesian paintings. In recent years we have sold more than 150 works by Rudolf Bonnet. Of course we also had the book *Rudolf Bonnet, een Zondagskind* by Dr. H. de Roever-Bonnet. This book provided a complete overview of Bonnet's life, art and significance to the art world. However, there were a few drawbacks. Firstly, this book was published in Dutch. This made it less interesting for an international audience. Secondly, many of his works were depicted in black and white, which made them less attractive. It is against this background that the idea aroused to reissue the book by Dr. de Roever-Bonnet. After contacts with Arend de Roever, son of the author, this process started. The project was received worldwide with great enthusiasm!

The basis of this book is consequently the text of Dr. de Roever-Bonnet which has been translated into English by Wendie Shaffer around 30 years ago, but which was never used for publication. After converting this translation from paper to a digital file, this text was corrected by Richard Horstman. John Selders, as final corrector, especially made an effort to make the text more pleasant to read.

In addition, a lot of unpublished photographic material about Bonnet's life from the archive of Rudolf Bonnet has been

used. Arend de Roever, the manager of this archive, made it available to me. However, a large part of Bonnet's photo archive was donated by his mother to the Tropenmuseum (Tropical Museum) in Amsterdam. Nowadays the Tropenmuseum is part of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures). Through Koos van Brakel we obtained permission to publish photos from this archive free of charge. Ingeborg Eggink helped us obtaining the selected photos to be published. The artist and Bonnet admirer Louis Nagelkerke also has an archive of Bonnet's photographs. He also provided several photos.

Many photos of Bonnet's work come from our auction archive. Private collectors and museums provided images as well. Henny Dharmawan and Siont Teja have put a lot of effort into obtaining photos in Indonesia. The grandniece of the artist Willem Gerard Hofker, Seline Hofker, could, thanks through her extensive research done for her uncle's oeuvre, provide us with images of rare 'camp portraits' made by Bonnet during the war. She also noticed several inaccuracies in the text. Gianni Orsini noticed some inaccuracies in the text as well, especially with regard to W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp.

Important works from President Sukarno's collection could of course not be omitted. We received these photos through Amir Sidharta's mediation.

Given Bonnet's important role in the development of modern Balinese art, I thought that examples of this art should be added, too. Preferably also from the works that were in the Rudolf Bonnet Collection. Photos of this collection have also been made available by the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

Marieke van der Perk designed the layout and provided a design that matches the present time.

This is basically how this book came about. I would like to thank the above mentioned persons and institutes for their contribution.

In addition I would like to thank these institutes for providing us photos: Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Museon, Leiden University Libraries, Rijksmuseum, Duta Fine Arts, Museum Macan, Museum UPH, OHD Museum, Museum Pasifika and the Presidential Palace of the Republic of Indonesia.

I also owe thanks to the following people: Pienke Kal (Rudolf Bonnet Foundation), Olimpia Toppi (Civico Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Anticoli Corrado), Soemantri Widagdo and in general all private collectors who helped us obtaining photos and all buyers and sellers of Bonnet's work who participated at our auctions.

The title *Rudolf Bonnet - beauty remains* is derived from a verse that Bonnet wrote in the front of one of his books: 'Living means ageing and fading  
For people and all that they make  
In the end only beauty remains.'

René de Visser

Zeeuws Veilinghuis – Zeeland Auctioneers  
Middelburg, The Netherlands, August 2023

Chapter 1

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# Bonnet's early years

# Bonnet's early years

## The ancestors

Shortly before his death, Jean Bonnet Jr. wrote a brief chronicle of his life, in which for the year 1895 he noted the birth of his fourth son: '30 March: Rudolf born.'<sup>1</sup>

The Bonnet family originated in Chambon in the Dauphiné. Its members were followers of the religious teachings of Waldo<sup>2</sup> and when Louis XIV evoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, they fled from France along with many Huguenots and other Waldensians. After some wanderings they ended up in Kelze, a small town in the German state of Hesse. With the help of the count of Hesse they founded a farming colony, together with other French emigrants. Through hard work they succeeded in building up a life. However, it was a miserable existence, because the soil was poor and unproductive. As more and more children were born, the number of people who had to live from the yield of the land grew, which did not ease the poverty.

French culture was maintained in the colony for a long time. It was only after 1822, for example, that French was no longer spoken and Germans were taken into the colony. Rudolf Bonnet always used to relate how his grandfather still read the Bible in French. The French language also held its ground for a long time in the names and surnames of the colonists.<sup>3</sup>

In 1841 a certain Jean Bonnet left this colony for Amsterdam. He was the sixth child in a family of eight children. He probably left for economic reasons.

In Amsterdam, he worked as a baker. There in 1851 he married Geertruy Flink, the daughter of a plumber/slater from Loenen aan de Vecht. In 1863 their third child was born, the Jean Bonnet Jr. mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Rudolf Bonnet's mother also came from a family of emigrants. In 1834 C.C.W. Mann, who was born in the neighbourhood of Hanover, settled in Amsterdam

as a baker. In that same year he married Elsina Lubbers, also a German emigrant. Their son Friedrich Wilhelm had a flourishing butcher's shop on the Haarlemmerdijk in 1859. In 1862 he married Christina Lucia von Ronnen, who was also a daughter of German emigrants. Their daughter, named Elisabeth Elsina, was born in 1863. She was raised as the daughter of a prosperous citizen's family. But what she really wanted to do, attend high school, was out of the question! She was to be Rudolf Bonnet's mother.<sup>4</sup> Rudolf therefore had three grandparents who came from emigrant families, which presumably influenced his character. A special mentality is required for emigration, particularly if the reason for emigration is a matter of principle, religious freedom, as it was for Bonnet's ancestors. It requires not only readiness to make sacrifices, but also resoluteness and the ability to stick to strict rules. If the reason for emigration is economic, as was the case with the Mann family and Bonnet's grandfather, this means that they must be ready to work hard to build up a reasonable standard of living. And both the Bonnet family and Mann family succeeded in this.



The Bonnet family, Rudolf is next to his mother on the right, ca. 1898.



Birthplace of Rudolf Bonnet (above the bakery on the corner), Jodenbreestraat 1, Amsterdam, April 1930. The bakery was opposite the house where Rembrandt lived, the current Rembrandt House Museum. Collection Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

## Rudolf's parents

24 April 1887 the marriage of Jean Bonnet Jr. and Elisabeth Elsinia Mann took place in the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church) in Amsterdam. It was to be a harmonious marriage, because husband and wife complemented each other well. They respected each other and allowed another a great measure of freedom, while at the same time there was a deep understanding between them. On the occasion of their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, the father wrote to his children concerning this: 'Ma and I do not always think alike, believe alike, do not always value the same things, often have a difference of opinion ... but above all else we desire peace and love.'

The young couple settled in the Jodenbreestraat in a small bakery under rabbinical supervision, the Bakkerij aan de Sluis (ill. p. 17).<sup>5</sup> The living accommodation on the first floor consisted of a front room, a bedroom and a kitchen. In 1889 Jean Bonnet bought the whole house, but annexed the upper floor only in 1894. By then there were already four children, and three more were to follow.<sup>6</sup>



Bonnet's parents during a trip in Italy, 1920s.



The Bonnet family, Rudolf is the child with the large hat, 1899.

Jean Bonnet was a restless, energetic, very charming, somewhat schoolmasterish man with enormous *joie de vivre*. He had been trained as a teacher of book-keeping. He was always busy making plans, which he generally put into practice. He had many friends at all levels of society, both in the large canal houses and in the Jodenbreestraat. Through hard work and thriftily living, he succeeded in turning the bakery into a good business. He also managed to amass a tidy fortune through dealing in houses and other transactions.

In 1911 he gave the bakery over to one of his sons and devoted himself to his business affairs. In 1915 he became a stockbroker.

Although he had been married in church and was then a member of the Reformed Church, religion played no significant role in his life. And he had no interest in art at all. Bonnet's mother was a quiet, somewhat more thoughtful character, but she knew what she wanted. She was artistically gifted. She had a strong sense of colour and was very interested in art. Religion was still meaningful for her, and therefore the children were baptised. Rudolf Bonnet was baptised on 14 April 1895 in the Oude Kerk (Old Church), and given the names Johan Rudolf. Some of the Bonnet children were later confirmed, but I have not been able to find any indication that Rudolf did the same. In 1903 Jean Bonnet had moved with his family to Hilversum, but in 1909 they returned to Amsterdam and moved into a house on the Weesperzijde. In 1915 they moved to the Valeriusstraat.

At home there was strict discipline, but the children were taught from an early age to be responsible, to make decisions on their own, and (as far as their age permitted) to stand on their own feet. Their upbringing was far ahead of its time. My mother, who knew them at that time, often said about that period: 'The things those children were allowed to do!'



A share of Jean Bonnet in the Nederlandsche Bakkerij-Centrale (a bakers union), 1917. Share designed by Rudolf Bonnet. Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Archive family de Roever.

All the children went to high school, and after their final exams they were allowed to decide what they wanted to be. They lived the life of prosperous citizens. At home they read a lot, they went to the theatre, played chess and bridge, went for drives, gave grand parties. They travelled widely, both in the Netherlands and abroad, often visiting relations in Germany. Both parents spoke French, and the father also English.

In this active family the mother must have been a haven of quiet. After her fortieth birthday she had rheumatic complaints and could not walk well, so that she was often confined to her chair. There was a close family bond, not only within the immediate family circle, but also with more distant family members. Such was the atmosphere in which Rudolf Bonnet grew up.

## Education

Even in his youngest years Rudolf distinguished himself from his brothers in that he was by far the quietest of them. His mother often found him in a quiet corner with his sisters' dolls, telling them little stories or putting on small plays. High school was not a great success. He preferred drawing to doing his homework. But his father would not hear of an artistic education. He thought artists were wimps and good-for-nothings. It was ultimately his mother who managed to talk his father round. 'Well, if drawing is what he really wants to do ...'<sup>8</sup>

However, before father made his decision, he took some of his son's work to his friend Bert Voskuil, who had an art shop in Amsterdam. And it was only when the latter said that the work of the young Bonnet was promising, that he was allowed to leave the high school in 1911. However, his father made it a condition that he had to follow a practical training: 'Then at least he'll always be able to design wallpaper!' And this also had to be the best training available.<sup>9</sup>

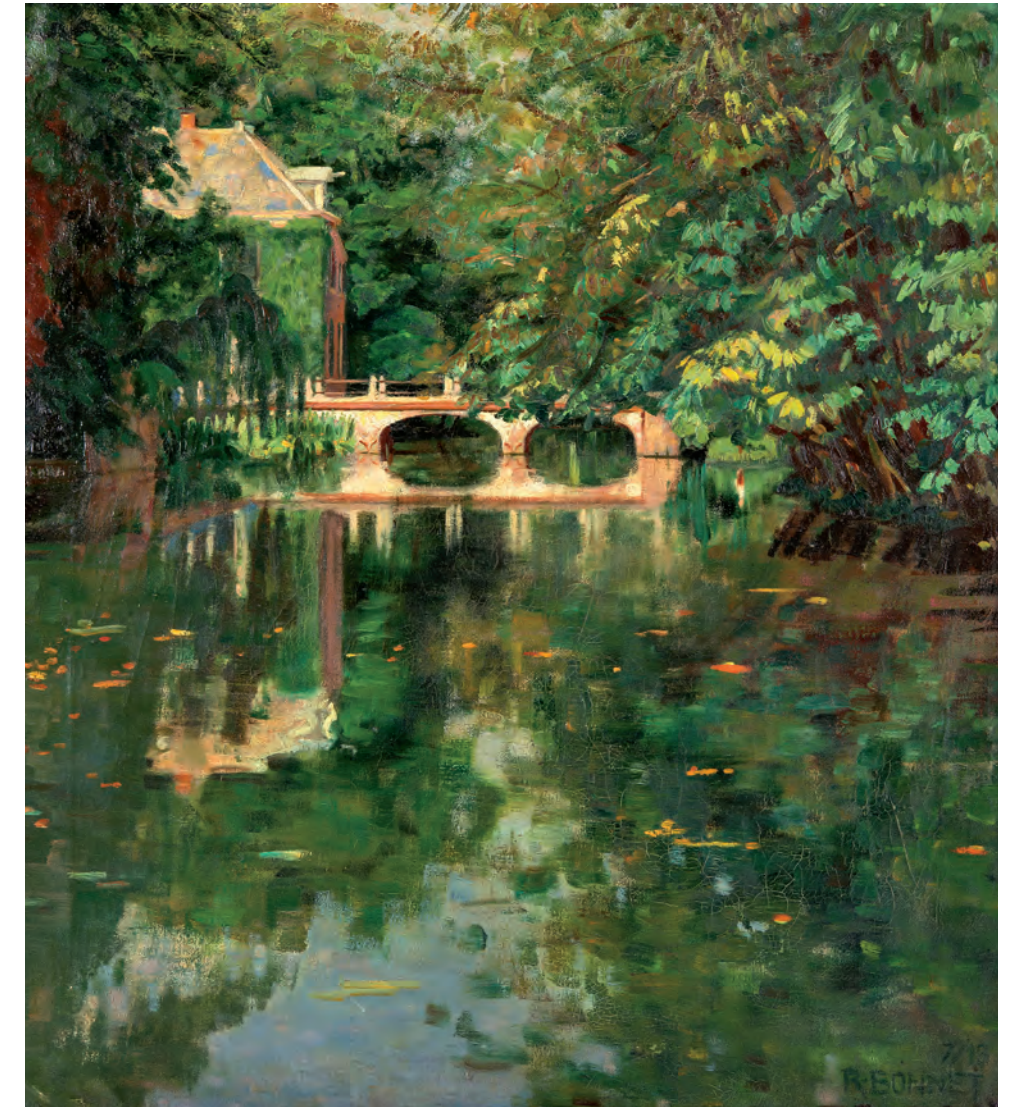
In this way Bonnet came to study at the Hendrick de Keyser School, a college for advanced technical training. In a photograph from 1911 or 1912 we see Bonnet as a student (ill. p. 20). He was to spend two years at this school, because in 1913 he did the entrance examination for the Rijkschool voor Kunstnijverheid (National School for Arts and Crafts), one of the two schools which housed on the top floor of the Rijksmuseum.<sup>10</sup> According to Luns<sup>11</sup> the students were trained as designers of various products, but according to the teachers the emphasis was more on art than crafts.<sup>12</sup> In 1916 Bonnet successfully sat his final exams in decorative painting (ill. p. 194). On his own initiative he also took an evening course at the Rijksacademie van Beeldende kunsten (National Academy of Fine Arts),



Class photo, 1908-1909. Bonnet is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person on the left, 3<sup>rd</sup> row from the bottom.



Hendrick de Keyser School, Amsterdam, 1911-1912. Bonnet is the 2<sup>nd</sup> on the left.



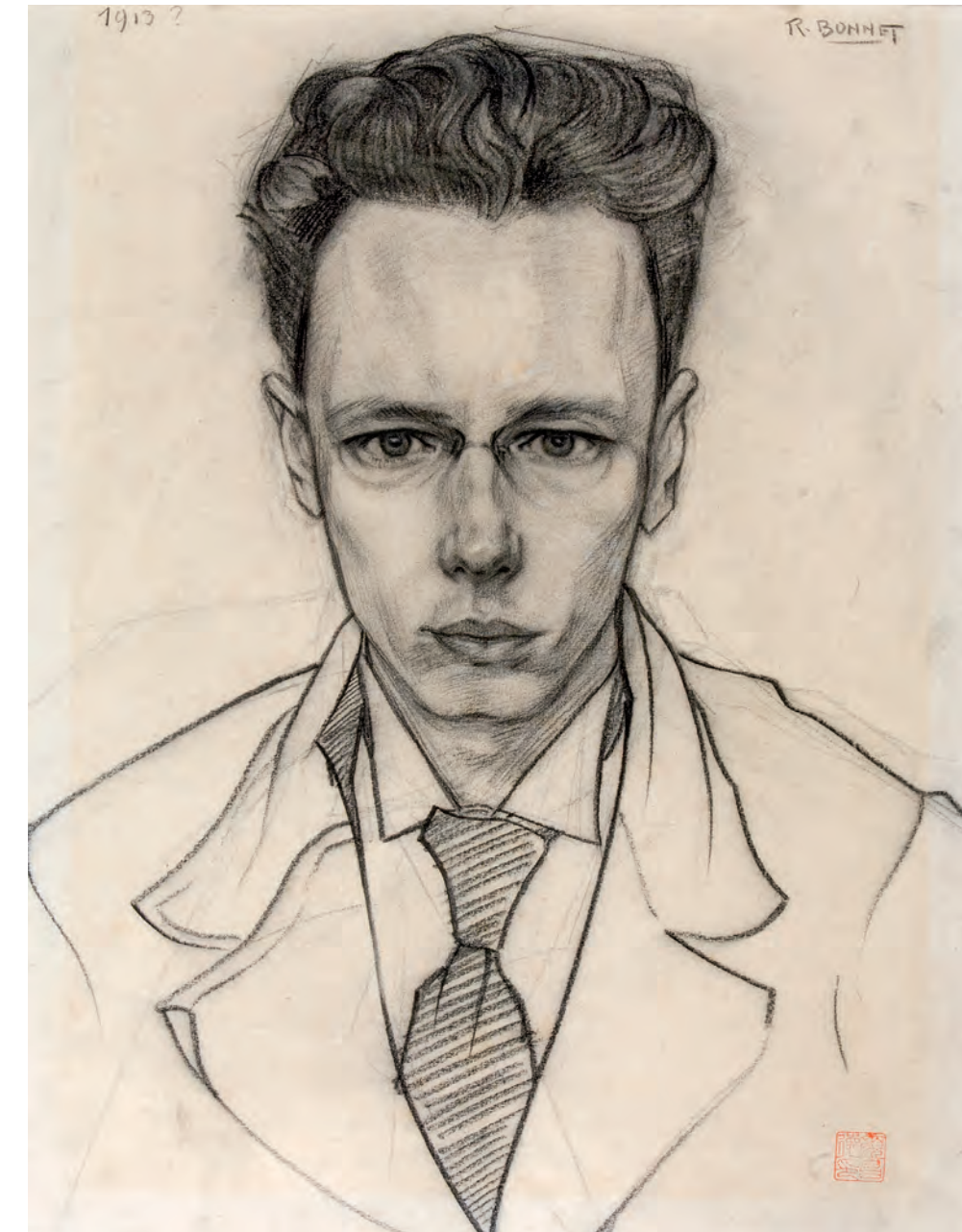
Castle Bridge, Zeist, The Netherlands, July 1918, oil on canvas, 65.5 x 58 cm.

having sat the entrance exam in 1913. At that time this course was regarded as a supplement to the training in the 'Museum Schools'.<sup>13</sup> Finally in 1916 he followed a daytime course at the decoration department of the School voor Bouwkunde, Versierende Kunsten

en Kunstambachten in Haarlem (College of Architecture, Decorative Arts and Crafts). Armed with the theoretical and practical knowledge, acquired in these four institutions, Rudolf Bonnet started his life as an independent artist in 1917.



H. de Roever-Bonnet (the author of this book), Amsterdam, December 1919, pastel on paper, 76 x 48 cm.



Self-portrait, ca. 1913, black chalk on paper. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.



*Patas Makako, January 1920, pastel on paper, 62 x 60 cm.*

### Intermezzo, 1917-1920

Bonnet was still living with his parents in the Valeriusstraat, but he worked in a rented studio in the vicinity of Leidseplein.

Not much is known about that period. He probably led the life of a young, budding artist. We know, for example, that he regularly went to the theatre and made sketches of the actors there, which he later finished.

My sister and I also served as models. In the hotel 'De Schaepkens van St. Fijt' in Valkenburg, where the family spent a holiday, he decorated the walls of the conservatory with vines.<sup>14</sup> He decorated the menu and other papers used at the silver wedding anniversary party of his parents in 1912 with hops.

Some other drawings from this period will be discussed later.



*A Macaw on a Branch, ca. 1920, oil on canvas, 82 x 61 cm.*

Chapter 2

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**First  
Italian  
period**  
1920-1928

## First Italian period 1920-1928



Bonnet with his parents, Italy, 1920s.



Anticoli, 1920s.

### Anticoli Corrado

In October 1920, Bonnet's parents made a trip through Italy and took him with them. They parted company in Florence, because Bonnet was so fascinated by this city that he wanted to stay there. He rented a room in a pension on Mentana Square, which looks onto the banks of the Arno. From there he visited Anticoli Corrado. He then went to southern Italy, where he also made some drawings in 1921. Later that year he returned to Anticoli and stayed there.

The village is located in the Sabine mountains 60 kilometres south-east of Rome. It was a resort where many artists rented studios during summertime. Bonnet also rented a studio there, but he stayed on for the winter as well. The villagers welcomed him into their community and shared their lives with them. He visited them in their homes and at the inn he listened to their stories and sung along with their songs. He also participated in the Catholic feast days and even went on a pilgrimage to a church in a neighbouring village. All the inhabitants were his friends, and the painter Mario Toppi was his best friend.

He also found good friends among the summer visitors, both men and women, who came from all parts of the globe. They went on trips into the surrounding areas and they celebrated parties together, as appears from the photos he made, some of which have names of people included on them.

One of these visitors was Charles Eyck,<sup>15</sup> who spent some time in Anticoli in 1923 and 1924.<sup>16</sup> This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Escher also visited him there in 1927.<sup>17</sup> With him and his sister-in-law Bonnet made a trip to Tunis in 1928. He so much loved this place that he remained there for some time after his travelling companions returned home. He followed them later with a portfolio full of drawings.<sup>18</sup>



Gente Abruzzese (Abruzzese People), 1927, pastel on paper, 68.5 x 89 cm. Collection Tumurun Museum, Solo, Indonesia.



*Girl with Poppies, Anticoli, 1926, pastel on paper, 88 x 76 cm.*