

WADDINGTON CUSTOT

The Nabi Shock

24 June–12 September 2026

Following its inaugural run at the gallery's newly opened Paris space, 'The Nabi Shock' opens in London this summer.



'The Nabi Shock' brings together over 20 paintings by leading figures of the Nabi movement, Émile Bernard, Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Charles Filiger, Paul Ranson, József Rippl-Ronai, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Paul Sérusier and Édouard Vuillard, drawing on Waddington Custot's expertise in this strand of European modernism. The paintings all date from that remarkably fertile period between 1888 and 1900, when the Nabis were actively working together in Paris. Here, Waddington Custot presents them alongside new paintings by Marcel.la Barceló, Ben Arpéa, Ian Davenport, Marcel Dzama, François Réau, Anne Rothenstein and Fabienne Verdier. This juxtaposition foregrounds the striking relevance of the Nabi aesthetic today, where colour, rhythm and interiority remain driving forces.

In just 12 years, the Nabis radically redefined the possibilities of painting. Adopting the burgeoning view, as articulated by Denis, that a 'painting – before being a warhorse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of any kind – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours, assembled in a certain order', they heralded an artistic renewal. Paintings such as Bonnard's 'Étude pour 'Le Corsage à carreaux'' (1892) and Vuillard's 'La Chambre verte, rue

Truffaut' (c.1900–01) are characterised by flat planes of unmodulated colour, distinctive outlines and textured surfaces that give Nabi painting its rhythm.

Underneath its painterly aesthetic, the work of the Nabi drew from the nascent theories of the subconscious developed by Sigmund Freud. Rather than depicting reality as it appeared before them, they wished to convey the experience of being enveloped in the world, engaging the viewer emotionally through the richness of the colours and the tactile quality of the brushstrokes. Guided by this interest in the inner life, Nabi subjects were often drawn from the immediate and personal: sisters, wives and mothers, or occasionally a celebrated stage actor. Most appear in quiet interiors or secluded gardens, exemplified by Roussel's 'Femmes au jardin' (c.1893–95) and 'Femme lisant' (1895) by Vuillard.

The Nabis' interests were wide-ranging: beyond canvases and works on paper, they designed theatre sets, posters and textiles. The exhibition presents Denis' impressive stained-glass design 'Le Cheval blanc' (1894), Bonnard's illustrations for musical scores and concert programmes, and Ranson's Japanese-inspired 'Le Grand Tigre' (1893), a work that migrated from paper into carpets and painting.

Today, the Nabis generate significant institutional attention. In recent years, their work has been the subject of major museum exhibitions across Europe and the United States, and Waddington Custot has played a significant role in this revival, exhibiting the Nabis at Frieze in London (2024) and at the gallery in Paris (2026).

As the purely formal tendencies of late 20th-century art have given way to poetic explorations of lived experience, artists are once again looking at the world with an imaginative sensibility. In this exhibition, Waddington Custot's curation spotlights the clear resonance between the Nabi and contemporary painting, where figuration, emotional depth and richly worked surfaces come to the fore. Barceló's sinuous lines recall Denis' lampshade designs, themselves inspired by Japanese printmaking, a sensibility echoed in the rich surfaces of Dzama's watercolours. Davenport's exploration of colour relationships echoes Filiger's chromatic studies, while landscapes by Arpéa and Rothenstein bring to mind Vallotton's distinctive *paysage composé* approach to sunsets and nocturnal scenes. Réau and Verdier, meanwhile, extend Vuillard's philosophical conception of the world in which interior experience and external reality are in constant dialogue.

Waddington Custot presents 'The Nabi Shock', celebrating the living history of a group that transformed modern painting with extraordinary boldness, and places it amongst a new generation of artistic visionaries who reflect or reimagine that spirit.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Credit Line

'The Nabi Shock', 24 June–12 September 2026 waddingtoncustot.com

Image

Édouard Vuillard, 'La Chambre verte, rue Truffaut', c.1900–01, oil on board, 44.7 x 43.5 cm / 17 5/8 x 17 1/8 in. Courtesy Waddington Custot, London Paris Dubai

About Waddington Custot

Waddington Custot was formed through the partnership of French art dealer Stephane Custot and long time London art dealer Leslie Waddington, in 2010. Located in Cork Street since 1958, formerly as Waddington Galleries, the gallery has a rich heritage and an international reputation for quality and expertise in works by modern and contemporary masters, with a particular focus on monumental sculpture. The gallery has cemented its reputation over several decades for high quality and well-researched exhibitions of significant artists operating in the mid-twentieth century and beyond.

About The Nabis

The Nabis were a tightly knit band of *fin-de-siècle* Parisian painters, active during the years of 1888 to 1900. Part of the wider Symbolist movement, and working at the dawn of Freud's theories on the subconscious, they sought to carry Impressionism beyond perception and into the realm of pure sensation.

Colour was chosen for emotional weight rather than optical truth; particular hues conjured feeling within a single figure or transfigured an ordinary scene into something charged with inner life. Pattern and ornament were celebrated equally, with intimate interiors and sun-dappled gardens resolved into compositions of flattened pictorial space and a light, luminous touch. The result was an art of quiet revelation – one that found poetry in the everyday and profound humanity in the domestic.

The seven principal Nabis included Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), Maurice Denis (1870–1943), Paul Ranson (1864–1909), Ker-Xavier Roussel (1867–1944), Paul Sérusier (1864–1927), Félix Vallotton (1865–1925) and Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940). Yet the circle extended further than art history has typically acknowledged — a broader, more collaborative brotherhood whose full reach is still being mapped.

The Nabi legacy is very much alive. With a decisive contemporary turn toward figurative painting in the last 10 years, the Nabis have undergone a significant reappraisal. Artists including Mamma Andersson, Ian Davenport, Peter Doig, David Hockney, Pierre Knop and Anne Rothenstein have each cited their influence, while a recent wave of scholarship has confirmed what their paintings always suggested: that their modernity runs far deeper than their celebrated contribution to art.

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