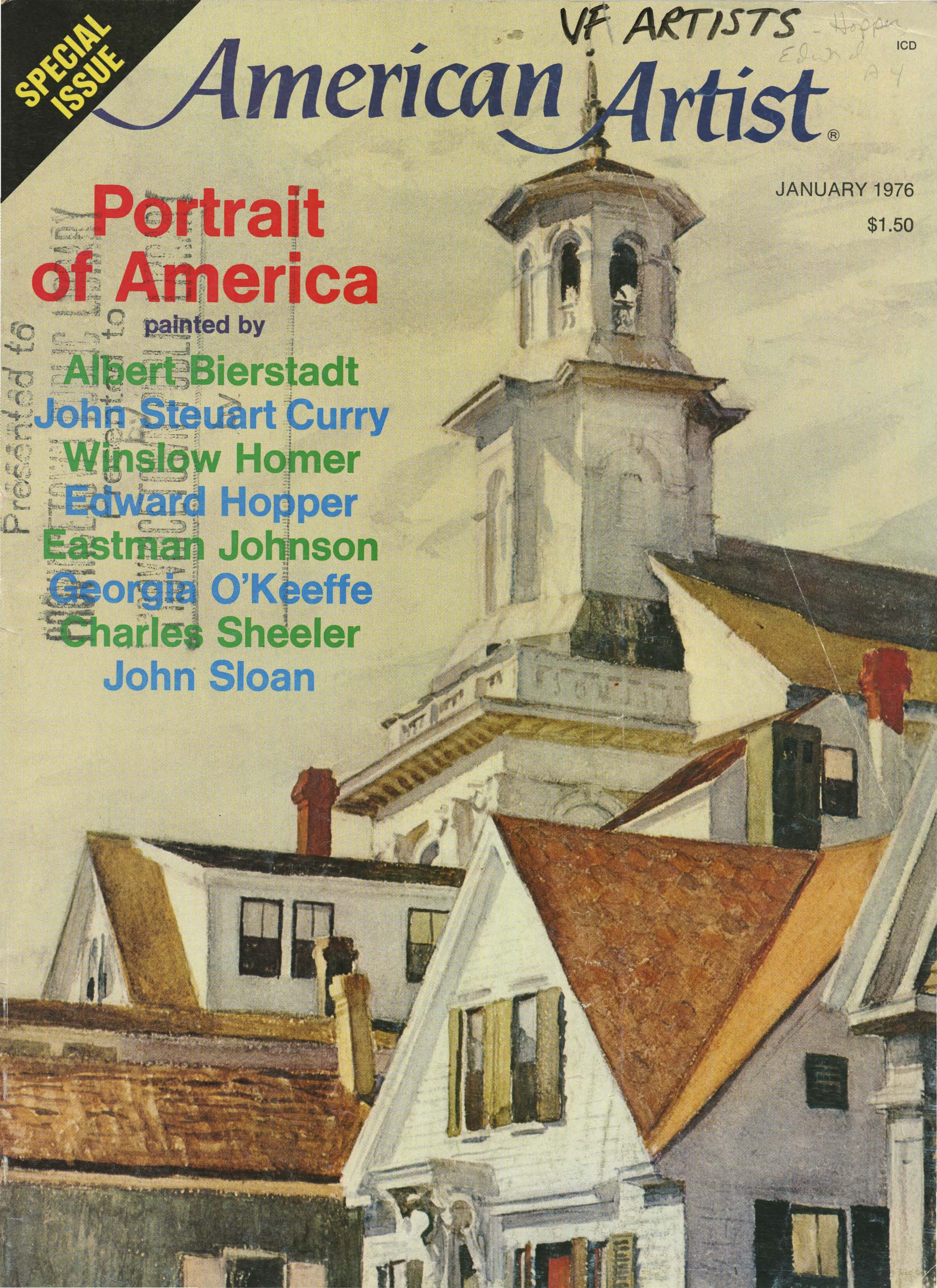

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Edward Hopper: Alone in America

"... A ROCK that stands forth boldly, impervious to, and unaffected by the complex currents of change and decay that eat at the structure of our present-day art world." That is how the American painter Charles Burchfield described his fellow artist, Edward Hopper, in the March, 1950, issue of *Art News*.

Although he exaggerates somewhat, it is truly often difficult to distinguish a Hopper painting of 1925 from one dated 1955, since his style and subject matter, once developed, seldom varied. And, according to all that has been said, Edward Hopper's life was remarkably consistent with his art. The man who is famous for creating images of old Victorian houses and mute, curiously isolated people was himself an extremely shy and quiet person who determined rather early what he wanted from life and art and then never swerved from that goal.

Born July 22, 1882, in Nyack, a short trip north of New York City on the Hudson River, Edward Hopper grew up near the River. He became interested in drawing as a child and spent Saturdays studying yachts in the Nyack shipyards. Neither Hopper's mother nor his father, who ran a dry goods store, objected to their son's desire to become a professional artist. However, they recommended commercial art, so Edward spent one year in a New York City school for illustrators. He didn't like it and transferred the following year (1900) to the New York School of Art, better known as the Chase School, where he remained for the next five years.

While studying at Chase, Hopper came under the influence of Robert Henri, a teacher famous for his ability to inspire and encourage students. Along with fellow pupils George Bellows, Rockwell Kent, and his longtime friend Guy Pène Du Bois, Hopper adopted Henri's so-called "swagger brushstroke"—big, aggressive slashes of paint—his dark palette, and his tendency to portray "ordinary" subjects: everyday people and scenes of city life. Also from Henri, Hopper acquired a deep appreciation for certain earlier European artists, notably Manet, Velásquez, Goya, and Hals.

Since the Chase School emphasized drawing from casts, Hopper's years there were devoted primarily to academic nude studies. He changed his focus in 1906, however, when he spent a year in Paris. The first decade of the century was an exciting period in the Parisian art world; it was the time of the Independents' exhibitions that introduced Europe to Cubism, Fauvism, and the other shockingly avant-garde, "modernist" styles. Hopper went to those shows but said they made no particular impression on him. Certainly there was no evidence of a modernist influence on his paintings, either then or later, and Hopper apparently preferred to avoid the glamorous, "bohemian" life of the Left-Bank artist as well. He lived with a respectable, middle-class family and taught himself French.

Instead of enrolling in a Paris art school, Hopper studied the works of his and Henri's heroes, Manet and Goya. A fellow Henri student introduced him to Impressionism: Hopper especially admired the works of Renoir, Sisley, and Pissarro. He painted his own, on-the-spot, impressionist views of Paris streets and rivers, using pale colors full of reflected lights, but even then his art was more concerned with light as a force revealing form and bulk rather than dissolving it.

While in Paris, Hopper also completed numerous watercolor studies of various Parisian "types"—policemen, workers, prostitutes, concièrges, and café patrons—that verge on caricature. Strange as it seems today, one of Hopper's early successes was with these pictures, which were a part of a 1923 Humorists's Exhibition put on by the National Arts Club in New York. However, Hopper seldom mentioned or showed these watercolors after that.

Photo © Arnold Newman

In 1907, Hopper returned to New York where, the following year, he participated in an exhibition of works by Henri's pupils. During the summers of 1909 and 1910, Hopper again visited France and also Spain. But after 1910 he never went abroad again; he made his home in New York and took regular summer trips to New England, the Southwest, and Mexico.

For the next 15 years, Hopper struggled to gain recognition as a painter of the American scene. His ob-

Opposite page, top: Portrait of Edward Hopper in front of his house in South Truro, Mass., with Josephine Hopper in the distance, August, 1960. Photo © Arnold Newman.

Right: *House at Dusk*, 1935, oil, 36¼ x 50. Collection Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Va. The John Barton Payne Fund.

jective portrayals of New England seacoast towns and New York City streets were rejected, year after year, by the only official art organization with much power in this country at that time, the National Academy of Design. According to the Academy juries, Hopper's work was unacceptable because it lacked charm and technical brilliance, two qualities Hopper had always deliberately avoided.

He had a clear choice to make: either change his way of painting and be accepted by the conservative powers of the art world, or continue to work as he wished and accept the consequences. Obviously, Hopper chose the latter alternative. As a result, he was forced to support himself through commercial art, which he detested, but which he continued to produce, off and on, until 1924.

Meanwhile, Hopper's "serious" artwork did not go entirely unrecognized. At the 1913 Armory Show he sold his first oil painting, *The Sailboat*. It was the last oil he sold for the next ten years.

Ironically, Edward Hopper first became known through his prints, not his paintings. He began to make etchings in 1915, under the tutelage of Martin Lewis. Between 1915 and 1923, Hopper produced some 60 plates, based on such subjects as cows walking over a railroad track toward an old house, two small children playing beside an isolated apartment building, a young couple huddled together late at night in the corner of an otherwise deserted New York City subway car.

In 1923, Hopper won two awards for an etching entitled *East Side Interior*, a particularly sensitive picture of a young woman seated at her sewing machine inside a dark and rather shabby looking apartment, gazing out the open window at something the viewer cannot see. It is typical of Hopper that, despite the early success of his etchings, he set a top limit of 100 for the number of prints from each plate and seldom pulled even that many.

Edward Hopper, oil painter and printmaker, was also successful in watercolor. In the 1920s Hopper began producing watercolor pictures of the areas in Maine and Massachusetts he had painted previously in oils. When he showed some of these paintings to New York art dealer Frank K. M. Rehn, Rehn immediately offered to put on a one-man show. The 1924 show sold out completely, leaving Hopper an artist of some note, with Rehn as his lifelong dealer. After the Rehn show, Hopper abandoned commercial art to devote himself to his own work.

This period, 1923-24, marked a definite turning point in Hopper's career. From then on, articles and books were written about him; he was given numerous awards and honorary degrees; and retrospective shows of his work were held at major galleries and museums throughout the country, including the Museum of Modern Art (1933) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (1950, 1964).

But none of this fame and fortune seemed to change Hopper's personal or professional life significantly. He and his wife, painter Josephine Verstille Nivison, whom he married in 1924, continued to lead a simple existence. They lived at 3 Washington Square North, on the top floor of a building that had served as Hopper's studio since 1913. In this austerely furnished home, both Hoppers had studios for their winter work; in summer they took painting trips to New England and other parts of the country. In 1930 the Hoppers bought land at South Truro, on Cape Cod, where they built a simple house overlooking Massachusetts Bay and thereafter spent their summers.

Hopper died in his New York studio at the age of 85 in 1967, after an artistic career spanning 60 years. Jo Hopper died the following year.

The most interesting aspect of Hopper's art is its consistent overall mood. An impression of utter silence is one of the key components of this "mood." Hopper's works are filled with silence and arrested motion, whether they concern sleepy, smalltown houses in New England; rural views of California and New Mexico; or midtown New York City streets. They are very

Continued on page 103

Right: *East Side Interior*, 1922, etching, 8 x 10. © Kennedy Galleries, Inc.

Above: *From Williamsburg Bridge*, 1928, oil, 29 x 43. Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y., George A. Hearn Fund. 1937.

Left: *Automat*, 1927, oil, 28 x 36. Courtesy Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa, Edmundson Collection.

Overleaf: *Lighthouse Hill*, 1927, oil, 28¾ x 40⅛. Collection Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Purnell.

HOPPER *(from page 75)*

much unlike the urban paintings of such American artists as John Sloan, who stresses the lyrical quality of the city's inhabitants, or Reginald Marsh, who shows the raucousness of city life.

To Hopper, the city—like the country—was essentially a vehicle for painting what interested him. Hopper was capable of painting pictures with "stories," he did so for years as a commercial artist. But Hopper preferred other kinds of art and always maintained that what he wanted to do was simply "to paint sunlight on the side of a house."

That statement is important; he didn't want to paint a particular house in a particular town, or even the side of that house. What interested him was *the light*. The importance of light in all of Hopper's work is paramount. In his pictures, light almost always falls at a raking 45-degree angle to illuminate figures and objects very strongly, almost harshly. Although his style remained substantially the same, in his late works Hopper focused even more closely on the subject of light. This can be seen best in a very late painting, *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963). This illustrates precisely what the title suggests: one corner of a room, with a window in the right-hand wall. There are no figures, no furniture or props of any kind. The

whole canvas is devoted to a study of how light falls through the window, onto the walls and the floor of that corner of the room.

And yet, Hopper's art is not purely an objective study of form; it has a definite emotional content, as well. There is no doubt that some Hopper works are intentionally melancholy. Take, for example, the pictures of couples alone together in a room, or a solitary figure at a luncheon counter, or a woman slumped at the piano, half-heartedly plunking a key with one finger. Hopper admitted that loneliness was an important element in his work, but added that the critics tended to overemphasize its significance.

There is a certain distance in all of his work because of two kinds of barriers—one physical, the other psychological. The physical barrier that appears in many of Hopper's pictures is the long, unbroken, horizontal element—a railroad track, a sidewalk, a field or hill—that effectively cuts off the viewer from the space "inside" the picture. More affecting than this compositional device, though, is the psychological barrier Hopper sets up between the viewer and his paintings. When there are figures, they either have their backs to us, or they look away, often gazing out into space, through a window, at something we cannot see. Or, if there are no figures, the buildings themselves often seem to resist us, offering only blank, impenetrable facades with empty windows and drawn shades.

Hopper's people always seem to be waiting for some vague, undefinable person or event. They are locked into their poses and surroundings; it is impossible to imagine them moving or speaking. His townscapes recall a particularly eerie science fiction movie in which some mysterious extra-terrestrial monster or other unseen power suddenly sucks all the plant and animal life out of a town, leaving just the lifeless buildings and the endless, unchanging blue sky.

Despite the ominous aspect of many Hopper paintings, certain others are more emotionally accessible. Hopper painted many "Peeping-Tom" views of people seen through windows or doors. The intimacy of such scenes is usually greater when he painted women, since his female figures (almost all of them modeled on Jo Hopper) are generally nude or clad only in an ubiquitous pink slip.

Hopper himself recognized the two apparently contradictory aspects of his artistic philosophy: on the one hand, he maintained that he had only formal interests, that he only wanted to paint light. At the same time, however, he admitted an interest in emo-

tional content. If he was ambivalent about the esthetic goal of his painting, Hopper was equally divided in his opinion about its subject matter: he had a classic love-hate relationship with America. When he first returned from France, Hopper commented that the United States seemed "awfully crude and raw" in comparison. And yet he chose to make his home in this country, with its crazyquilt of untouched rural splendor juxtaposed against the crass commercialism of heavy industry and the dreariness of suburban life. And Hopper's artistic reputation was founded, perhaps ironically, on pictures of what he called "Our native architecture with its hideous beauty, its fantastic roofs, pseudo-Gothic, French Mansard, Colonial, mongrel or what not, with eye-searing color or delicate harmonies of faded paint, shouldering one another along interminable streets that taper off into swamps or dump heaps. . . ."

Throughout his life Hopper had eschewed any subject that could be called charming or picturesque. There is a famous story that, on his first trip to New Mexico in 1925, Hopper spent days wandering around the desert, unable to find anything to paint, because everything there was "too beautiful." In the end he painted a picture of a railroad train—quite a contrast with the Southwestern subjects of Georgia O'Keeffe.

This same viewpoint can be seen in comparing Hopper's seacoast scenes with those of Winslow Homer. While Homer concentrated on the pioneer wilderness aspect of America or on portraits of rugged old New England fishermen dressed in oilskin coats, Hopper depicted far more neutral scenes: a single boat in the water, manned by a pair of generalized figures, or a seaside house, slowly falling into disrepair.

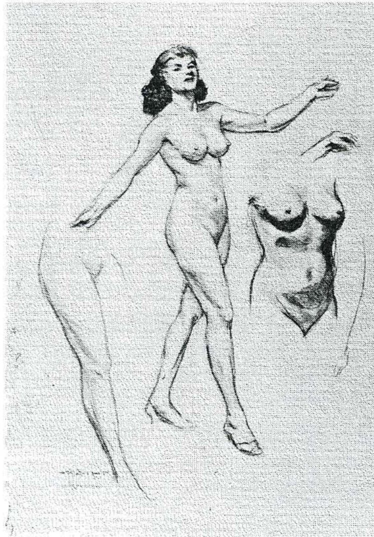
It is precisely this objective neutrality that turns some people away from Hopper's art. Throughout his career, certain critics have complained that his work is too static, even lifeless, devoid of emotion or any feeling of sensuality. In a sense, these charges are true; Hopper is certainly not a colorist. He does not revel in the pleasures of the texture of pigment, nor does he produce in his viewers the kind of clear and immediate emotional response evident in the work of an artist such as Goya. But what Hopper accomplished was his unique manner of selecting some of the most inherently dull and outwardly uninteresting aspects of American life—buildings we would never glance at twice, figures we would miss entirely—and, by choosing unusual compositions and viewpoints, by introducing evocative titles, and by making an intriguing

mystery of the fall of light, he transformed them into something interesting, upsetting, or lyrical. Hopper was the painter of what the American poet Randall Jarrell called "the dailiness of life."

Charles Burchfield summed up the essential quality of Hopper's painting best of all when he said, in the catalog to the Museum of Modern Art's 1933 retrospective, "Edward Hopper is an American—nowhere but in America could such an art have come into being. . . . But more than being American, Hopper is—just Hopper, thoroughly and completely himself."

EDWARD HOPPER

BY ROBERT HOBBS



Drawing for Girlie Show, 1941
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

The repertory theatrical company is an organizing principle for Edward Hopper, who used his wife as the basis for all the women occurring in his art after their marriage. A loner, Hopper had few associations and almost no close friends except for his former classmate Guy Pene du Bois, a stylish Art Deco painter noted for his streamlined renditions of the human figure. In a 1931 article for *Creative Art*, Du Bois characterized his friend: "He is a quiet, retiring, restrained man who has been working for a number of years in New York and Paris, almost as a hermit, rarely exhibiting and rarely appearing in those places where artists gather, though known by and knowing most of them."

Hopper's life revolved almost entirely around his art and his wife, Jo. Stubborn and taciturn to the extreme, Hopper made of his small world a universe, and he managed to transform the one woman in his life into all women. His restricted world may have resulted from Jo's protectiveness as well as her attempt to dominate him and the few people with whom he associated. Jo was garrulous, petty, argumentative, and also fiercely loyal to Edward. Though she might consistently disagree with him, she had tremendous respect for his art, and helped to manage his world so that he could have the solitude and time to create. Edward may have been quiet, but he was not docile. He created his own personal world as he had created his art. The number of sensitive, intimate portraits that he made of Jo over the years points to his deep involvement and respect for her. In the 1920s he made several sensuous nude studies of her, and in the ensuing decades he created drawings and paintings that emphasized her emotional maturity and strength of will. These works could represent wishful thinking on his part, since they indicate a person far different from the constantly bickering, jealous female who is remembered by people acquainted with the Hoppers. In cartoons and casual sketches, however, Hopper indicates an understanding of his wife's failings, but he does not judge them significant enough for his serious art. These cartoons are caustic and funny: they point to Jo's imperiousness, her devotion to her cat who at times appears more important to her than Edward, and her lack of interest in preparing meals. Hopper's ability to make fun of Jo and himself indicates his confidence in their relationship.

It is difficult to fathom the human needs and satisfactions that are part of any marriage, and the Jo and Edward Hopper relationship is no exception. One can only wonder why Edward chose to transform his middle-aged wife into an oversexed secretary and an aging stripper in the 1940s. Was he so removed from life that Jo became a necessary intermediary? Was he so repressed that he could only fantasize about other women by first imagining Jo in these guises, or was he really so dominated by Jo that he could not hire young models if he wished? There does not seem to be an easy or clear answer to this aspect of Hopper's personal world, except to point to his portraits of Jo and suggest that theirs was a complex, intimate relationship that Edward regarded at times as immensely satisfying. Although he was a loner, he may not have been sexually repressed. His taciturnity made him appear glum and even monk-like to Raphael Soyer in a 1980 symposium held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. Talking about a portrait he made of Hopper for his Homage to Thomas Eakins, 1964-65, Soyer quoted a page from his own diary of 1963:

"Carved and bent though his body is, his height [6 feet 4 $^{5/8}$ inches] comes through. I imagined him in the role of those fantastic saints who flagellate themselves or meditate in deserts in the paintings of Carpaccio and De la Tour. There is a loneliness about him, an habitual moroseness, a sadness to the point of anger. His voice breaks the silence

Jo and Edward Hopper

Photo: Louise Dahl-Wolfe

loudly and sepulchrally. He posed still with folded hands on the table. A few times he raised his folded hands and scratched his ear with the tip of one of his intertwined fingers. We hardly conversed."

Hopper appears to have exhibited a healthy appreciation for the female body throughout his life and to have made it alluring even when it is middle-aged. As he moved away from the 1920s, he ceased to conceive the human form in smooth, thinly applied paint. His later figures are awkwardly modeled in thick paint. The new orientation cannot be written off as lack of skill but has to be considered a symbol for the human condition, for the body which has been described since before biblical times as an earth vessel.

Hopper's use of Jo as an actress from repertory theater, who is capable of playing many different roles, is consistent with his overall approach to art, his interest in creating new roles for the audience, and his practice of picturing isolated fragments that point as much to the function of the viewer as to the narrative content that is implied but not given. Jo helps Edward to extend his world even though he isolates each new scene by making his characters into general types instead of known individuals. Hopper becomes the implied viewer of his art, and then he questions his motives for looking at the scene and his connection to these isolated framents of reality. He presents vision as a form of agression, and he casts in doubt the artist's act of appropriating reality. He indicates that an artist can only take possession of fragments of reality and can never grasp it in its entirety; truth in his art is constantly changing, constantly open to new interpretations depending on who is viewing a scene.

Looking at Hopper's art is akin to voyeurism, to a type of seeing that is agressive and passive, intimate and distant, sexually stimulating and safe. It is apparent that Hopper was a viewer of twentieth-century life and not a participant in it. He found a refuge for himself in his studio on Washington Square, which he left only for short vacations or for his other refuge on Cape Cod. And he found in Jo a constant companion and a model capable of becoming the many different women in his art. It is significant that the actual portraits of Jo are always intimate pictures of a distinct individual, while the fantasies are usually pictures of strangers: a voluptuous secretary, a female in a restaurant, an aging striptease artist, a young girl on a sidewalk, a sunbather.

Hopper's repertory of women can be categorized as diversions for travelers, and in particular for traveling salesmen, who are implied viewers of pictures dealing with the hotel lobby, the diner, the movie theater, and the burlesque hall. Both *Eleven A.M.* and *Girlie Show* can be considered part of this repertoire of images appealing to the traveling salesman, who is the twentieth-century counterpart of the nineteenth-century woodsman, cowboy, and trapper.

Second-Story Sunlight, 1960 Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Two Comedians, 1965 Private collection

In considering Hopper's late paintings it is important to point out that they were made by a man nearing the end of his life, and also important to note that he does not sentimentalize his subject. He remained as steadfastly realistic as he had been in the 1920s when he refused to believe in the great new modernist faith that so many of his compatriots had celebrated. He had worked to remain a realist in the twenties and had managed to survive the Great Depression and World War II without becoming bitter in the former and overly patriotic in the latter. In the fifties and sixties he was able to continue to synthesize his impressions so that they presented facts without succumbing to either propaganda or mawkish sentiment. He had the good sense to find equivalences for his feelings in situations, places, and scenes, to continue to be excited by light, human beings, and the differences in generations, and to record apathy as just another aspect of modern life.

His *Second Story Sunlight*, for example, communicates his feelings for people, his ability to continue to be excited by the female body, and to become entranced with the new teenage phenomenon that was characterizing the 1950s and 1960s. "Toots" (his name for the young girl) is full of life. She sits on the second story balcony taking in the sun and waiting for the hot rods that would be cruising the neighborhood. She is just as eager to get off the balcony and join the mad rush of modern life as the old woman is content to remain there and watch life go by. The teenager in this painting points to an important new force in the postwar era. And Hopper's delight in her is not that different from his fascination with the legs of the woman pictured in *Automat* almost forty years before.

Hopper was aware of his oncoming death. He was ill for some time, and he symbolized his passing by creating a farewell picture entitled *Two Comedians* (1965), which, according to Jo, represented the two of them bidding farewell like "two small figures out of pantomime." In the painting, the tall comedian bows and gestures to the female, who shyly stands a little behind him and points back to him. The painting affirms that the art on one level was a collaborative venture, a process of Edward Hopper thinking up possible roles for Jo, which she then acted out so that he could paint them.

Although Hopper emphasized vision as a historical fact that indicates new orientations for twentieth-century viewers, his last painting reaffirms the very traditional orientation of the proscenium stage theater. In a preliminary sketch he considered placing himself and Jo at the rear of the theater so that they would become an entr'acte, but he decided in the painting to make their leave-taking more traditional and to move from his usual position behind the viewer and to go up to the stage and take his bow as a retiring performer. His final act as a painter was to let his viewers know that art and life are part of a grand play in which the artist and his wife have been primary actors, thus paralleling Shakespeare's famous lines, "All the world's a stage/and all the men and women merely players./They have their exits and their entrances/and one man in his time plays many parts."

Two years after completing *Two Comedians*, Edward Hopper died; a year later his wife, Jo, followed him. ❑❑

Reprinted from the book Edward
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HOPPER

(continued from page 75)

Hopper *by Robert Hobbs, published in 1985 by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., N.Y. in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.* *Text (c) 1987 Robert Hobbs.*

Robert Hobbs is also the co-author, with Gail Levin, of Abstract Expressionsim: The Formative Years *and author of* Robert Smithson: Sculpture, *both published by Cornell University Press. His article, "The Significance of a Responsive Culture," appeared in the August, 1986, issue of* Provincetown Arts.

THE POWER OF SILENCE

Edward Hopper—the subject of a major retrospective at the Whitney Museum this month—captured a distinctly American mood of melancholy that has influenced generations of artists and writers. Novelist Leonard Michaels celebrates one of his favorite paintings.

Museum of Modern Art, New York/Courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art

ON HER OWN: THE ROMANTIC, LONELY HEROINE OF HOPPER'S *NEW YORK MOVIE*, 1939, STANDS APART.

The painting had the exciting effect of a beautiful face, shadowy and erotic, touched with savage reds. As with a beautiful face, I couldn't get enough of it, and I wanted to be alone with it. I was tantalized by a presence beyond what I looked at. Greedy and desirous, I'd go up to the second floor of the museum and look again and again at *New York Movie.*

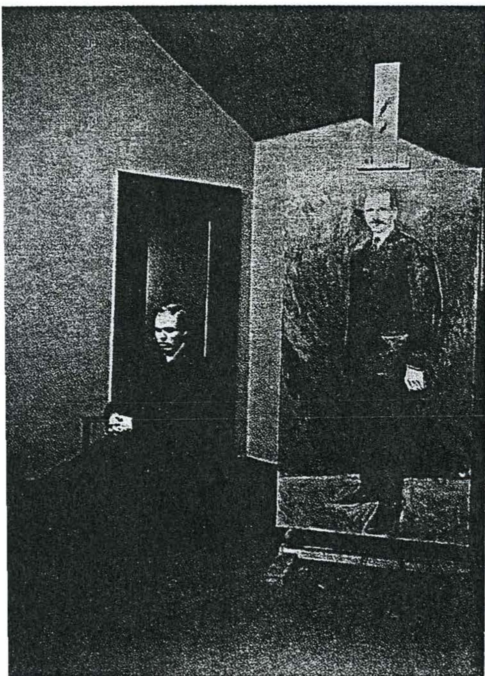
I was sixteen, a high school senior, when I first saw the painting. I had little money and had never owned anything valuable, but I could go to the museum. Alone with the painting, I felt I could almost possess it, or be possessed, as in a religious mutuality of what you see and what isn't there. I thought *New York Movie* was about this strange mutuality, about living with desire, which is the effect of movies.

A movie named *Laura,* also very haunting, was released about that time in the forties, soon after Hopper finished the painting. *Laura* is about a man who falls in love with the portrait of a woman he has never met. He believes she is dead. It turns out she isn't. The man is frightened to discover that his desire has a material body. I also felt frightened, then tortured and sickened by love. Laura lived and might actually be had by the man, Dana Andrews. She'd have been better off dead, I thought, but I was ferociously jealous.

Played by Gene Tierney, Laura seemed impossible not to love, and far beyond possession. She was a man's dream of endless desire. I suppose every movie is like *Laura,* a woman watched from the point of view of darkness, in a world of desire and disembodied presences. Hopper called his painting—which focuses on a woman—*New York Movie,* so he seems actually to say this woman is a movie, or this movie is a woman. He had the erotic relation in mind, the relation between desire and what isn't there. He was a painter of erotico-metaphysics, the basis of a philosophical life as described by Plato. Hopper joked about the idea of himself as a philosopher, but he read Plato. In fact, Hopper was a philosophical painter, known to be solitary and thoughtful, like the blond woman in his *New York Movie.*

In the forties and fifties, solitude was easier to appreciate than it is today. I can remember being alone with *New York Movie,* feeling the solitude it contains. Hopper painted public places, rooms where people gathered, but with few people or nobody in them. Few people went to museums during the week. Galleries were vacant for long minutes. You could stand before a painting as if it were an icon, and not hear voices on every side. There was silence in those days. It was associated with solitude, sacredness, and internal life.

Silence and solitude became very great in popular music, in songs like "Deep Purple" and "Ol' Man River" who "don't say nothin'," or "Blue Moon" with the lyric "You saw me standing alone. . . . / without a love of my own," or the song "These Foolish Things," which carried a mood of solitude in almost every line: "A tinkling piano in the next apartment/Those stumbling words that told you what my heart meant. . . . /These foolish things remind me of you." No stumbling now, no tinkling, no haunting presences. Everything is here. "In your face," we say, and "I want it now." We rap, we shriek in the raving crowd, and wear clothing big enough to hold two or three people and walk about wearing earphones, lest we feel alone. There are no philosophers.



EDWARD HOPPER IN HIS NEW YORK STUDIO C. 1914 WITH AN UNIDENTIFIED PORTRAIT.

In Hopper's era, we wore tight clothing and held each other close, saying nothing, dancing slowly, shuffling a few inches this way and that, feeling possessed, or possessed by feeling. Everyone preferred feeling to sex. I'd look at the woman in *New York Movie,* at her blue uniform and elegant high-heeled shoes, and think her shoes were too elegant for the usherette uniform. They gave away her yearning. Around midnight, when the last movie ends, she would take off the uniform, put on a black cocktail dress, and not have to think about what shoes to wear. She had a date. They were going to a party. Of course she wasn't going anyplace, couldn't leave the theater. I mean only that for me there was drama in the painting. It was more psychologically intense than the movie on the distant, blurry screen, a rectangle near the upper left corner of the painting, like the window of a dark room.

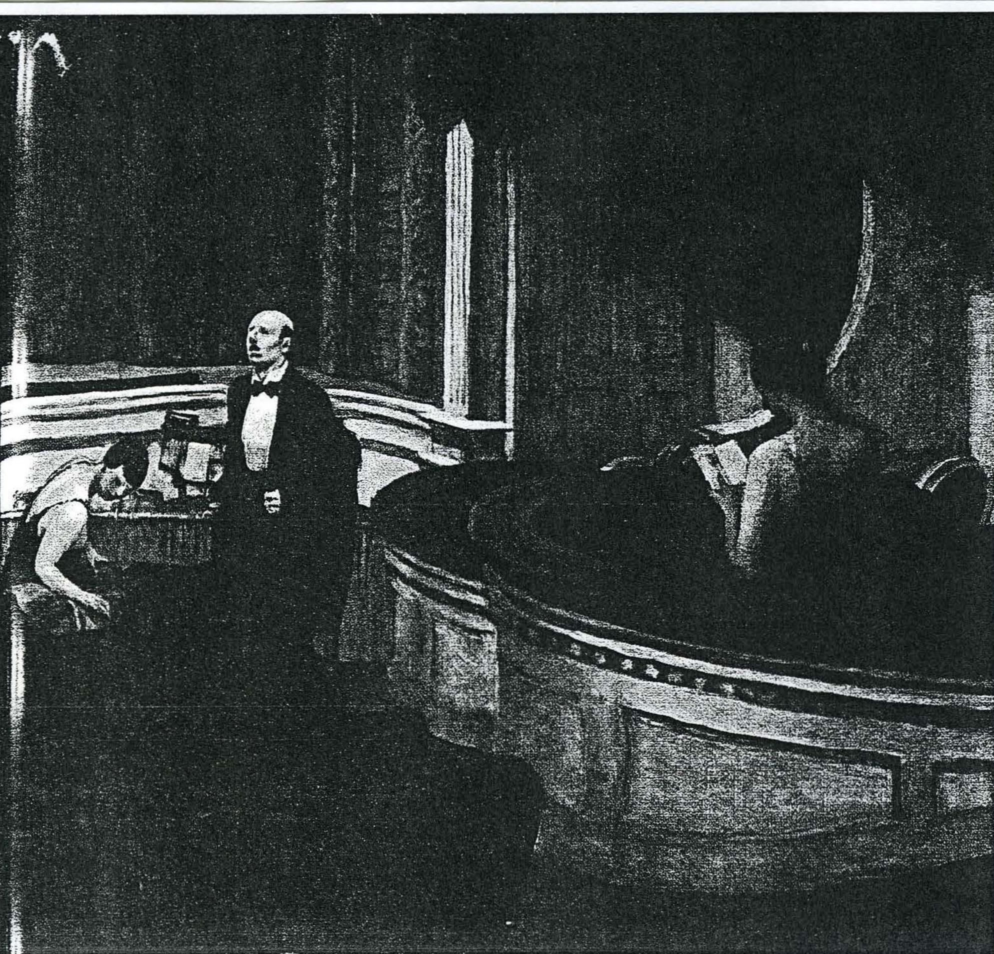
The usherette wasn't involved in any movie drama, any mechanical story told with cuts and fades while music works on your feelings, exactly the same every time you looked. Hers was a drama in the sense of myth, the myth of Eurydice, doomed to wait at the edge of darkness. You can suppose the red flashes in the shadows are streaks of fire, and streams and gouts of blood. Eurydice stands at the edge of Hades waiting for Orpheus. The movie theater, like many others, might be called the Orpheum.

Hopper's Eurydice stands against a wall, holding her chin while thinking about the party she will go to later in a Village apartment, in an old brownstone on Hudson Street, a short walk from the theater. Small crowded rooms, high ceilings, and the whole apartment overheated by clanging iron radiators. She sees herself standing in the kitchen, always the loudest, most crowded room, with a drink in one hand, cigarette in the other, laughing, feeling slightly overdressed in those shoes that have begun to hurt her feet, but free of the costume she must wear amid the Byzantine phantasmagoria of the movie house, the palace of the unreal where people go for a shot of desire and confuse it with life.

A man looked at Eurydice. She'd noticed him when she walked into the party. He was standing alone beside a tall window. The instant he looked at her, she looked away and left for another room. He followed, working slowly through the crowd. Now he was beside her in the kitchen. She ignored him. She was laughing because others were laughing. Someone had told a joke. She hadn't heard it, but she laughed, making herself part of the ha-ha group; unapproachable. "Are you here alone?" he said, terrible directness in his tone. She couldn't not turn, not look at him confusedly. "What?" she said.

I felt such pleasing confusion, as if I were at a movie, when looking at *New York Movie.* But I would hardly ever look at a movie twice, let alone 20 times, as I would a great painting. Still, Hopper's painting pulled me into itself, like a wonderful movie I'd never seen. Its drama resisted understanding. A poem, says Wallace Stevens, "must resist the intelligence/Almost successfully." The same for a painting. Stevens's poems, like Hopper's paintings, suggest elusive

THIS ESSAY APPEARS IN THE CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITION "EDWARD HOPPER AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION."



Hopper's painting pulled me into itself, like a wonderful movie I'd never seen. Its drama resisted understanding

TOGETHER ALONE: *TWO ON THE AISLE,* 1927, ANOTHER HOPPER THEATER INTERIOR LADEN WITH DRAMA.

meanings, like women who can't be had; at least not easily.

"Are you here alone?" he said.

Eurydice said, "Go away, mister."

With his dark, gangsterish stare, the man resembled the actor John Garfield, but taller, meaner-looking, and handsomer though his skin was bad. Eurydice's mouth said go. Her eyes said stay.

"Finish your cigarette," said the man. "We'll leave."

She said, "Pardon me?" She raised an eyebrow, at once quizzical and disdainful, then smiled coldly.

He waited with the patience of an intelligent animal, unsmiling. She let go of her cigarette. It fell to the linoleum floor, sticky with spilled beer. She tried to remember where she'd put her coat. All women used to be virgins, so kids were shocked to learn what their fathers had done to their mothers. Now kids are shocked by nothing, bored by a lot of things, and they do it, too.

In Hopper's painting *Two on the Aisle,* a man and woman are taking seats in a largely empty theater. The man is removing his coat. The woman is placing hers over the back of her seat. It's all very ordinary, very plain. But then you think maybe the show is over. Maybe they are leaving their seats. Maybe he is putting on his coat, and she is reaching for hers. What Stevens calls "The Plain Sense of Things" is anything but plain.

Stevens and Hopper looked vaguely alike, and I have long suspected they were the same person. They lived on the East Coast, two philosophical artists with a sensuous eye, committed to monolithic marriages. They loved French culture, and were self-mocking fellows who saw themselves as comedians, and were fascinated by silence and ghostly presences. Of the sea, Stevens writes, "Like a body wholly body, fluttering/Its empty sleeves." If *wholly* puns on *holy,* he means whatever is, is never all there is, for there is always the weight and palpable density of ubiquitous nothingness. The nothing that is not there.

Hopper says that in his paintings. His lighthouses, stark, visionary towers at the edge of the sea, stand blindly in sunlight, full of dark seeing. Stevens talks of singing beyond what you can hear. Hopper's Eurydice, in her elegant shoes, thinks of Orpheus, great hero of song who fails to save her from Hades. Horribly sad. Orpheus' singing could enchant trees and birds, but no artist could save Eurydice. Besides, if Orpheus saved her, he'd make an end to desire, an end to art. His fate was to be torn to pieces by a horde of mythical women who then flung his head into the ocean. It continues singing, in the myth, as it floats toward the island of Lesbos.

Eurydice feels guilty. She must tell Orpheus she went to the party alone and met a man. Orpheus will be upset and want to know everything. He'll never stop asking questions. He'll cry. He'll say they can't be together anymore, but he won't leave. She'll cry. It will be hard to see the man again.

Now, against her hip Eurydice holds a tragic flashlight to light the way into the sumptuous and fiery vault. Only a man and a woman are seen within. They are close to each other, but not seated together. They look lonely to Eurydice. The movie has been going for a while. Many seats remain empty. It wasn't important, in Hopper's day, to see a movie from the beginning. People often arrived in the middle, which led to an expression we no longer hear: "This is where I came in."

The empty seats, and the man and woman who are not together, make the theater seem to loom all about, luxuriously overwrought, ceiling aglow with bulging red nipple-lights above red seats. In its luxurious excess, it seems hollow and wasted. A column of thick, massively involved carving stands between the people and Eurydice. It has a lacerated, bleeding, meaty look. You hardly notice it at first. Eurydice doesn't notice it at all, doesn't know it is the body of Orpheus. But who can tell what she notices? The way her head is turned, she might be willfully ignoring *(continued on page 248)*

Art, Toledo, Ohio; gift of Edward D. Libbey.

ON VIEW AT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK, FROM JUNE 22 TO OCTOBER 15, 1995.

THE POWER OF SILENCE

(Continued from page 209)

the column. She is petulant. Orpheus failed to save her. He got torn to pieces and she remained stuck in a dull job, in a silly uniform. The uniform looks very good on her, even rather exciting, but she wants to get rid of it and put on her dress and go to the party. She wants adventure.

Orpheus' head is singing while poor Eurydice, without a song of her own, dreams of being saved from this lush and funereal theater, built for the primal drama of sacrifice, fire, blood, and shadows. The victims' ghosts play indistinctly on the cold blue distant screen. A guilty red line runs down the trouser leg of Eurydice's uniform. It means her connection to the theater is both formal and metaphorical. The theater is, formally, her workplace. Metaphorically, it is her body, an interior darkness of desire, pleasure, and fantasy.

She stands below red shaded lamps that cast intense light, catching the edges of her hair and giving a morbid whiteness to her temple and wrist. Perhaps the tendency of her thoughts is grim, like the woman in Stevens's poem "Sunday Morning," published about fifteen years before Hopper finished his painting. In the poem's sensual setting, a woman thinks of desire and sacrifice, and wonders, "Why should she give her bounty to the dead?" Her working-girl sister, Eurydice, might ask the same question in her sensual movie theater.

I heard voices in the adjoining gallery. My trance was broken. I left quickly, as though I'd been discovered doing something illegal, maybe standing too close to Eurydice, like the gangsterish man, and I'd startled her. But it was I who was startled. She heard no voices. She was thinking; heard nothing.

People used to think. There used to be silence, solitude, and thinking. Hopper was known for silence and solitude, living half the year in semi-isolation on Cape Cod, and he made paintings about the drama of thinking. That was almost 50 years ago. We no longer care about history. Still, from Hopper's paintings, you get an idea of what thinking felt like. In one painting, a fully clothed man sits on the edge of a bed, his back to the naked bottom of a woman. She sleeps. Of her nakedness, he is oblivious. He is thinking.

In another of Hopper's paintings, a fully clothed woman sits at the edge of a bed with her back to a naked man. His nakedness means nothing to her. She is thinking. Wearing clothes means thinking is a personal experience, unlike nakedness, or impersonal, instinctive life. Today we are mad about nakedness. Some artists say, when working from live models, you must wait until they stop thinking. Too personal. Too old-fashioned. Thinking violates our obsession with surfaces. We hang totally black and totally white paintings in museums while outside, everywhere you look, graffiti attack surfaces. Names shout for recognition. They long for they know not what. There used to be selves before there were surfaces.

As for Eurydice, she couldn't be less naked. She's in a uniform, immersed in her thinking self. The theater critic, Friedrich Nietzsche, would say she is an Apollonian figure in a Dionysian setting. Many theaters are called The Apollo. The best known is in Harlem, and it becomes Dionysian when the entertainer, usually a singer, fails to enrapture the crowd.

Eurydice is tightly contained in a bright blue uniform, consistent with her thinking mood. All about are the wild forms and strong reds of the theater where instinctive life is externalized, or made dramatic; that is, into forms of nakedness. People used to say "naked passion," or "raw emotion," the very thing you see in the orphic column in the center of the painting, so violently carved. Stevens writes, "To lay his brain upon the board/And pick the acrid colors out." He means you can tear off Orpheus' head, but can't see the singing or stop it.

I could have taken the subway downtown to Sheridan Square, which was only a few blocks from Hopper's movie theater, but Eurydice would be gone. She'd left years earlier, in 1939, to stand in *New York Movie.* It was the year the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed and Poland was invaded. Eurydice belongs to a moment, like the appointments of the theater. In a more philosophical sense, she is a property of time. There used to be time. Guys would say they "made time" with a girl. There used to be girls. Now there's just guys, and nothing like time in the rage and blare of movies or New York City's hyperflux. There used to be plenty of time. There used to be day and night. There was even a song called "Night and Day," which is utterly different from "A Hard Day's Night." In the thirties, forties, and fifties there was day and there was night. The distinction is biblical, verses four and five of Genesis.

Hopper could put the hours into his paintings, the embrace of their shadows, their particular stillness, particular light. He painted a woman sitting up in bed as sunlight comes through a window. He painted a woman standing naked in sunlight before the window. People used to look out of windows. The woman is naked, but not for us to gape at, which would be obscene. There used to be obscenity.

There used to be a distinction, like the distinction between day and night, between private and public. There used to be privacy. In Hopper's painting, the light in the window has called the woman to look, to see moments of the day, the time. Time is real, according to the philosopher Henri Bergson. He means organic rather than abstract. He means it's part of creation, and it existed long before we began using it in clocks.

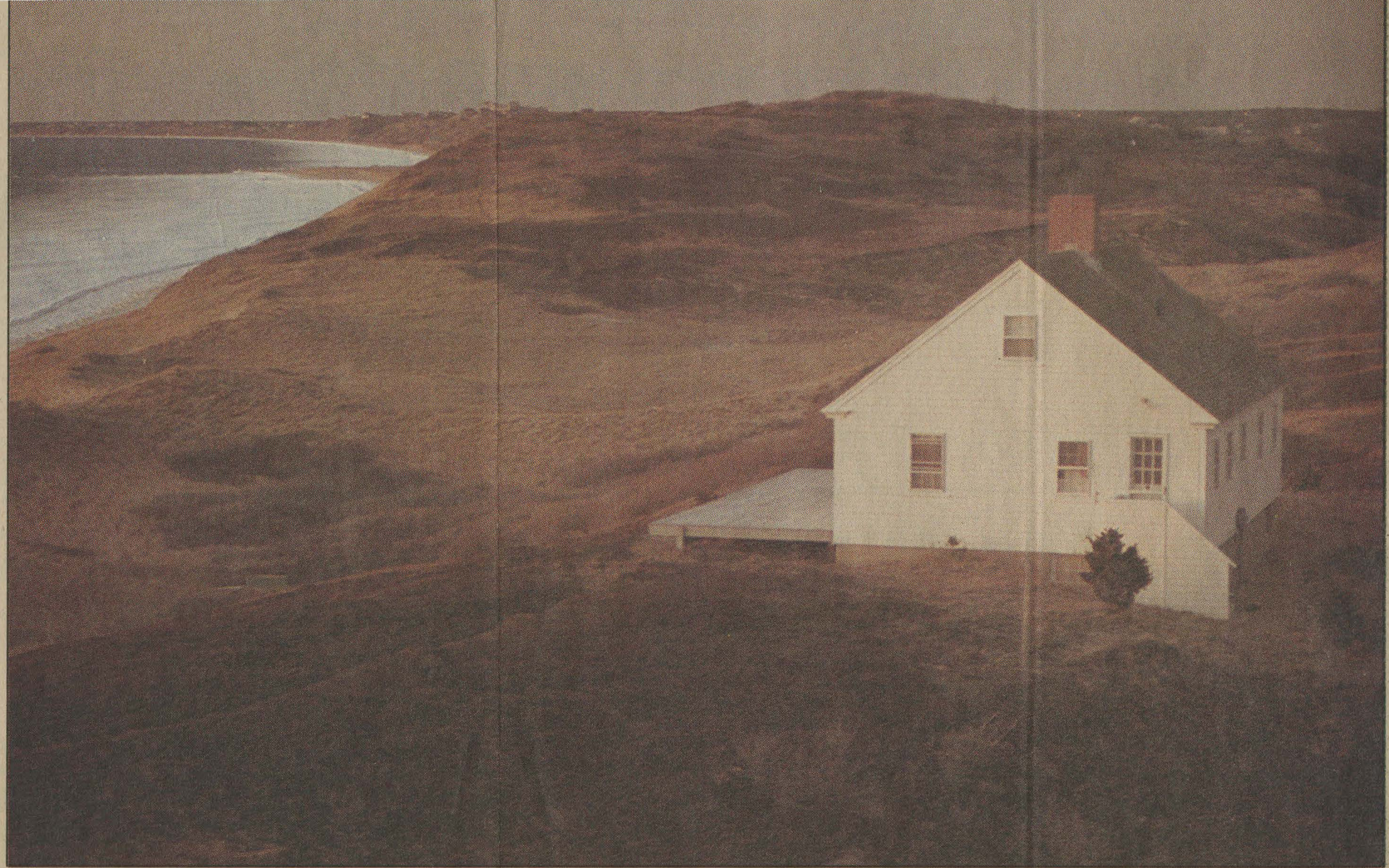
Bergson, who died in Nazi-occupied Paris, was contemporary with Hopper and influenced Wallace Stevens. What Hopper sees, Bergson means. Hopper's usherette is adrift in her private thoughts, in the medium of real time, unlike the manufactured public time of movie darkness. There used to be real time and solitude and stillness. There used to be individual people, Apollonians, as well as the Dionysian public. Politicians used to say "Americans," but that implies individuals, so they now say "The American People." No president now says to the American people, as Roosevelt used to say, "You and I know."

A body was once the reality of a soul. "I'm all for you, body and soul," said the popular song, yearning for a sacred equilibrium of inner and outer. Hopper finds it in paintings of wordless silence, moments of stillness, either indoors or out in the silent light of nature. Even nighttime in Hopper's paintings can seem darkly luminous, or strangely theatrical, noir-movie–like, a sensuous and enveloping darkness, alluring yet scary, as if something out there can't be dispelled by electricity.

Hopper loved movies. They influenced his work, and movies have long paid tribute to Hopper. His New York movie theater is the eye of darkness. Hopper's people are sometimes indoors, seen through windows from the point of view of darkness, or they have left the house to be in nature, in the ancient light. There used to be inner and outer, indoors and outdoors, you and nature. There used to be nature. People left the house to be within its light. There used to be light. □

A4
Hopper, Edward

Trusts preserve Cape Cod's open spaces



■ The Hopper House sits close to dunes and heathlands purchased by the Truro Conservation Trust.

Painter's Truro Days Revisited

A4

Hopper's View of Life Examined Through Lens of European Artist

By Joyce Johnson

TRURO — When Truro artist Edward Hopper created his genre paintings of America during the mid-1900s, it is doubtful he realized how strongly his work would influence other artists, particularly photographers and cinematographers, both here and abroad.

A new German film on his life reveals the strength of that influence — not only Hopper's fascination with light but how his paintings have contributed to a perception of American life.

"For Europeans, two painters represent the American character, personality and way of life — Norman Rockwell and Edward Hopper," film director Wolfgang Hastert told The Cape Codder Saturday, following a showing of his film in Truro.

"Germans are existentialists — the melancholia of Hopper's paintings draws them in. Germans are more uptight — they are attracted to that kind of art. You can find his painting "Nighthawks" reproduced in any poster shop. They think — want to believe — that's how it is in America."

The 45-minute movie-for-television was shown to two packed houses Saturday at the Truro Central School. Proceeds will benefit a grassroots effort to save the oldest lighthouse on Cape Cod, Cape Cod Light in North Truro, which must be moved back from the edge of an eroding cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

Mr. Hastert hired actors to recreate some of the scenes Hopper painted, imparting his own interpretation of the human situations that the artist portrayed.

By also interviewing people who lived in Truro

(Continued on Page 11)

Filmmaker Wolfgang Hastert, on the trail of other renowned Cape artists, visits one of the unique dune shacks in the Provincelands where many artists and writers have worked during the past century.

Staff Photo by Joyce Johnson

Hopper's View

when Hopper and his wife, Josephine, lived there, Mr. Hastert offers insight into the contrasting personalities of the couple — he, taciturn, thoughtful and slow, and she, talkative, animated and the business manager.

Provincetown photographer Joel Meyerowitz, known for his own portrayal of the special light of the Outer Cape, said Hopper was completely in tune with nature.

"Places put out a call and he would hear it — he heard the song of the space he was in and the parallel took place in (his) studio," Mr. Meyerowitz said.

But the paintings apparently evolved slowly and with great effort.

"It is difficult to paint an inside and an outside at the same time," Hopper said in an interview.

An element of isolation bordering on desolation pervades his paintings, particularly those which include humans, but also his landscapes, which are stark in their simplicity. The haunting quality apparently influenced filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock, who may have modeled his house-of-evil in "Psycho" after Hopper's "House by the Railroad."

In his struggles to find the silent core that resonates from his work, Hopper often made hundreds of drawings and watercolors before starting a painting.

Truro painter Paul Resika, who had a studio in the same New York City building as Hopper, remarked he met him one day sitting quietly in Central Park. When he asked him what he was doing, Hopper said he was formulating a new painting in his head, a process Resika felt could inhibit the magic of creating spontaneously.

John Thornley of Truro, who has a home not far from the famous Hopper studio off Steven's Way in Truro, said his parents knew the Hoppers well and they often came to tea.

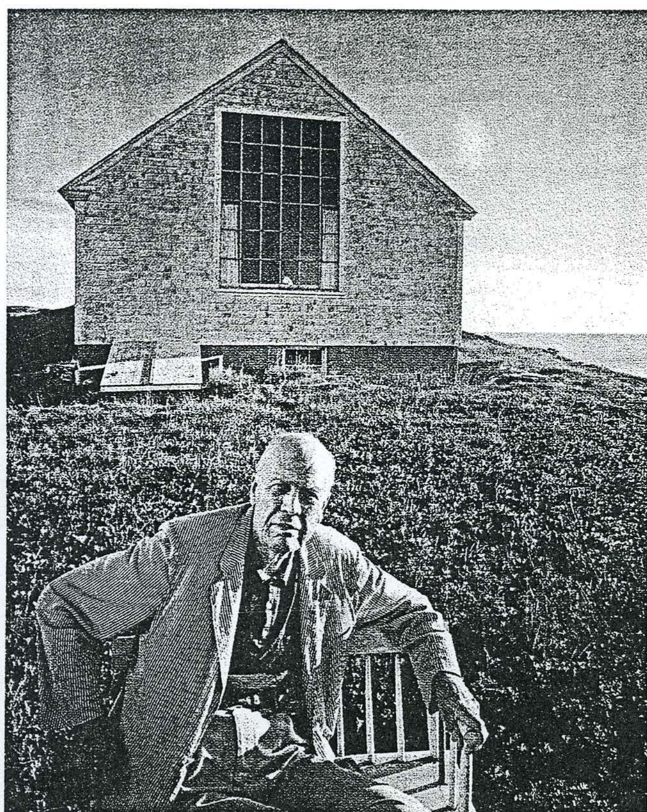
He remembers his aunt exclaiming after one of those occasions that Josephine did all the talking and Hopper "did not say one word."

Mr. Hastert said one of the most exciting aspects of making the film was meeting the men who had photographed Hopper. They included Arnold Newman, Robby Muller and Sidney and Abraham Waintrob. The brothers traveled to Truro this past weekend to be on hand for the showings, a special honor for Mr. Hastert because Sidney is now 92 years old and his young brother "Budd" is 86.

EDWARD **HOPPER** in Truro

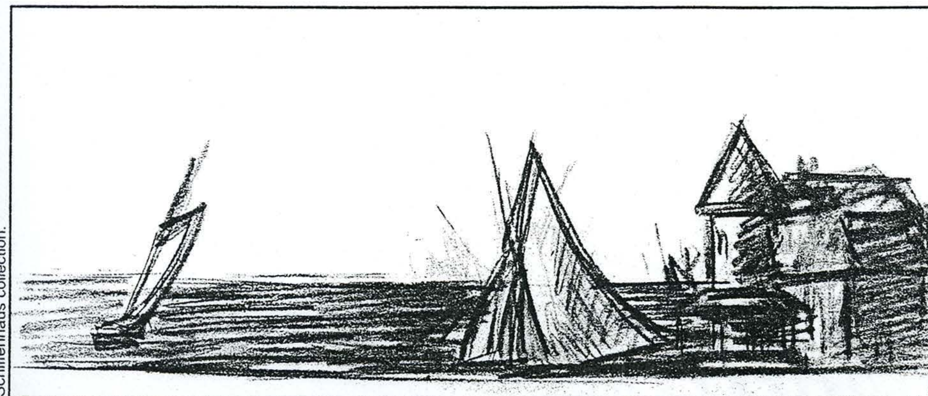
This Summer, Two Provincetown Exhibits Feature This Modern Master

by Sara London



Edward Hopper in front of his house in Truro in 1960. Copyright © 1996 Arnold Newman

Art Resource, NY



Schiffenhaus collection.

Edward Hopper, Study for Lee Shore, 8 1/2" x 11"

Edward Hopper, Lee Shore, *1941, oil on canvas, 28 1/4" x 43", Private Collection*

Great art," wrote Edward Hopper, "is the outward expression of an inner life." Hopper's outward expression of quintessential American scenes earned him recognition as one of the most influential American realists of this century. His achievement was to paint the texture of place in the province of modern times. His images are slices of life evoking despair and alienation, yearning and nostalgia; their success lies in their poignant and sometimes haunting familiarity. We've stirred coffee, forlorn in the fluorescence of the city diner in *Nighthawks.* We've witnessed dawn kindling the bricks of a downtown building on an *Early Sunday Morning.*

National Museum of American Art, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY

Edward Hopper, Cape Cod Morning, *1950, oil on canvas, 34 1/4″ x 40 1/8″, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.*

Two Provincetown Exhibits

While Hopper is recognized by many as a chronicler of the urban, his numerous images of Cape Cod (in addition to Gloucester and Maine) depict another story. Truro in particular attracted the artist to its simple wooden houses, barren sands, and bands of sky and sea. He painted the area's barns, churches, and lighthouses, vernacular structures hugged by dunes tufted with sea grass and scrub pine. These settings are the focus of "Hopper's Places," part of an ambitious summer series of exhibitions, lectures, and films on the artist sponsored by the Pilgrim Monument Museum in Provincetown. Based on the book published in 1985 by Hopper biographer Gail Levin, "Hopper's Places" (April 1–September 2) will feature quality reproductions of his Cape Cod paintings, paired with photographs of the actual sites.

A much larger exhibition at the same location will offer the public a rare glimpse into the reticent man behind the canvas. Curated by Anton Schiffenhaus, "Edward Hopper: Silent Light, Silent Life" (May 25–July 21) will feature over forty original drawings and sketches by the artist. It will also include personal effects and memorabilia, such as his wife Josephine Hopper's diaries, letters by both the artist and his wife, his homemade easel, his painting stool, and a scaled reconstruction of Hopper's studio. Several paintings by Josephine will be exhibited as well, and many of the items will be on view for the first time.

The museum's season of Hopper comes a year after the much noted retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art. More recently, the publication of Levin's ample volume, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (Knopf), has sparked new interest in the artist's personal life. The biography, which draws upon unpublished letters and diaries, was characterized in the *New York Times Book Review* as "masterly but chilling." Josephine's journal entries portray a quiet man of intellect and wit, whose self-absorption and dark temperament resulted in deep marital conflicts.

Courtesy of the J. Anton and Laurence C. Schiffenhaus collection.

Edward Hopper, Study for High Noon, *1949, 12 3/4″ x 7 7/8″*

From the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Barney A. Ebsworth

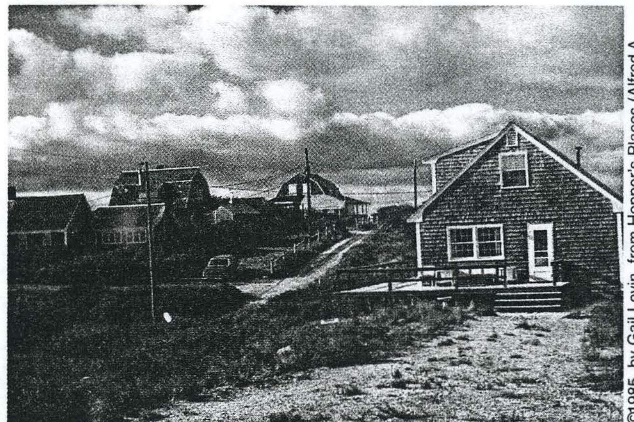
Edward Hopper, Cottages at North Truro, MA, *1938, watercolor on paper, 20 3/16″ x 28 1/8″*

THE TRURO HOUSE

A classic love-hate drama, the Hoppers' marriage was played out, in part, in a modest house on the dunes of Cape Cod. In 1930 they rented a cottage on a farm in South Truro, and three years later built a summer house with a studio and a vast window (36 panes) overlooking the bay; its view would inspire *Rooms by the Sea.* The simple unadorned shingled structure, which Levin describes in her biography as "almost Bauhaus modern," sat poised on a dune banking steeply down to the bay. "Not my idea of a house," wrote Josephine who considered the structure—famously photographed by Arnold Newman in 1960—lacking in eccentricity. "This is E. Hopper's house," she stated. Edward responded with *The House that Jo Built,* a caricature showing an upside-down house teetering on its chimney and a pair of springs with Josephine watering a garden on its skyward foundation. Edward's tiny model of the Truro house, made with shirt-back cardboard and complete with miniature furnishings, will be on view at the museum.

The man of "Chez Hopper"—as Josephine called it—was born in 1882 to a middle-class family in Nyack, New York. He studied illustration and painting in New York City after high school, and from 1903 to 1906 Hopper worked with William Merritt Chase and his most influential teacher, Robert Henri. Several visits to France, beginning in 1906, inspired a lifelong devotion to French culture. The paintings he made there were among the first to appear in group shows in New York.

Hopper was slow to receive critical attention during these early years, and he supported himself reluctantly as a commercial illustrator—a talent for which he gained noteworthy recognition. In addition to achieving success with his etchings, he began rendering on canvas what he saw around him: city streets, 19th-century houses, nautical scenes—all thoroughly American.



©1985 by Gail Levin, from Hopper's Places (Alfred A. Knopf, 1985)

In Provincetown this summer, renowned scholar Gail Levin will be exhibiting her photography of sites painted by Hopper. In this photo of the site of "Cottages at North Truro," a new house has been inserted into the landscape where the railroad once ran.

EDWARD AND JOSEPHINE

In 1923, at the age of 41, Hopper spent the summer painting in Gloucester. There he met Josephine Nivison, an artist who had

Edward Hopper, Mouth of the Pamet River—Fall Tide, *1937, watercolor on paper, 20″ x 28 1/4″, Private Collection*

coincidentally studied with Henri. Described in Levin's biography as gregarious, sociable, and barely over five feet tall, the 40 year old Nivison was attracted to the shy and quiet, six-foot, five-inch artist. When he did speak, wrote Josephine, it was "apt to be very witty or very wise—or both."

The two shared a passion for the French language, literature, theater, and film, as well as watercolor. They married the following year. That same year Hopper had his first one-man show at the Rehn Gallery in New York. Sixteen pieces were sold and the reviews were enthusiastic. He was called an "incorrigible romanticist" and an independent artist, "quintessentially not a group artist."

Levin writes that, "The frugal artist celebrated by going to Brooks Brothers and buying a hundred-dollar ulster, the long loose-belted overcoat that he favored for New York winters."

While Edward thrived, Josephine's painting career was soon overshadowed. She became his model and record keeper, taking over most of his correspondence and keeping house. Her letters and diary entries reflect a growing resentment. "Time was I considered myself an artist and would accept no other destiny," she wrote to a friend. "Now I know myself as a kitchen slave and everything being considered, don't see my way out."

Gail Levin notes in her introduction to the biography that although Josephine continued to produce paintings throughout her life, very few of her works have survived. In the Provincetown exhibition, Anton Schiffenhaus will include a painting and several drawings by Josephine from his own collection.

Ultimately, Josephine received little if any of Edward's support for her own painting. Despite a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1933, Edward struggled with his own self-doubt, depression, and slow output. He would sometimes complete as few as one or two paintings a year, and often felt uninspired by the scenes around him—searching relentlessly for the right subject. One critic called him "the poet in paint of loneliness." But over the next three decades Hopper's work would make its foray into the American imagination. In 1967 he died in his studio in New York City. One year later Josephine, virtually blind, passed away.

The Hopper Legacy

One of Josephine's closest friends on the Cape was Mary Schiffenhaus, a longtime summer resident of Truro, and it was to her that Josephine bequeathed the Truro house. Anton and Laurence Schiffenhaus have since inherited the property and it is Anton's hope that the Provincetown exhibition will introduce an even wider audience to the legacy of Edward Hopper.

It was during a renovation of the house in 1970, says Schiffenhaus, that a worker found "piles of paper—here, there, and every place." These included hundreds of drawings by Edward in conte crayon or pencil, on scrap paper, even on the reverse sides of carbon-copied letters.

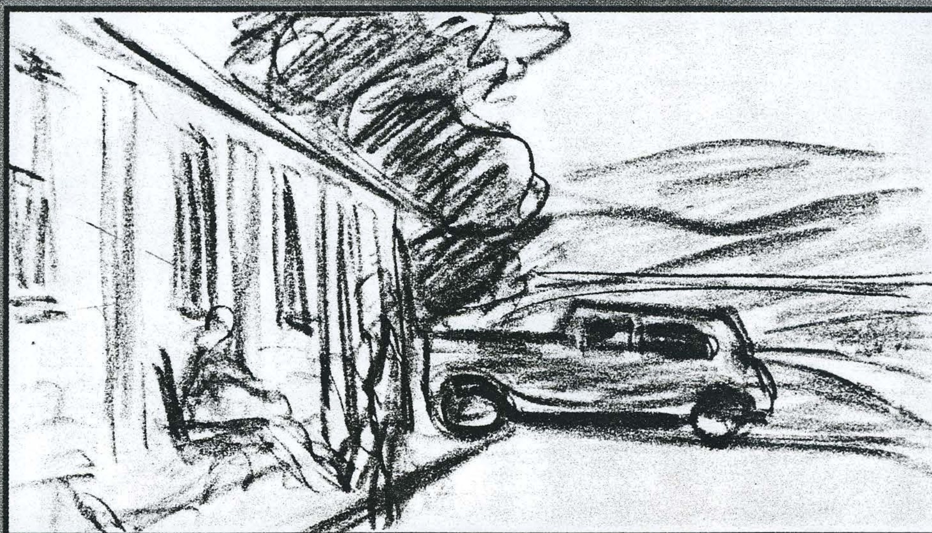
Hopper worked for years out of doors, and often from his car, making hundreds of studies and drawings that he brought back to his studio to complete as paintings. For a single work he could render as many as fifty studies. The drawings in the Provincetown exhibition—simple renderings such as a car parked at a motel, a sailboat on the water, a female figure with repeated studies of an arm—offer a revealing look at Hopper's creative process. Just as the contact sheets of Robert Frank and the manuscripts of T.S. Eliot reveal imperfect stages in the development of great photographs and poems, here the limned and shaded compositions describe Hopper's struggle toward masterful oils.

Among the drawings in the Provincetown Museum show are studies for *The Lee Shore*, *Sea Watchers*, *Hotel by a Railroad*, and *Cape Cod Morning*. Familiar Cape Cod scenes in the "Hopper's Places" exhibit include *Highland Light*, *Dauphinee House*, *Jenness House Looking North*, and *Near the Back Shore*. While so much here is recognizably Cape Cod, many of the sites he painted have either changed or no longer exist.

Gail Levin documented this evolution in *Hopper's Places*. She first discovered Hopper's work in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston during her college years. Inspired by his realist style, she began painting her own Cape Cod landscapes. Her discovery of a book documenting places painted by Cézanne inspired her to create a similar record of the places Hopper painted—houses and landscapes that were already in transformation. "By the time I arrived at these places," wrote Levin in 1985, "decades had passed since Hopper was there; but fortunately he was attracted to backwater locations where the force of progress has been gentler than might be expected."

Writing on other artists in 1927 Hopper noted, "It is something if a modicum of the brutal reality can be saved from the erosion of time." Fortunately for museum goers, Hopper did more than that—his paintings both reinvent and transcend time lost and found.

Sara London is a freelance writer and poet who resides in Provincetown.



Edward Hopper, Motel/Car, *A possible study for* Western Motel, *c.1957, 6" x 9 1/2"*

Both Studies courtesy of the J. Anton and Laurence C. Schiffenhaus collection.

THE HOPPER EXHIBITS

April 1 to September 2: Hopper's Places. A photographic exhibit of Hopper's works and Gail Levin's photographs. Additionally, Gail Levin will present a special slide lecture exploring Hopper's life and his Cape Cod connection at 7pm on July 9 and 10.

May 25 to July 21: Edward Hopper: Silent Light, Silent Life. This exhibit features Hopper's sketches, drawings, and finished works as well as works by Josephine Hopper and rare personal effects of both artists.

Both exhibits are held at the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, High Pole Hill Road, Provincetown. 487-1610.

Edward Hopper, Study for Road and Trees, *1962*

EDWARD HOPPER

BY BUDD HOPKINS

In 1964, when Joan and I moved into our new summer studio in Truro, we realized that from our high ground we could see the Edward Hopper house on a ridge across the tiny Pamet River. And since the Outer Cape—Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown—is a rather small area, we found ourselves passing Hopper from time to time on the area's winding, narrow roads. He drove an old, bulbous Pontiac or Buick or the like, and sat hunched over the wheel with his gaze fixed rigidly straight ahead. He was truly a terrible driver, and a number of friends of mine told stories about how they almost ended a major chapter in American art, narrowly averting a head-on collision when the elderly artist wandered into their lane.

Hopper was enormously tall—about six-foot-five—but so sadly bent over that when he sat at the wheel of his old car he was shaped like the letter "C." He favored clothes that were several decades out of style, and often wore the kind of sharp, wide-brimmed hat favored by Dick Tracy, the Crime Fighter. I very much admired Hopper's art but was well aware of his hermetic nature; even though we were nearly neighbors and in the same profession, speaking to him seemed to be completely out of the question.

My feeling about his work is that his paintings range from overly stiff, near-illustrations to some of the most powerful and evocative images in all of American art. Like the films *Citizen Kane* and even *Casablanca*, Hopper's "Nighthawks," "Gas," and "New York Movie," three of his finest paintings, have become icons of both high and popular culture. (Can the pensive couple seated at the counter in "Nighthawks" be Rick and Ilsa, having made it safely to New York in another life?) In general, though, I tend to prefer Hopper's watercolors to his oils, and am particularly drawn to some of his early depictions of city rooftops with their forests of personalized chimney-pipes, his images of lighthouses, some of which have their windowed domes perversely cropped by the edge of the paper, and, of course, his renderings of old Victorian structures moldering proudly in the sunlight.

His paintings focused on male and female figures are often less successful, as if his cool architectural poetry tolerated the intrusion of warm, living, human beings only with reluctance. One can no more picture a Hopper painting of a cherubic baby or a pair of young lovers than one can imagine a Renoir crucifixion.

And yet there is an odd undercurrent of repressed eroticism in Hopper, stated most blatantly in his depiction of a big-breasted stripper strutting her stuff on a burlesque stage, pasties, red hair and all. More typical, however, is the sense of a not-quite accidental voyeuristic moment: a naked woman in an unfastened blue bathrobe, standing in the doorway of a distant house; the thighs and hindquarters of a partially-clad female apartment-dweller bending over just inside an open window; a pensive young woman in a slip, waiting, wistful and alone, on a flat, featureless hotel room bed. And for someone ostensibly so interested in sunlight, an unusually large number of Hopper's tableaux take place at night. It's enough to make me wonder if he might not have taken some of those reckless drives on the backroads of Truro in the hope of coming upon just such distant erotic enticements.

Or, put another way, I can easily imagine the aging, hermetic painter working in his studio on yet another weathered Victorian cottage, laying in the gingerbread around the entrance . . . and then at the last minute allowing his fantasy to place an alluring blonde in her gaping housecoat right at the front door, gazing out towards the viewer—in this case, the artist himself.

When Joan and I first got together, she told me a story about Edward Hopper. It needs a little background in the telling, but it is both amusing and absolutely on target. Hopper was not, shall we say, a generous man, as her recollection attests. The Puritan austerity that has come to be seen—only partially correctly—as the hallmark of Hopper's work, included a very real and unattractive miserliness. When he died, workmen renovating his Truro house found an attic full of bundles of old newspapers, boxes of empty but washed-out Listerine bottles, work shirts bought in the 1940s but never worn, and so on, all being saved, one presumes, against a rainy day when they might come in handy. And whenever he dined out at a local cafe, as he often did since his wife hated to cook, chicken a la king was his regular choice. Probably because, as a one-time patron there once told me, it was the cheapest thing on the card.

My wife was a little girl during World War II when she sometimes stayed in Truro with a family named Beal in a rented house quite close to Hopper's. One day, Joan told me, she and the Beal's daughter ("my-girlfriend-Linda;" I always pictured hyphens whenever Joan said the name) planned to draw and color and then cut out some paperdolls. Unfortunately, however, they had no paper. Town center was quite a walk away, and no one was willing to use the gas to drive them there just so that they could buy a sketch pad. But then "my-girlfriend-Linda" remembered that the old man at the top of the hill was an artist, and as such would surely have some paper to give them. They walked up the path to his place with trepidation, about to face the grouchy old codger who never talked to anyone.

They knocked on Hopper's kitchen door, and soon he answered, glowering down at them from his impressive height. They stated their request: some paper so they could make some paper dolls. With more than a touch of anger in his voice he refused them. "The only paper I have is watercolor paper and it costs me 75 cents a sheet, and you can't have any." With that he closed the door and the interview was over.

In my sense of him, Joan's story is pure Hopper. Who could be less likely to have sympathy for a pair of little girls than a miserly, childless man, protective of his expensive paper, an artist who, for all I knew, had never drawn or painted a child in his life? But there is a sequel to the story.

Years later, at his huge and beautiful retrospective exhibition at The Whitney Museum, Joan and I approached Hopper to congratulate him on the show. As one after another of his admirers came up to shake his hand, he seemed to be almost smiling. We introduced ourselves, and I informed him that we lived in Truro at some distance from, but in sight of, his house. We exchanged some geographical information and a few conventional niceties, and then I found myself launching into Joan's story about the watercolor paper. I had honestly forgotten its distressing denouement, remembering only the name of the Beal family and the fact that the girls wanted to borrow some paper.

Hopper said he remembered the Beals. But with Joan melting with embarrassment and dread at my side, I continued with the story until suddenly, way down the tracks, I remembered its end. The situation called for an immediate alteration. "And so," I went on to the conclusion, "they knocked on your door and you came out, and when they asked for paper to make paper dolls, you said that all you had in the house was watercolor paper. And you gave them some." I stopped in relief, having lamely and in the nick of time saved my own neck. Hopper's response was to frown down at me from his arched but Olympian height and say, "Nope! I never gave those little girls watercolor paper to make paperdolls." Worse, he said it as if he still *remembered* the event, now some 20 years later. He knew that no little girls had ever gotten a 75-cent sheet of paper out of him.

This tight-fistedness affected, I assume, just about everything in Hopper's life. I once saw a study for one of his classic paintings, "Gas," which he'd drawn on the kind of cheap second sheet that used to accompany packs of typewriter paper. On the back of this beautiful drawing was the carbon copy of a letter he'd written to the owner of—as I remember it—a Sunoco station in New Mexico. "Dear Sir," the letter opened, and I paraphrase from memory: "When I was recently motoring through your town I stopped at your place of business and purchased a tire gauge for 85 cents, plus tax. It has since proven to be defective. I am returning it under separate cover to the address on your receipt. I would appreciate a full refund, as well as repay-

ment for the cost of postage. Yours sincerely," followed by a place for his signature. He wasted nothing—neither a broken tire gauge, a worthless, throw-away piece of paper, nor even the available backside of a trivial business letter.

There's another Hopper sketch of a collie dog which was done on a piece of scratchpaper bearing the letterhead of the Truro library. Obviously he'd gone there to look up pictures of collies so that he would be able to include one, accurately drawn, in a painting he was working on. Then, rather than waste a sheet of his own for such a minor task, he naturally chose to use the library's free paper.

But despite his human failings, as an artist Edward Hopper was one of America's greatest. Though formidably talented and in many respects highly sophisticated, there was also about him a kind of wooden primitivism and naivete. Apparently he looked upon Picasso and Matisse with contempt, and was absolutely wedded to the idea that art must be stringently representational. Robert Motherwell once told me of being on a two-man painting jury with Hopper, who insisted on rejecting anything that did not adhere to his own rigid esthetic, and even tried to give the first prize to his wife, Jo, who painted exactly like him.

He seemed to have only a dim idea of the compositional inventiveness that underlies his best paintings, a subtle quality that gained him respect among the very abstract and modernist artists he chose to despise. Hopper's friend Lloyd Goodrich told me that during a slide lecture he once compared the structure of a Hopper painting with that of a dramatically simplified abstraction by Mondrian. When he told his friend of the striking similarities he'd found, Hopper responded testily: "You kill me."

I've always felt that some of Hopper's urban landscapes of the '30s and '40s recall Leger's masterful city paintings of around 1920, and an occasional work even suggests the powerful abstract-expressionist dark-and-light compositions of Franz Kline. God knows what Hopper would have thought about that. All he said he wanted to do, after all, was "to paint sunlight on the side of a house." We can be thankful he did so much more. ■

Budd Hopkins, a painter and sculptor, was featured on the cover of Provincetown Arts *in 1991, along with a dozen other artists who comprise Provincetown's artist-run cooperative Long Point Gallery. "Hopper" is a chapter in Hopkins's "ongoing autobiography," which joins his career as an artist with his avocation as a world-authority on UFO's. Hopper is America's artist of alienation and Hopkins is our poet of aliens. The date of Hopkins first UFO sighting on the Cape was the summer he moved near Hopper.*

HOPPER HOUSE STUDIO WINDOW, 1996
PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BUSA