



EDWARD HOPPER

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART / SEPTEMBER 16, 2007 – JANUARY 21, 2008

THE EXHIBITION IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS GRANT FROM
THE GLOBAL CONSULTING FIRM BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON



1 *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, oil on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase, with funds from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney

cover *Automat* (detail), 1927, oil on canvas, Des Moines Art Center, Permanent Collections, Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc.

THE ICONIC AMERICAN ARTIST EDWARD HOPPER (1882 – 1967)

honed his compositions by eliminating unnecessary details to reveal the essence of a scene. From his distillations emerge poignant and enigmatic pictures filled with audible silences and pregnant pauses: Hopper’s art speaks volumes without uttering a word. Always a realist, Hopper was never a documentarian. In his hands, reality was transformed, seeming at once real and unreal, familiar and strange, ordinary and extraordinary. As he once declared, “My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature.”¹

EARLY WORK

Hopper’s earliest artistic success came by way of his watercolors and etchings, rather than the oil paintings for which he is now best known. Lacking buyers for his canvases, Hopper reluctantly worked as a commercial illustrator. In 1915 he discovered etching, a medium that made economic sense (multiple prints could be sold of a single image) and also permitted the artistic freedom he craved. Hopper’s etchings signal themes the artist would explore throughout his career: isolated figures, empty streets, strong contrasts between light and shadow (fig. 2), and the play of sunlight on architecture.

Although Hopper’s etchings are primarily drawn from urban subjects, he chose watercolor to depict his early small-town or rural images. Encouraged by his fellow art student and future wife Josephine (Jo) Nivison, Hopper began using watercolor in earnest when

summering in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the early 1920s. The portability of the medium allowed Hopper to paint outdoors, where he favored local architecture to the picturesque coastal scenes that had made the region a popular artists' colony. His depictions of New England garnered Hopper important recognition: in 1923 his first sale to a public institution (the Brooklyn Museum's purchase of *The Mansard Roof*, fig. 3) and in 1924 a solo exhibition at Frank Rehn's Fifth Avenue gallery that sold out quickly. Critics admired his deft handling of the medium, straightforward style, and ability to transform vernacular architecture into something beautiful.

2 *Night Shadows*, 1921, etching on white wove paper, Gift of the Print and Drawing Club, 1944.156, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

3 *The Mansard Roof*, 1923, watercolor over graphite on paper, Brooklyn Museum, Museum Collection Fund 23.100





4 *Lighthouse Hill*, 1927,
oil on canvas, Dallas Museum
of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs.
Maurice Purnell

5 *Burly Cobb's House*, 1930,
watercolor over graphite on
paper, The James W. Glanville
Family Partnership



NEW ENGLAND

Throughout his career, New England—first Gloucester, later Maine, and finally Cape Cod—was the source for much of Hopper's subject matter. These coastal communities were popular destinations for artists, but the independent-minded Hopper remained distant from his colleagues, dryly noting, “[W]hen everyone else would be painting ships and the waterfront, I’d just go around looking at houses.”² He

had a penchant for architectural styles of past centuries, especially the Victorian with its heavy ornamentation and mansard roofs. He rendered these houses with dramatic light and often in isolation. Along the coast of Maine, where Hopper visited in the late 1920s, he painted lighthouses, solitary beacons amid the landscape (fig. 4). Full of intrigue and mystery, Hopper's lighthouses surpass their utilitarianism and assume a commanding presence—no longer mere incidental structures like those in the seascapes of other artists.

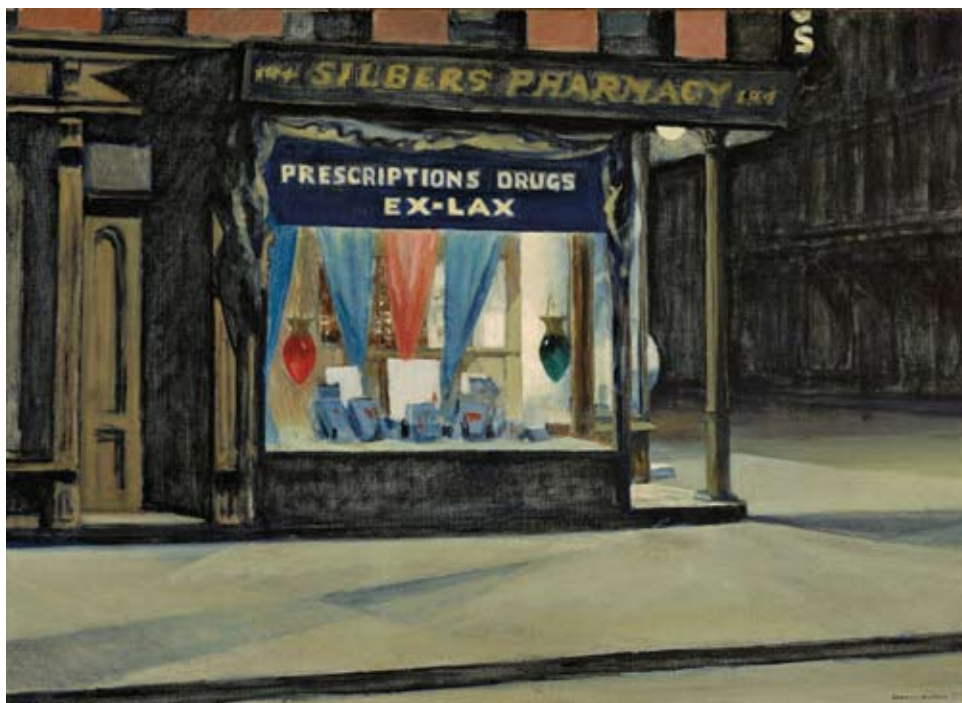
Beginning in 1930, Hopper and Jo (who wed in 1924) spent summers on Cape Cod, where the couple eventually built a house and studio in the town of Truro. There, Hopper's style became more geometric, perhaps inspired by the architecture of the region's salt-box constructions. Always a realist painter, and critical of many modernist trends, Hopper nonetheless inched toward abstraction in these simplified compositions that experimented with the interplay of color, form, and light (fig. 5). For Hopper, however, architecture was never reducible to mere form—it always remained in dialogue with nature. As the artist plainly remarked later in his career, "What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house."³

URBAN PICTURES

Although Hopper regularly visited New England, Greenwich Village (where he lived in the same apartment from 1913 until his death in 1967) was home, and New York set the stage for many of his most iconic paintings. Just as he in New England shunned dominant artistic motifs, Hopper disregarded many Jazz Age subjects—soaring skyscrapers, bustling streets, and industrial machinery—favored by American modernists. Indeed, Hopper's New York is at once instantly recognizable and strangely unfamiliar: streets are devoid of pedestrians (see fig. 1), stores are without customers (fig. 6), and even automats—modern restaurants in which coin-operated, food-dispensing machines replaced waiters—lack signs of anything automatic (fig. 7). And though New York architecture rose to great new heights, Hopper favored instead a horizontal compositional format more closely linked to landscape traditions (see figs. 1 and 11). He also avoided signs of the grit, noise, and commotion of urban life, imbuing his portrayals of the city with an overwhelming silence and disquieting stillness.

The voyeuristic possibilities inherent in the modern city, especially at night, fascinated Hopper. Stolen glances from fast-moving elevated trains and glimpses from windows into neighboring buildings allowed unprecedented public access to private lives (fig. 8). In Hopper's paintings, figures—usually women,

and often alone—are seen undressing, reading, sewing, dining, gazing out windows, or simply lost in thought. When Hopper depicts more than one figure, viewers encounter ambiguous relationships fraught with tension (fig. 9). Conversation and movement are suspended, and there is the sense of having stumbled upon some sort of drama; Hopper, however, never divulges the narrative details.



6 *Drug Store*, 1927, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of John T. Spaulding

7 *Automat*, 1927, oil on canvas, Des Moines Art Center, Permanent Collections, Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc.



8 *Night Windows*, 1928, oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of John Hay Whitney, 1940

9 *Office at Night*, 1940, oil on canvas, Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, Gilbert M. Walker Fund, 1948

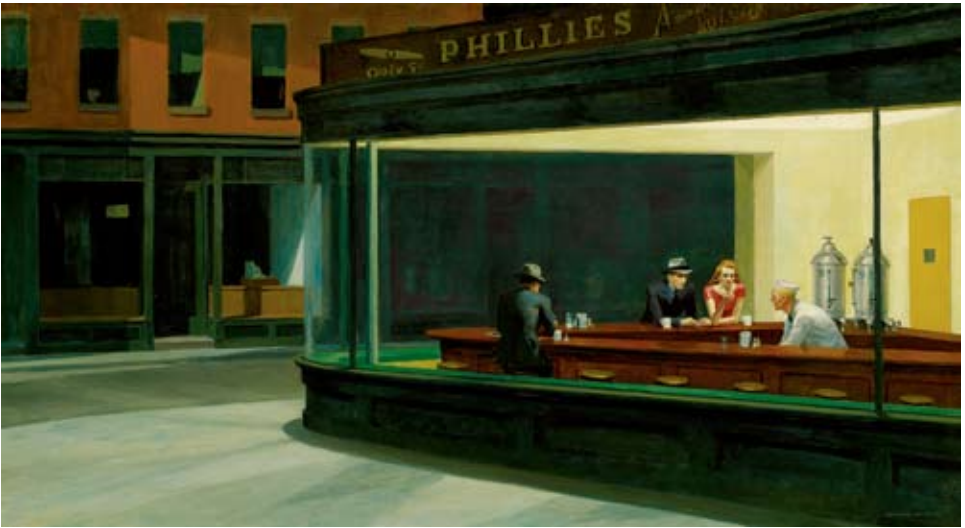


THEATER AND THE MOVIES

Hopper had a lifelong passion for the theater—both conventional and cinematic. In his first professional job as a commercial illustrator, he created publicity posters for a New Jersey film production company, and theater scenes are present throughout his oeuvre. One of Hopper's most celebrated canvases, *New York Movie* (fig. 10),

10 *New York Movie*, 1939, oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Given Anonymously, 1941

11 *Nighthawks*, 1942, oil on canvas, Friends of American Art Collection, 1942.51, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago



illustrates a movie theater with the silver screen just visible to the left. The real drama, however, is focused on the pensive, uniformed usherette; for this young woman, the cinema's promise of escape and fantasy has lost its hold. Standing alone, she ignores the film, consumed by her private concerns.

Theater and film influenced not only what Hopper painted, but also *how* he painted. He borrowed numerous theatrical devices and translated them to his canvases to create dramatic, suspenseful scenes. Viewers' glimpses into the dramas Hopper depicted parallel those of movie audiences, who peer unobserved into the lives—even the most intimate moments—of others. Strong light and high

contrasts—so important to Hopper—recall theatrical lighting as well as the film-noir movies the artist admired, while the horizontality of many of Hopper’s works suggests the long pans and unfolding narratives of film (fig. 11). In writing about the proportions of his canvases, Hopper noted that the long horizontal shape hints at the space beyond the scene; indeed, his paintings are not unlike film stills that arrest a narrative and deprive the viewer of its context. A filmmaker’s painter, Hopper has inspired numerous, diverse directors; Alfred Hitchcock, Ridley Scott, and Wim Wenders have all counted him among their influences.

LOOKING AT THE OVERLOOKED

Whether Hopper portrayed the coast or the city, and regardless of the medium employed, his compositions capture ordinary moments that few observers would stop to notice—and even fewer would consider fit for art. For Hopper, real drama was found in the overlooked: the athlete stretching before a big race, commercial establishments before or after hours, a pause in conversation between companions, or the theater as the audience just begins to trickle in and patrons take their seats. The artist’s architectural preferences, too, favored the unfavored: when Hopper painted lighthouses they were believed to be simple, utilitarian structures, and when he looked to Victorian architecture for inspiration, the style was considered outmoded.

Although the two women in *Chop Suey* (fig. 12) are fashionable—sporting form-fitting sweaters, cloche hats, and makeup—they are nonetheless depicted in a mundane moment, perhaps while

12 *Chop Suey*, 1929, oil on canvas, Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth



13 *Gas*, 1940, oil on canvas,
The Museum of Modern
Art, New York, Mrs. Simon
Guggenheim Fund, 1943



waiting for menus or the check. Hopper recognized such an ordinary moment in an unremarkable setting as an ideal vehicle to suggest quiet, internalized human dramas. John Updike observed that it is as though conversation at the *Chop Suey* table has halted and both women are listening.⁴ The brief interruption in action, the masklike face of the protagonist, and the abstract geometries in the windows contribute to the sense that the unfolding narrative is not about these specific actions or this place, but rather about a modern state of being.

ISOLATION

Emptiness and silence pervade Hopper's scenes. New Yorkers find themselves alone in the supposed privacy of their homes and hotel rooms, but also in the public realm of restaurants, lobbies, theaters, and the street. In New England, houses and lighthouses stand secluded on hillsides or along the coast. In *Gas* (fig. 13), a scene from Truro, a lone attendant adjusts the nozzle at a deserted rural filling station. The lanky figure (not unlike that of the artist) echoes the form of each pump, whose progression in the center of the canvas leads the viewer down the empty country road. In other works, the presence of additional figures—a fellow diner, traveller, colleague, or spouse—only renders the isolation more acute by unfulfilled promises of true companionship.

Hopper's paintings invite endless interpretation; they have been variously described as representations of loneliness, alienation, melancholy, or solitude. Hopper, however, cast doubt on such readings, noting, "the loneliness thing is overdone."⁵ Over the years when prompted, he offered several explanations for his paintings, often defining them in personal terms: "Great art," he wrote, "is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world."⁶

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The exhibition is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery of Art, Washington; and The Art Institute of Chicago.

¹ Edward Hopper, “Notes on Painting,” in *Edward Hopper: Retrospective Exhibition* [exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art] (New York, 1933), 17.

² Quoted by William Johnson, research for *Time* magazine cover story, typescript, October 30, 1956, 17, Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, Edward and Josephine Hopper Research Collection. Also noted in Carol Troyen, “Hopper in Gloucester,” *Edward Hopper* [exh. cat., Museum of Fine Arts] (Boston, 2007), 58.

³ Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York, 1971), 31; and Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* [exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art] (New York, 1979), 2.

⁴ John Updike, *Still Looking* (New York, 2005), 188.

⁵ Quoted in Brian O’Doherty, “Portrait: Edward Hopper,” *Art in America*, 52 (December 1964): 72. Also in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York and London, 1980), 10.

⁶ Edward Hopper, “Statement by Four Artists,” *Reality*, 1 (Spring 1953), 8. Also quoted in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York and London, 1980), 9.

⁷ Quoted in Brian O’Doherty, “Edward Hopper’s Voice,” in *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth in Modern Art* (New York, 1973), 42.

⁸ Hopper to Mrs. Frank B. Davidson, January 22, 1947, quoted in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York, 1995), 401.

In the 1920s, war-weary Americans focused on domestic concerns as the Harding and Coolidge administrations asserted independence from Europe. The American art world paralleled the isolationist policies of the government and sought to establish an alternate tradition to the dominant French model for modern art. While Cézanne, Picasso, and Duchamp were lauded in certain avant-garde sectors, a strong desire arose for a “native” American art. To many, Hopper and his work fit this ideal. Although he had studied as a young art student in Paris and was influenced by the likes of Manet and Degas, Hopper largely turned his back on major developments in European modernism. Combined with his very American subject matter and plain style, this perceived independence helped establish Hopper as a rugged individualist, a role model for an “authentic” American art. Cultivated by critics, this image was not entirely discouraged by the artist. As Hopper acknowledged years later, “The critics give you an identity. And sometimes, even, you give it a push.”⁷

Though Hopper’s resistance to art world trends may have served him well in the 1920s, it made him appear out of touch in the years following World War II, when a new kind of American art rose to prominence. Hopper, steadfast in his commitment to realism, did not hide his disdain for abstraction. He noted that a drive to create “pure painting” independent of life or nature was neither possible nor desirable:

We are all bound to the earth with our experience of life and the reactions of the mind, heart, and eye, and our sensations, by no means, consist entirely of form, color, and design. We would be leaving out a great deal that I consider worthwhile expressing in painting....⁸

While no longer perceived as at the forefront of American modernism, Hopper nonetheless had reached a venerable status, bolstered by a steady stream of critical acclaim and popular appeal. In 1945 he was inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters; in 1952 he was one of three representatives of the United States at the prestigious Venice Biennale; and in 1956 he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. From that date until his death in 1967 at the age of eighty-four, Hopper’s work was represented in more than a dozen exhibitions per year. His popularity continues today.

The enduring fascination and broad appeal of Edward Hopper’s art is perhaps best explained by its illusiveness. Hopper offers a brand of realism not bound by reality. His work appears at once traditional and modern; his women are both erotic and puritanical; and the places he depicts are familiar and foreign, comfortable and disquieting. While Hopper insisted that it was himself he was after in his painting, a part of all of us resides in these quiet spaces.

SUNDAY LECTURES

East Building Auditorium, 2:00 pm

September 16

Edward Hopper: An Introduction to the Exhibition

Franklin Kelly, senior curator of American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art

Edward Hopper: A Master Whose Poetry Is Realism

Carol Troyen, John Moors Cabot Curator of American Paintings, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

November 4

Edward Hopper Goes to the Movies: Silence and Sound in Painting and Film

Charles O'Brien, associate professor, School for Studies in Art and Culture, Carleton University, Ottawa

December 2

Meet the composer, John Musto; librettist, Mark Campbell; and cast of *Later the Same Evening: an opera inspired by five paintings of Edward Hopper*. A panel discussion will follow.

CONCERTS

Fridays, September 14 and 21

The U. S. Navy Band Commodores perform arrangements of American popular music from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

Sculpture Garden, 5:00 to 7:00 pm
Admission: free

Sunday, December 2

The Voice / Opera Division of the University of Maryland and National Gallery Orchestra present *Later the Same Evening: an opera inspired by five paintings of Edward Hopper*.

Music by John Musto; libretto by Mark Campbell

East Building Auditorium, 6:30 pm
Admission is free, but reservations are required. Call 202-842-6941.

GUIDED TOURS

The Adult Programs department offers regular public tours of *Edward Hopper*. For further information, please consult the Calendar of Events at the Art Information Desks or Web site, or call 202-737-4215.

DOCUMENTARY FILM

Narrated by Steve Martin and produced by the National Gallery of Art, this film traces Hopper's varied influences, from French impressionism to the gangster films of the 1930s. The documentary uses archival photos and film; specially shot footage of locations painted by Hopper in New York and along the New England coast; and interviews with artists Eric Fischl and Red Grooms, scholars, and curators.

East Building Small Auditorium
Monday to Friday, noon to 3:00 pm
Weekends, 1:00 to 4:00 pm
(with minor exceptions)

East Building Auditorium
Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11:00 am
(with minor exceptions)

This film was made possible by the HRH Foundation.

AUDIO GUIDE

Narrated by National Gallery of Art Director Earl A. Powell III, this tour includes commentary by exhibition co-curators Franklin Kelly, National Gallery of Art; Carol Troyen, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Judith Barter, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Rental fee: \$5

FILM PROGRAM

Three illustrated talks on October 20, October 27, and November 4 will probe the relationship between Hopper and the cinema. Robert Kolker will discuss the artist's influence on American filmmakers such as Robert Altman. David Gariff and Charles O'Brien will explore the American culture that awakened Hopper's own interest in movies. Each of these lectures will be followed by a related film screening.

PODCAST

Watch senior curator Franklin Kelly as he discusses some of the pervasive themes in Hopper's work. Available for viewing or downloading at www.nga.gov/podcasts and on iTunes. This podcast is made possible by Booz Allen Hamilton Inc.

TEACHER WORKSHOP

Drawing upon the exhibition, this workshop examines Hopper's approach to realism. Activities will explore implied narrative in Hopper's images and will use them as a springboard for storytelling in visual art and creative writing.

Dates: December 1
(If needed, repeat: December 8)
10:00 am to 3:00 pm
Fee: \$20.00
To register, call 202-842-6796.

FAMILY WEEKEND

November 3, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm
November 4, 11:00 am to 6:00 pm
East Building
Ages 4 and up
All activities are free; participation is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Families can explore Hopper's paintings using activity booklets, create colorful works of art with oil pastels and finger paints, and see live performances. The weekend will include the premiere of *Who's in the Hopper? An Art Mystery Adventure*, a new play written and directed by Mary Hall Surface. Inspired by Hopper's work, the play introduces families to the concepts of light and shadow in painting through an engaging story about teamwork and creativity. The weekend will also include performances by the U.S. Navy Band. For a detailed schedule of events, visit www.nga.gov/kids.

CATALOGUE

Edward Hopper includes essays by exhibition co-curators Carol Troyen, John Moors Cabot Curator of American Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Judith Barter, the Field-McCormick Chair of the Department of American Art at The Art Institute of Chicago, and others. The fully illustrated catalogue (264 pp., 170 color, 15 b/w illustrations) is available in both softcover (\$45) and hardcover (\$65) editions. Available in the Gallery Shops, online at the Gallery Web site, or by phone at 202-842-6002 or 800-697-9350.

ON THE WEB

www.nga.gov/hopper