



EDWARD HOPPER (1882-1968)

1882-1900

Edward Hopper was born on 22 July 1882 in Nyack in the State of New York. His father, Garret Henry Hopper, who was born in New Jersey, owned a textile and clothing shop. Hopper's mother, Elizabeth Griffins Smith, inherited various properties, which meant that the family enjoyed a prosperous existence. The small town of Nyack is located on the left bank of the River Hudson, forty kilometres north of New York.

A solitary child, Edward Hopper enjoyed drawing from an early age, an interest that his parents encouraged. In 1900 and having graduated from the Nyack High School, he embarked on an art correspondence course with the School of Illustrating in New York with the aim of becoming an illustrator, a profession that would ensure him a living. That same year he entered the New York School of Art, also known as The Chase School.

1901-1920

In 1901 Hopper changed departments within the school and joined the Fine Arts section. His teachers included William Merritt Chase and Kenneth Hayes Miller. Among his fellow pupils were George Bellows, Guy Pène du Bois and Patrick Henry Bruce. The training offered by the school was anti-academic in approach, with drawing and colour taught simultaneously using live models. In 1902 Hopper had a new teacher who would prove an important influence on his work, namely Robert Henri, who had studied in Europe and Philadelphia.

While still pursuing his studies, in 1904 the school chose Hopper to give classes in drawings, paintings, printmaking and composition. One year later he obtained his first employment as an illustrator, working half days for the New York advertising agency C. C. Phillips & Company.

John Sloan was the last teacher whose classes Hopper attended at the New York School of Art. In the autumn of 1906 he went to Europe for the first time, spending most of his time in Paris where he lived in the Baptist Mission at number 48, rue de Lille. Hopper paid particularly close attention to the work of Camille Pissarro, Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley. At the Autumn Salon he attended the exhibitions in homage to Gustave Courbet and Paul Cézanne and discovered the work of Albert Marquet, Walter Richard Sickert and Félix Vallotton.

In 1907 Hopper travelled to London, Amsterdam, Berlin and Brussels. On his return to New York he worked half-heartedly for the advertising agency Sherman & Bryan until 1923, also designing front covers for the commercial magazines *Tavern Topics* and *Hotel Management*. In 1924 he moved to New York where he used his free time to paint. Robert Henri continued to wage his campaign for a national type of American art that was independent of European models. The exhibition that he organised at the Macbeth Galleries was a resounding success, focusing on realistic painters of scenes of everyday American life who would become known as The Eight. This exhibition would subsequently be considered to mark the start of the Ashcan School, a term that began to be used in 1934. In the meantime Hopper had abandoned French subjects in favour of modern life in the USA and had turned to the depiction of trains, boats and popular spectacles and events as the key motifs in his oeuvre.

Nonetheless, in 1909 Hopper returned to Paris, again living in the Latin Quarter where he began to produce plein air compositions. One year later Henri, Sloan and Arthur B. Davies included him in the Exhibition of Independent Artists that was held in an empty department store on West 35th Street in New York. That same year Hopper made his third and final trip to Europe, travelling to Madrid and Toledo via Paris.

In 1913 The Armory Show (International Modern Art Exhibition), organised in New York and subsequently in Chicago and Boston by Arthur B. Davies and numerous painters from The Eight group, introduced the European avant-garde art to the USA. Hopper took part in the exhibition and sold his first work, *Sailing*, for 250 dollars to Thomas F. Vietor, a Manhattan textile manufacturer. This first sale was entered into an account book that the artist would systematically maintain throughout his life.

Hopper spent the summer of 1914 in Ogunquit (Maine), a fishing village that had become an artists' colony following Winslow Homer's stays there. One year later he embarked on printmaking, a technique that he would continue to use until 1923.

Guy Pène du Bois had become a member of the Whitney Studio Club founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and directed by Juliana Force. In 1923 he persuaded the two women to exhibit Hopper's work. This solo exhibition featured sixteen canvases, eleven of them painted in Paris. Hopper's prints were generally well received on the New York art market but on this occasion he did not sell a single one and was thus obliged to remain financially dependent on his work as an illustrator.

1921-1940

In 1923 Hopper again spent the summer in Gloucester, where he coincided with Josephine (Jo) Verstille Nivison, a painter and former fellow student at the New York School of Art. She shared his passion for French culture and on 9 July of the following year they were married. That same year the gallery owned by Frank K. M. Rehn presented its first solo exhibition of Hopper's work and would continue to represent him until his death. The exhibition consisted of sixteen watercolours of New England, all of which were sold. Among the purchasers was the collector Stephen Clark.

From around the following year Hopper's income from the sale of his works enabled him to abandon his activities as an illustrator and devote himself to painting. During this period he painted *House by the Railroad*, often considered his first mature painting. Almost immediately acquired by Stephen Clark, the painting was the inspiration for the sinister house in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho*.

In 1930, Stephen Clark, who had been one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, donated *House by the Railroad* as the first work in its future collection. That same year Hopper painted *Early Sunday Morning* (initially entitled *Seventh Avenue Shops*) which includes a dark rectangle at the upper right that suggests a skyscraper, one of the few depictions of this symbol of the New York urban landscape that appears in his work. One year later he painted *Hotel Room*, his first large-format canvas and one of the most ambitious compositions of his career. In 1933 the MoMA organised the first retrospective on his work, curated by its director Alfred H. Barr.

In the summer of 1938 Hopper experienced a crisis of inspiration that prevented him from finding new subjects to paint in Cape Cod. He had experienced similar periods for some years, as a result of which the inventory of available works at the Rehn Gallery was not replenished.

In 1939 Hopper and his wife visited the exhibitions *Three Hundred Years of American Painting* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and *Picasso: Forty Years of his Art* at the MoMA. The latter, which included *Guernica*, would remain open until 1940. That year Hopper painted *Office at Night*, a work inspired by his trips on the New York subway and on Degas' American paintings, particularly *A Cotton Office in New Orleans* of 1873.

1941-1967

In the creation of *Nighthawks* (1942) Hopper was inspired by four different sources: a restaurant on Greenwich Avenue, Vincent van Gogh's *The Night Café* (1888), gangster films of the 1930s and Ernest Hemingway's short novel *The Killers* of 1927. In addition, he may also have had Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* in mind, a work that he first encountered many years before in Amsterdam.

In 1944 Hopper paid tribute to the friends with whom he went out sailing with a painting entitled *The "Martha McKeen" of Wellfleet*. Some years later, in 1949, he painted *Conference at Night*. Exhibited almost immediately at the Rehn Gallery, it was acquired by Stephen Clark but the anti-Communist sentiment arising from the Cold War was so intense at this time that the collector returned the work out of fear that the scene depicted might show a clandestine meeting of Communist agents.

In 1950 the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York devoted a retrospective to the artist, organised by Lloyd Goodrich. After its New York showing it moved to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where its inauguration was attended by Edward and Jo Hopper.

In 1956 Frank Rehn died and his assistant of many years, John Clancy, took over as head of the gallery until 1981. It was Clancy who donated the Hopper archives to the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1985. Shortly after Rehn's death Hopper painted *Lane Road*: "I bought a small camera to take architectural details and things of that sort, but the photograph was always so different to the view created by the eye that I stopped", he noted at the time. One year later his painting *Early Sunday Morning* was included in the exhibition *The American Vision: Paintings of Three Centuries*.

In 1960 John Morse interviewed Hopper for *Art in America* while this magazine awarded him its annual prize for the exceptional contribution that he had made to American art. Three years later Hopper painted *Sun in an Empty Room*, noting with regard to this work that: "I have always been interested by an empty room. When we were at college, Du Bois, Rockwell Kent and others discussed what a room was like when no one saw it and no one was looking at it. Of course there could always have been a mouse in it somewhere! I have worked so much on the figure that I decided to leave it out."

In 1965 Hopper painted what would be his last work, *Two Comedians*. "Hopper's intuition that there was a parallel between himself and Pierrot reflects his awareness of the solitude that he shared with clowns and other artists in their roles as outsiders." The painting belonged for many years to Frank Sinatra who, in his song *Send in the Clowns*, tells the story of an ageing couple that seems to refer to this painting.

Edward Hopper died on 15 May 1967 at the age of 84 in his studio in Washington Square. He is buried in the Oak Hill cemetery in Nyack with its views over the Tappan Zee River. Josephine Nivison died the following year. In 1970 the artist's heirs donated The Hopper Bequest to the Whitney Museum of American Art, comprising a large number of works and documents including the artist's diaries.