

# THE ROLE OF DRAWING

The realistic painter Edward Hopper (1882-1967) has now achieved international renown. Identified with both urban and rural America, he divided his time between New York City and coastal New England. His surroundings often became the settings for his paintings. From 1930, Hopper and his wife, the painter Josephine Nivison Hopper, spent their summers on Cape Cod, in Truro, Massachusetts, where he designed a house in 1934. Hopper preferred to stay on in Truro through October, when, after the crowds of summer deserted the Cape, he was often at his most productive.

During his mature period, Hopper was not a prolific painter, often producing only a few pictures a year. He insisted that he needed to have a conception fully formed in his mind before he could begin work on canvas. He would often make drawings as studies while developing an idea; and subsequently, while sketching his final composition on the canvas itself, he might make further adjustments.

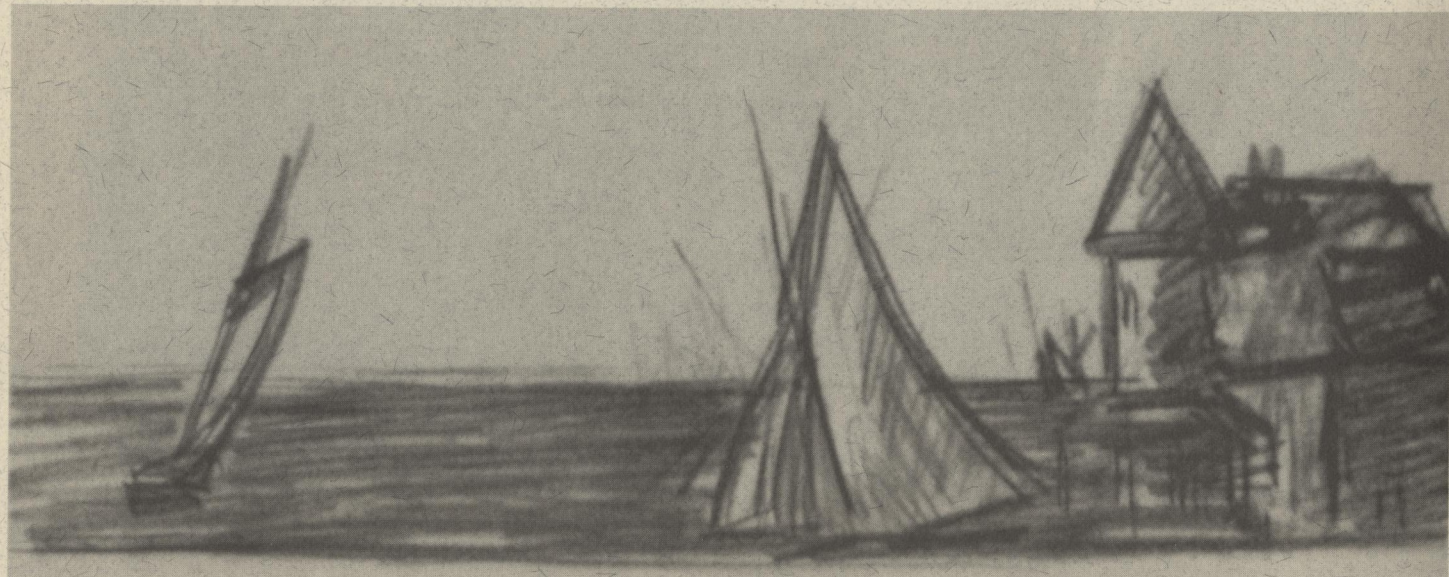
He usually struggled to convey the image from his mind's eye to his painting. He complained: "I find, in working, always the disturbing intrusion of elements not a part of my most interested vision, and the inevitable obliteration and replacement of this vision by the work itself



Motel/Car  
A possible study for *Western Motel*, c. 1957

as it proceeds. The struggle to prevent this decay is, I think, the common lot of all painters to whom the invention of arbitrary forms has lesser interest."<sup>1</sup>

# THE REALISTIC PAINTER



Study for *The Lee Shore*, 1941

# IN THE ART OF EDWARD HOPPER

by Dr. Gail Levin ©1991



Estham Street

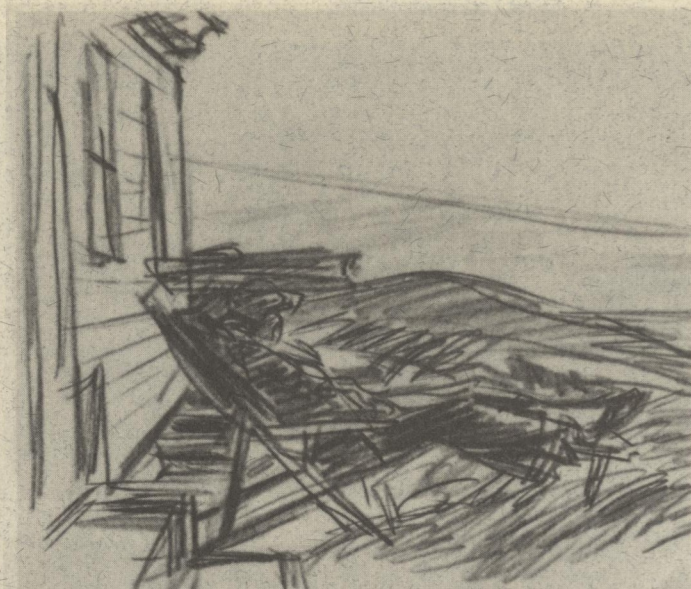
# EDWARD HOPPER

Hopper told Lloyd Goodrich, the organizer of two of his retrospective exhibitions, that he did not want to finish his preparatory drawings too much, as he might then resort to copying them, rather than expressing the concept in his mind.<sup>2</sup>

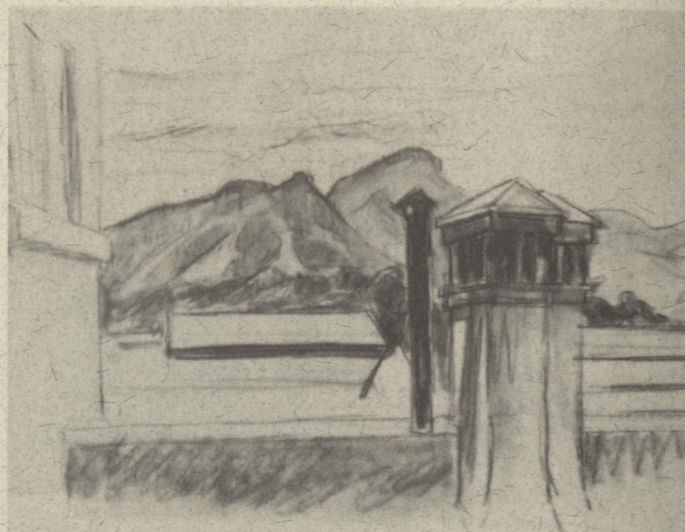
The role of drawing in Edward Hopper's art changed over the years as his mature style and working method evolved. He never, however, considered his drawings to be finished works for exhibition. He rarely showed or sold them and was usually reluctant to have them published.

Thus, most of his drawings were in his possession at his death, and they remained untitled and uncatalogued.

(The titles used in this essay are working descriptive titles.) Because the drawings were so personal and such important working documents, they can be particularly informative in what they reveal about his art. Despite Hopper's reservations about exhibiting his own drawings, we know that he did think seriously about the entire process. In 1927, when he was still rather little known, he agreed to review a book, Vernon Blake's *The Art and Craft of Drawing*, for the magazine, *The Arts*, which had published an article on his work just a few months earlier.<sup>3</sup>



Reclining Figure Study for *Sea Watchers*

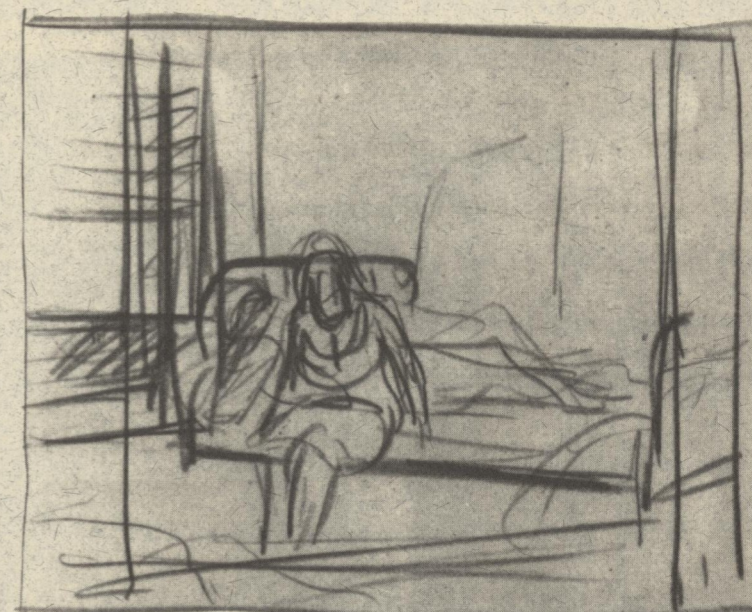


Untitled  
Southwest Mexico or New Mexico



Untitled

In his review, Hopper predicted “a reversion to a more exact representation again;” he admitted that he thought that while this book would not “be of much use to the art student as a guide to the making of good drawings (what can a book be?)” that it might help “indirectly to shape his general understanding of aesthetics.”<sup>4</sup> As a boy, Hopper drew prolifically, trying out many of the subjects that would later appear in this mature work: nautical themes, trains, architecture, soldiers, restaurants, couples, and theater scenes. His sister Marion later recalled that his first easel was the blackboard that he received for Christmas at age seven. He was largely self-taught, although he had illustrated books and magazines to copy.



Untitled  
Study for *Summer in the City*, 1949



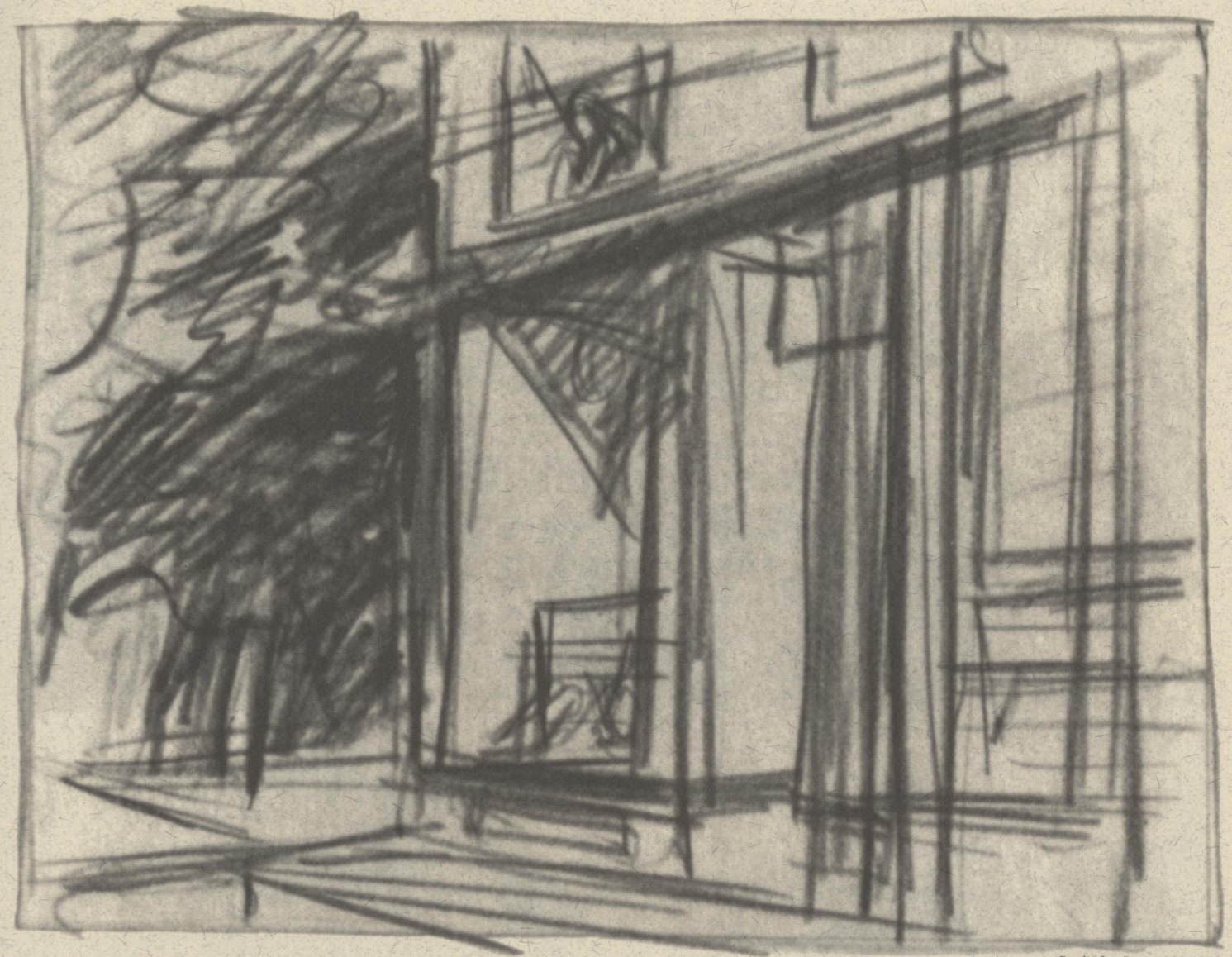
Untitled 1952

# I WANTED TO PAINT SUNLIGHT ON THE SIDE OF A HOUSE

At the New York School of Art, where he studied from 1900 to 1906, his former classmate, Rockwell Kent, recalled that their fellow students dubbed Hopper, "the John Singer Sargent of the class," who could be counted on to produce an "obviously brilliant drawing." This was not trivial praise because their class, which was taught by the charismatic Robert Henri, also included many others who would eventually make names for themselves among them, George Bellows and Guy Pene du Bois.

Many of Hopper's life drawings are extant from the assigned work in life and portrait classes where he frequently sketched the models who posed for the students. The quality of the life drawings produced in these earlier years, and later, during the early 1920s at the Whitney Studio Club, demonstrate that he could have communicated more vitality in his painted figures, which some have characterized as stiff and lifeless, had this been his aesthetic aim.

Hopper's reluctance to show his drawings may be related to the two earliest decades of this career, just after art school, when he found it



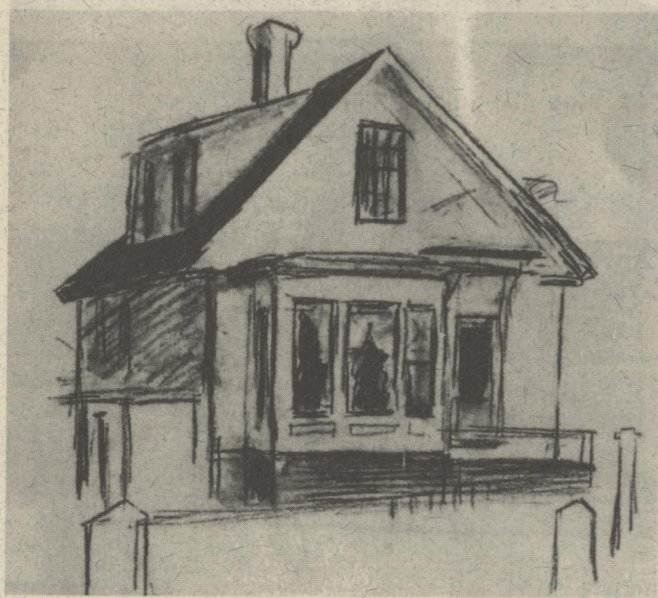
Study for *Seven AM*, 1948

necessary to earn his living by work as a commercial illustrator.

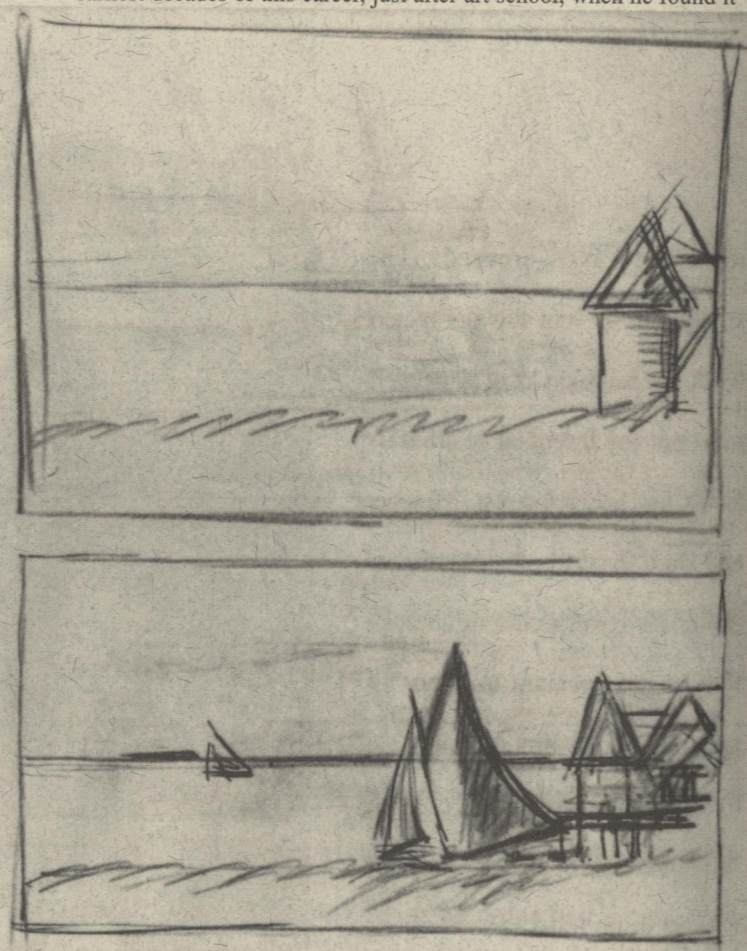
Many of his published illustrations in newspapers and magazines like *Everybody's*, *System*, and *Scribner's* are, in fact, highly finished drawings. Having to produce such meticulous detail for publication may have made Hopper associate such drawings with the commercial work that he detested. Hopper insisted: "I was a rotten illustrator - or mediocre, anyway," explaining that he was not very interested in drawing people "grimacing and posturing. Maybe I am not very human. What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house."<sup>7</sup>



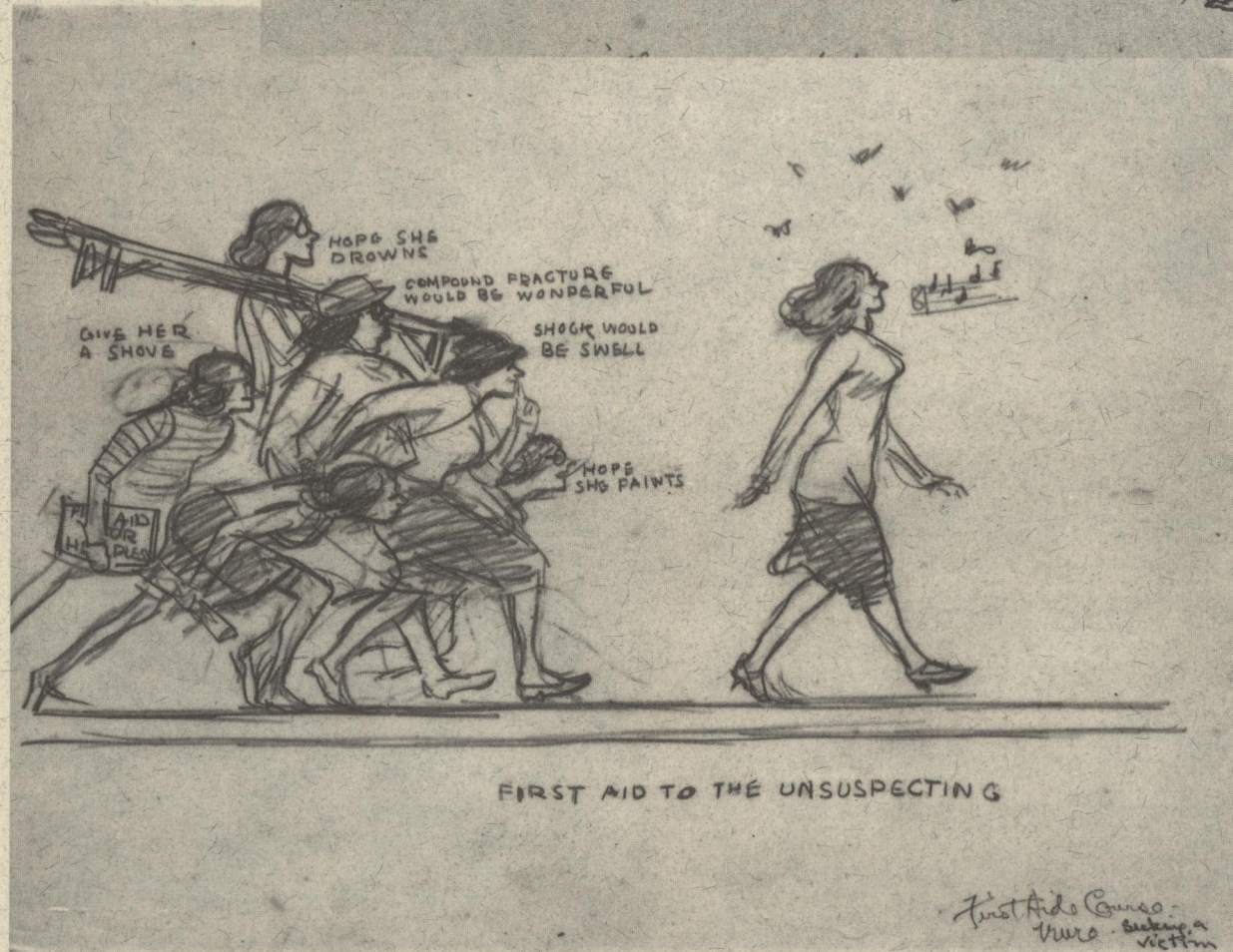
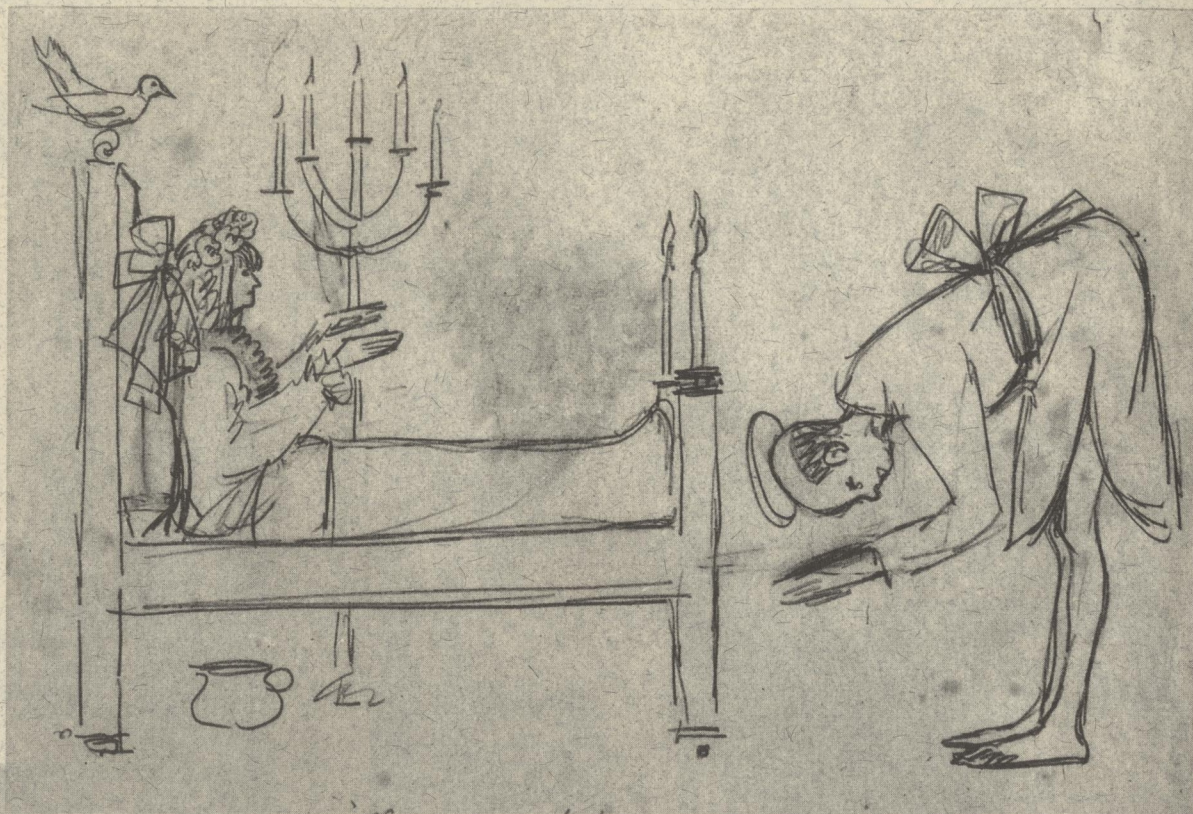
Study for *Hotel by Railroad*



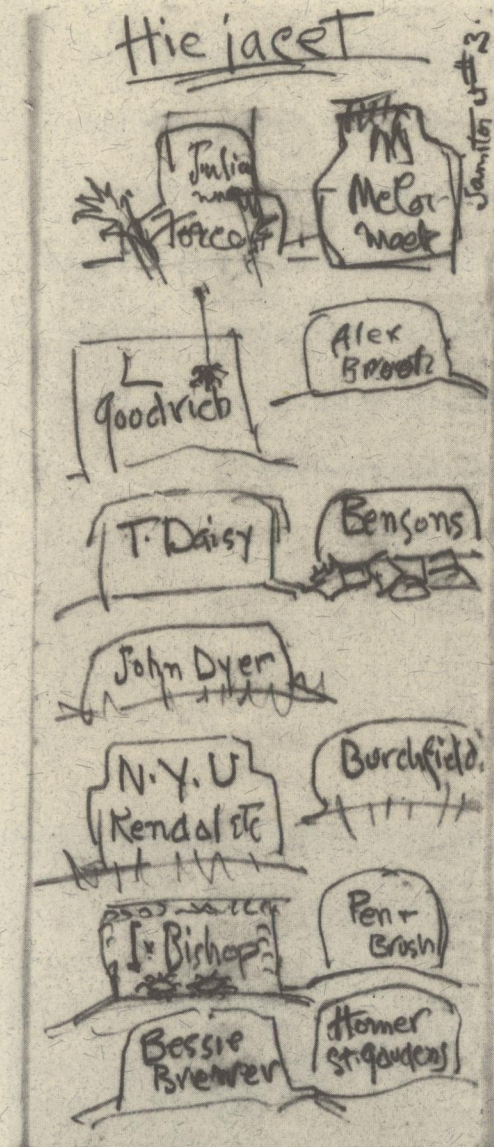
Cape Cod House, Unfinished Fence



Study for *The Lee Shore*, 1941



Illustrations by Edward Hopper



Preparatory sketches are extant for many of Hopper's etchings dating from the later 1910s and early 1920s, yet relatively few study drawings exist for Hopper's oil paintings before the mid-1930s. There are, however, almost no instances of his having produced smaller oil studies for his paintings. And only very rarely did he develop an oil painting from the composition of an earlier watercolor. We know that before he built his own Cape Cod home in 1934, he continued to paint oils on location out-of-doors during his summer sojourns away from his New York studio.



# HOPPER'S SKETCHES REVEAL HIS SEARCH FOR FORM & LIGHT

Still, by this time, Hopper had already developed the working methods of his maturity. As a rule, he liked to work on location, making monochrome sketches on paper - what he called "from the fact" - and take these back to his studio where he painted only his final composition in oil. These preparatory sketches were usually in conte crayon or pencil. Always frugal, Hopper often drew on scrap paper, then on the reverse side of carbon copies of letters that he sent out, typed on the cheapest yellow typewriter paper. Sometimes he made drawings which he stored away when no painting was immediately forthcoming, only to pull these out on some later occasion when he was searching for an idea for a picture.

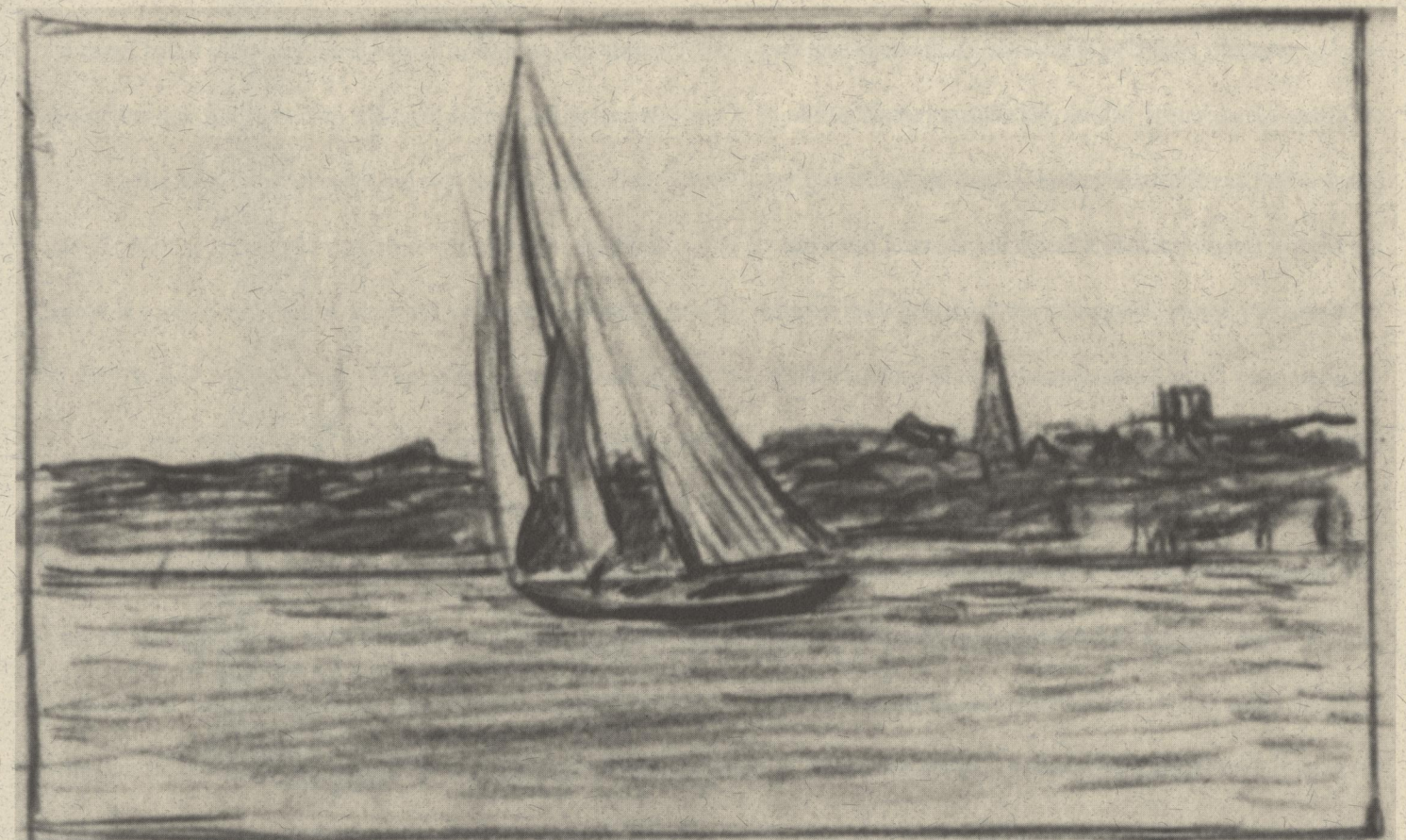
As he conceptualized his final composition, Hopper frequently produced a series of drawings. For any given painting, several drawings might focus only on details. Not infrequently, Hopper recorded verbal notations indicating color and light for later reference. It was his habit to return to the site which had inspired him as many times as he felt necessary in order to gather further information and reinforce his original conception. Thus, there are often multiple drawings for any given work.



Untitled Study

Eventually, Hopper did limit his paintings to single locations, often synthesizing several locales in his studio. For example, *New York Movie* of 1939 is based on at least four different theaters. His wife, Jo, posed for the usherette in his studio and over fifty studies have survived detailing the evolution of this work. Although the final canvas seems so real, it is not one theater, but the quintessence, of theaters.

Working in the studio, Hopper also made sketches for paintings drawn from his memory and his imagination. He produced the ten preparatory drawings for *The Lee Shore* of 1941 in his Cape Cod studio before making a final sketch on the canvas itself. Hopper's sketches on paper often have a rough, loosely drawn quality, revealing his search for form and light. In fact, it appears that the house in *The Lee Shore* may have been based upon a recollection from his boyhood in Nyack, New York, where he learned to sail in the Hudson River.



Study for *The Lee Shore*, 1941



Study Cape Cod Morning 1950

For *Cape Cod Morning* of 1950, Hopper made at least eight sketches, eventually combining architectural details seen in the town of Orleans, Massachusetts, with his more direct observation of Jo posing in his Cape Cod studio in Truro. There, although he had no bay window, Hopper had Jo lean over in the posture of the woman in the painting. Several of Hopper's drawings for this work included a staircase and a carved wooden ornament that he omitted from the simplified composition of the final painting.

Some of Hopper's many extant drawings appear to be unrelated to his paintings, while others can only be loosely associated with his canvases. In order to sharpen his vision, he made generalized studies of foliage, rocks, and other views of landscapes. His love of nautical life inspired detailed drawings of sailboats and other ships, continuing the practice he had begun in boyhood.

Hopper also made sketches of local color while traveling to unfamiliar places such as Mexico, California, Oregon, or the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. His pleasure in making caricatures also persisted from his adolescence, with his wife becoming the object of his jokes.

Although Jo was his only model after they married in 1924, Hopper readily transformed her into whatever age or sex or shape he needed. In his study of her posing for the woman in *High Noon* of 1949, he focused again and again on getting her arm to look right. In the sketch, she barely resembles the sultry woman in the final composition which Jo described in the record book she kept as a "Blonde female in stringy blue kimono open in front over possibly naked body." When Jo posed in 1961 for *Woman in the Sun*, she was seventy-eight years old. Hopper's sketch reveals her thickset waistline and other signs of age, yet the young woman in his painting

# "THAT'S JO GLORIFIED BY ART"

Edward Hopper



Study Cape Cod Morning 1950



Study for A Woman in the Sun 1961

is remarkably lean. Regarding the figure in the painting, Hopper once quipped to his dealer: "That's Jo glorified by art."

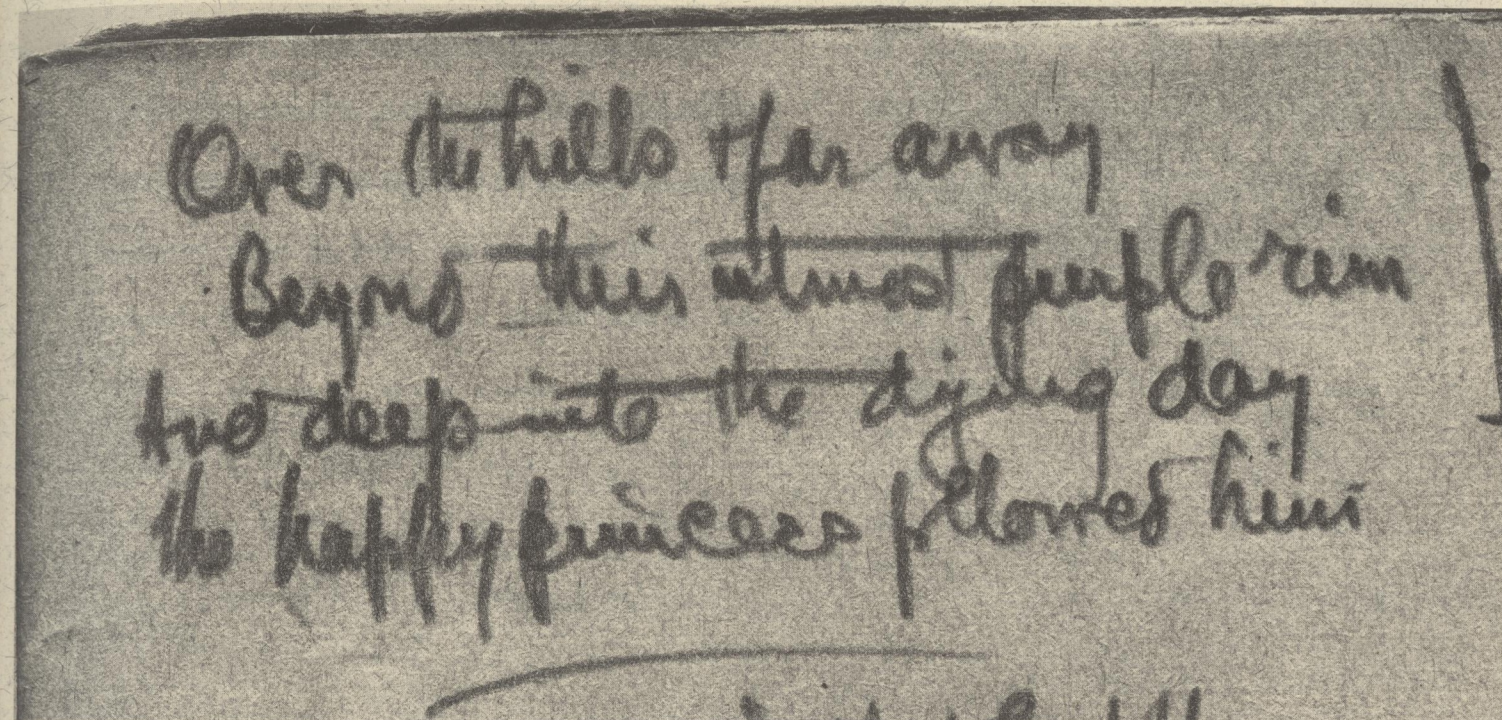
When queried about his working process by Katharine Kuh in 1960, Hopper said of his drawings: "I never show these. They're more or less diagrams. I make preliminary drawings of different sections of a painting - then combine them. My watercolors are all done from nature - direct - out-of-doors and not made of sketches."<sup>9</sup> (The faint outlines that Hopper often drew in pencil directly on his water color paper before he applied color are sometimes visible.) Another time, he referred to one of his studies for a figure once intended for the now empty space in *Sun in an Empty Room* of 1963 as "a piece of tripe."<sup>10</sup> Extremely self-critical, Hopper produced paintings which are timeless. The related sketches reveal the private struggles of a great artist.

# JOSEPHINE NIVISION HOPPER



Edward and Jo Hopper on Cape Cod, c. 1930

# IN HER OWN WORDS



Poem from a diary of Josephine N. Hopper

## OVERSHADOWED

Overshadowed by Edward Hopper's extraordinary talent and fame, Josephine Nivison Hopper (1883-1968), his wife of forty-three years, remained until recently something of a specter. Her bequest of her own work with her husband's to the Whitney Museum of American Art encouraged the preservation and promotion of his pictures, which she referred to as "their children," but resulted, ironically, in the disappearance of her own, which she poignantly called her "pathetic little bastards."<sup>1</sup>

But through the years, from the early 1930s until her eyesight failed not long before she died in 1968, she did keep diaries. Often she wrote to express herself when her introverted spouse shunned conversation. Edward could not imagine that anything Jo produced might have a significant impact, yet the diaries grew in importance in her mind. She even asked Edward to write a foreword during a long automobile trip and recored his response:

"Record of a woman's wandering mind & wondering thru the U.S. and Mex. There is no excuse or justification for such an effusion, only God will be allowed to see what has there been written & I think it will not please him greatly."<sup>2</sup> Secure in his own sardonic humor, he took for granted that the diaries would have no interest and no real public.

Yet Jo's diaries devotedly chronicle the creation of most of her husband's major paintings, often from her unique vantage as his only model. She played, too, another essential role in her husband's life and work, serving as the intellectual peer and fellow painter who both stimulated and challenged her more gifted colleague, struggling to help him escape from painter's block.

Edward first met Jo at the New York School of Art, where they were both studying painting with Robert Henri. Unlike Edward, Jo arrived at art school having earned a degree at the Normal College of New York, where she received a liberal arts education, acted with the Drama club, and earned teaching credentials.

Although they both left art school in 1906, their courtship did not begin in earnest until the summer of 1923, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. By then, Jo had acted for the Washington Square Players and other avant-garde theater groups, published her illustrations in *The Masses* (the Socialist magazine which boasted John Sloan as its art editor), and exhibited her paintings in New York galleries. When she was invited in the fall of 1923 to show her watercolors in an important group show at the Brooklyn Museum, Jo successfully promoted Edward's work to the exhibition's organizers. As a result, he sold his second painting ever, his first in a decade. His career received the boost that he had long sought and he married the instigator.



Sketchbook of Josephine N. Hopper

As man and wife, the Hoppers made art together, often using the same studio or working at the same locations. Before long, forgetting her early generosity in his behalf, he discouraged her creative efforts, even demeaning women artists in general. Despite her frustration and anger, she devotedly served as his model and kept detailed records of his work, all the while struggling to make her own paintings.

By Dr. Gail Levin ©1996



Sketchbook of Josephine N. Hopper

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3 Washington Square North  
New York, New York

September 18th, 1946

Dear Mrs. Hopper:

We are setting forth the terms of the contract for 1947 which we are pleased to make with you for including one of your pictures in our American Artists Group Christmas Card Collection. For purposes of identification the titles are: "The Oil Lamp".

- You grant us permission to reproduce your pictures domestic copyright notice thereon, and to apply for deem same advisable, and for the purpose mentioned, exclusive right to the reproduction of these works to copyright.
- We are to pay you a royalty of 10% of the selling price and 50% of the retail price of the card to be paid annually on January 20th on the basis of to said accounting date.
- Your agent shall have right, upon request, to examine insofar as they relate to you.
- Since the proper presentation of these reproduction and publicity, you agree to permit us to include advertising and publicity material, and not to permit by or for any other Christmas card manufacturer.
- For a period of three years from this date you grant right to reproduce your pictures for greeting card.
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We have signed this letter and the duplicate enclosed herewith your approval, will you be good enough to place your signature and return same to us. Please keep the original as your receipt.

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I have read, accepted and agreed to the foregoing as the agreement between us which authorizes you to reproduce my pictures for the above mentioned purpose.

DATE Sept. 30, 1946 SIGNATURE Jo N. Hopper

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March 8, 1946

Dear Mrs. Hopper:

We have not yet received the invitation card for your invited water color Holy City, Cheshone, Wyoming. Since we plan to send the collection list to Edworth in a few days, we should appreciate having the card at your early convenience.

Yours sincerely,  
*Frederick A. Sweet*  
Frederick A. Sweet  
Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture

Mrs. Josephine Hopper  
3 Washington Square  
New York, N. Y.



# NOTES

## Josephine Nivision Hopper

<sup>1</sup> See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, pp. xv-xvii).

<sup>2</sup> Jo Hopper diary entry of February 20, 1933.

## A Window on the World of Edward and Josephine Hopper

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gail Levins's interview with John Clancy, 1979. Essay by Dr. Levin in *Seeds of Genius* Catalogue, The University Gallery, Salisbury State University, 1993. Copyright 1991 by Dr. Gail Levin.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995), page 257.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Hopper Draft Letter to Colonel Homer Saint-Gaudens, August 12, 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Mary Schiffenhaus to Josephine Hopper, September 26, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Mary Schiffenhaus to Josephine Hopper, June 1961.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995), page 577, from a letter to Catherine Rogers, June 4, 1967.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995), introduction, page XVI.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995), page 168.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Verlaine, *La Bonne Chanson*, (Paris, 1870) translated by John Van Sickle.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Stephen C. Clark to Edward Hopper, September 10, 1958.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from John Clancy to Edward Hopper, September 9, 1958.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Stephen C. Clark to Edward Hopper, September 17, 1958. Draft letter from Edward Hopper to Stephen C. Clark.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Bernard L. Glaser, Safire Public Relations, Inc., September 16.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995), pages 21 and 211.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from James G. Legburn to Edward Hopper with questioner, October 13, 1958.

<sup>16</sup> Draft letter from Edward Hopper to James G. Legburn, October 13, 1958.

<sup>17</sup> Draft letter from Edward Hopper to George L. Stout, September 13 1954.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995) introduction, page XI.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper*, (Knopf, 1995) page 579.

# NOTES

## The Role of Drawing in the Art of Edward Hopper

<sup>1</sup> Edward Hopper, "Notes on Painting," in *Edward Hopper Retrospective Exhibition*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1933, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Hopper, review of "The Art and Craft of Drawing" by Vernon Blake, New York: Oxford University Press, 1927, in *The Arts*, June, 1927, pp. 334.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Hopper, review, *The Arts*, June, 1927, pp. 334.

<sup>5</sup> Rockwell Kent, *It's Me O Lord: The Autobiography of Rockwell Kent* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1955), p.84.

<sup>6</sup> See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with John Clancy, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Hopper quoted in Brian O'Doherty, *The Voice and the Myth: American Masters* (New York: Universe Books, 1988), 26.

## Further Readings by Gail Levin

Those interested in learning more about Edward Hopper's life, including his enthusiasm for poetry, will want to read *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). For poets' interest in Hopper, see *The Poetry of Solitude: A Tribute to Edward Hopper* (New York: Universe Books, 1995). For an extensive bibliography, exhibition history, and other reference data, see her *Edward Hopper: A Catalog Raisonne*, fully illustrated in three volumes with a CD-ROM (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc, 1995). For her discussion of her work on Hopper, see "Biography & Catalog Raisonne: Edward Hopper in Two Genres," (in *Biography and Source Studies*, II, AMS Press, New York, 1995).

Briefer bibliographies and good color reproductions can be found in her *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1980), *Edward Hopper* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1984), and *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1979). For reproductions of Hopper's graphic work, see her *Edward Hopper: The Complete Prints* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1979). Photographs by Gail Levin of actual sites painted by Hopper are available in her *Hopper's Places* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

SILENT LIGHT - SILENT LIFE



# A WINDOW

INTO THE WORLD OF EDWARD AND JOSEPHINE HOPPER