

Edward Hopper and the Democratic Tradition

GAIL LEVIN

Edward Hopper is commonly considered a quintessentially American artist. His identity as an American does not depend on any overtly political content in his work. For him, political content was too close to commercial illustration which he detested. He had been obliged to work as a commercial illustrator to support himself for nearly two decades before he succeeded in establishing himself as a painter. As a result, he rejected anecdotal painting. He also repudiated the experiments with abstract art that were then in vogue. Instead, he chose to take the advice of his favorite teacher, Robert Henri, and depict the world around him.

Hopper painted the commonplace and the common man and imbued them with a complex psychological resonance that sets him off from his realist predecessors and his contemporaries. Perhaps he best summed up his aim when he responded to a question about what he was after in his 1963 painting *Sun in an Empty Room*. He replied: "I'm after ME."¹

Hopper's belief in freedom and self-expression links his work to the democratic tradition. Although his work is not usually discussed from the standpoint of politics and democracy, his focus on the common man links him to the values of democracy. For Hopper, democracy was a moral and political doctrine implying a high degree of individual responsibility. He admired Emerson, whose work he read and reread, and quoted from Emerson's essay, "Self-Reliance," in his own article on his colleague Charles Burchfield:

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility, then most when the cry of voices is on the other side. Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and

¹ Edward Hopper quoted in Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth* (New York: Universe Books, 1988) 26.

felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our opinion from another.²

In Emerson, Hopper had no doubt found comfort in the years before his painting won recognition: "To be great is to be misunderstood."³

The few critics who have tried to relate Hopper to politics have reached diametrically opposed conclusions. The reasons for this state of affairs among critics are evident. Unable to identify an overt political program in Hopper's work and lacking knowledge of his politics, critics allowed their personal ideologies to determine their reading of his art. Hopper championed few causes in his life and his political gestures were rare. In order to get beyond the impasse of previous discussion, I will present new evidence about Hopper's politics which I have discovered while writing the first biography of the artist.

By the time of the First World War, although Hopper had followed Henri's lead in painting what he observed, unlike his classmate, George Bellows, he had not embraced his teacher's Anarchist politics or his radical friends such as Emma Goldman. Nor did he engage in political activism like the artists who illustrated for the Socialist magazine, *The Masses*, who turned to pacifism and protested the war.

The only sign of any response by Hopper to the political drama of the time was his entry in a wartime poster competition. The contest was sponsored by the United States Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation in 1918. The U.S. government created this agency in September 1916 to build, purchase, lease, or requisition vessels needed for the war effort. Hopper was encouraged to design his poster by the editor of the *Morse Dry Dock Dial* which was the magazine published by a company in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn that fitted and repaired battleships. The editor, Bert Edward Barnes, liked Hopper's illustrations and encouraged him to visit the shipyard so that he could experience the sights and sounds of the work. Barnes even arranged for one of his employees, Pete Shea, to model for the figure in the poster.⁴

Hopper recalled: "I got this big Irishman to pose for me in the shipyards, with a background of ship's ribs, that sort of thing. I had him swinging a maul, and the maul was aimed at a bloody bayonet sticking up

² Edward Hopper, "Charles Burchfield: American," *The Arts* 14 (July 1928): 6. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First Series*, "Self-Reliance," (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Co., 1841, 1879) 43f.

³ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" 52.

⁴ See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979) 26.

in one corner. I titled it 'Smash the Hun'; it was pretty awful"⁵ Awful or not, Hopper's design scored two successes: it beat out fourteen hundred other entries to win the first prize of three hundred dollars and it persuaded its model, Shea, to join the Navy.⁶ Hopper's poster was exhibited in August 1918, along with nineteen others, in the window of Gimbel's department store on Broadway, where according to the press, "thousands" saw the "stirring pictures placed on view."⁷ Hopper himself was five years too old for the first military draft. Even when the age limits were extended in August 1918, as the sole son of his widowed mother, he was not a likely choice.

Little is known of Hopper's response to politics from the end of the war through the 1930s. After a long struggle, his reputation and income soared during the late 1920s. As a result of his new fame, Hopper suffered very little during the Great Depression. Historians speak of the collapse of capitalist support for the arts by 1932 and document an era when artists and intellectuals moved to the Left. Ironically, for most of the 1930s, Hopper's income was more than ample for his frugal lifestyle. His pictures were finding new audiences as major museums purchased them, including the Metropolitan, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, and the newly-founded Whitney Museum of American Art. Since he had had to survive on his meager earnings as an illustrator for nearly two decades during the prosperous Pre-Depression era, Hopper felt little sympathy for those who had to struggle during the Depression.

Hopper and his wife, Jo (the painter Josephine Nivison Hopper), disliked President Franklin Roosevelt. Hopper disapproved of the New Deal relief programs, including the WPA, which he believed would only encourage mediocrity. It is not surprising that in 1937 he declined an invitation he received from the United States Treasury Department to submit sketches for murals for the Post Office building in Portland, Maine. Although he had already painted pictures of places in and around Portland, he refused to take on the project and gave these reasons: the commission would keep him from doing other work for at least six months; he knew nothing about the techniques of mural painting; he felt that he would not be able to paint what he wanted.

The Hoppers believed that President Roosevelt was trying to make the United States a dictatorship; in 1937, they were particularly concerned by what Jo called his "villainous scheme to enlarge the Supreme Court so that

⁵ Edward Hopper to William Johnson, unpublished interview, October 30, 1956.

⁶ "Pete Shea, Poster Model, Joins Navy," *New York Sun* 15 August 1918: 12.

⁷ "Prize Ship Posters Join in Loan Drive," *New York Sun* 12 October 1918: 9.

he'd control that last stronghold of our national traditions."⁸ They vehemently opposed the controversial plan that the President had submitted to Congress to reorganize the federal judiciary. In voicing their dissent, the Hoppers were part of a widespread and bitter debate. Jo denounced the proposal in letters to New York's Senators, Royal S. Copeland and Robert F. Wagner, as well as to Senators from New Hampshire, North Dakota, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Texas. She and Edward, who shared her view, even purchased a new radio at this time so that they could listen to the reports on the vote. Jo also joined the National Organization for Hands Off the Supreme Court and tried to convince her friends to write protest letters to their senators. For the moment, Jo was completely distracted from painting by what she saw as an urgent need for political activism.

In order to register to vote for Wendell Willkie, the Republican Party candidate running against Roosevelt in 1940, the Hoppers made a hasty trip back to New York from Cape Cod. Since Willkie's foreign policy was not so distinct from F.D.R.'s, one would have to conclude that Hopper's biggest complaint was the president's domestic program, particularly the WPA and its assistance for artists. Yvonne du Bois, the daughter of Hopper's good friend, the artist, Guy Pene du Bois, recalled of Hopper: "His mind was closed. He was an inveterate Republican, an unquestioning one."⁹

Hopper's conservative political outlook often puzzled fellow artists and art critics, most of whom favored the Left. In November 1940, on his way to Washington to jury an exhibition, Charles Burchfield visited the Hoppers. The somewhat more liberal-minded Burchfield was quite put off by the vehement expression of the Hoppers' conservative political views, for he noted in his journal that he had had "a disturbing visit, as they were rabid about the election and kept at me until I might inch, and as a result we did not visit at all."¹⁰ At the Rehn Gallery, Hopper did not share the views of other liberal artists like Reginald Marsh, and, was particularly distant from the Leftist artist Peppino Mangravite.¹¹

Lloyd Goodrich, who organized two retrospectives of Hopper's work for the Whitney Museum, recalled: "After all the 1930's politics, in particular leftist social politics, was in the air, nobody could escape it except Hopper! . . . Hopper never had any interest in politics . . . I think he

⁸ For a full discussion of these attitudes. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

⁹ Yvonne du Bois McKinney, unpublished memoir and conversation with the author.

¹⁰ Charles Burchfield in his journals, quoted in Edna M. Lindemann, *The Art Triangle* (Buffalo, NY: Burchfield Art Center, 1989) 70, n. 6.

¹¹ Mangravite even joined the Leftist organization, the Artists Congress (1936-42).

did, but he didn't express it But I sensed he was a Republican."¹² Hopper, who covered his tracks politically as he did artistically, intentionally revealed to the more liberal Goodrich only what he thought his important critical supporter wished to hear.

While Edward was usually rather reserved about his political views, his wife was garrulous. Writing to the *New York Sun* in December 1940 to complain that art critic Henry McBride's article on Islamic miniatures was inadvertently cut off by the layout, Jo took the opportunity to praise McBride's writing and to lambaste Roosevelt's policies:

A lot one cares for Islamic Miniatures until the tour is conducted by some one who finds for us some relativity - the thing that makes H. McB., with no more Roger Fry, the most fascinating writer on his chosen subject that is provided today....Well, when you get good Henry James style in a daily one resents having it chopped off with vicious rudeness. More Roosevelt Administration! Which reminds us that we rejoiced at his forthright stand agin New Deal prodigality & waste in his own field & with every blade of grass against him. Maybe not *Every* - the 2 of us cantankerous ones drove 600 miles just to register so that we might vote our protest -- & self exile from the flock. So where we are practically White Russians at large in a world fast losing its appetite for such things, we naturally want to hear the rest¹³

As Hopper followed the events of the Second World War, he wrote to his friend du Bois in 1940, revealing his concerns: "We are evidently eye witnesses to one of those great shiftings of power that have occurred periodically in Europe, as long as there has been a Europe, and there is not much to be done about it, except to suffer the anxiety of those on the side lines, and to try not to be shifted ourselves."¹⁴ In response to du Bois, he admitted: "It seems that I have no definite philosophy that would be a consolation in these times, but if I had one, it would be of no use to you, for you would not like it and no doubt would despise it" ¹⁵ But he suggested "Painting seems to be a good enough refuge from all this, if one can get one's dispersed mind together long enough to concentrate on it."¹⁶

¹² Lloyd Goodrich, October 28, 1980, interview with Edna Lindemann, quoted in Lindemann, *The Art Triangle* 45.

¹³ Jo N. Hopper to The Editor of the *New York Sun*, December 21, 1940, Henry McBride papers, Yale University.

¹⁴ Edward Hopper to Guy Pene du Bois, letter of August 11, 1940.

¹⁵ Hopper to du Bois, August 11, 1940.

¹⁶ Hopper to du Bois, August 11, 1940.

Hopper reported that Jo, too, suffered anxiety over the war: "[S]he burst into tears among all the groceries in a store here in Wellfleet when she heard of the fall of Paris, and was patted and consoled by the grocer's wife, who I feel sure was much puzzled to know why anybody should actually weep over something happening so far from Wellfleet."¹⁷ To make matters worse, wartime shortages of gas and tires soon forced Hopper to change his working habits and painting locales. He could no longer cruise around looking for subjects and use his parked car as a mobile studio, as he would again after the war.

The Hoppers witnessed troops being rescued by freighters after an attack just off Provincetown in 1942. Edward wrote of it to his dealer Frank Rehn: "We are quite close to the war at sea here. The survivors of the vessel from Iceland that was sunk near here were brought into Provincetown and taken care of in one of the hotels. Some were badly injured."¹⁸ The Hoppers' neighbors were then on duty at the local observation tower. Blackouts were now enforced. Jo enlisted in a First Aid course in Truro, and Edward became a volunteer Air Raid Warden, keeping watch once a week at the Truro Center Fire Department and Ambulance Service from four until eight in the morning.

The end of the war thrilled Hopper. When he attended the victory parade on Fifth Avenue, he uncharacteristically held up small children so that they could see. One of the books he owned in the post-war period was *Thomas Jefferson on Democracy*, an anthology of Jefferson's writings edited by Saul K. Padover. Hopper marked the section headed "Why send American youth to Europe for education?" No doubt Hopper was thinking about the impact that French life and culture had had upon him during the formative period he had spent in Paris after art school during 1906-07. Jefferson wrote at length about some of "the disadvantages of sending a youth to Europe:"

He acquires a fondness for European luxury and dissipation, and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country; he is fascinated with the privileges of the European aristocrats, and sees, with abhorrence, the lovely equality which the poor enjoy with the rich, in his own country; he contracts a partiality for aristocracy or monarchy; he forms foreign friendships which will never be useful to him . . . he is led, by the strongest of all the human passions, into a spirit for female intrigue, destructive of his own and others' happiness, or a passion for whores, destructive to his health, and in both cases, learns to

¹⁷ Hopper to du Bois, August 11, 1940.

¹⁸ Edward Hopper to Frank Rehn, letter of July 4, 1942.

consider fidelity to the marriage bed as an ungentlemanly practice, and inconsistent with happiness; he recollects the voluptuary dress and arts of the European women . . . he retains, through life a fond recollection, and a hankering after those places, which were the scenes of his first pleasures and his first connections . . .¹⁹

My biography of Hopper shows how apt Jefferson's warning was for Hopper's own experience abroad.

During the post-war years, Hopper, like many Americans worried about the spread of Communism and the threat of the atom bomb. He did not again become politically active, however, until 1956. Andrew Wyeth telephoned to ask him to join Eisenhower's Committee for Arts and Sciences. Although Jo commented that "they saw little good of art getting mixed up with politics," he agreed after hearing that his old friend the artist Leon Kroll was on a committee for Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate for President. Hopper, who never liked the Democrats, joined together on this Eisenhower committee along with Wyeth, Charles Burchfield, Helen Hayes, and others.

After this brief survey of Hopper's political opinions and actions, we can ask if his politics are ever visible in his work. The most direct answer to this question is no. In fact, in some of his paintings, Hopper seems to have been more sympathetic with workers than his Republican sympathies might suggest. Even after his income increased, he lived a very frugal life. He had occasion to share the insecurity of the working classes. He was disturbed in 1946 when he learned the inauspicious news that his landlord, Sailors' Snug Harbor, had sold the building he had lived in since 1913 to New York University which immediately raised the rent by twenty percent and refused to give any lease renewals. This was in the midst of the post-war housing shortage. Thus began what Jo dubbed "The Battle of Washington Square, the long struggle against New York University" to remain in their home. Jo went on an energetic letter-writing campaign in which she claimed that the expansionist university, which was after the park and the surrounding property for its campus, was guilty of "Hitler-like aggression."²⁰

One result of this experience was Hopper's expression of sympathy with the working classes. In the face of his anxiety over losing his home and studio, Hopper did not complete another picture until January 1947

¹⁹ Saul K. Padover, *Democracy by Thomas Jefferson* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1939) 139-40.

²⁰ Jo Hopper, draft of letter of February 7, 1949, to the Federation of American Artists.

when he painted *Corn Belt City* in his New York Studio.²¹ Perhaps Hopper's travels in the Midwest as an exhibition juror, as well as driving through on the way to the West Coast in 1941, had made him focus on the look of that region. But he had also read novels set there. Once, when pressed in an interview to reveal what he thought of the writing of Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, he had replied "they're a little too Midwestern for me."²² But on another day, he told that same interviewer that Sinclair Lewis was "a fathead," Dreiser was "all right," and Anderson was "a good writer."²³

Still in New York, Hopper continued to look toward the locus of the protest writers. His next canvas, finished April 23, 1947, was *Pennsylvania Coal Town*. It shows a figure of a bald man raking leaves by the side of a non-descript house. The scene brings to mind Hopper's student sketch after Millet's *Man with a Hoe*; it represents the closest Hopper ever came to expressing sympathy with the working class. Jo noted that the grey steps were "dark" and that the terrace was "sooty;" she identified the glum, lonely figure of a man with red hair as "a Pole," picking an immigrant ethnic working-class group of that region.²⁴

Pennsylvania Coal Town evokes Sherwood Anderson's 1917 novel *Marching Men*. Set in the Pennsylvania coal region in a town called "Coal Creek," the novel, which Anderson dedicated "To American Workingmen," comments on the oppressive routine of workers' lives.²⁵ He called the town "hideous . . . a necessity of modern life."²⁶ Hopper's painting of the man with the rake recalls Anderson's description: "An Italian who lived in a house on a hillside cultivated a garden. His place was the one beauty spot in the valley."²⁷ The novel recounts: "When a strike came on he was told by the mine manager to go on back to work or move out of his house. He thought of the garden and of the work he had done and went back to his routine of work in the mine. While he worked the miners marched up the

²¹ Jo Hopper, in Record Book III, 21, described this canvas as depicting a "little grey hot dog stand" with a neon sign and a sandy colored stream passing under the bridge. Tall buildings with towers were visible in the distance with tree tops in the middle ground. Seen against the evening sky were "Sailor boy & girl in green hot dog consumers," while behind them stood "'Jimmy' in white coat."

²² Brian O'Doherty, "Invitation to Art," WGBH-TV, interview (Boston: April 10, 1961).

²³ O'Doherty, *American Masters* 20.

²⁴ Jo Hopper, Record Book III, 23.

²⁵ Sherwood Anderson, *Marching Men* (New York: John Lane Co., 1917) 9.

²⁶ Anderson 38.

²⁷ Anderson 39.

hill and destroyed the garden. The next day the Italian also joined the striking miners."²⁸

Hopper suggested the "Italian" ethnicity of the man with the rake by placing in front of the otherwise dreary house an unexpectedly elegant object: a terra-cotta urn in a classical style that is distinctly Italianate. This visual sign of a taste and a yearning for something beyond the humdrum is picked out and emphasized by the same dramatic sunlight that shines on the man's bald head. When Jo referred to the figure in Hopper's painting as "a Pole," not an Italian, she may have recalled that Anderson's novel also discusses Polish immigrants: "In little Polish villages the word has been whispered about, 'In America one gets much money . . .'"²⁹

Burton Rascoe, who reviewed Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919, summarized Anderson's technique in a way that almost describes what Hopper later achieved in paint; he noted that the writer "frequently suggests rather than depicts; that he respects the imaginative faculty of his reader by refusing to be explicit where overtones of emotion are already invoked in the reader; that he is selective, indefinite, and provocative instead of inclusive, precise, and explanatory."³⁰

Hopper's choice of ordinary scenes from everyday life makes it easy for his viewers to identify him as exemplifying a democratic strain in American art. However, there have been those who interpreted his work in quite different ways. The most extreme example of this was a demagogic current in American art criticism during the mid-1930s and 1940s that attempted to link "American Scene" painting in general and Hopper's work in particular to the art of the Nazis in Germany.³¹ Writers and artists on the Left alleged that the art of the Regionalist artists, most notably Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood, resembled fascist art in both style and in their emphasis on nationalistic pride in America.³² In fact, between 1939-1945, all three of these artists produced paintings that advocated the cause of democracy against fascism.³³

²⁸ Anderson 39-40.

²⁹ Anderson 155.

³⁰ Burton Rascoe, *Chicago Tribune*, 1919, quoted in Walter B. Rideout, "Sherwood Anderson," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 9: *American Novelists, 1910-1945*, ed. James J. Martine, (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1981) 23.

³¹ Meyer Schapiro, "Race, Nationality and Art," *Art Front* 2 (March 1936): 10, denounced racial and national messages in art.

³² See Cecile Marie Whiting, "The Response to Fascism in American Painting, 1933-1945," (Dissertation Stanford University, 1986) 127-28.

³³ Whiting 129-30.

Dorothy Miller, who organized the show *American Realists and Magic Realists* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943, felt compelled to defend realism: "No other style of painting appeals so naturally to the great majority of people, and in this sense it is a truly democratic style, offering no barrier of technique between the artist and the untrained eye."³⁴ Although the exhibition focused on young American contemporaries, Miller cited Charles Sheeler, Grant Wood, and Hopper as anticipating the younger artists' direction.

Hopper was neither a Regionalist nor sympathetic with fascist causes. He had, however, spoken out for the need for a native art in his 1927 article, "John Sloan and the Philadelphians," praising:

certain artists of originality and intelligence who are no longer content to be citizens of the world of art, but believe that now or in the near future American art should be weaned from its French mother. . . . We should not be quite certain of the crystallization of the art of America into something native and distinct, were it not that our drama, our literature and our architecture show very evident signs of doing just that thing.³⁵

Hopper's call for an authentic American art follows Emerson in "Self-Reliance:"

And why need we copy the Doric or the Gothic model? Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought and quaint expression are as near to us as to any, and if the American artist will study with hope and love the precise thing to be done by him, considering the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of the government, he will create a house in which all these will find themselves fitted, and taste and sentiment will be satisfied also.³⁶

Interest in developing an indigenous American art also linked Hopper to the Regionalists, although he rejected their emphasis on anecdote and folk traditions. For him, painting was a private expression: "So much of every art is an expression of the subconscious, that it seems to me most of all of the important qualities are put there unconsciously, and little of

³⁴ Dorothy Miller, "Foreword and Acknowledgment," *American Realists and Magic Realists* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943) 6.

³⁵ Edward Hopper, "John Sloan and the Philadelphians," *The Arts* 11 (April 1927) 177-78.

³⁶ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" 71.

importance by the conscious intellect. But these are things for the psychologist to untangle."³⁷

Hopper chose to disassociate himself from both the Regionalists and the misguided critics' views of them. He rejected the label "American Scene" painter. In 1964, even at the age of eighty-two, he energetically objected to being called a painter of the "American Scene." He protested with uncharacteristic intensity:

The thing that makes me so mad is the "American Scene" business. I never tried to do the American Scene as Benton and Curry and the midwestern painters did. I think the American Scene painters caricatured America. I always wanted to do myself. The French painters didn't talk about the "French Scene," or the English painters about the "English Scene."³⁸

To understand Hopper's dismay, we need only examine Lester D. Longman's now deservedly obscure article "Contemporary Painting," which appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, published by the Philosophical Library in New York during the Second World War in 1944.³⁹ The journal billed itself as "A Quarterly Devoted to the Advancement of Aesthetics and the Arts." Longman (1905-1987), who was then both an associate editor of the journal and the head of the art department at the State University of Iowa, was joined on the masthead by many distinguished names on the list of associate editors including George Boas of Johns Hopkins University, A.K. Coomaraswamy of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Thomas Munro of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Longman accompanied his article with a fold-out chart that he called an "Outline of Modern Painting." The issue that includes his article was announced as a "Special Issue" devoted to "Art in a Post War World," despite the fact that the war was not yet over. Longman proclaimed that his chart and his article would "make clear the formal and expressive problems which face the painter today, from the points of view both of the internal evolution of his art and of the ideological forces to which he is subjected."⁴⁰

³⁷ Edward Hopper to Charles Sawyer, letter of October 29, 1939, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971) 73.

³⁸ Edward Hopper quoted in O'Doherty, *American Masters* 15.

³⁹ Lester D. Longman, "Contemporary Painting," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 3.9-10 (1944): 8-18.

⁴⁰ Longman 8.

Longman divided his chart at the top between POST-IMPRESSIONISM on the left and ACADEMIC NEO-CLASSICISM, ILLUSTRATIONAL ROMANTICISM, NATURALISM, AND LATE 19TH C." on the right. He then split all modernist painting into two camps: the "analytical" which included Cubism and the "Expressionistic" which included pre-cubist Picasso and German and French Expressionism. But what interests us more is where Longman placed Hopper: symbolically, in the far right corner of the chart, descending from the detested "ACADEMIC NEO-CLASSICISM, ILLUSTRATIONAL ROMANTICISM, NATURALISM, AND LATE 19TH C.," in a category he called "PROGRAMMATIC REACTIONISM 1930-43 (IDEOLOGICAL; NATIONALISTIC; STYLISTIC REACTION.)" Descending from this wretched category, he placed "AMERICAN SCENE, 1930-43," "AMERICAN 'SANITY IN ART', 1935-43," AND "NAZI ART, 1930-43." Under "AMERICAN SCENE, 1930-43," Longman placed Hopper in the sub-classification, "'POPULAR ROMANTIC' ILLUSTRATION," together with Paul Sample, a painter then serving as an artist-correspondent for *Life Magazine* assigned to the U.S. Navy, and Dale Nichols, an illustrator and painter who produced Christmas cards and covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Neither artist had any significant association with Hopper.

Longman even insisted that those he identified as "'Popular-Romantic' illustrators" (including Hopper) were not "considered genuine painters."⁴¹ His essay describes "American Scene" painters as those who depict "'Popular Romantic' illustrations of old Victorian houses and bric-a-brac, Mississippi steamboats, farmhouses, or back yards" which suggests Hopper's *House by the Railroad* (1925) with its Mansard roof or his Cape Cod landscapes of old farmhouses such as *Cape Cod Afternoon* (1936). The essay also makes the outrageous claim that "Artists working in exactly the same styles may be found not only among the Nazis, but among the minor painters and the aggressive reactionaries of all countries."⁴²

Clearly Longman disliked and misunderstood realism as a style and confused style with political ideology. While Longman tried to brand Hopper a fascist, more recently, some art historians have strained to turn Hopper into an artist who offered a Leftist critique of society.⁴³ His actual

⁴¹ Longman 14.

⁴² Longman 16.

⁴³ For a discussion of an erroneous interpretation of Hopper's politics, see Gail Levin, "Edward Hopper," *The New England Quarterly* (Sept. 1988): 475-79.

position lies somewhere between these two extremes - in the heart of America's political mainstream.

The issue of Hopper's political beliefs and the politics of realist art during the 1930s is still a subject of confusion. Consider, for example, the recently deceased Swedish artist Dick Bengtsson who appropriated Hopper's work in a panel painting called *Edward Hopper: Early Sunday Morning* of 1970. Bengtsson's only addition to a garishly colored reproduction of Hopper's original is a swastika in a medallion placed on the lower left corner of the composition.

Bengtsson's most ardent promoter is the Swedish museum director, Pontus Hulten, who organized a show of Bengtsson for the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and is the curator of a current Bengtsson show in Vienna. He also owns the painting in question. Curiously, it was this same Hulten, who turned down the major Hopper retrospective organized for the Whitney Museum in 1980-81 when it was offered to him in his capacity as director of the Musee National d'Art Moderne in Paris. This was the same moment when museum directors from Germany, England, the Netherlands and the United States were clamoring to have the show. Can it be that the misapprehension of the 1940s has not completely faded away? A Swedish curator of modern art recently suggested to me that Hulten thinks Hopper is a fascist.⁴⁴ It is time to set the record straight. Hopper was squarely in the tradition of democracy in America.

⁴⁴ Hulten has not responded to the author's query of July 14, 1993.

aus

BJ
3-19-96

ung
Doerries
ffmann (ed.)

acy and
in the United States