

# EDWARD HOPPER'S "NIGHTHAWKS"

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Drawing on the literary and visual sources he admired, Edward Hopper's conception of "Nighthawks" was essentially dramatic, capturing the sinister aspect of a disquieting urban night.

As late as 1960, Edward Hopper told an interviewer that *Nighthawks*, painted eighteen years earlier in 1942, was one of his paintings that he liked "very much," and explained that it "was suggested by a restaurant on Greenwich Avenue where two streets meet (Fig. 1). *Nighthawks* seems to be the way I think of a night street."<sup>1</sup> Just how Hopper thought of "a night street" and, indeed, what motivated him to paint *Nighthawks*, one of his best-loved paintings, can best be answered by looking at the literature and art he admired, his career as an illustrator, and his own earlier paintings.

After Hopper left art school in 1906, he worked mostly out-of-doors, only occasionally experimenting with composing oil paintings in the studio through a process of improvisation often loosely based on memories and sketches, but in the end primarily imaginative.<sup>2</sup> The roots of his method of combining observation and imagination date back to his early training with Robert Henri, his favorite teacher at the New York School of Art. In his most original conceptions, Hopper managed to convey an authentic sense of mood, which again recalls Henri's advice to his students: "Low art is just telling things, as, there is the night. High art gives the feel of night. The latter is nearer reality although the former is a copy."<sup>3</sup> Here one is reminded of Hopper's subsequent fascination with the "feel of night" in his etchings *Night on the El Train* of 1918, *Night in the Park* and *Night Shadows*, both of 1921, and in his paintings *Night Windows* of 1928, *Office at Night* of 1940, as well as in *Nighthawks*. In these works, night seems to have suggested to Hopper a combination of eros and anxiety. He cast the viewer in the role of voyeur, watching these nocturnal dramas unobserved.

Hopper responded to a question about loneliness in *Nighthawks* with less of a denial than usual: "I didn't see it as

particularly lonely. I simplified the scene a great deal and made the restaurant bigger. Unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city."<sup>4</sup> But in general, Hopper objected to the critics' emphasis of this point about his art: "The loneliness thing is overdone."<sup>5</sup>

In the record books Hopper's wife Jo kept, she described this canvas at length (Fig. 2):

Night and brilliant interior of cheap restaurant. Bright items: Cherry wood counter and tops of surrounding stools; lights on metal tanks at rear right; brilliant streak of jade green tiles  $\frac{3}{4}$  across canvas—at base of glass of curving window and counter. Light walls, dull yellow ochre door into the kitchen right. Very good looking blond boy in white (coat, cap) inside; nighthawk (beak) in dark suit, steel grey hat, black band, blue shirt (clean) holding cigarette. Other figure dark sinister back—at left. Light sidewalk outside pale greenish. Darkish old red brick houses opposite. Sign across top of restaurant, dark—Phillies 5¢ cigar, picture of cigar. Outside of shop dark green. Note: bit of bright ceiling inside shop against dark of outside street at edge of stretch of top of window.

Other interpretations of *Nighthawks* have often focused on these "desolate figures at a lunch counter,"<sup>6</sup> "the tough, brightly lit oasis of an all-night diner,"<sup>7</sup> and have suggested that these "figures in an all-night hash house seem held in a dramatic tension that almost asks for literal explanation."<sup>8</sup> Even in 1950, the mood evoked was one of impending violence: "In these predatory times it would not be surprising to see one of the three draw a gun and demand the contents of the cash-register."<sup>9</sup> More than one writer has noted that "a sinister eeriness of light emanates from this painting."<sup>10</sup>

Fig. 1. Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 33 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 60-118". Art Institute of Chicago.



Several critics have compared or contrasted *Nighthawks* to Vincent van Gogh's *Night Café* (Fig. 3) for its "nocturnal emptiness" or its "artificial light."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, van Gogh's own description of *Night Café* emphasizes points in common with *Nighthawks*:

I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green. The room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table in the middle ... Everywhere there is a clash and contrast of the most alien reds and greens in the figures of little sleeping hooligans in the empty dreary rooms in violet and blue; the white coat of the patron, on vigil in a corner of this furnace, turns lemon yellow or pale luminous green.<sup>12</sup>

As in *Night Café*, Hopper's palette in *Nighthawks* emphasizes red and green with yellow nocturnal light. Hopper's waiter, like van Gogh's patron, wears a white coat while the men seated at the counter (one of whom Jo described as "sinister") wear blue-violet as do van Gogh's hooligans. Van Gogh explained his intention in painting *Night Café*, a place where "night prowlers can take refuge ... when they have no money to pay for a lodging."<sup>13</sup>

In my picture of the "Night Café" I have tried to express the idea that the cafe is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime. So I have tried to express, as it were, the powers of darkness in a low public house ... an atmosphere like a devil's furnace. ...<sup>14</sup>

Despite the obvious similarity of mood of *Night Café* and *Nighthawks*, reflected in the frequent description of both pictures as "sinister," no writer has suggested that Hopper was inspired by van Gogh's painting. Yet there is ample evidence that Hopper knew van Gogh's painting and saw it in several exhibitions. *Night Café* was purchased in 1933 by Stephen C. Clark, who was to become one of Hopper's major patrons. Clark had purchased Hopper's *House by the Railroad* in 1926, which he gave to the Museum of Modern Art in 1930. *Night Café* was exhibited in New York from November 19, 1934 through January 20, 1935, at the Museum of Modern Art in its "5th Anniversary Exhibition," which Hopper certainly would have seen, since it included *House by the Railroad* and followed his own retrospective there just a year earlier. Although he did not travel to Chicago to see The Art Institute's "A Century of Progress: Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture" in 1934, Hopper had certainly seen van Gogh's *Night Café* reproduced in the catalogue of this exhibition which included five of his own major oil paintings.<sup>15</sup> Thus, by the time *Night Café* was first shown in New York, Hopper knew it from reproduction. He had a chance to see *Night Café* again at the Museum of Modern Art in the popular van Gogh exhibition there in 1935.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the exhibition's catalogue included van Gogh's descriptions of *Night Café* (quoted above) next to a reproduction of the painting.<sup>17</sup>

In 1936, a monograph, *Vincent van Gogh*, by Hopper's friend, neighbor, and former classmate Walter Pach was published; this volume reproduced and discussed *Night Café*.<sup>18</sup> Hopper's next opportunity to see *Night Café* was in the exhibition "Eleven Paintings of Vincent van Gogh" held at the Paul Rosenberg Gallery in New York from January 5 through January 31, 1942. This was during the period Hopper was painting *Nighthawks*, which he completed January 21, 1942.

Hopper, who reportedly would wait for months without touching a blank canvas on his easel, worked quickly when he did find inspiration. Claiming that it usually took him a month to do a painting the size of *Nighthawks*, Hopper may have completed it in less than three weeks time.<sup>19</sup> It seems very likely, at least, that he did go to see *Night Café* while his picture was in progress, for the exhibition was widely announced and reviewed in the press.<sup>20</sup> One critic, Margaret Breuning of the *New York Journal American*, described in van Gogh's *Night Café* what Hopper must have been aiming for in *Nighthawks*:

The emotional intensity, the almost perilous vitality of this canvas, with its sinister suggestion of lurking evil, are actually overwhelming. The vividness of such an impression is like our vision of things seen momentarily in a lightning flash. In this one canvas we realize Van Gogh's amazing mastery of dramatic illumination, which conveys the essential spirit and character of a scene.<sup>21</sup>



"Night Hawks" 33x60

Finished June 21, 1942

Blocks and W. mosaic Newton colors, W. N. G. white

poppy oil English linseed oil in priming  
 Night - brilliant interior of cheap restaurant. Bright tiles; cherry wood  
 counter - tops of surrounding stools; lights on metal tanks at rear right;  
 brilliant outside of jado glass tiles - across counter at base of glass of  
 windows. Light walls dust yellow across door into kitchen right.  
 Very good looking blond boy in white (coat, cap) inside counter. Girl in red blouse,  
 brown hair, fatigues, sandwiches. Man night hawk (hat) in dark suit, blue tie,  
 hat, black hand, blue shirt (clean) holding sign to left. Other figures dark sinister back.  
 - at top. Light side walk outside past greenish. Dark red brick terrace of the  
 into. Sign across top of shop dark. Phillips 50 cigars. picture of sign. Outside of  
 shop door green. Note: big sign looking inside shop past door dark outside street at  
 edge of picture top of window.

May 13, 42 Chicago Art Inst. ...  
 Oct. 27, 42 ... "Ada S. Garrett" ...  
 in exchange for ...  
 Compartment 1000 - low 50 2000

Fig. 2. Page from Edward Hopper's record book with sketch after *Nighthawks* and Jo Hopper's description, 1942.

Fig. 3. Vincent Van Gogh, *Night Café*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 29 x 35". Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark.

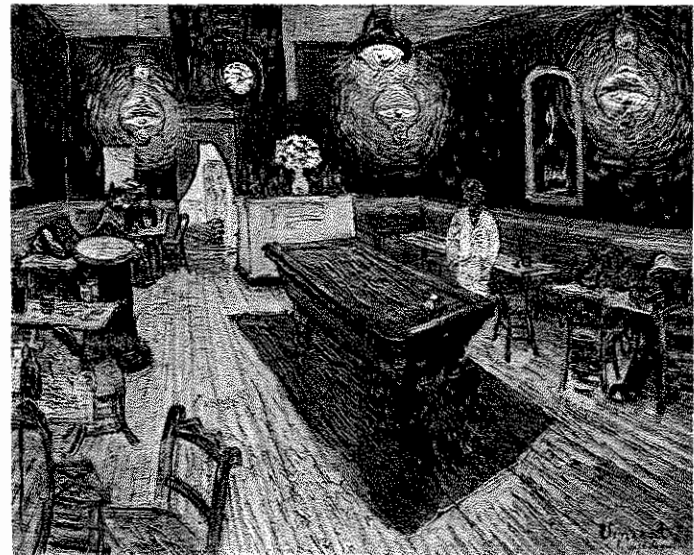




Fig. 6. Edward Hopper, Study for Nighthawks, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 7 1/4 x 4 1/2". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

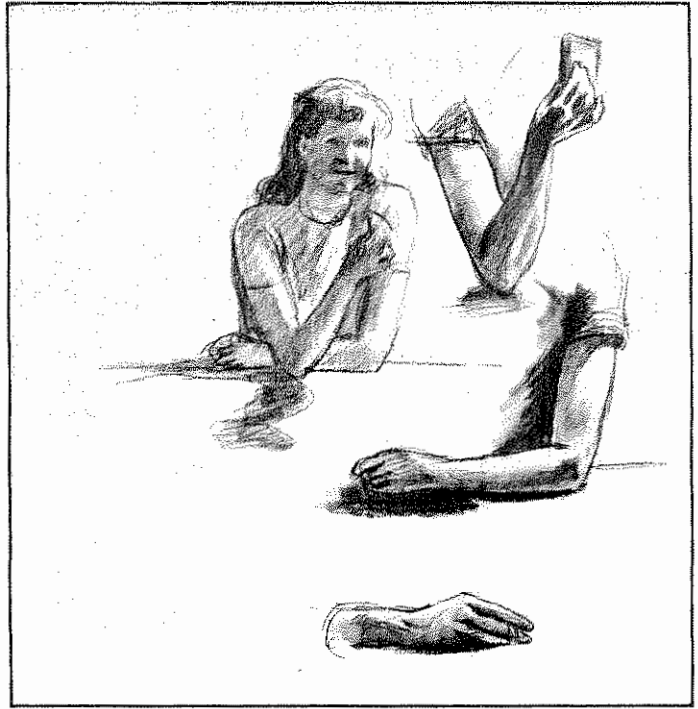


Fig. 5. Edward Hopper, Study for Nighthawks, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 15-1/8 x 11-1/16". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

Fig. 4. Edgar Degas, Absinthe, 1876. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 26-7/8". Musée du Louvre, Paris.



That Hopper could find inspiration in van Gogh, an artist of such a different sensibility, might at first seem surprising. Perhaps Hopper was responding to a critic's challenge. In 1929, Forbes Watson had written:

As a matter of fact there is a limit to every painter's art and, as so truly said, every positive quality in an artist's work denies some other positive quality. Otherwise there might be in the same artist the flaming fire of a Van Gogh and the ungainly sobriety of a Hopper. The two qualities are contradictory. . . .<sup>22</sup>

It may be that in *Nighthawks* Hopper was seeking some of "the flaming fire" of van Gogh, something to set this situation on edge, to raise expectation and anxiety.

Hopper's own "sinister suggestion of lurking evil" goes back to his days as an illustrator. He was forced to support himself through commercial art for nearly twenty years although he detested drawing people "grimacing and posturing."<sup>23</sup> In general, Hopper considered most of the fiction he was assigned to illustrate unsatisfactory. In 1927, just after he had finally been able to abandon his career as an illustrator and support himself through painting, he "discovered" Ernest Hemingway and wrote a fan letter to the editor of *Scribner's*:

I want to compliment you for printing Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers" in the March *Scribner's*. It is refreshing to come upon such an honest piece of work in an American magazine, after wading through the vast sea of sugar-coated mush that makes up the most of our fiction. Of the concessions to popular prejudices, the side stepping of truth, and the ingenious mechanism of trick ending there is no taint in this story.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, there is something in the setting and mood of this story that evokes *Nighthawks*. Hemingway's tale is set in the evening in a lunchroom:

Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other side of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 7. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 7¼ x 4½". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

Fig. 8. Edgar Degas, *Women in a Café, Evening*, 1877. Pastel on monotype, 16-1/8 x 23-5/8". Musée du Louvre, Paris.



While Hopper has placed the same number of characters around his counter, his couple corresponds to the two men in the Hemingway story who "sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter."<sup>26</sup> What Hopper must have appreciated most in the Hemingway story—the suspense of impending violence that never takes place—he also suggested in his painting *Nighthawks*. Even his choice of a title relates to "The Killers," for the "hawk" is also slang for a person who preys on others, as well as being a verb meaning "to hunt on the wing." In the record books, Jo referred to the woman's companion as a "Nighthawk (beak)." Using "Nighthawks," however, to refer to people who are just habitually up or moving about late at night seems excessive when the more innocuous "Nightowls" might serve that purpose; "Nighthawks" suggests predatory activity.

Hopper may also have been familiar with the poem "Birds in the Night" by Paul Verlaine, whose work he had long admired.<sup>27</sup> In the poem Verlaine bitterly expresses his ironic regret and the recrimination he feels over his broken marriage. The opening lines of this poem might express what the lone man in

*Nighthawks* is thinking while gazing across the counter at the couple he confronts in the still night:

Therefore, to what good these sighs and groans?

You do not love me, that's the end of all, and  
since a man should bear his grief alone, I'll  
suffer calmly and be stoical.<sup>28</sup>

Like Verlaine, perhaps Hopper also intended to convey despair, resignation, perhaps even acceptance of what cannot be changed. The lone man's posture is that of someone worn out, leaning on the counter for support, his head cast downward, dejected. The couple whose hands almost touch accentuates the isolation of the solitary diner across the counter: a juxtaposition of eros and the loneliness of night. The poignancy of the painting also owes to the apparent vulnerability of all of these people out in the disquieting night.

Even the couple in *Nighthawks* appears glum, reminiscent of the sullen pair in Degas' *Absinthe*, a painting of 1876, which Hopper knew well in reproduction (Fig. 4).<sup>29</sup> Hopper had Jo pose for the female figure and even sketched details of her arms (Fig. 5). For her companion, however, he had no model except himself. His two extant sketches for this figure (Figs. 6 and 7) demonstrate a pose strikingly similar to that of the figure of Marcellin Desboutin in *Absinthe*. The man's face is shown beneath his hat brim in three-quarter profile and he leans forward, his right elbow resting on the counter just as Desboutin's arm rests on the table top. Although the hands of the couple in *Nighthawks* almost touch, something is wrong. Instead of taking her hand, he holds a cigarette and looks somber; she holds a sandwich but appears lost in thought, spiritually distant from her companion. If Degas' couple seems brutalized by alcohol, Hopper's seems dehumanized by something else, perhaps by criminal intent. As in Degas' composition, Hopper's figures do not face the spectator but are situated along an oblique line formed by the surface of the counter; they are further distanced by the opposite section of the counter, the stools, the window, and even the sidewalk outside.

Other compositional elements of *Nighthawks* may reflect Hopper's familiarity with Degas' *Women in a Café, Evening*, a pastel on monotype of 1877 (Fig. 8).<sup>30</sup> The vertical banding Hopper used in *Nighthawks* is less pronounced than that in his *Soir Bleu* of 1914, but it is significant that in both paintings he employed a device characteristic in Degas' work. These bands form the structure of the restaurant, dramatically framing the window and the action within. As in Degas' cafe, we look through the illuminated restaurant, on to the darker street beyond, and across the street into the windowed building facades.

People sitting on stools at a counter appeared in several illustrations that Hopper made as early as 1913-16.<sup>31</sup> In one example from a July 1916 issue of *System* magazine (Fig. 9), a salesman in a white coat stands behind the counter waiting on a customer, just as the blond boy would in *Nighthawks*; in both, the top of the counter is visible, viewed from up above. In a 1914 illustration from *Associated Sunday Magazine* (Fig. 10), the waiter in a white coat looks at a man whose back we see as he leans against the counter top; dressed in hat and coat, he hints of the "sinister" character to come in *Nighthawks*. While in these illustrations Hopper did not yet express a mood as in *Nighthawks*, the basic furniture and even the still-life details (such as the cash registers) recur in the painting, having taken on new significance. Perhaps in *Nighthawks*, the cash register, the only object visible across the street through an illuminated store window, hints of the greed of these sinister nocturnal prowlers. In the days of armed robberies, the register may refer to the very object of these hunters in the night, suggesting their evil intentions.

For the design of the architecture in *Nighthawks*, Hopper may have adapted actual structures he observed in New York's Greenwich Village, a short walk from his home. Where Greenwich Avenue, Seventh Avenue, and Eleventh Street come together, a wedge-shaped lot now stands empty where, presumably, the all-night eatery once was. Across the street is another wedge-shaped building, now a candy store with but a small counter, merely hinting at how the neighboring structure might have looked.

Yet Hopper had painted the illuminated windows of a corner

shop in *Drug Store* of 1927 (Fig. 11). As in *Nighthawks*, the light extends from the shop, lighting up the sidewalk outside and making visible the darker buildings across the street. Even the "Silbers Pharmacy" sign in *Drug Store* resembles that for "Phillies" cigars in *Nighthawks*. The red brick color above the pharmacy also reminds one of Hopper's fondness for such structures as in *Early Sunday Morning* of 1930 or in the buildings across the street in *Nighthawks*. In this latter painting, Hopper reversed the direction of the thrust of the building in *Drug Store* and made the near wall cut into the composition at a sharp angle from the right foreground to the left middleground. Where we look through the restaurant's window to the buildings beyond in *Nighthawks*, we also look through the entrance of the pharmacy (as defined by the post and light) across the street to the buildings there.

In his study for *Nighthawks*, we see that Hopper had initially intended much less of an angle for the building's thrust (Fig. 12). His final sketch reveals a conception of a building which recalls his *New York Corner* or *Corner Saloon* of 1913 (Fig. 13). When he made his sketches for *Nighthawks*, Hopper certainly had this earlier painting firmly in his mind, for he had just exhibited it at the Rehn Gallery in New York, from January 6 through February 1, 1941, in a show of twenty-three of his early paintings. Furthermore, Hopper must have been delighted that *New York Corner* was purchased from the exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art. In his canvas of 1913, Hopper had focused on the corner saloon or restaurant at what appears to be dusk. While the saloon's sign and the red brick facades would recur in *Nighthawks*, he never depicted such crowds in his mature work.

Hopper painted *New York Corner* during the period he was unable to sell paintings and had to work as an illustrator. Yet when he first exhibited *New York Corner*, in a group show at the MacDowell Club of New York from February 11 through 21, 1915, he received his first press notices from the critics. Although they panned *Soir Bleu*, the larger canvas he exhibited in the same show, *New York Corner* was praised as "a perfect visualization of New York atmosphere" and for its "completeness of expression."<sup>32</sup> With such positive early reinforcement for *New York Corner*, occurring in a time of general discouragement, it is not surprising that Hopper only later turned to developing his ideas begun earlier—first in *Drug Store* and then in *Nighthawks*.

Hopper's concern with composition is demonstrated by the sketches he made for the architectural structures in *Nighthawks*, one of which contains a kind of schematic shorthand for the four figures, each reduced to a few lines (Figs. 14, 15, and 16). These simple linear drawings reveal his strong instincts for design and explain the basis of the considerable regard for his painting among proponents of abstract art, who early on acclaimed the aesthetic qualities of his composition, his forms, and his light. Critics have often cited parallels in Hopper's work to abstract art:

Hopper betrays, within the context of American realism, a thorough assimilation of the constructivist tradition of the early twentieth century. The austere simplicity of the architectural environment, the large rectangular progression of circular stools along its lower edge—these forms could hardly be imagined without the previous work of Mondrian and the Bauhaus tradition.<sup>33</sup>

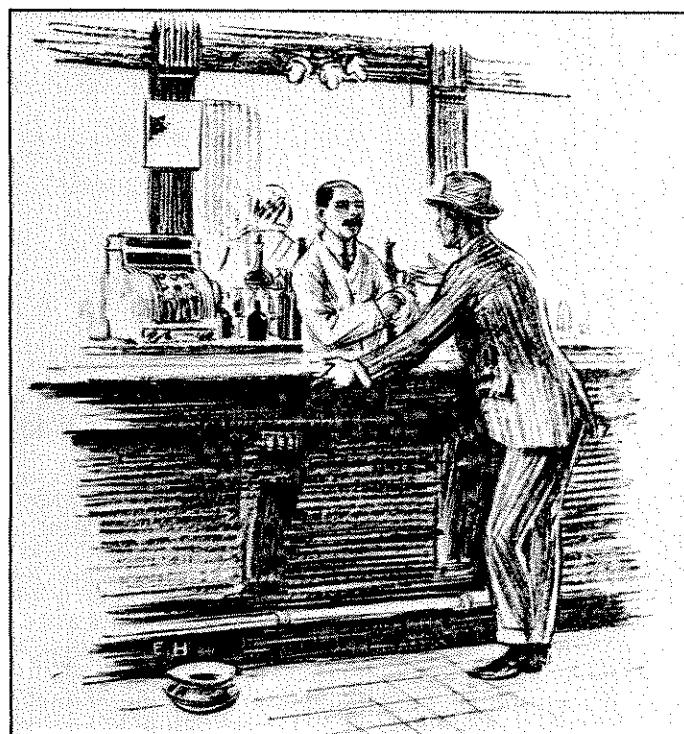
When Lloyd Goodrich told Hopper that in a lecture he had compared a slide of a Mondrian with his *High Noon*, Hopper's only comment was "You kill me."<sup>34</sup> In fact, Hopper detested abstract art, claimed that he did not remember even having heard of Picasso during his Paris visits of 1906-10, and insisted: "One of the weaknesses of much abstract painting is the attempt to substitute the inventions of the intellect for a pristine imaginative conception."<sup>35</sup>

While he denounced "the invention of arbitrary and stylized design," Hopper admitted that he "subjected, consciously or otherwise," "color, design and form . . . to considerable simplification."<sup>36</sup> It is this simplification that makes *Nighthawks* work; Hopper dealt with the essentials, a reductive approach, perhaps a reaction against years of having to include details in illustrations for his commercial assignments, rather than owing to any assimilation of modernism. In his paintings he refused to



Fig. 9. Edward Hopper, Illustration for Carl H. Fast, "Customers' Wants Versus Buyers' Guesses," *System*, 30 (July 1916), p. 97.

Fig. 10. Edward Hopper, Illustration for "Tales from the Road," *Associated Sunday Magazine*, May 24, 1914, p. 12.



be narrative, and instead merely hinted at meaning beyond external appearances. Who are these people out in the night? Hopper's painting is suggestive, but never specific. Symbolic content is left to the viewer's imagination. For many, including the abstract painter Amadée Ozenfant who admired Hopper's work, paintings like *Early Sunday Morning* and *Nighthawks* "succeeded in immortalizing certain typical aspects of modern American life."<sup>37</sup> Ozenfant interpreted the three figures being served as night-shift workers or "travailleurs de nuit" rather than as the more sinister characters others described.<sup>38</sup>

In *Nighthawks*, and in his paintings in general, Hopper was concerned with light. He explained:

I am very much interested in light, and particularly sunlight, trying to paint sunlight without eliminating the form under it, if I can. It's very difficult to do. The form begins to obscure the light itself and destroy it. . . . Night scenes are not so difficult because the light isn't so strong and it doesn't obscure forms the way sunlight does.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in *Nighthawks*, Hopper dramatically presented a brightly illuminated interior accentuated by the contrast to a darkened exterior space. The viewer looks into the all-night diner much as one observed the activity in an aquarium—through the glass wall. Hopper has frozen one passing moment in time with a powerfully expressive force. His vehicle is light, which serves him as it might a film director. It is a harsh, direct, high-key light shining down on the four characters, the burnt umber counter top, and the seats of the bar stools, reflecting off the bright yellow and green trim of the wall at the base of the plate glass window. The result is certainly more a created illusion than a copy of reality.

Hopper used light to concentrate our attention on the essentials, eliminating extraneous detail, casting the unimportant in shadow. Light serves to communicate the emotional tone of the entire picture. That this restaurant seems to many to be a rather ghastly, sinister, almost nightmarish place owes to the harsh effect created by overlighting the interior. Even the men's hat brims contribute to their more sinister appearances by casting shadows—in the case of the accompanied man, directly over his face, causing deep shadows in his eye-sockets, clouding the eyes which might otherwise "mirror the soul." Hopper also used light to contribute to the sense of pictorial space. Beyond the interior, across the street, light illuminates the storefront with its metallic cash register glowing, creating a clear background with the street as a middleground, the sidewalk and interior as foreground.

Patterns of light and shadow animate the entire composition with a complex interplay of geometric shapes. For example, at the second-story windows, where green window shades balance against blackened interiors, the third window from the

Fig. 14. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon and pencil on paper, 8½ x 11". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

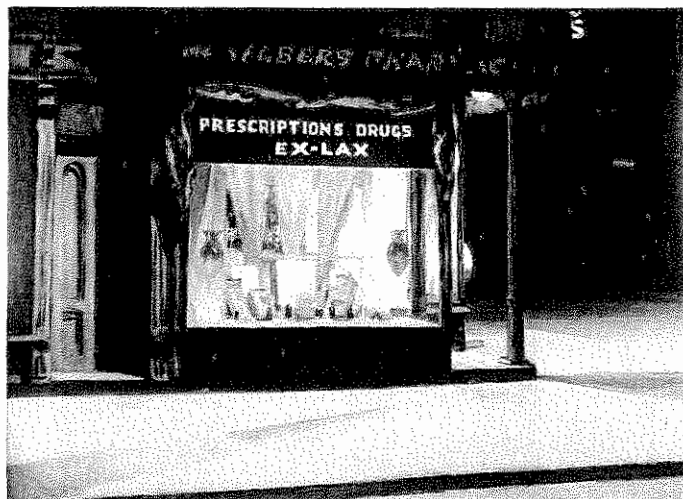
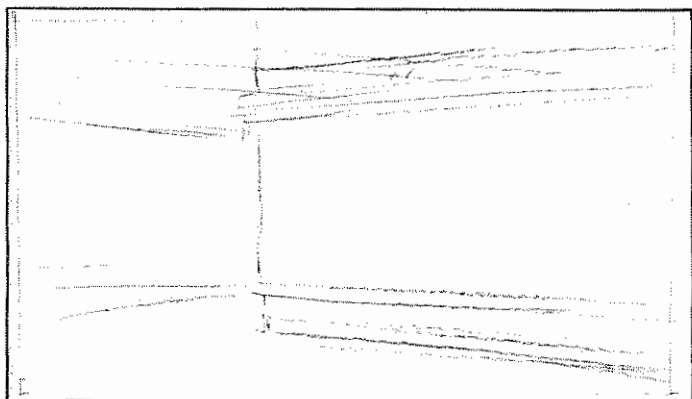


Fig. 11. Edward Hopper, *Drug Store*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 29 x 40". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of John T. Spaulding.

Fig. 13. Edward Hopper, *New York Corner or Corner Saloon*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29". Museum of Modern Art, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund.

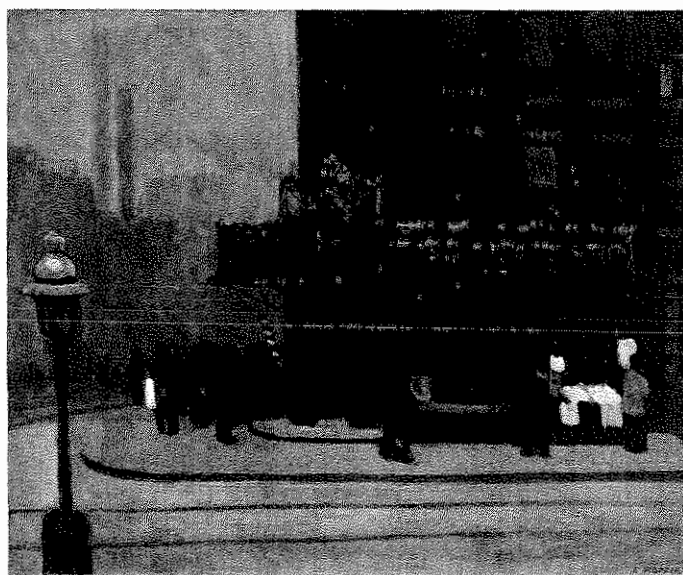


Fig. 12. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 7¼ x 14". Private Collection.



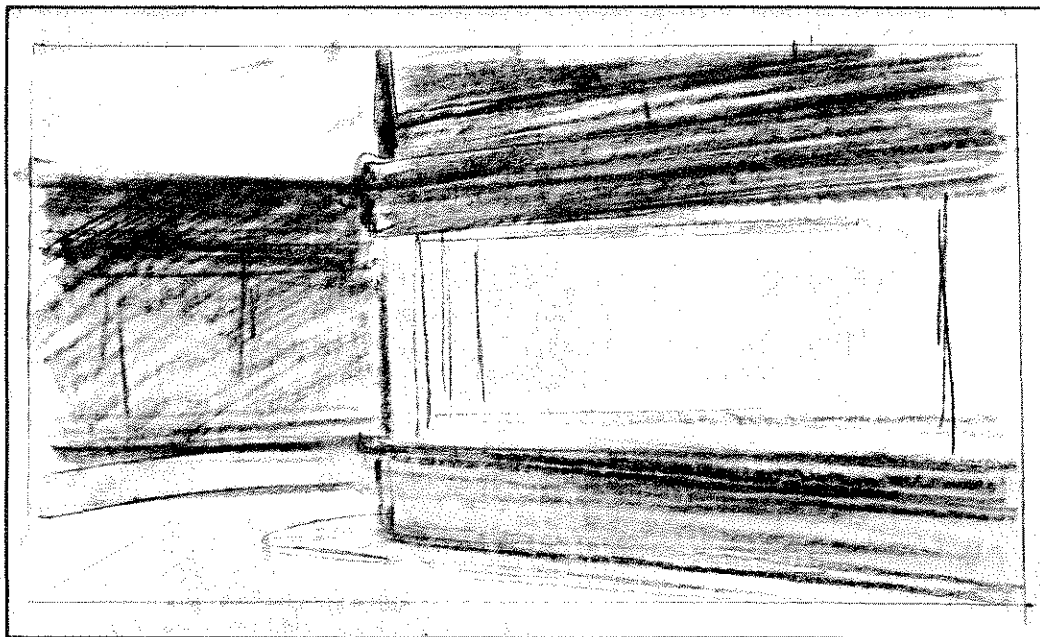


Fig. 15. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 8 1/2 x 11". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

left falls within a large horizontally placed triangle of light on the red wall. Within the window itself is a geometric arrangement of at least four shapes, including, in the lower right corner, a vertical green triangle of bright light. This triangular form is repeated in the storefront window below, again in the lower right corner, this time in pale blue but within a different combination of shapes. The repetition of shapes, such as these triangles, aids in visual dynamism, leading our eye in movement through the space of the canvas.

Many aspects of *Nighthawks* had been worked out in Hopper's earlier paintings. He had effectively employed the simultaneous interior and exterior view seen from the outside in *Apartment Houses* of 1923. More usual in his work, both before and after *Nighthawks*, was the interior space complete with an exterior view as in *Room in Brooklyn* (1932), *Compartment C, Car 293* (1938), *Hotel by a Railroad* (1952), *Hotel Window* (1956), *Western Motel* (1957), or *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* (1958). But in *Nighthawks* and *Apartment Houses*, there is both a view from the exterior into the interior and a second view back into the exterior space through the device of two windows. The idea of the fishbowl view, looking through glass to observe the activities within, was utilized in an earlier restaurant theme in *Tables for Ladies* of 1930 where only the window's base is visible. If not for the typical window display and the proximity of the exit, the viewer might miss such a subtle representation of an exterior window-wall. But putting the spectator in the artist's place, as a nocturnal urban voyeur stealing glances of an illuminated interior, had occurred to Hopper with *Night Windows* in 1928. Then, too, he had explored the interactions of a couple in *Office at Night*, an illuminated interior painted in 1940, just two years before *Nighthawks*.<sup>40</sup>

Examining the figures in his working sketches clarifies Hopper's intentions in *Nighthawks*. In the most complete sketch (Fig. 12), the couple at the counter clearly turn toward one another, while in the painting they look straight ahead, each appearing lost in a world of private thoughts. In this same sketch, the lone man turns his gaze out toward the window, while in the painting, Hopper has shifted his head toward the right, to the light, so that he regards the couple at least with his peripheral vision. The blond boy looks down at his work in the sketch, but in the painting he gazes up and out the stretch of window between his three customers. Hopper's headless sketch for this figure (Fig. 17) works out the proper curve of his back in this stooped posture, developing from the more



Fig. 17. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 10 1/2 x 8-1/16". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

schematic representation in the overall study. In one of several sketches for the lone man at the counter (Fig. 18), Hopper depicted him dressed in a sporty, belted safari jacket of the kind he himself often wore—revealing, perhaps, his point of reference for this and most of his male figures. Even still-life details such as the metal water tanks or condiment containers were also thoughtfully worked out in sketches (Fig. 19).

The expressive force Hopper achieved in *Nighthawks* is no accident. As he once admitted, "If I don't have something to say, I don't try to say it, that's all."<sup>41</sup> This picture is not a mere record of a situation which he had stumbled upon, but a carefully conceived scenario where light, composition, and content play major roles. This is Hopper's theater and he was a punctilious director with a vast knowledge of artifice. The lighting effects suggest the cinema; both the posture and the placement of the figures are intentional.<sup>42</sup> He considered the orientation of his buildings with all the aesthetic concern of an architect. His geometric shapes work together with the harmony of a great graphic designer or an abstract artist. Drawing on the literary and visual sources he admired, Hopper's conception of *Nighthawks* was essentially dramatic, capturing the sinister aspect of a disquieting urban night.

*Nighthawks* and its studies can currently be seen in the exhibition *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* sponsored by Philip Morris Incorporated and the National Endowment for the Arts: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, through June 17, 1981; Stadtische Kunststhalie, Düsseldorf, July 10-September 6, 1981; The Art Institute of Chicago, October 3-November 29, 1981; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, December 16, 1981-February 14, 1982.

1. Quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 134.
2. See, for example, *Le Bistro* of 1909 and *Soir Blue* of 1914, two reminiscences of Paris Hopper painted in New York, reproduced in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), plates 122 and 378. For all works by Hopper cited in this article but not reproduced, see this volume.
3. Robert Henri, "A Practical Talk to Those Who Study Art," *The Philadelphia Press*, 12 May 1901, reprinted in Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, ed. Margery Ryerson (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1923), pp. 274-75.
4. Quoted in Kuh, *The Artist's Voice*, p. 134.
5. Quoted in Brian O'Doherty, "Portrait: Edward Hopper," *Art in America*, 52 (December 1964), p. 72.
6. Suzanne Burrey, "Edward Hopper: The Emptying Spaces," *Arts Digest*, 1, April 1955, p. 10.
7. Bryan Robertson, "Hopper's Theater," *New York Review of Books*, 17, December 16, 1971.
8. "Relentless Realist," *Newsweek*, February 20, 1950, p. 84.
9. Loring Holmes Dodd, "Hopper Show Proves Him Stark Realist," *Worcester Evening Gazette*, May 31, 1950.
10. Parker Tyler, "Edward Hopper: Alienation by Light," *Magazine of Art*, 41,

December 1948, p. 294.

11. John Sandberg, "Some Traditional Aspects of Pop Art," *Art Journal*, Spring 1967, 26, p. 229: "The nocturnal emptiness recalls Van Gogh's *Night Café*, and perhaps implies some of de Chirico's melancholy as well." Alexander Eliot, *Sight and Insight* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., inc., 1960), p. 12: "With his *Night Café* at Arles he made a mothlike rush at artificial light." Of Hopper's *Nighthawks*, Eliot wrote: "Artificial light and natural dark are given equal weight. The dark is the less lonely."
12. Mark Roskill, ed., *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (London: Fontana Library, 1963), p. 288-289; Letter to Van Gogh's brother Theo, September 8, 1888 (letter 533).
13. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed., *Vincent Van Gogh* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1935), n.p., catalogue 34.
14. *Ibid.* Also quoted in "Life of Van Gogh is Fully Illuminated by Great Display," *The Art News*, November 16, 1935, p. 7.
15. *Catalogue of A Century of Progress: Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*, The Art Institute of Chicago, June 1-November 1, 1934. Included were Hopper's *Barber Shop*, *Hodgkins' House*, *Lighthouse Hill*, *Two on the Aisle*, and *Williamsburg Bridge*. Hopper also would have seen *Night Café* reproduced in *The Art News* accompanying the article "Chicago Reveals Painting Loans For Fair Exhibition," May 5, 1934, p. 3, which cited his name among the painters of the "present day." At this time, much attention was focused on Clark's acquisition of this painting from the Museum of Western Art, Moscow.
16. Walter Pach, *Vincent Van Gogh* (New York: Artbook Museum, 1936), p. 9, describes the "tens of thousands of people" attending this exhibition and "the crowds, which, even in those big galleries, prevent one from seeing the pictures."
17. Barr, ed., *Vincent Van Gogh*, catalogue 34.
18. Pach, *Vincent Van Gogh*, p. 51.
19. Edward Hopper, transcript of taped interview with Arlene Jacobwitz at the Brooklyn Museum, April 29, 1966. Hopper was referring to *Macomb's Dam Bridge* of approximately the same size.
20. See, for example: "A Dozen Van Goghs," *Art News*, January 15-21, 1942, XL, pp. 17 and 35; "Van Gogh's Art in Benefit," *The Art Digest*, January 1, 1942, 16, p. 31.
21. Quoted in "Van Goghs Loaned for Red Cross Benefit," *The Art Digest*, January 15, 1942, 16, p. 10.
22. Forbes Watson, "A Note on Edward Hopper," *Vanity Fair*, 31, February 1929, p.

107.

23. Edward Hopper, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), p. 31.
24. Edward Hopper to the Editor, *Scribner's Magazine*, 82 (June 1927), p. 706.
25. Ernest Hemingway, "The Killers," reprinted in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), p. 377.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
27. Hopper was given a volume of Verlaine's poems in French by Jeanne Cheruy in 1922 and quoted from it by heart as late as 1961.
28. C.F. MacIntyre, ed., *Paul Verlaine Selected Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), p. 127.
29. This similarity has been noted by John Sandberg, "Some Traditional Aspects of Pop Art," *Art Journal*, XXVI, pp. 228-229. Hopper owned Paul Jamot, *Degas* (Paris: Editions de la Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1924), inscribed "for Edward Hopper from Jo" which he received in 1924, the year of their marriage. *Absinthe* is plate 42.
30. Reproduced in Jamot, *Degas*, plate 45.
31. See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), plates 54, 83, and 127; Plate 601 also has a similar counter and window design with men in coats and hats.
32. "Shows and Sales. Mr. Bellows Paints Cross-Eyed Boy," *New York Herald*, February 13, 1915, and "Exhibit at MacDowell Club," unidentified newspaper clipping saved by Hopper.
33. Sandberg, "Some Traditional Aspects of Pop Art," p. 229.
34. Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, p. 149.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.
37. Amadée Ozenfant, transcript of "Edward Hopper," a Voice of America radio broadcast, March 7, 1950, New York, pp. 4-5; author's translation.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
39. Edward Hopper, transcript of interview by Aline Saarinen, *Sunday Show*, NBC Television, 1964, p. 3.
40. See Gail Levin, "Edward Hopper's 'Office at Night,'" *Arts Magazine*, 52 (January 1978), pp. 134-37.
41. Hopper, interview by Aline Saarinen, p. 4.
42. See Gail Levin, "Edward Hopper: The Influence of Theater and Film," *Arts Magazine*, 55 (October 1980), pp. 123-127.



Fig. 18. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 11-7/8 x 8-7/8". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

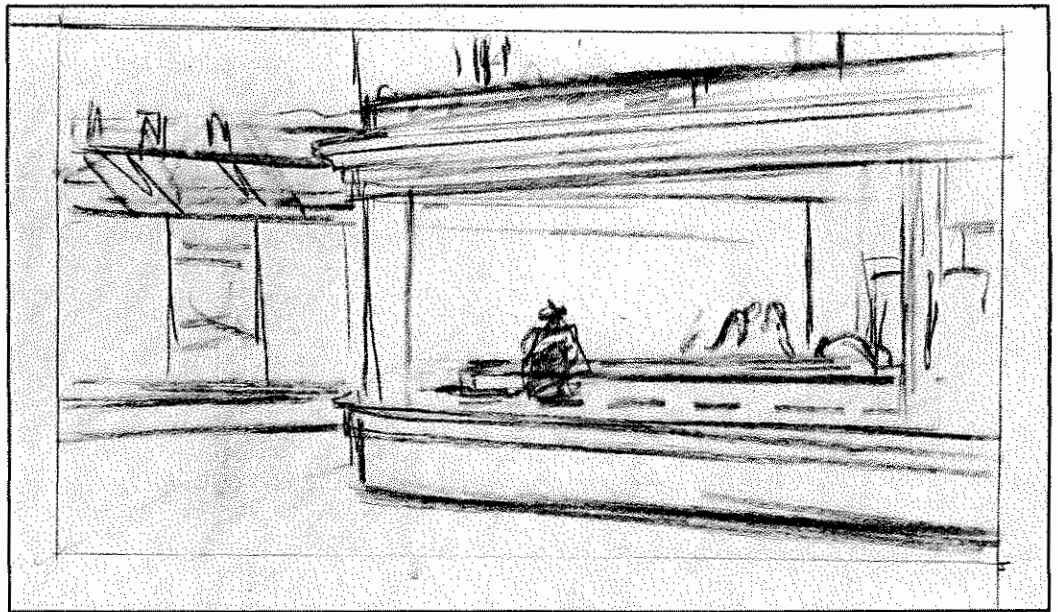


Fig. 16. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 8 1/2 x 11". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

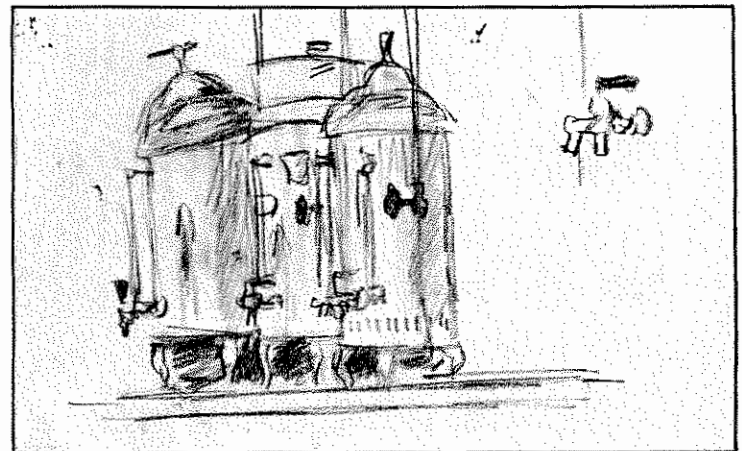


Fig. 19. Edward Hopper, Study for *Nighthawks*, 1942. Conté crayon on paper, 4 1/2 x 7 1/4". Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.