



Indianapolis Museum / Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art

■ "Hotel Lobby" (1943) is typical of the bleak works by artist Edward Hopper.

Edward Hopper biography brings readers close to

# The MASTER of LONELINESS

By **JOCELYN McCLURG**  
*Courant Book Editor*

**E**dward Hopper's America is a desolate place, a lonely landscape of hotel rooms, offices, train compartments, lighthouses, gas stations and men and women who look past one another in silence.

Hopper's haunting, Depression-era images have become achingly familiar and immensely popular. But until now, Hopper the man has remained something of a mystery, a figure as enigmatic as his paintings.

That is changing with the publication of the first-ever Hopper biography, "Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography" (Knopf, \$35), by

Hopper scholar Gail Levin. She will give a free lecture and sign copies of her book Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at the University of Hartford.

The new biography follows on the heels of a major exhibit of Hopper's work at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, which ended Sunday.

As The New York Times Book Review suggested in its Oct. 8 review of Levin's biography: "Readers of this masterly but chilling book will never again view with quite the same feelings a picture by Edward Hopper, perhaps the most powerful American 'realist' painter of the 20th century."

Levin paints a devastating portrait of the childless marriage between Hopper and

Jo Nivison Hopper, based largely on Jo's unpublished diaries. The Hopper who appears in his wife's journals is morose, taciturn, introverted, all the things one might expect from the artist who painted such bleak works as "Nighthawks" and "New York Movie."

But Hopper's sullen temperament made for a hellish marriage. Hopper was psychologically and sometimes physically abusive to his spirited wife, and he undermined her artistic career. Yet theirs is what today would be dubbed a co-dependent relationship. Jo fought back ("I once bit him to the bone," she told an interviewer). She was his

**Please see Diaries, Page E3**

# Diaries by Edward Hopper's wife form basis of Levin's biography

Continued from Page E1

model; the sexy women who populate Hopper's work are variations on his wife. When Hopper battled depression and had "painter's block," it was Jo who urged him on.

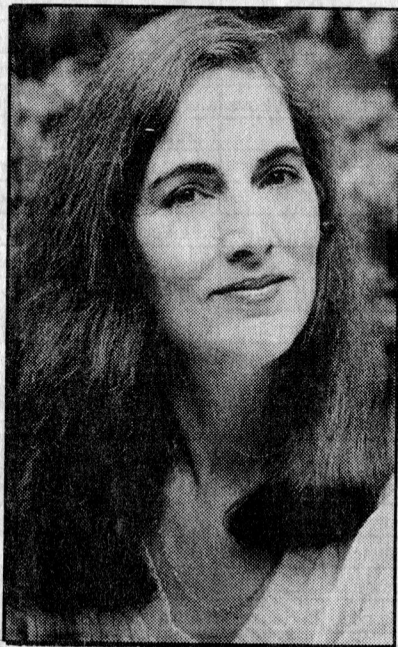
"She was not a quitter," Levin, 47, says during a recent interview in her apartment on New York's Upper East Side. "She defended herself. At the same time, she clearly loved Edward, was enormously devoted to him. He was the center of her life."

As The New York Times review pointed out, "Jo was no saint," either. "I don't mean to paint Edward as always the bad guy at all," Levin says. Some of the scenes from their marriage — especially on the rare occasions when Hopper let Jo drive — border on the darkly hilarious.

The subject of Levin's slide lecture at the UofT is "Edward Hopper and His Silenced Collaborator" (his wife).

Upon her death in 1968, Jo Hopper left her husband's and her own art work to the Whitney museum. According to Levin, the Whitney's directors gave some of Jo's paintings to charity institutions and destroyed the rest.

"I'm not claiming that Jo's work is in any sense equal to Edward Hopper's, but she's a lot better than plenty of mediocre male artists who are ensconced in museums all around the country," Levin says.



■ Gail Levin

Biographer of Edward Hopper

Some critics have questioned the biography's heavy reliance on Jo's diaries, but Levin says she also found letters between friends of the Hoppers that confirm problems in the marriage.

But Levin's biography isn't judgmental, nor is it a psychobiography.

"I have empathy for [Hopper], because he wasn't able to transcend his Victorian roots and really enjoy being a 20th century man," she

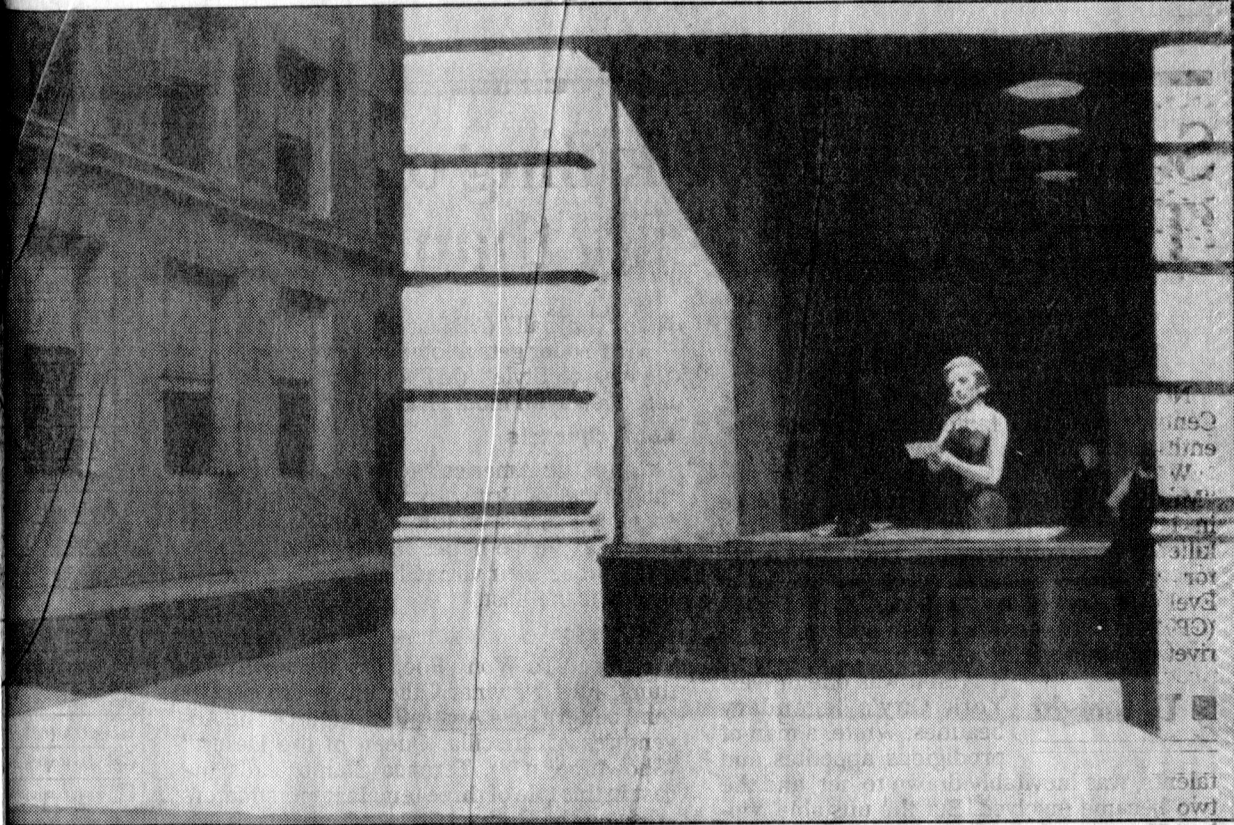
says. "It's not just a modern woman he couldn't adapt to. He didn't like airplanes. He didn't like skyscrapers. He really wasn't capable of a lot of emotional growth. He was somebody who suffered enormously from depression. When he was painting, those were the moments he was happiest."

Edward Hopper (1882-1967) was born in Nyack, N.Y., and quickly showed his artistic abilities. He studied commercial art (which he loathed, even though for many years it paid the bills) and attended art school, and he admired the work of impressionists and post-impressionists while living in Paris from 1906 to 1907.

In 1913, Hopper moved to Greenwich Village and indulged his interest in movies and the theater. But until he was 40, he sold only one painting. After his marriage to Jo in 1924, when he was 42 and she 41, Hopper's work over time increasingly drew the attention of important American museums.

The Hoppers also had a summer home in Truro, Mass., where Hopper painted his light-infused portraits of the Cape, in contrast to his film-noirish visions of New York's urban landscape.

Levin has devoted many years to studying Hopper's work. After earning a Ph.D. from Rutgers, she worked at the Whitney as curator of the Hopper collection from 1976 to 1984, and she organized the major Hopper retrospective at the muse-



Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts / Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art

■ **Edward Hopper's artworks, including "New York Office" (1962), depict a world of alienation.**

um in 1980-81. She has written eight books on Hopper and will publish the complete catalog of Hopper's watercolors, oils and commercial and literary illustrations in November. ("Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné," being co-published by W.W. Norton and the Whitney, sells for \$600 and includes a CD-ROM.) Levin currently is professor of art history at Baruch College and the Graduate School of the

City University of New York.

Levin believes Hopper is the great realist of 20th century art. "His painting is standing the test of time very, very well."

Even 70 years later, Hopper's work somehow seems of the moment.

"I think what contemporary people respond to in Hopper is the sense of alienation that is so present in his paintings, and it's what makes

him so modern," Levin says. "He suffered something many of us suffer, which is alienation from modern life, from modern technology."

***Gail Levin will give a free lecture on Edward Hopper Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at the University of Hartford's Wilde Auditorium, 200 Bloomfield Ave., West Hartford. A book signing will follow. Information: 768-4393.***