

'Hopper's Places,' by brush & lens

By **JERRY TALLMER**

INSTRUCTIVE lesson: compare the roofpipes.

The one in the photo is flat, stumpy, colorless, metallic, uninteresting. The one in the Edward Hopper painting is bold, round, tall, terra-cotta-ish, brown and orange, with a deep shadow and a ringlike top.

"You know," said Gail Levin, "once in an early interview Hopper said: 'It's amazing how much personality you can get into a rainpipe.'"

The personality roofpipe is left-center in Hopper's *City Roofs*, painted 1932 from atop 3 Washington Square North, the building where he had his studio and where he and his wife Jo lived from 1913 until his death in 1967; a haunting, afternoon-sunlit canvas — but is there, anywhere on earth, an Edward Hopper that is not haunting?

The photograph from the same roof, embracing the same scene, was taken three or four years ago by Gail Levin. It faces the *City Roofs* painting itself in *Hopper's Places*, the new book by this young woman who was Hopper curator at the Whitney from 1976-84 and put together its big 1980 Hopper retrospective.

As Gail Levin sat now in a coffee house talking about Hopper and his places and her photographs, a lady got up from a nearby table, glanced down at the book, and said: "He gets you very easily. Good luck."

One famous Hopper painting, perhaps the most famous Hopper painting, the Whitney's *Early Sunday Morning*, a row of low brick buildings along an empty avenue, is not in the book, and for good reason. Nobody knows where it was done.

"People always think



New York Post: Louis Liotta

Gail Levin: Hoppers, Hoppers everywhere.

they see Hoppers around them," said Miss Levin. "Alfred Kazin said he saw *Early Sunday Morning* in Brooklyn. Hopper said: 'No, it's Seventh Avenue in the Village, but it's no longer there.'

"I think Hopper was exaggerating," said Gail Levin, diplomatically. It's her theory that *Early Sunday Morning* derives at least in part from Jo Mielziner's original 1929 set for Elmer Rice's *Street Scene*. "Hopper was a great theatergoer and saved all his stubs. We have his stubs from *Street Scene*. He sat in the second balcony — he was economical too — looking down on Jo Mielziner's set from the same angle as the painting."

Hoppers not only exist all around us, they also exist in our movies. Herbert Ross in his 1981 *Pennies From Heaven* went directly to Hopper's *Nighthawks* for a vignette of Steve Martin and Bernadette

Peters at an all-night diner. The original may have been the White Castle in that little triangle across 11th Street from St. Vincent's. "For some reason the Germans — Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, Peter Handke — keep putting Hopper into their movies and novels. He represents something to them." And anyone who has ever seen *Psycho* has seen a Hopper, because — though Alfred Hitchcock denied it — the Victorian gingerbread Norman Bates mansion is a clear copy of Hopper's 1925 *House by the Railroad*.

You'll find that one on page 17 of *Hopper's Places* (Knopf), and you can find Gail Levin herself teaching *The Influence of the Visual Arts on Film* as of January at Drexel University. She's also just started *Art at Issue*, a 3-hour live call-in show for Manhattan Cable Channel 6. Next session's Dec. 6.