



ANACLETO RAPPING / Los Angeles Times

MUSE SPEAK: Historian Gail Levin, above, sheds light on artist Edward Hopper in her book "Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography," which draws heavily on the diaries of Hopper's wife, Josephine. Levin will be at LACMA this weekend for a lecture called "Edward Hopper and His Silenced Collaborator." **F1**

LEVIN

Continued from F1

Levin, who teaches art history at Baruch College and the Graduate School of the City University of New York, says the book has created a stir because it's "the first biography of a popular artist who was determinedly private during his lifetime."

Now Levin is on the road, promoting her book with lectures, interviews and signings. Her travels will bring her to Southern California this weekend. She'll talk about "Edward Hopper and His Silenced Collaborator"—which is to say Jo—at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Saturday at 2 p.m. and at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art Sunday at 2:30 p.m. The Huntington Library will host a different lecture, "Edward Hopper and the American Literary Tradition," Monday at 10 a.m.

She has customized her lectures for Southern California, including information about the Hoppers' California connections: their first trip to the West Coast, in 1941, and their six-month sojourn in Pacific Palisades, in 1957. Edward found the traffic unbearable, but the lifestyle pleasant, Levin says. Always at pains to find something suitable to paint, he managed to complete one canvas, "Western Motel," and to start a watercolor, "California Hills," while living in the verdant, seaside community.

As author of a dozen other books

and exhibition treatises on Hopper and former curator of the Hopper collection at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, the world's largest repository of his work, Levin is the preeminent authority on the artist. It might seem that she would have had nothing left to say about him, but her new book delivers a great deal of news about his forebears, travels and artistic preferences, as well as a marital relationship that was passionate, violent and symbiotic.

Afrustrated artist whose work was constantly denigrated by her husband, Jo was as loquacious and sociable as he was taciturn and solitary. Married when they were both 41, the couple shared a love for French poetry, literature, theater and films, but their frequent spats often escalated into violence. Jo was Edward's promoter, muse, model and caretaker, but as a feminist who was born too soon, she was also a thorn in his side and—apparently—something of a masochist.

Although friends and associates witnessed Edward and Jo's volatile relationship, he succeeded very well in guarding his privacy—with the help of his wife, Levin says.

Claiming that only she could write her husband's biography, Jo dissuaded Edward from any inclination he may have had to submit to interviews, including a request for a profile in the New Yorker. She never attempted to turn her diaries into a book, but left them to

a friend of Edward's, whose children preserved them.

The voluminous diaries are a blessing and a curse to a biographer, Levin says. While loaded with details that bring her subject to life, the journals are poorly written, tedious to study and frustrating in their references to unidentified people.

"But they are extraordinarily accurate," Levin says. "Jo had excellent recall. What she wrote was an eyewitness account of events in the art world." She also revealed the flaws of a gifted artist and miserable man who was something of a period piece. "He was a Victorian man who couldn't cope with life in the 20th century. He couldn't cope with women. He couldn't cope with skyscrapers. He couldn't cope with airports," Levin

REVIEWS

Continued from F3

pleased, both by his foresight and her achievement. Without paint or canvas, her abstractions fulfill many of the Abstract Expressionist's intentions, simultaneously pushing painting into the fourth dimension.

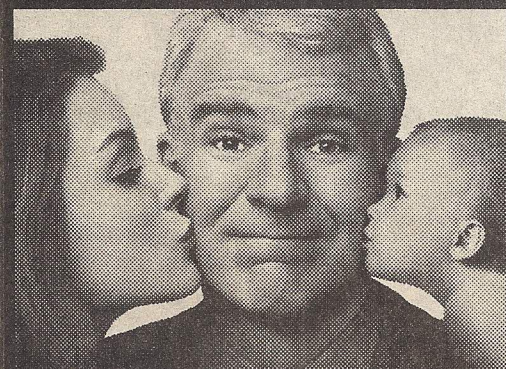
Time is essential to "SWELL," as are groups of viewers. In contrast to most paintings, which are seen best on an individual basis, Steinkamp's high-tech abstractions get more interesting as the number of viewers increases.

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says.

"I'm glad I wasn't married to him. He was a misogynist, but he grew up on misogynist literature, as men of that era did," she says. "He didn't just demean Jo. He demeaned all women artists, and all women. I'm just trying to understand him.

"If Hopper had lived in the 1990s, his professional relationship with his wife might have been more like Claes Oldenburg's or Christo's or Ed Kienholz's," she says, citing well-known artists who have given equal billing to their spouses. "Jo got no credit."

She also got no respect from the Whitney. At Edward's death in 1967, she inherited his estate of more than 3,000 paintings, drawings, watercolors and prints. Although Jo didn't like the Whitney,

she honored his wish that his art go to the museum and bequeathed most of her work there as well.

A scandal ensued when it became known that the museum was planning to sell off the Hopper collection. Most of Edward's works were retained, but Jo's were disbursed to charity organizations that kept no records, Levin says. "The Whitney kept three of her paintings, but by the time I arrived there as the first curator of the Hopper collection in 1976, they were already lost."

The few of Jo's works that Levin has found "make me eager to see more," she says. As for Edward, revealing his flaws hasn't lessened her esteem for his art. "I came out of this project with even more admiration for his work. He is one of the great artists of the 20th

century."

And no, Levin hasn't written the last word on her favorite subject. She's currently teaching a course on "Edward Hopper and the Theater" at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and she's thinking about his influence on filmmakers. "There might be a book in that," she says.

■ "Edward Hopper and His Silenced Collaborator," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Bing Theater, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Saturday, 2 p.m., (213) 857-6000, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State St., Santa Barbara, (805) 963-4364, Sunday, 2:30 p.m.

■ "Edward Hopper and the American Literary Tradition," Huntington Library and Art Collection, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino, Monday, 10 a.m., (818) 405-2141.

Composed of front- and rear-projections, her work's long wall of swelling and disappearing forms is interrupted by crisp silhouettes of other viewers, when they pass between the dual projectors and the partially transparent wall. As you move around the trippy installation, you get lost in a world of thought-provoking evanescence, where distinctions between what's inside and outside dissolve in a fluid continuum of optical—and bodily—stimulation.

■ ACME Gallery, 1800-B Berkeley St., Santa Monica, (310) 264-5818, closes Friday.

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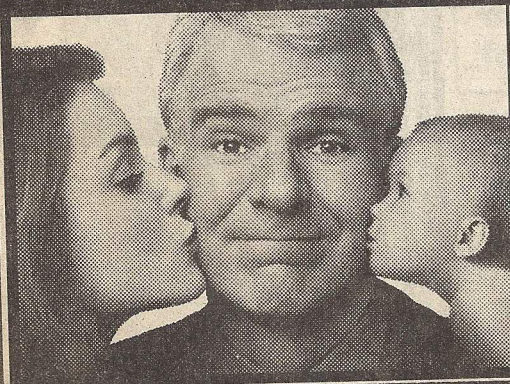
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