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WOMEN IN (AND OUT OF) EXHIBITS

Chapter 9

Gail Levin

ART WORLD POWER AND WOMEN'S INCOGNITO WORK: THE CASE OF EDWARD AND JO HOPPER

"Great Art" proves that men are superior to women . . . being labeled "Great Art," almost all of [it] . . . was created by men. We know that "Great Art" is great because male authorities have told us so, and we can't claim otherwise.

Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967)

THIS CRY OF OUTRAGE at the art establishment's arrogant male chauvinism appeared in 1967 in a slender text published by Solanas herself.¹ Its author went from words to action, shooting Andy Warhol on 3 June 1968. When Solanas first appeared in court, Ti-Grace Atkinson, then New York chapter president of the National Organization of Women (NOW), pronounced her "the first outstanding champion of women's rights."² Solanas's protest against male bias in definitions of "Great Art" was to resonate with feminists from Atkinson to Judy Chicago,³ including art historian Linda Nochlin. In an influential 1971 essay, Nochlin denounced "the unstated domination of white male subjectivity as one in a series of intellectual distortions which must be corrected in order to achieve a more adequate and accurate view of historical situations."⁴

Historical developments would lead us to believe that since that time, museums, and more generally, the "art world," would be more receptive to the work of female artists, and in particular to the project of rescuing them from invisibility. While some female artists have fared better, the works of many twentieth-century women remain obscured by their husbands' fame as artists, and museums collude in this practice. The result is the perpetuation of inaccuracies in the historical record and the loss of valuable art works from our collective history. The story of Josephine Nivison Hopper, wife of Edward Hopper, exemplifies this trend. Her marginalization began well before the 1960s and continues today, long after the feminist movement attempted to rescue women like her from oblivion. Edward Hopper's sexism contributed to the erasure of her work, and the Whitney Museum of American Art gave away much of her legacy, which has led to distortions in recent exhibitions and publications.

To obtain an “adequate and accurate view” of an artist’s work and its context was my goal as a newly minted PhD in art history hired in 1976 by the Whitney Museum to prepare the Edward Hopper *catalogue raisonné*. Little did I realize that my research would uncover evidence of the power of “white male subjectivity” and cast me in the role of a whistleblower exposing “a series of intellectual distortions” rooted in traditional male chauvinism and compounded by the self-serving interests of art world powers. Even the concept of a whistleblower was unknown to me; however, my professional training as an art historian dictated that I gather information and reconstruct the past as thoroughly and truthfully as possible.

A problem arose when I had to decide who had painted several unsigned landscapes in a lot bequeathed by Hopper’s widow. Aware that Josephine Nivison Hopper had been a painter, too, I wanted to make certain that the canvases were by Edward Hopper – and not by her – before including them in the *catalogue raisonné* of his work. Carrying out my assignment proved difficult because no effort had been made to document Jo Nivison Hopper’s work. This particular group of canvases had been forgotten by the museum and languished in the workshop of an outside conservator for years. In an effort to learn more, I set to work collecting the most basic documentation – photographs of paintings, checklists of shows, exhibition reviews, catalogs, letters received and sent by Edward and Jo, letters and diaries written by those who knew them, and other testimony to their professional and cultural lives.

The task expanded as I came upon more and more evidence that Edward Hopper’s artistic output took shape in part through a vibrant collaboration with a wife, who was not only a trained painter but also an experienced actor. My research had to circle back to encompass both members of the duo. As my study expanded, I turned up evidence of “white male subjectivity” in Hopper’s professional life and personal relations with his wife. I found myself documenting Edward Hopper’s disdain for art produced by women, especially his own wife, even as I was discovering Jo Nivison Hopper’s role in sustaining Edward as his costumer, supplier of props, and deliverer of fantasies. His only model, she performed every dramatic *mise en scène* that he recorded in paint.⁵

I discovered, too, that traces of “white male subjectivity” plagued the artist’s wife beyond the grave. When Jo Nivison Hopper died on 6 March 1968, twelve days before her eighty-fifth birthday, she left both her own and her husband’s artistic estates to the Whitney Museum. Jo Hopper’s bequest of Edward’s work consisted of more than 3,000 pieces – mostly drawings and canvases painted before he achieved fame, but also examples of almost all of his etchings with many of their plates, some unresolved canvases and watercolors that he considered failures, and a vast number of preparatory drawings, which he had never liked to exhibit. Among the drawings were even some of his efforts as a teenager. Jo Nivison Hopper’s legacy also comprised her husband’s gifts to her, including almost all of his depictions of her at work as an artist. The Whitney did not issue a press release announcing the gift of “the entire artistic estate of the late Edward Hopper”⁶ until 19 March 1971. The museum never made any public statement about Nivison Hopper’s art. Its failure to do so has become a challenge to further research and publication.

Although Jo Hopper’s 1968 bequest contained her artistic legacy, it received only one public comment of note. In *The New York Times*, James Mellow described her art as containing “generally pleasant, lightweight works: flowers, sweet-faced children, gaily colored scenic views.”⁷ Just eight years later, at the time of my arrival as the first curator of the Hopper collection, the museum had almost nothing of Jo Hopper’s to show. What remained was a list of the titles and sizes of framed pictures that the museum had given away – four to New York University (which still possesses them) and ninety-one to New York hospitals, none of which still owned them or knew their fate.⁸ It is possible that unknown persons adopted the works given to hospitals, and they may still survive. The fate of another group of canvases discarded by the Whitney remains unknown.

Remnants of Jo's *oeuvre* managed to escape the general purge but remained without formal accessioning until 2001; these included a few works on paper, mainly watercolors, and some oils on thin wood panels that she had painted in Europe in 1907.⁹ These objects were mixed in with Edward's work, which allowed them to escape the museum's notice. Three canvases that appeared on a list of works kept by the museum have never been located.

The devaluing of Josephine Hopper's work, which culminated in the loss and destruction of so many of her paintings, can be traced to the beginning of her career. Jo Nivison was born in New York in 1883, a year after Edward. She studied at the New York School of Art and went on to learn more about painting from Homer Boss, who taught vanguard trends after the New York Armory Show in 1913. She also worked in Provincetown with Ambrose Webster, an early champion of modernism.¹⁰ During this time, she frequented circles of modernist artists, writers, and performers in Greenwich Village and Provincetown. Before her marriage, Jo Nivison also participated in group shows in New York with such modernists as Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth, Florine Stettheimer, Amedeo Modigliani, and Pablo Picasso.¹¹ Her few surviving early works suggest her affinity with fauvist color and the paintings of Raoul Dufy.

Reports of when and how the couple first met differ, posing a problem for historians. In 1970, critic Lloyd Goodrich reported that the couple first met at the New York School of Art, although he did not specify a date.¹² In his over-sized monograph, *Edward Hopper*, published two years after Jo Nivison Hopper's death, Goodrich wrote: "She had also been a Henri student, *after his time* [Edward's time, emphasis added], and they had met when he came back to visit the school."¹³ Research for the *catalogue raisonné* demonstrated, however, that the two were in school together. It appears that Nivison Hopper attempted to conceal her age, as women in her generation often did, misleading Goodrich by suggesting that she and Edward met later than they actually had.

When I further researched Jo Nivison Hopper's history, I was able to document that she and Edward had occasionally seen each other after art school and that they participated in at least one group show together. Further research revealed that their relationship became serious in 1923, when they both happened to summer in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He took the initiative, inviting her to accompany him on sketching trips. She in turn urged him to take up her favorite medium, watercolor. He had previously refused to work with this medium except in commercial illustrations, which he undertook solely to earn his living and despised.¹⁴

In the fall of 1923, Jo Nivison's facility with watercolors won her a place in a large group show at the Brooklyn Museum. She suggested that the exhibit's organizers consider adding the watercolors Edward had tried that summer in Gloucester, and they hung six of his watercolors next to hers.¹⁵ His image of a great Mansard-roofed house was purchased by the museum, where it can still be admired. Thrilled, Edward Hopper persuaded Nivison to paint with him in Gloucester the following summer by proposing marriage and making the trip their honeymoon. With the watercolors resulting from their honeymoon, he obtained his first show at the Rehn Gallery, which became his life-long dealer. The show sold out, and his painting career was launched.

From 1924, Jo Hopper showed her work at the Whitney Studio Club. The Twelfth Annual Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by the Members of the Club in 1927 included her painting *Boats*.¹⁶ Both husband and wife participated in the 1938 annual at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where Jo Hopper showed *Cape Cod Hills* and Edward Hopper exhibited the 1936 portrait *Jo Painting*. Jo Hopper, like her husband, also participated in the Golden Gate International Exhibition of Contemporary Art in San Francisco in 1939, where she exhibited *Chez Hopper*, an oil of Edward's feet resting on the coal stove that heated their New York home. This painting, which reminded the public of her closeness to her famous husband,¹⁷

was among those discarded by the Whitney. Whatever judgment caused the museum to discard Jo Hopper's work, it is unfortunate that the staff did not understand that her portraits of Edward in their domestic setting, such as *Chez Hopper* or *Edward Hopper Reading Robert Frost* had lasting value as records of the famous male artist's life. Likewise, the landscapes she produced when they traveled together should have been preserved, both as documentation of his career and for their own aesthetic value.

Further research also revealed the gregarious Josephine Nivison's training as an actor and its influence on her husband's work. She studied in New York with Yvette Guilbert, who appears in Toulouse Lautrec's posters, and she performed with the Washington Square Players, an *avant-garde* troupe in the Village during the mid-1910s.¹⁸ Nivison Hopper was the perfect collaborator for Edward's paintings, able to suggest and create roles, eager to shop for props – a provocative muse and model who dressed or undressed for imaginary scenes. A notable example is her February 1941 nude performance for Edward's canvas *Girlie Show*, during which she burned her leg on the coal stove that offered the only heat in their home.¹⁹ The Hoppers' interactions in the studio were compounded by their shared fantasies about the invented characters he painted from scenes she performed.

The tone and intensity of the Hoppers' long marriage are documented in recorded interviews, letters, and diaries.²⁰ The year of their marriage, Jo Nivison Hopper began keeping careful records of his art, noting whenever it left the studio for exhibition or sale. His record-keeping had been spotty at best, so his wife's strict regime proved crucial to my work toward an accurate *catalogue raisonné*.²¹ Beyond the limited information in the formal record books, Jo Hopper's diaries, which later turned up in a private collection, offered details of the couple's interactions with each other and the art world. Her diaries outlined his creative process and suggested that their relationship played out in the subject matter of some of his realist paintings.

Angry pronouncements in Jo Hopper's diaries revealed the dark side of her husband. Others had also noticed his grumpy, depressive personality, commenting that it was evident in his paintings. In a 1980 interview, actress Helen Hayes remarked of an encounter with Hopper: "I had never met a more misanthropic, grumpy grouchy individual in my life, and as a performer I just shriveled under the heat of this disapproval."²² Raphael Soyer, for whom Hopper posed for a portrait, shared the actress's reaction: "There is a loneliness about him, a habitual moroseness, a sadness to the point of anger."²³ Nonetheless, the public's image of Hopper as "a nice man" proved to be a stumbling block to the appreciation of his wife's work.

Edward's brutal candor about his wife's art, which he disliked and to which she was devoted, cannot have promoted marital harmony. Jo Nivison Hopper and her artistic career remained an important and unresolved issue in the marriage, creating tension in both persons' lives. This tension presented itself in the content of some of Edward's paintings of couples, making them appear autobiographical. I decided to reproduce examples of Jo Hopper's art in my biography of her husband, because they are key parts of the record of their life and work together as artists.

Despite the male chauvinist in Edward Hopper, as he dealt with illness and faced the end of his life, he might have responded to the rumblings of the women's rights movement. Hopper and his wife kept up with current events, reading several New York newspapers, discussing politics, and even writing letters of protest to politicians. They often read aloud to each other such magazines as *The New Yorker*. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, first published in 1963, attracted a huge amount of attention, selling more than two million copies.²⁴ "What happened to [women's] dreams?" Friedan asked. What happened to their "share in the whole of human destiny?" Regardless of whether the Hoppers discussed the question of women's fulfillment, which was featured in many reviews and published excerpts, as well

as in radio, television, and print discussions of Friedan's book, Edward seems finally to have considered mollifying his wife's demands for a share of the limelight.²⁵

After years of open disdain for his wife's artistic career, Hopper paid homage to her dramatic flair and productive collaboration with the painting he planned and recognized as his last. In *Two Comedians* (1965), Edward Hopper portrayed himself hand-in-hand with his wife. Both were dressed as clowns – figures of the old *commedia dell'arte* taking their final bow. He thus framed and reinterpreted his life's work, inscribing Nivison Hopper into the story and giving her credit at last. The use of clown figures to reflect on his own art, indeed to represent an important dynamic of his career, takes on still greater moment because it harks back to a painting I discovered languishing nameless and forgotten when I began to study the Hopper bequest.²⁶ Piecing together bits of evidence, I was able to identify the smoke-covered canvas as a work called *Soir Bleu* (painted in 1914 and exhibited just once, in February 1915), one of the largest canvases Hopper painted.²⁷ "Blue Evening" (or "Twilight," although Hopper never translated the title), the wide canvas depicts a garishly made-up woman looming over an outdoor cafe, where the seated customers include an elegant worldly couple, a pimp (as further research would uncover), and an observer wearing the garb and makeup of a clown. The youthful painter projects no communication between the seated clown and colorful female. All the more remarkable that Hopper, circling back over his career to make an emblematic close, imagined male and female clowns – himself and his wife virtually symmetrical – bowing out together and holding hands. The poignancy and retrospective power of *Two Comedians* as a programmatic variation on *Soir Bleu* made still more urgent the need for adequate and accurate accounts of the couple's shared life.

Blotting Jo Nivison Hopper out of Edward Hopper's *oeuvre* diminishes both its intensity and complexity. Edward himself gave hints to interviewers that his art was autobiographical. In their opinions about biography, Jo and Edward Hopper agreed. Jo Nivison Hopper was defying an outsider when she claimed that only she could tell "the real story."²⁸ With these facts in mind, as I began to write Hopper's biography, I decided to tell Jo Nivison Hopper's story, reproduce images of some of her art works, and quote from her diaries. I never expected to challenge history, but the need to set the record straight emerged as my research progressed. I anticipated resistance to telling Jo Hopper's story, which was at the center of Edward's life, but was nonetheless astonished to encounter not merely disregard for her efforts, but attempts to twist the story and distort the truth.

In this context, it is not surprising that Jo Nivison Hopper expressed fears in her diary that her work would be destroyed. She often stated her dismay that neither her husband nor the men who ran the art world paid her paintings sufficient attention. Nor did anyone then realize her collaborative role in her husband's work. Jo Nivison Hopper's fears were in fact realized after her death. Even though her bequest went to the Whitney in 1968, a year marked by revolt against many forms of institutional authority, feminist challenges to the museum did not lead to the preservation of her paintings. It is not clear how much the museum had discarded by 1970–71, when groups of feminist activists such as "Women Artists for Revolution" placed eggs and Tampax on the Whitney staircase to call attention to the absence of female artists from a show that purported to survey the contemporary American art scene.²⁹ Even today, the Whitney's website acknowledges donations by Nivison Hopper and a fellow female artist (also married to a painter) without recognizing their own creations: "In appreciation of the Whitney's enduring support of their [sic] art, Josephine Nivison Hopper and Felicia Marsh, the artists' widows, made substantial bequests of their husbands' works to the Museum."³⁰ Nowhere is it even hinted that the Whitney Studio Club and the museum exhibited Jo Hopper's art, because the website never mentions that she was an artist at all.

The reasons for the disposal of Jo Hopper's work may be inferred from the Whitney's history. The museum was founded in 1930 by the socialite sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt

Whitney, who devoted her life to art. However, by the late 1960s, a larger social prejudice against women artists pervaded the museum's administration. Of 143 artists in the 1968 Whitney Annual, only eight were female. Lloyd Goodrich headed the museum until 1968. A prolific writer on American art and an important early critical supporter of Edward Hopper, Goodrich shared Hopper's contempt for women artists, although he included Jo Nivison Hopper's work in several group exhibitions at the museum. Perhaps he was mindful that the couple were childless and wished to increase the chances that the institution might inherit the Hopper estate.³¹ John I. H. Baur (1909–87), who took the helm of the museum in 1968, also neglected women's artistic contributions. He included only seven works by women among the 199 illustrations in his book, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art* (1951).³²

In contrast, by the time that I first came upon Jo Nivison Hopper's diaries in a private collection, I had already paid attention to her life and art. Spurred by the rise of feminist scholarship during the late 1970s, I had written what was then the only article about Jo Hopper's work to appear in a journal. Focused on the great man by my job as curator of the Hopper collection, I thought I should rescue his wife's art from obscurity as my small contribution to the history of female artists. My article appeared in the first issue of *Women's Art Journal* in the spring of 1980 without attracting much notice.³³ Only more recently has this article been singled out for praise in a book called *The Power of Feminist Art*.³⁴

Giving Jo Nivison Hopper a voice in my biography of her husband (*Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 1995) also provoked outrage in some quarters. One female scholar whom I interviewed went so far as to claim that I had cooked up the diaries myself.³⁵ A male art historian, writing in *The Wall Street Journal* in 1995, asserted incorrectly that I favored Jo Nivison Hopper because we had formed a close friendship while I was researching the book.³⁶ In fact, we never met; when Nivison Hopper died, I was still an undergraduate. A vast majority of critics and readers, however, welcomed the frank and detailed account of an intense marriage that often inspired autobiographical art. Although I did not anticipate the rawness of Jo Hopper's feelings, nothing about the content of her diaries seemed inconsistent with what I had already observed from reading the couple's letters and studying Edward Hopper's pictures. Other sources corroborated much of the detail that Jo Nivison Hopper recorded.

The question of how Jo Nivison Hopper's art fitted into or deviated from the modernist canon which dominated the Whitney in 1968 is also essential to understanding the museum's continuing rejection of her work. The issue of modernism and American women artists came up in 1994, when the Whitney invited Janet Wolff, a cultural sociologist who writes on feminism and art, to curate an exhibition in the museum's series "Collection in Context." Exhibitions in the series, which began in June 1993, were organized by outsiders who used parts of the permanent collection in new contexts. Wolff determined to look at women artists through "social networks and art circles connected with Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and her assistant (later the first Director of the Museum), Juliana Force, and particularly the Whitney Studio Club, which operated from 1918 to 1928."³⁷ Wolff ultimately decided on sixteen works by fourteen artists. Since the actual works were stored off site and had remained unseen for decades, Wolff went to view them, accompanied by the curator of the permanent collection. The result of their "joint assessment," according to Wolff, was that "the work simply did not merit exhibition. I postponed the decision for a few months, but more or less abandoned any idea of doing this show – at least at the Whitney Museum – by early 1997."³⁸

Wolff later reconsidered and reflected on what had happened, questioning her changing attitudes, "what was involved in the assessment of these paintings as uninteresting or second-rate." She blamed her own inexperience as a curator and her willingness to defer to "the judgment of the Whitney curator who was with me," attributing her rejection of the work to her "own aesthetic (modernist) prejudices, which coincided with, and were strongly

reinforced by, those of the Whitney.³⁹ Wolff concluded that the “invisibility” of these women artists in the Whitney’s collection was not attributable to “gender prejudice”; it was “rather a consequence of the resolution of competing aesthetic narratives, a resolution which sidelined the work of male realist artists in (almost) the same measure as that of women.”⁴⁰ In another essay, Wolff asserted:

I came to understand the marginalization of realism in post-war art history as itself a gendered practice, in which realism figures as “feminine” against modernism’s masculinity. The relative invisibility of American figurative art in the early twentieth century, particularly after the consolidation of the “MoMA narrative” (the privileging of post-cubist and abstract art associated with and maintained by the Museum of Modern Art in New York) after World War II, applied equally to work by men and women. The question of gender instead operated at another level, in the discursive production of modernism as masculine and of realism as feminine. This meant, of course, the feminization of figurative (non-modernist) work by men and not just of work by women.⁴¹

Wolff’s argument demands quotation at such length because it depends strongly on theory that flies in the face of empirical evidence. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., organized Edward Hopper’s first retrospective at MoMA in 1933, even though his work was largely figurative. Wolff goes on to claim that we should study anew the work of artists such as Yasuo Kuniyoshi, which is commendable, but her reasons for doing so are flawed. She argues that these artists deserve attention because “their discursive construction as feminine – the basis for their absence from the primary canon of 20th-century art – can provide entry into understanding how the masculinity of modernism operates.”⁴² To take the example of the Japanese-born Kuniyoshi (1893–1953), Goodrich did note Kuniyoshi’s naturalistic subjects. He attributed them to two trips Kuniyoshi took to Europe, writing that, after one of these trips, Kuniyoshi’s “viewpoint [became] closer to European modernism.”⁴³ Kuniyoshi later drew posters for the United States Office of War Information, including, according to Goodrich, “some of the most powerful produced by the war.”⁴⁴ None of Kuniyoshi’s imagery would typically be labeled “feminine.”

In fact, Wolff cites no evidence that realism was marginalized in post-war America because it was deemed feminine. Plenty of examples suggest the opposite. In the book, *Edward Hopper*, which served as the catalog of the artist’s 1950 retrospective at the Whitney, Goodrich writes of Hopper: “His is a masculine landscape art as contrasted with the feminine one of the impressionists. In its strength and its deep feeling for the earth, it reminds one of a realist older than impressionism, Courbet.”⁴⁵ Goodrich goes on to write about Hopper’s “instinctive sense of solidity and weight, he builds forms that are massive and monolithic.”⁴⁶

Wolff overstates when she argues that a competing and changing aesthetic displaced a number of the artists from the early days of the museum and from its precursor, the Whitney Studio Club. One might argue instead that, as the Whitney made the transition from artists’ club to museum, the institution became more elitist, and that factor limited the ability of women artists to show there. Certainly, the change was not just about realism falling out of fashion. Jo Hopper’s work was not always realist, though it was often figurative and always representational rather than abstract. In fact, by her training and conventional standards (her use of palette, brush strokes, and departure from realism toward stylization), she was much more of a modernist than the man she married. Her expressed admiration for the ethereal work of Marie Laurencin; her proto-feminist depictions of feminine knick-knacks on dressers or garments hanging on a clothesline; her symbolism; and the intensity of her palette (to the extent we know it) all point to modernist precedents.

Not realism but gender must be the cause for the rejection of Hopper's wife from the canon. The rejection of women's art by the Whitney and other museums cannot be ascribed to aesthetic hierarchies alone. After making the transition from an artists' club to a museum, the Whitney was actively collecting and showing abstract work by Stuart Davis (and even his still life paintings), but not abstract work by contemporary women such as Agnes Pelton or Henrietta Shore.⁴⁷ The museum did give solo shows to token women, such as Georgia O'Keeffe, who produced both abstract and representational paintings. The Whitney's acquisitions in the years before Jo Nivison Hopper's bequest bolster this assertion. Of the 142 works donated during 1965–6, only seven appear to have been made by women. Eight works were purchased, and none of these was by a woman.⁴⁸ At the time, the museum's director, associate director, curator, and two associate curators were male. Women held only the positions of secretary and research curator. The staff remained in place the following year, when eight works by women were added to the collection, one of them from a purchase fund provided by the Larry Aldrich Foundation.⁴⁹

More recently, Jo Hopper's art has found a champion in Elizabeth Thompson Colleary, who published "Josephine Nivison Hopper: Some Newly Discovered Works," in *Women's Art Journal* in 2004. Colleary followed the themes and chronology that I established in my article "Josephine Verstelle Nivison Hopper," which appeared in the same publication twenty-four years earlier.⁵⁰ Colleary's inclusion of Jo Hopper paintings bequeathed to the Whitney by Felicia Meyer Marsh was significant, because the receipt of this work had not been previously announced to the public. I was not told about the Marsh bequest while I was employed as curator of the Hopper Collection from 1976 to 1984 and producing a *catalogue raisonné* of Edward Hopper's work.⁵¹

Unfortunately, Colleary erred in attributing the provenance of at least one work reproduced in *Women's Art Journal*, the *Head of Edward Hopper* [undated]. The work was not part of the Josephine N. Hopper Bequest as she claimed. As curator of the Hopper Collection, I asked John Clancy, Nivison Hopper's dealer at the Rehn Gallery, to give this portrait to the Whitney since so many of her oil paintings had been destroyed.⁵² Looking back, it seems as if I put another of Jo's paintings at risk, but I did not imagine that the Whitney would repeat its mistake. Colleary also claimed that the Whitney "loaned or gave many of Jo's oil paintings to hospitals throughout New York City to hang in offices and reception areas." In fact, all of these transfers were outright gifts. The publication of Jo's paintings in Colleary's article, however, is the first for most, although not all, of the works.⁵³

Colleary's error is perpetuated by the catalog of a 2005 exhibition, *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910–1945*. Held at Brigham Young University Museum of Art and organized by Marian Wardle, this show included Jo Hopper's work. Catalog essayist Gwendolyn Owens cites Colleary's article without questioning its correctness: "It was believed that many paintings by Josephine Nivison Hopper, a frequent participant in exhibitions and later the wife of artist Edward Hopper, were lost; new research shows that they exist and lay uncataloged in a storeroom at the Whitney Museum."⁵⁴ None of the ninety-one framed works given to hospitals or the rest of Nivison Hopper's works on canvas which she bequeathed to the Whitney has ever been recovered; they remain lost or destroyed.⁵⁵

It is not without irony, then, that the next erasure of Jo Hopper – in the show, "Edward Hopper," organized in 2007 by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston – coincided with the year of the national Feminist Art Project coordinated by Rutgers University.⁵⁶ The latter project was linked to two feminist milestones: the twentieth anniversary of the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC, and the opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

Carol Troyen, curator of the Boston show, remarked to me at the press preview for the show, "I just don't like biography," a comment which seems curious in light of Edward

Hopper's notion of the importance of the personal in his art. Troyen's decision to exclude biography may well explain how she managed to make Hopper's work seem like illustrations to some critics, for it took the life out of the art. It is possible that Troyen simply embraced the trend to reject biography, which began during the radicalized 1960s, when neo-Marxists preferred to focus "on the material and the social over . . . the individual or the subjective."⁵⁷ Still, a theoretical bias against biography hardly seems sufficient to explain why a female curator would erase from history the artistic identity of another woman, denying Jo Hopper's dual role as Edward's artistic collaborator and wife. Nowhere to be seen in the Boston museum's galleries were familiar paintings such as the shrewish wife screaming from a window at her impassive husband in *Four Lane Road* (1956). Absent, too, was *Hotel by a Railroad* (1952), depicting another couple, this time not communicating at all – a glum woman is absorbed in reading, while her husband stands distracted, peering out a window at empty tracks that loom ominously below. As strife between the sexes disappears, so do Josephine Nivison Hopper and her art. The show omits Hopper's portrayals of her at work such as *Jo Painting* (1936) or *Jo in Wyoming* (1946). For *Jo in Wyoming*, Edward Hopper, who sat in the back seat, depicted his wife sitting in the front and painting Mt. Moran; in effect, he reproduced his studio practice of using his spouse as his model.

The absence from a show of one or two scenes of marital tension, even Jo Nivison Hopper's virtual slip from view as an artist, might have been blamed on the difficulty of obtaining loans, although few American museums can be said to have the power of those in Boston, Washington, and Chicago to borrow whatever they wish. Above all, Edward Hopper's images of his wife painting all belong to the Whitney, the major institution thanked in the catalog for its indispensable support. The whole enterprise looks calculated and choreographed as an attempt to change how the public views the Hoppers: one varnished, the other vanished.

The organizers of this show repackaged Hopper as a casual illustrator of observed scenes, eliminating the sexual tensions and the artist-wife who often encouraged him to paint when he suffered from depression. But the curators' success in packaging Hopper "lite" left him vulnerable to critical rebuke: his "New England pictures [are] . . . far from experimental. They're blandly virtuosic tourist-brochure illustration, Chamber of Commerce Modernism," wrote Holland Cotter in the *New York Times*.⁵⁸

The show's catalog also erases Jo Nivison Hopper's artistry. Both reductive and deceptive, the catalog's chronological table dates Jo Nivison's first encounter with Edward Hopper as taking place in 1923. Normal scholarly practice would be to explain a change in the chronology of an artist's career; yet no one takes explicit issue with the chronology published in 1980 in the catalog of a comprehensive retrospective called *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, long accepted as the standard in the field.⁵⁹ The distorted chronology that removes from the picture Hopper's artist spouse might be ignored as an isolated phenomenon. However, the distortion has sired progeny. Troyen's statement that Edward Hopper first met Jo Nivison in 1923 resurfaces in the chronology appended to the catalog of a small exhibition called "Edward Hopper Women," which opened at the Seattle Art Museum in November 2008, organized by curator Patricia Junker.

A similar willful suppression of biography in the discussion of work by male Minimalist artists who worked during the 1960s has provoked Anna Chave to write about the need to recover forgotten events, arguing:

By restoring to men – in critically conscious ways – their private and family lives and their embeddedness in their bodies and in nature, we can also move, importantly, toward defeminizing and so upwardly revaluing those realms of experience; we can move toward a society where what is coded as feminine will not reflexively be counted as secondary.⁶⁰

Indeed, since the 1960s, feminist critics have turned the discussion around to insist that the personal and the social cannot be dismissed, because they have played a significant role in modern life. The constructive role of artists' spouses needs to be acknowledged when their stories are recounted. The intentional stifling of social and biographical context by museums or individual scholars does matter. Perpetuating the narrative of the great man who exists without the support of an artist-spouse-partner only generates more fiction and undermines contemporary female artists who are seeking precursors. Moreover, if scholars do not speak out, the public will remain ignorant.

It is now more evident than ever that the erasure of history is a product of politics. Institutions and individuals have vested interests in justifying their mistakes and maintaining the *status quo*, so that even those who are re-inscribed in history, like Jo Nivison Hopper, remain vulnerable to deletion. Museums today remain burdened by a centuries-old commitment to maintaining a master narrative that privileges white men. Recognizing this fact is crucial if female artists are ever to achieve parity. Erasure of women, it seems, is not a one-time phenomenon.

Notes

- 1 V. Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1996, 1997, pp. 24 and 58.
- 2 F. Baer, "About Valerie Solanas," in Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, pp. 54–5. Sentenced to prison, Solanas later drifted in and out of mental institutions.
- 3 See G. Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, New York: Harmony Books, 2007, p. 136. Chicago describes how she shuddered with terror upon reading Solanas, but she recognized the truth of much of what Solanas observed. See also L. Lippard, "Rejecting Retrochic," in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*, New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 191, where the author calls Solanas "the uninvited guest whose *Scum Manifesto* is too hot for anyone to handle."
- 4 L. Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), reprinted in L. Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988, p. 146.
- 5 Although Jo modeled for male as well as female figures, there is one known exception, when she recorded in her diary that Edward was so angry at her that he failed to use any model for *Four Lane Road* (1956).
- 6 Whitney Museum press release, 9 March 1971.
- 7 J. Mellow, "The World of Edward Hopper," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 September 1971, 21.
- 8 One hospital replied to my query in the late 1970s by explaining that it did not keep inventories of art works more than five years.
- 9 This is made clear by the accession numbers assigned to surviving works which were recently sent out on loan. A typical number for one of these works is X.2001.0054, indicating the work was catalogued in 2001. Ordinarily, this work would have received an accession number pertaining to the year it came into the museum's possession, which was 1968.
- 10 See G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, New York: University of California Press, 1995, p. 157.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 13 L. Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970, pp. 83 and 18, where Goodrich writes: "Henri's influence persisted for some years after Hopper left the New York School of Art in 1906." Henri's portrait, *The Art Student*, is reproduced and correctly captioned "Portrait of Josephine Nivison, later Mrs. Edward Hopper, by Robert Henri, 1906," on the verso of this page, creating a contradiction between the caption and the text. It was well known that Henri painted *The Art Student* in January 1906. The date appeared in both newspaper accounts about Henri and in W. Homer, *Robert Henri and his Circle*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969, p. 119. Goodrich appears never to have questioned what the Hoppers told him or conducted further research to confirm what he heard; he failed to detect the dissembling in some of what they said.
- 14 See G. Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979, pp. 2, 11.

- 15 Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, p. 171.
- 16 Josephine N. Hopper's work is number 100 on the checklist for this show, which took place at the Whitney Galleries of the club at 8 West 8th Street from 16 February to 5 March, 1927.
- 17 Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, pp. 299 and 304.
- 18 The author turned up Josephine Nivison Hopper's records as a student at the Normal College of New York in the archives of Hunter College, CUNY (the former school's successor), as well as programs and reviews for the Washington Square Players.
- 19 Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, p. 335.
- 20 The interviews of Edward and Jo Hopper together include one by Arlene Jacobowitz, taped 29 April 1966, at the Brooklyn Museum, and one by Brian O'Doherty for WGBH-TV, Boston, taped in April 1962. O'Doherty's interview is excerpted in his 1980 film, *Hopper's Silence*. O'Doherty has judged Nivison Hopper harshly since her death, in contradiction to the tone and content of his interview with the Hoppers as well as what he wrote about her during her lifetime.
- 21 G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.
- 22 H. Hayes to G. Levin, in G. Levin (ed.), "Editor's Statement, Edward Hopper Symposium at the Whitney Museum of American Art," *Art Journal*, 41:2 (1981), 129.
- 23 I knew Raphael Soyer, to whom I spoke at length while he painted my portrait. See also R. Soyer, *Diary of an Artist*, Washington, DC: New Republic Press, 1977, p. 70. Much earlier, Walter Tittle, C. K. Chatterton, and G. Pène du Bois (three of Hopper's classmates) each recorded his chronic depression; see Levin, *Edward Hopper*, pp. 116, 124–5, and 217.
- 24 B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963, reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, 7 April 1963, 63.
- 25 Excerpts of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* appeared as "The Fraud of Femininity," in *McCall's Magazine*, XC:6 (March 1963), 81, 130–32. See also, for example, Joan Cook, "'Mystique' View Backed by Many, Author Finds," *New York Times*, 12 March 1964, 30.
- 26 *Soir Bleu*, the painting that I eventually reunited with its lost history and title, was on loan to one of the museum's "friends" for \$250 a year.
- 27 The evidence included reviews of the 1915 show, as well as the recollections of Hopper's friend Guy Pène du Bois. See Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, pp. 98–101.
- 28 J. Hopper to W. Johnson, unpublished interview with Edward and Jo Hopper, 30 October 1956. Copy at the Whitney Museum in the archives assembled by Gail Levin.
- 29 See, for example, J. Hole and E. Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971, pp. 366–7.
- 30 <<http://www.whitney.org/www/collection/history.jsp>> accessed 29 December 2008.
- 31 Among the shows that included Josephine Hopper's works were the annual exhibitions of 1953, 1959, and 1960. See G. Levin, *Edward Hopper*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995 (2nd expanded edn, Rizzoli, 2007); and E. Colleary, "Josephine Nivison Hopper," *Women's Art Journal*, 25 (2004), 11, n. 22.
- 32 J. I. H. Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951.
- 33 G. Levin, "Josephine Verstillie Nivison Hopper," *Woman's Art Journal*, Spring/Summer 1980, 28–32.
- 34 C. Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," in N. Broude and M. Garrard (eds), *The Power of Feminist Art*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994, p. 120.
- 35 B. Novak, "The Posthumous Revenge of Josephine Hopper," *Art in America*, 84: 6 (June 1996), 27–31.
- 36 A. Davidson, "Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography," *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 1995, A 12.
- 37 J. Wolff, "Women at the Whitney, 1910–30: Feminism/Sociology/Aesthetics," *Modernism/Modernity*, 6:3 (September 1999), 119.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 41 J. Wolff, "The Feminine in Modern Art," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 17 (2000), 44–5.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 L. Goodrich, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi*, New York: The MacMillan Company for the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1948, p. 25.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 45 L. Goodrich, *Edward Hopper Retrospective Exhibition*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1950, p. 11. This catalog was printed for the Whitney Museum in Great Britain, where it appeared in 1949 as part of the Penguin Modern Painters series.

- 46 Ibid.
- 47 For example, the Whitney showed two retrospectives of Stuart Davis (both organized elsewhere) in 1957 and 1965. The latter was a memorial show.
- 48 *The Whitney Review 1965–66*, New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1966, pp. 35–45.
- 49 *The Whitney Review 1966–67*, New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1967, pp. 39–45.
- 50 Colleary, "Josephine Nivison Hopper," 3–11.
- 51 After I became a whistleblower about the Whitney's decision to discard much of Jo Hopper's work and its failure to protect all of her husband's work in her bequest, I no longer had access to the watercolors and the handful of oils on panels that had survived the museum's purge.
- 52 Nivison Hopper's portrait of her husband appears in my office at the Whitney in Ron Peck's 1981 film, *Edward Hopper Based on Conversations with Gail Levin*. In Colleary's article, "Josephine Nivison Hopper," the work is given no accession number; its absence should have made clear to her that the painting did not arrive with the other objects in Jo Hopper's bequest.
- 53 I used some of these images in lectures for many years. The oil portrait of Edward Hopper appears in Ron Peck's film, where I discuss Nivison Hopper as an artist. I arranged for the loan of at least one of Jo Nivison Hopper's watercolors, *Methodist Church, Provincetown*, which also appeared in the catalog, Ronald A. Kuchta and Dorothy Gees Seckler, *Provincetown Painters*, Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1977, p. 154. I am thanked in the catalog, which lists my name as "Sandra Levin." [My doctoral dissertation at Rutgers University on "Wassily Kandinsky and the American Avant-garde, 1912–50," appears under the name, "Sandra Gail Levin."]
- 54 G. Owens, "Hidden Histories: Robert Henri's Female Students and the Market for American Art," in M. Wardle (ed.), *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910–1945*, Salt Lake City, UT: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, in association with New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 158.
- 55 The only exceptions are the four works that the Whitney gave to New York University. The lost works include Jo Hopper's *Portrait of Bertram Hartman, Painter*, which Colleary reproduced in black and white, as well as *The Kerosene Oil Lamp (Gifts – Cape Cod Bureau Top)*; *Jewels for the Madonna (Homage to Illa)*; *Edward Hopper Reading Robert Frost*; *Buick in California Canyon*; *Judson Tower, Washington Square*; *Self-Portrait*; and many other canvases. I have located one of these works in private hands.
- 56 It traveled to the National Gallery of Art, and then concluded its tour in 2008 at the Art Institute of Chicago, where I had sent the Hopper retrospective I organized for the Whitney in 1980–81. Although I had lectured there on several occasions and published in the Art Institute of Chicago's journal, I was no longer invited to lecture about Hopper, even when a Chicago patron offered to sponsor my lecture.
- 57 A. Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," *The Art Bulletin*, 82 (March 2000), 149.
- 58 H. Cotter, "Hopper's America, in Shadow and Light" [review of "Edward Hopper" exhibit organized in 2007 by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which traveled to Brooklyn], *The New York Times*, 4 May 2007, 25.
- 59 G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980.
- 60 Chave, "Minimalism and Biography."