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WORKING WITH COMPOSITION

Special Feature on Edward Hopper

EDWARD HOPPER'S AMERICA

A lighthouse and an all-night diner; two very ordinary subjects, yet how do you feel when you look at these paintings? What makes these two images among the most famous ever painted?

Edward Hopper painted an America no one had ever seen before. Up to the beginning of the 20th century, most American artists had painted huge canvases showing the grandeur of an unspoiled American wilderness. Even in the early 1900s, American painters were still copying nature, or working in the style of the new European art movements like cubism or abstraction. Most artists ignored the great cities that were growing up all over the country. Those that painted the city, glorified the spectacular architecture, and the towering skyscrapers. Very few wanted to see the other side of the American metropolis — the sense of emptiness, alienation and loneliness that grew as quickly as the cities and suburbs did. By choosing the most “ordinary,”

commonplace scenes, and by composing them in a certain way, Hopper was able to create some of the most haunting scenes in modern American art.

Born in upstate New York in 1882, Edward Hopper worked as a commercial artist for many years. During this time, he developed the style that later made his paintings famous. Hopper lived and worked in New York City, but was also drawn to the simple, clean-cut architecture of New England. These two works show both aspects of Edward Hopper's America.

As you look at these paintings, what is the first feeling you get? Hopper did portraits not of people, but of *places*. Most of his paintings are of deserted streets or houses or rooms in cities or small towns. He captures the *mood* of a place at a certain hour. The stark

white shapes of the lighthouse (below, right) seem to wait silently in the last rays of the afternoon sun. When Hopper did paint people, he still produced a mood of loneliness. Look at the picture on our cover. (It is a detail of the painting above right, *Nighthawks*.) Do these people look friendly and happy? The man and woman sitting together make no effort to communicate. She is staring at something in her hand without seeing it, and he is gazing blankly, lost in his own thoughts. The counter-man is taking the order, but looks at no one. And the man on the left sits alone, his back to us.

Nighthawks is a painting of loneliness and separation. Just being in an all-night diner at this forlorn hour separates these four people from everyone else. And Hopper's carefully planned *com-*

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Nighthawks*, 1942, oil. The Art Institute of Chicago. Friends of American Art Collection.



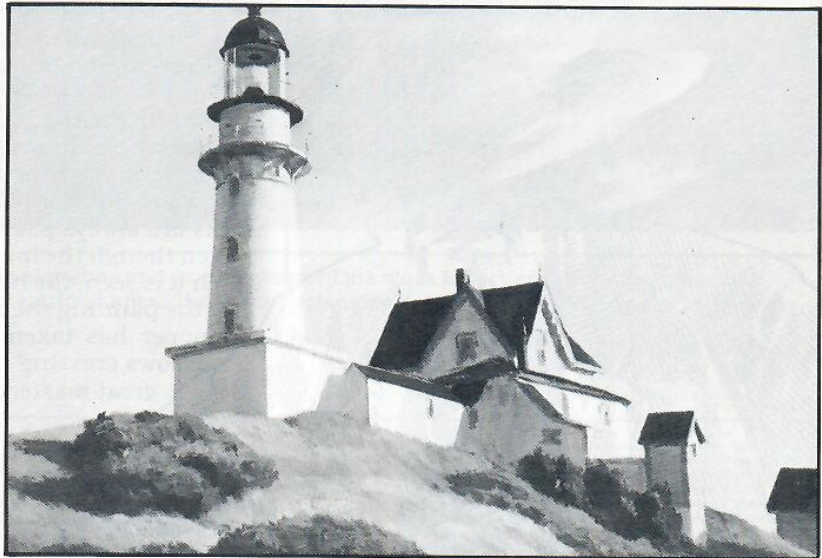


Edward Hopper saw the American city in a new way.

position conveys this feeling to us. The diner is an oasis of light in a dark, deserted city. The bright, garish colors of the artificial lighting inside separates the diner from the darkness of the world outside. We see these people through windows and the glass separates them from us even more. It's almost as though we are looking at actors on a stage.

At first glance, Edward Hopper's paintings look very "realistic," as if they were copied from life. In this issue, you will discover how Hopper carefully *composed* each shape, shadow, and color to capture just the feeling he wished to communicate. In addition to seeing more Hopper paintings, you'll meet a young artist working with composition, and you'll use some of Hopper's techniques in creating a work of your own.

Lighthouse at Two Lights, 1929, oil. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Hugo Kastor Fund, 1962.



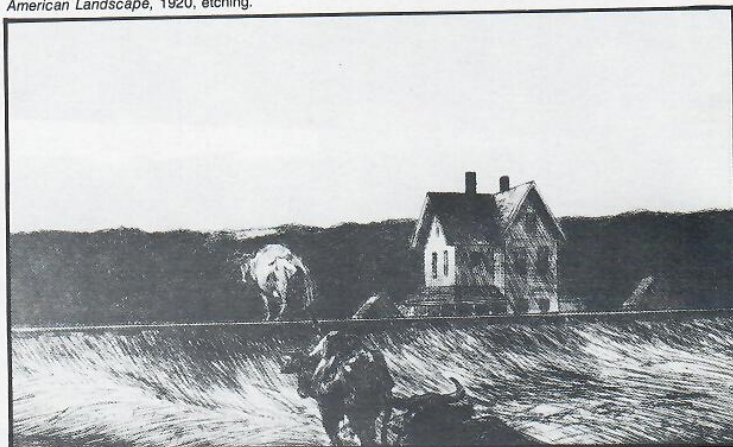
Hopper also painted the New England countryside. This lighthouse in Maine was the subject of many of his compositions.

Adventures of the Artist

THE POETRY OF PLACES

Look at the drawing above, done from life, and the painting to the right. Do they look similar? Find out how Edward Hopper transformed this sketch into one of his greatest paintings, *House by the Railroad*.

American Landscape, 1920, etching.



Hopper kept a sketchbook in which he drew scenes like this "from the fact."

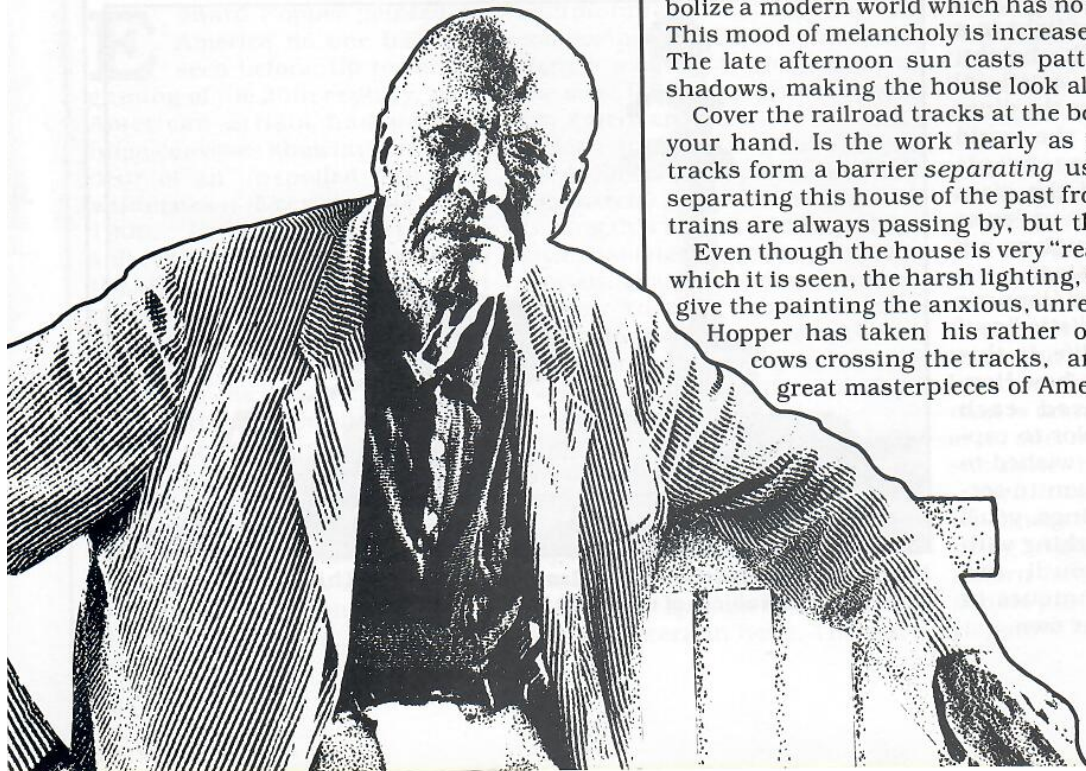
Hopper's paintings are personal, mysterious and poetic. They are very human, except for one unusual fact. Most of Hopper's paintings contain no people. He said, "Maybe I am not very human. What I really want to do is paint sunlight on the side of a house." The very *absence* of people in this painting, *House by the Railroad*, intensifies the feeling of loneliness suggested by this isolated house set against an empty sky. There is no connection with nature — no bush, tree, or blade of grass. Everything is totally man-made.

Hopper didn't arrive at this image immediately. He first did many drawings and prints from life, such as this etching called *American Landscape* (above). The basic idea for *House by the Railroad* is contained in this early print, but you can see how Hopper changed it into a work of art. Hopper used only two elements in the etching — the house and the railroad tracks. In the painting, the house is enlarged to fill the canvas. Hopper creates a special mood by turning the simple farmhouse into an elaborate Victorian mansion. The railroad tracks, cutting across the once-elegant yard of the decaying mansion, symbolize a modern world which has no use for such architecture. This mood of melancholy is increased by Hopper's use of light. The late afternoon sun casts patterns of dark, mysterious shadows, making the house look almost haunted.

Cover the railroad tracks at the bottom of the painting with your hand. Is the work nearly as powerful? The horizontal tracks form a barrier *separating* us from the house and also separating this house of the past from the modern world. The trains are always passing by, but they never stop.

Even though the house is very "realistic," the low angle from which it is seen, the harsh lighting, and the simplified shapes give the painting the anxious, unreal atmosphere of a dream.

Hopper has taken his rather ordinary-looking sketch of cows crossing the tracks, and turned it into one of the great masterpieces of American art.





Hopper composed his paintings from his sketches and from memory. This work is very carefully thought out. Notice how Hopper repeats certain geometric shapes. How many triangles can you find in this painting?

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AMERICAN REALITIES

Edward Hopper saw America in a new way. Each of these famous American painters saw a different "reality." Find out how four artists used composition to communicate the world they saw to others.

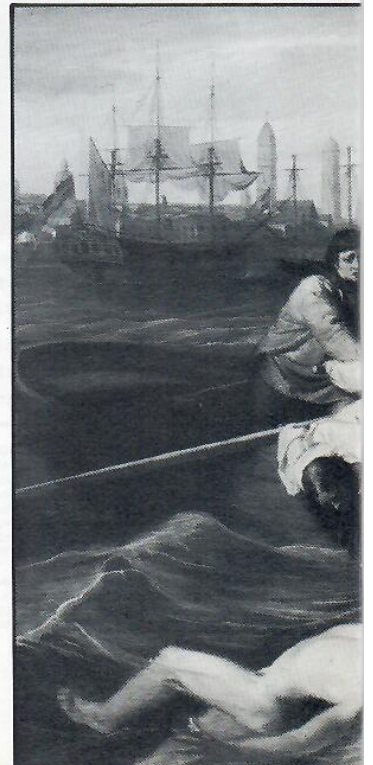
John Copley — Heroic Realism ◊

Each of these artists has painted the same subject, a boat in a body of water. This painting by John Copley was done 200 years ago. The man, Brook Watson, shown in the water, had been swimming when he was attacked by a shark. The shark bit off a foot, but Watson was rescued. He later commissioned Copley to paint this event.

This incident actually happened, but do you think this is the way things really appeared? Copley has put together dozens of studies of single figures posed in the "heroic manner." He has combined their movements as elaborately as a choreographer. In fact, the effect is a little like a stage set or an epic film. The composition of the picture is a dramatic triangle. Your eye starts at the top of the spear, and follows it down to the monstrous jaws of the shark, over to the helpless man, then back up to the horrified expressions

and gestures of the men in the boat. Nature reflects the horror of this event in the lurid sky and dark, turbulent waves. The purpose of this painting is not to give a factual report, but to glorify a man who has confronted and overcome the jaws of death.

John Singleton Copley (1738-1815). *Watson and the Shark*

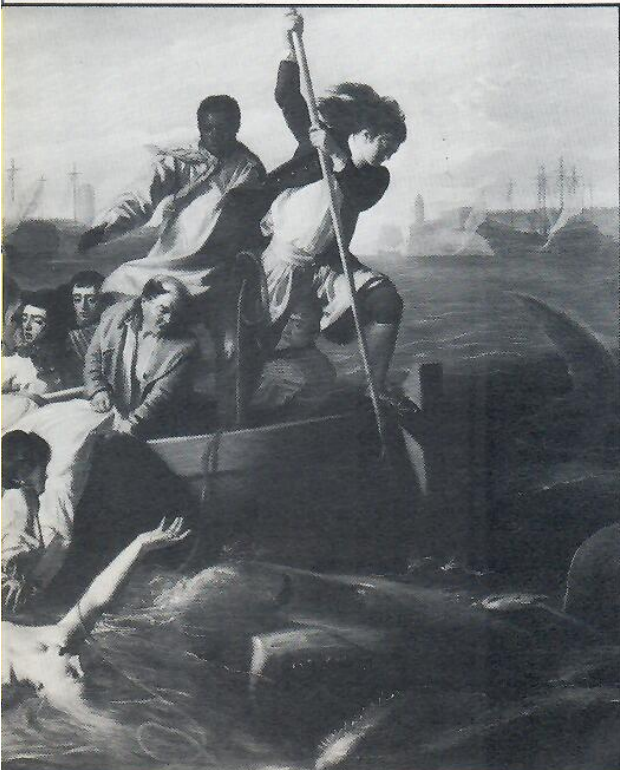


The American artist John Copley painted this dramatic sea rescue in 1778.



In 1873, American painters like Thomas Eakins saw another "reality."

Shark, 1778, oil. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Ferdinand Lamot Belin Fund.



Thomas Eakins — A Timeless Reality

The American painter Thomas Eakins did this picture of another boat nearly a century later, but the results are very different. Instead of glorifying an individual or a nation, Eakins painted self-contained figures in harmony with nature. These two oarsmen row down a tranquil river on a late summer afternoon. The feeling of a calm, silent river, broken only by the strokes of the oars, is expressed by the long horizontals of the boat, the ripples on the water and the long line of riverbank. The bent fig-

ures of the oarsmen contrast with the horizontal tranquility of nature. The diagonals of their oars are echoed in the diagonal clouds.

Eakins was known as the first American "realist." He wanted to paint exactly what he saw, so he went about it scientifically. He did mechanical drawings of the boat in geometrical perspective and mathematically transferred them to the canvas. Using layers of transparent glazes, Eakins then built up the painting's hallucinatory illusion of reality.



(Continued from page 7)

Winslow Homer — The Reality of Action ◊

Painted at about the same time as Eakins' racing shell, this sailboat by Winslow Homer gives a very different feeling. Homer worked quickly from life, and did many scenes of outdoor action. Eakin's boat is timeless and eternal, while Homer's is dynamic and active. Homer produces this effect through his composition and painting style.

The sailboat is seen from a dramatic, low angle, and the sweeping diagonal of the sail pulls the leaning boat to the left. In a moment it will be out of the picture. The dark shape of the boat on the left is balanced by the negative space of the sky on the right and by the tiny sails of the boat in the distance. In contrast to Eakins' still, horizontal river, Homer's wind whistles through the

sails and the spray and waves (done with choppy brushstrokes) whip past the boat. Eakins' intent oarsmen are mechanical and independent, while

Homer's people laugh and shout to each other. Time has stopped on Eakins' silent river, but Homer has captured the reality of this split second.

Winslow Homer (1836-1910). *Breezing Up*, 1876, oil. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of the W.L. and May T. Mellon Foundation.



Winslow Homer's painting, done in 1876, has the feeling of a modern snapshot.



Malcolm Morley (b. 1936). *S.S. Amsterdam in Rotterdam*, 1966, acrylic on canvas. Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York.

Artists working today sometimes take a very critical view of "reality."

◊ Malcolm Morley — "Super Realism"

The contemporary painter Malcolm Morley has also painted what might be called a "realistic" painting of a ship. But what is strange about it? The canvas covers 35 square feet and was painted completely by hand. Why didn't Morley use a camera? In fact, this work was painted from a photograph — a postcard photo to be exact. What kind of reality is this artist expressing?

Malcolm Morley was one of the first *Super Realist* painters. He has

done giant reproductions of snapshots, calendars, travel brochures and postcards, which he refers to as "vacation propaganda." Images like the one at the left — a huge glamorous ship gliding into the harbor, viewed from an impossible angle, no clouds, no rain, everyone smiling — present an idealized reality. Postcards and ads outwardly reproduce "reality," but Morley sees them as dreams of the way things never were. No real experience could ever live up to this fantasy.

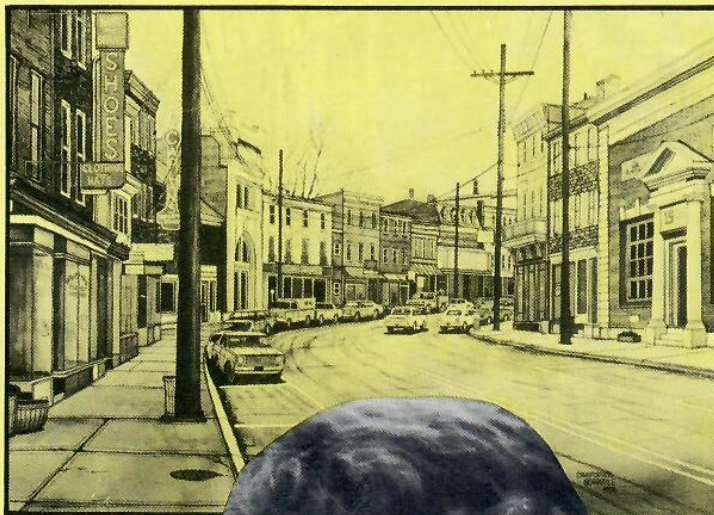
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Artist of the Month

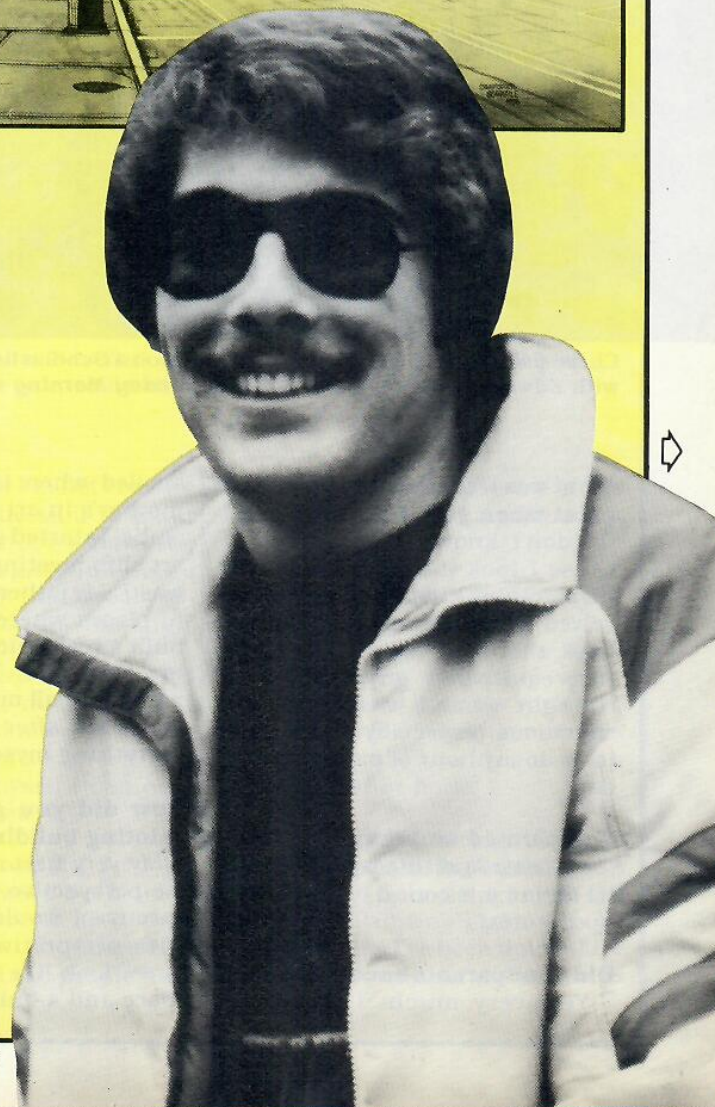
Christopher Scarafile, **PAINTER**

How do you paint a city scene so that it looks and *feels* real? Find out in this interview with 18-year-old Christopher Scarafile.



Can you imagine painting every day since the age of 7? That's the way it's been for Chris Scarafile, now a freshman at college. He began by painting cars and army vehicles but soon progressed to barns, ornate old houses, and other buildings. He has become a master at making buildings look real through the use of perspective, and gradually he learned how to incorporate more and more detail.

Chris has already painted more in 11 years than many other artists have in a lifetime. He began selling his work when he was 7 and since then has sold *hundreds* of paintings. Some years he has exhibited in as many as 15 shows, and he has won more than 50 awards. His biggest award came from The Scholastic Art Awards last year — a full-year scholarship to the school of his choice. On the next page is his award-winning work *Ellicott City, Maryland*. We visited Chris at school, the Rochester Institute of Technology in upstate New York, to find out more about his work.



(Continued from page 17)

Photo by Richard Hutchings.



Chris' painting, *Ellicott City, Maryland*, won a Scholastic Art Award. Compare its subject and composition with Edward Hopper's painting *Early Sunday Morning* on page 20.

What was it that made you want to paint when you were so young?

I don't know. It was hard, because I took a lot of harassment from other kids. I'm pretty involved in sports now, but I wasn't back then. So I didn't have the interests other guys did. They thought what I was doing was ridiculous, especially when I'd go in to do my hour of painting every day.

You painted an hour a day?

At least. And this was constant. If I had to miss one day, I'd make it up the next.

Did your parents encourage you?

Yes, very much. I was really

spoiled when it came to art. My mother's in art and belongs to art clubs. I started going to shows and art club meetings with her when I was 7. My father would take me out to places where I could draw. He built a really nice drafting desk for my bedroom. They started out paying for all my supplies and lessons, but after a while I paid for everything myself.

How did you get interested in painting buildings?

My very first art teacher taught me perspective, and without perspective I wouldn't be anywhere. With perspective you can make a street look like it's going back in space and a building look like it's

three-dimensional. My challenge was making buildings look as three-dimensional as possible.

How did you happen to paint Ellicott City in Maryland?

We went down to visit my uncle and passed through this old town, full of antique shops and old stone buildings. It was a nice town and I'd say the people had a lot of pride in it from the way it looked. We took a series of pictures of the main street, and I sketched different views for a couple of hours.

When did you decide to make a painting of this town?

It might have been the next day. I was so excited by the subject mat-

ter and it was so clear in my mind that I wanted to start right away. First I did a detailed drawing, working from the photos and sketches. I didn't have to change it very much — maybe just the cars to make it a stronger composition.

What made you choose this view of the town?

I liked the deep perspective — the way the road went back. I could have taken another photo and painted just one side of the street with front views of the shops. If you look at it, you'll see that the lines in the building and the road lead you right into the painting. Your buildings go down from the top and the road comes up from the bottom, so everything centers in the middle. And that's very important. You can't have your composition leading your viewer off the page.

What was the hardest part?

The cars. Everything's at an angle so you're getting a weird view of them.

Another problem was the road. You've got all this great detail in the buildings, but this big boring road in the middle. So I had to find ways to make it interesting. I put colors through it, lines indicating tracks of cars, road markings, shadows playing across it from buildings and telephone poles.

What did you do to give the painting this quiet mood?

I put in very few people. And there is no strong sunlight, no clouds to create excitement. Not even the cars are moving. Everything is parked in a stationary position. The colors are also calm — none are very bright.

How did you feel when you'd finally finished it?

Relieved! I ran right out to show my parents. I felt I had something good. The next day I gave myself a reward and took off from painting.

Let's talk about college now, since this is the time when some of our readers may be thinking about school. How did you happen to choose the Rochester Institute of Technology (a private

four-year college)?

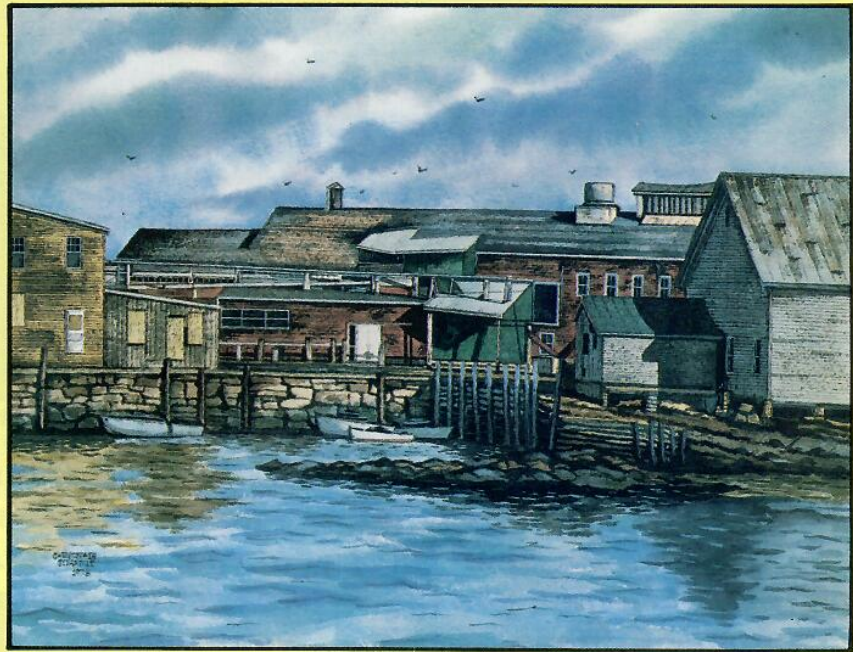
My grades weren't that great and I didn't know if I'd make it to college. But then I started thinking in my sophomore year that I *had* to go to get anywhere. I considered going into fine arts or architecture but figured I'd be better off in industrial or interior design, which is under environmental design at R.I.T.

Why did you settle on design?

There's no money in fine arts,

Is there any particular advice you could give in choosing a school?

Think about what area you want to go into and then start comparing schools. Do it very carefully. When you narrow your choice down to three or four, visit them, check out their facilities, talk to some instructors, and talk to some students in your area. That's very important. If they're satisfied and they're doing good work, there's a good chance you will feel the same way. People here at R.I.T. like it.



While in high school in New York state, Chris travelled frequently to New England. There he painted detailed harbor scenes like this.

and anyway I know I'm not creative enough. I have the skill to paint what I see, but I don't have the ideas or the imagination to go much further than that. I really respect modern artists for their creativity.

I felt architecture would be too demanding for me mathwise, so I decided on environmental design which is related to architecture. I know if I apply myself I can be a success in this area.

Why did you choose R.I.T.?

I was very impressed by their art facilities. They were so up-to-date and there was an abundance of studio space. And the people here seemed to care.

Some say it's too hard, but if it's not hard, what's the use in paying for it?

When you apply to a school, what do they usually require?

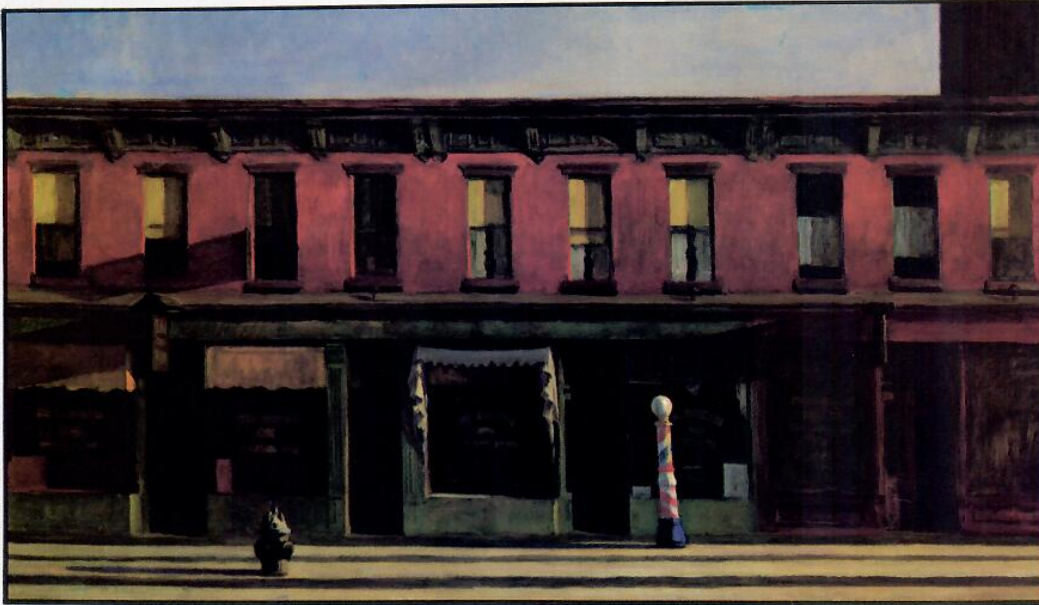
You submit your portfolio. They usually tell you what they want, but you tend to put in a variety of your best work. Then sometimes you have to take a written test or a drawing test or both.

You're going into design. Do you plan to keep painting on the side?

Definitely. School's going to get me a job. Painting's going to be ... like my life. I've been doing it for so long, that without it, I'm minus something.

WORKING WITH COMPOSITION

Edward Hopper (1892-1967), *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, oil, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



The composition of *Early Sunday Morning* captures the melancholy of a small town at dawn.

This is one of Edward Hopper's most famous paintings. There are no people in it – no action – no story is being told. Its composition makes it a great work of art. Learn how you can make exciting compositions like this out of things you see in your own neighborhood or school.

Hopper created convincing portraits of everyday scenes. We respond to them because of the moods and feelings they create. Why are these paintings so convincing and how do they give such a solid appearance? To find out, you must look beyond the subject and see how the paintings are constructed. Hopper's paintings are compelling because of their solid *compositions*.

When we talk about a painting's composition, we are talking about the arrangement of shapes in the work. Hopper's use of certain shapes and his *repetition* of these shapes is a vital element of his composition. But if he composed only with these same repeated shapes, the paintings would be visually boring. To avoid this, Hopper made the repetition less obvious, and often introduced shapes at the very edge of his paintings to make them more dynamic.

The work above, called *Early Sunday Morning*, is clearly composed of repetitive vertical and horizontal shapes, but it is the less obvious diagonals that

give the canvas its interest. There are three signs jutting out at us in the painting. Follow the three long, diagonal shadows and you will find the signs. These diagonals are repeated in the band at the top of the buildings and then echoed in the stripes of the barber pole. Notice, too, the way Hopper adds surprise by putting a vertical wall in the upper right-hand corner. The horizontal strip of sky at the top is repeated in the sidewalk at the bottom edge of the painting. There are four horizontal shadows in this area – that of the curb, the fire hydrant, and the barber pole. What is casting the fourth shadow and why did Hopper put it in?

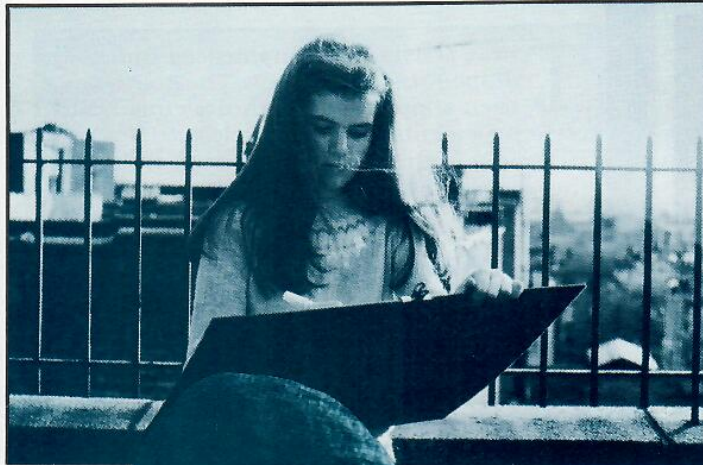
This month our workshop is focusing on composition. We will be putting special emphasis on repetitive shapes, and forms at the edges of the frame which "surprise."

The only materials you will need for this project are a set of waterbase or permanent markers, a black permanent outline marker, and paper or illustration board.

Thanks to the Packer Collegiate Institute, Brooklyn, NY.

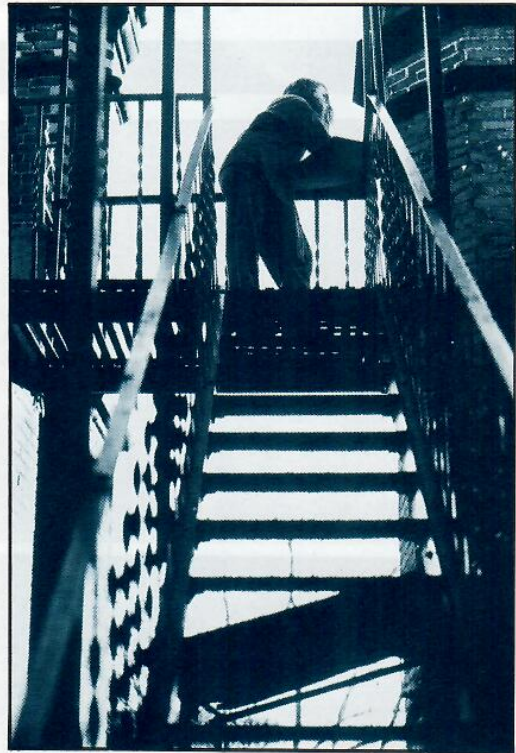
STARTING OUT

Choose a spot in your immediate neighborhood with many architectural features — storefronts, office buildings, or, perhaps, the roof of your school.

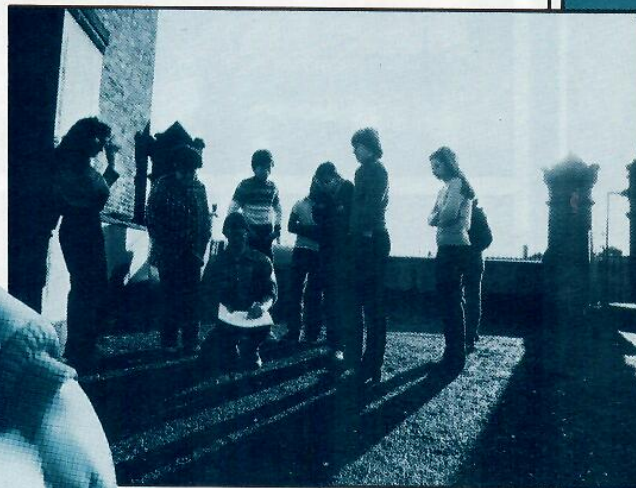


1 Select your location carefully, trying to find shapes which repeat (the fence, roofs, TV antennae). Remember, you are not making a detailed drawing, but a compositional study.

2 Are there interesting shapes at the "edges" of the view you have chosen?



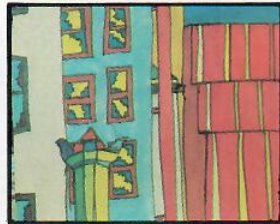
3 Put down a simple network of lines, emphasizing the repeating elements. When you select colors, keep them simple and flat so that your composition remains the dominant element.



4 Do you want to consider the light source and add shadows? Hopper's shadows always form strong compositional elements.

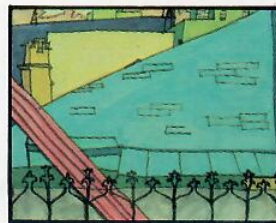
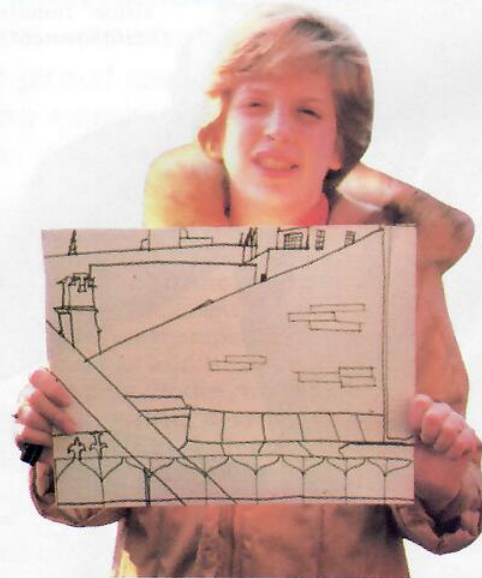
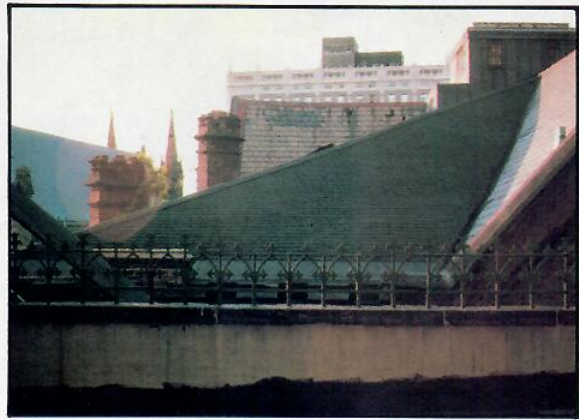
Photos by Richard Hutchings.

S O M E S O L

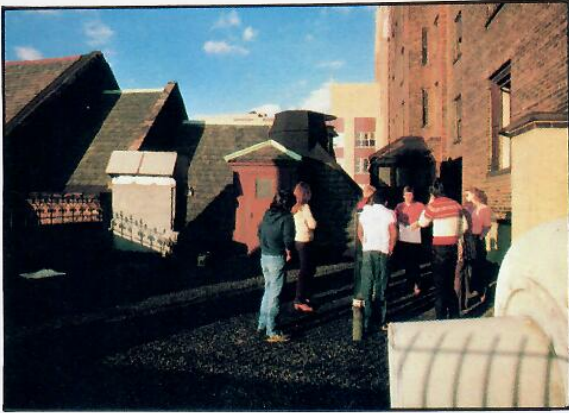


Like Hopper, you can take a frontal view and emphasize the *verticals* and *horizontal*s. The drawing, (above, left) is made up entirely of repeated rectangular shapes. Don't be afraid to try placing your shapes in different spots before deciding. What does the tiny square of blue sky do to the composition of the drawing above, left? The second composition (above, right) was done from the same view (see photo above). What has this artist done differently?

These artists have emphasized the *diagonals* in this view. The scene has been simplified in both drawings. Only certain elements have been selected. Notice the treatment of the edges and corners in both of these compositions.



U T I O N S

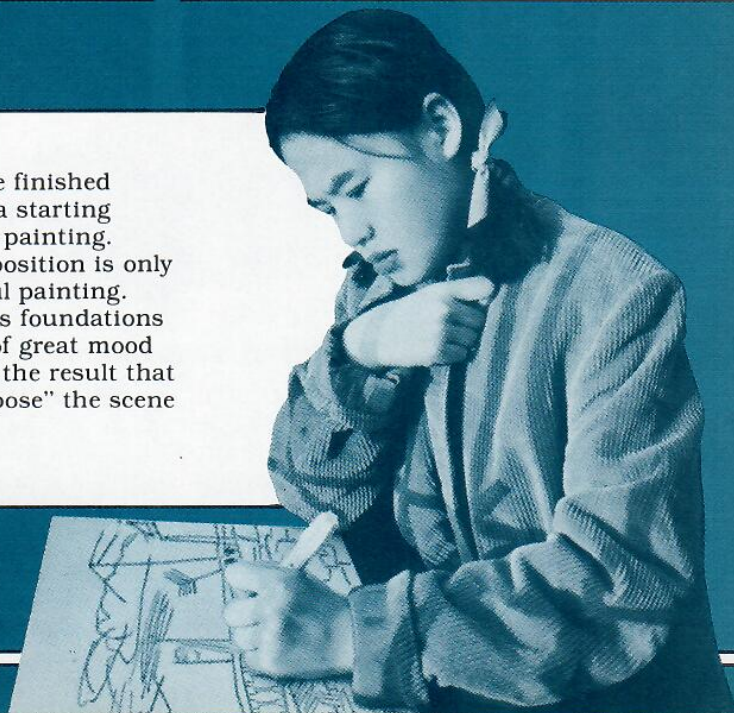


These two artists worked from this scene, but chose to isolate and repeat only one element in each of their drawings – the diagonal shapes of the roofs, and the diagonal lines of the TV antennae.



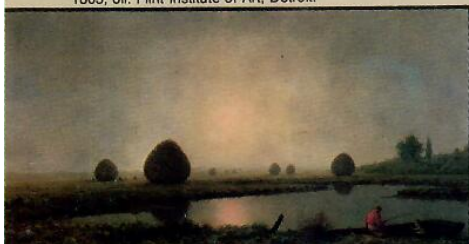
Shadows can become part of your composition and can create shapes of their own. Notice how each of these artists' compositions includes only tiny fragments of buildings at the edges of the frame.

Your first "study" can be the finished project, or it may serve as a starting point for a more developed painting. Having a unified and solid composition is only the first step toward a successful painting. Hopper used his compositions as foundations upon which to build paintings of great mood and feeling. If you don't achieve the result that you want the first time, "recompose" the scene until you are satisfied.



ARTS ALIVE

Martin Johnson Heade . *Sunrise on the Marshes*, 1863, oil. Flint Institute of Art, Detroit.



Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904). *Duck Hunters in the Marshes*, 1866, oil. Private collection.

Painters of American Light

Light has always fascinated artists, but did you know there was a forgotten movement in American art named after light? It's called *luminism*, and it is characterized by huge works glorifying nature. Only recently has any real attention been paid to this movement, and now the first major exhibition of luminism, *American Light: The Luminist Movement (1850-1875)*, can be seen at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, through June 15.

In the lush landscape of the luminists, sunlight, moonlight, twilight, and the dramatic light of storms and sunsets transform simple scenes into strong statements on the beauty of nature. Notice how the artist Martin Johnson Heade has used light to create very different views of a similar scene. In the first one (top), early morning light softens the water and marshes and creates a mood of peaceful calm, but in the second, the whole scene glows with the fiery light of the setting sun.

More Hopper

You've just been reading about Edward Hopper's *composition*. Now look at this early Hopper drawing. In it you can see some of the same compositional techniques that made Hopper's later work so effective. Notice how the dynamic *diagonals* give a feeling of speed. The cropping *frames* the action and makes the *edges* as important as the center.

Unlike the other Hopper works you've seen in this issue, this drawing isn't famous. It was done for a magazine during the years that Hopper worked as a commercial artist. You can see 200 more of these early works in a large show, *Edward Hopper. Prints and Illustrations*, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, until March 16. It will then travel to the Detroit Institute of Arts from June 10-July 20; the Milwaukee Art Center from August 7-Sept. 21; and the Seattle Art Museum from Oct. 16-Nov. 30.

Edward Hopper (1882-1967). *Jumping on a Train*, 1906-14, ink and wash. Whitney Museum of American Art. Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

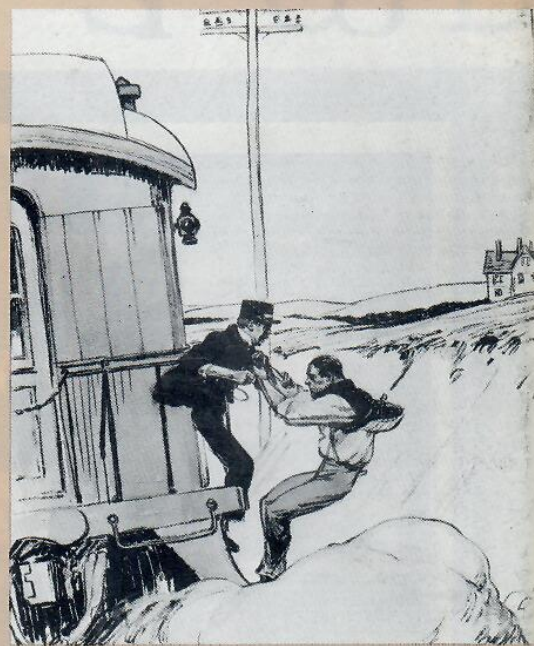


Photo by Evelyn Floret/Black Star



Prison as Art School

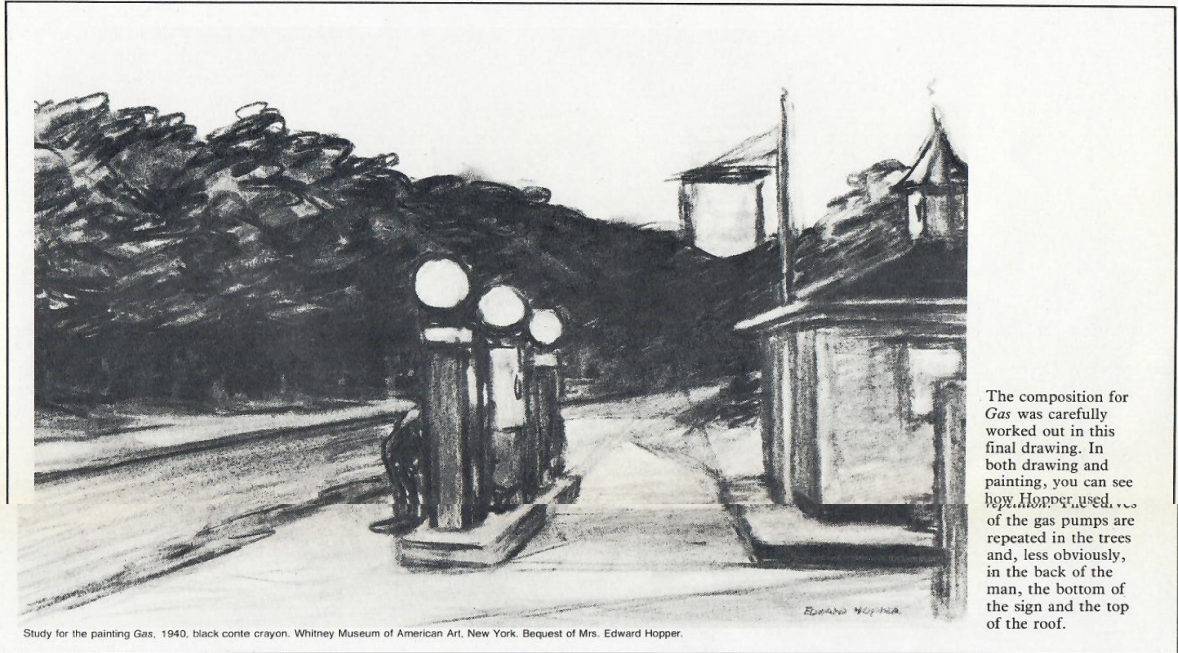
Half of his life was spent behind bars, but while he was there, ex-con Oliver Johnson made it his university and art school. He had sketched comic figures as a kid, but it wasn't until he got to prison that he

started getting serious about art. He pored over art books in the prison library and studied the paintings of the masters until he became a master himself of color and composition. Gradually his desire to be a painter grew, and he began selling his first paintings to other inmates.

Later his powerful urban portraits, like *Woman and Child Eating Ice Cream*, began attracting outside attention, and Nelson Rockefeller bought a canvas in 1972. In 1977, just before he was released from prison, he was so wrapped up in painting that he painted the walls of his cell. He gave himself two more years to make it big. He planned to be a success by the time he was 30, and that's just what happened. A few months later his paintings were spotted by some New York City art dealers at a small neighborhood art show, and it wasn't long before they were hanging in a prestigious Manhattan art gallery. Recently he had a show of 70 works — some priced as high as \$12,000.

A WORLD OF SHADOWS

"A Hopper painting glows in the mind like a suddenly remembered moment."



Study for the painting Gas, 1940, black conte crayon. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Bequest of Mrs. Edward Hopper.

The composition for *Gas* was carefully worked out in this final drawing. In both drawing and painting, you can see how Hopper used... of the gas pumps are repeated in the trees and, less obviously, in the back of the man, the bottom of the sign and the top of the roof.

In 1940 when Edward Hopper painted this work, America was just becoming a nation of travelers. Americans moved around constantly by train, plane, and bus. But their favorite method of travel was the automobile. Everyone had to have one, and the superhighways, motels and gas stations that went with them were growing up all over the land. Speed, power, and technology were all important, and getting there faster seemed to be all that mattered. Edward Hopper saw another aspect of this mania for travel, and he painted scenes of deserted railroad tracks, lonely small town streets, impersonal hotel rooms, depressing cafeterias and isolated gas stations, inhabited by faceless people who were just passing through.

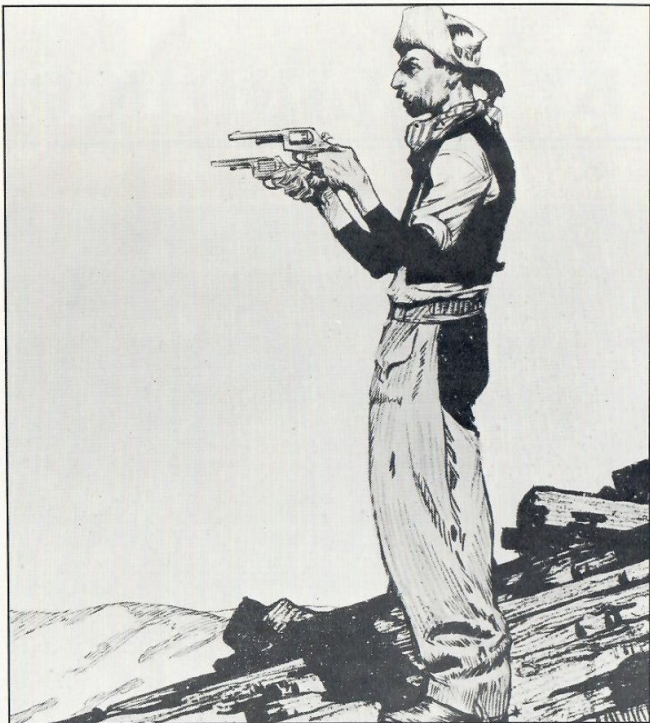
If you were driving down this road, would you stop at this gas station? Look at the road beyond the station. Does it look very inviting? Hopper has painted what should be a very dull filling station on a country road. Not only is the subject far from ordinary, but Hopper has managed to make it look quite ominous. How was he able to do this?

For Hopper the design or composition of a painting was the most important element. His oil paintings were planned in a series of drawings — at times as many as 30 or 40. Sometimes he would even build a small cardboard model of a building and put it in the sunlight to get the exact pattern of light and shadow. If there were figures, he would draw them separately. He usually used his wife as a model who complained that he had her posing for hours so he could get it "just right." Hopper's desire for authenticity sometimes got him into more serious trouble. In composing one work, he

wanted to paint light shining out of the windows of a particular house. He hated being watched as he worked, so he sketched the house each night from his parked car. The owners became so alarmed they finally called the police. In composing *Gas*, Hopper searched and searched for a filling station like the one in his mind. When he couldn't find it, he made one up out of parts of several.

After he felt he had enough material, Hopper would combine all his sketches into a final drawing, with notes to himself on the colors he planned to use. He would transfer this drawing to the canvas, indicating the patterns of dark and light (as in the drawing for *Gas* above). As you can see, the composition of the final painting has been changed only slightly from the original concept. The elderly, robot-like attendant has been clarified, and the tall signpost has been moved closer to the road to create another vertical. The rest closely follows Hopper's original plan.

It is hard to tell which is more sinister, the highway curving into the darkness to the right, or the acid-yellow bands of light radiating out of the station to the left. The color contributes to this feeling too. The bright-red pumps contrast with the dark green trees, standing out against the cold evening sky. The trees look like a dark, ominous army advancing toward the little station. Do the trees look real, or artificial? But what are the mysterious orange shapes on each side of the road? Are they patches of grass, or perhaps, flowers? They look almost like flames. What do you suppose Hopper meant these shapes to be, and how does the orange color work within the rest of the composition?



Cowboy, c. 1906-14, ink and wash on illustration board. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.

Hopper was able to dash off figure drawings like this one in a few minutes, but he would spend hours on the architectural backgrounds.

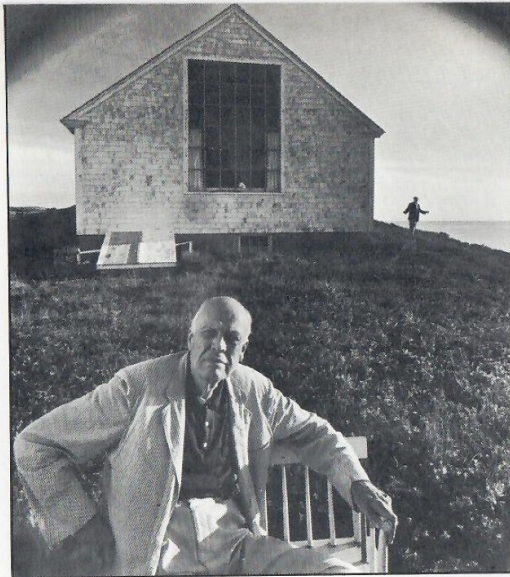
Edward Hopper in front of his summer studio on Cape Cod. This plain, severe house was used as a model for several paintings.



“The Great Stone Face”

This was the way a friend described Edward Hopper. Many painters can talk about their work, or at least about themselves. The few reporters who managed to interview Hopper got to stare at him for a half hour or so of prolonged, uncomfortable silence. Once, when he was notified that he had been given a very important painting award, he went to Mexico instead of to the ceremonies. The announcer at the presentation said, “From the safe distance of Monterrey, Mexico, Edward Hopper has sent his acceptance speech. It is two sentences long. If he were here in person, it would have been, ‘Thanks,’ or if he felt really expansive, ‘Thanks a lot.’” Hopper disliked small talk and was famous for his monumental silences. But like the spaces in his pictures, his silences weren’t empty. When he spoke, it was always to say something important, honest, and to the point. As Hopper put it, “If you could say it in words, there’d be no reason to paint.”

Edward Hopper didn’t begin painting seriously until he was 43. Born in Nvack, New York, in 1882.



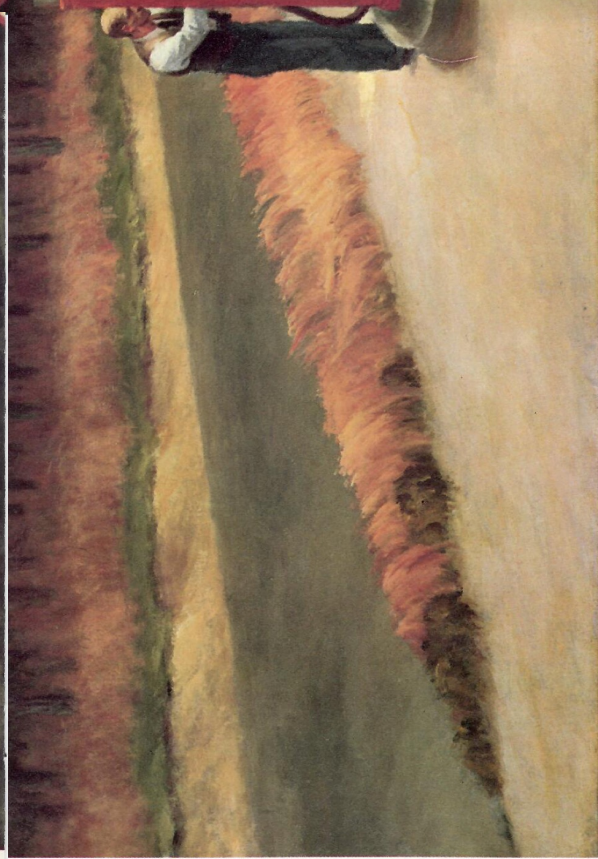
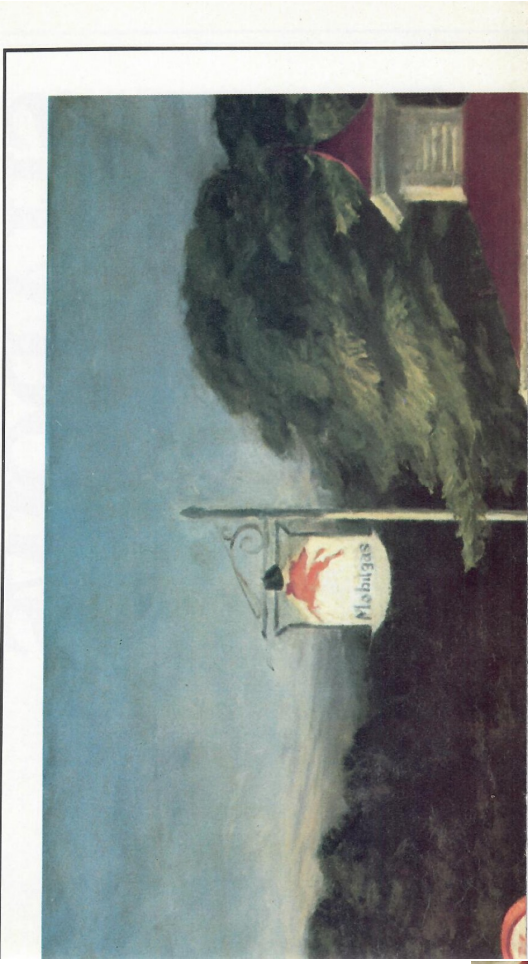
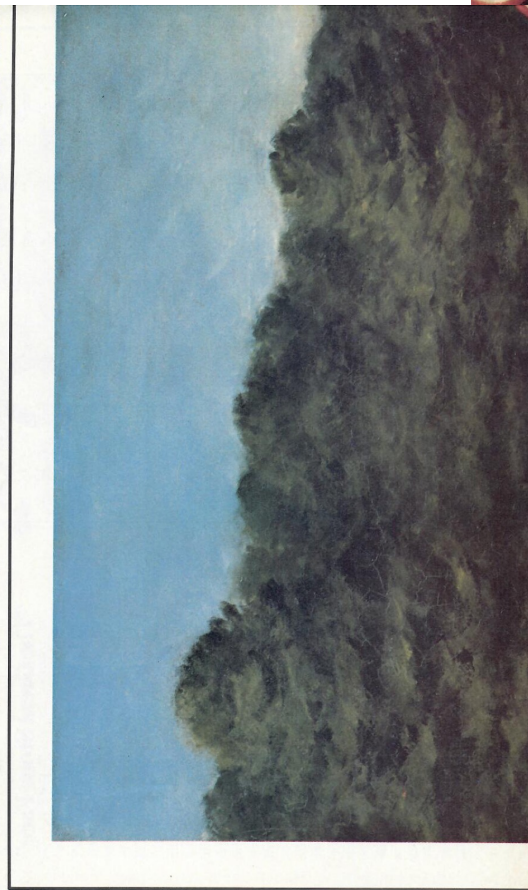
© Arnold Newman

“The Great Stone Face”

his parents were quite pleased when young Edward told them he planned to become an artist. They did suggest he take up commercial art in order to be able to earn a living, so at 17, he enrolled in a commercial art school. For the next 20 years, Hopper worked in an advertising agency. During this time he did over 500 book covers, advertisements and illustrations like the one of the cowboy above. Hopper hated this work, “I was always interested in architecture, but the editors wanted people waving their arms.” He bided his time and saved his money for summer painting trips to New England and abroad. The year 1924 was the turning point of Hopper’s life. One day he finally got up his courage and on his lunch hour walked into a New York art gallery with a bundle of watercolors under his arm. The rest was like a dream. The gallery owner liked the work and decided to give Hopper a show. The show was a sellout, and in the next few months Hopper quit his job, got married, and decided to paint full-time. He moved into the New York studio where he would live and work for the next half century. From that time on, the rest of Hopper’s life was entirely devoted to painting his scores of pictures. His style changed very little over the years, and each painting gives another glimpse into the unique world created by Edward Hopper.

Gas

BY EDWARD HOPPER



Masterpiece of the Month **art & man**

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Gas, 1940, oil, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Ms. Simon Guggenheim Fund.