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EDWARD HOPPER

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EDWARD HOPPER

i) INTRODUCTION

Edward Hopper was one of the most important realist painters of the twenties and thirties of this century. His work raises several important issues relevant to twentieth century life that need to be assessed and analysed. He used landscape to depict cultural and social aspects of twentieth century America. His landscapes not only depict the physical characteristics of a growing industrial landscape, but also the strange relationships and lifestyles of the people living in these environments.

Hopper depicts urban and rural scenes as a lonely stranger might. They are bleak and forbidding. They make the spectator feel alone and lost. Throughout his career, Hopper's style remained unwaveringly realistic. This is important as it reflected the uncompromising harshness of the suburban communities he depicted. He transformed personal and private situations into something universal and timeless. His working methods and their relationship to his concept of realism can be compared to other American painters that deal with the same themes and issues. I am going to discuss these and look at how the emotional content in his art reflects the social and personal experiences of twentieth century life.

ii) HOPPER'S INFLUENCES - The Ash Can School and Paris

Edward Hopper was rooted in the tradition of the Ash Can school and this will have influenced some of his attitudes and priorities as an artist. The Ash Can school was the name given to a group of painters inspired by the teachings of Robert Henri, whose importance was not so much from an artistic viewpoint but as a crusader and teacher in developing his pupils' potential as artists, and instilling in them the importance of the artist as a personality and an individual. Henri never achieved an adequate expression of his ideals in his art but he fought throughout his life for open-mindedness and for the new. He felt truth to be more important than tradition. He believed always in the importance of the individual and gave his pupils a sense of importance and purpose. He felt that all art which was worth while was art that recorded the reality and truth in life. To him art was not only a portrayal of life but also the shining sword of virtue; art was a weapon in a great crusade for truth and expression. Henri taught in the New York School of Art from 1903 - 1906, he was Hopper's favourite teacher. Henri encouraged his students to go abroad. He himself spent several years in Paris working and studying the work of the French Masters. While Hopper did not learn much in the way of technique or style, he worked in dark tones recommended by Henri to render mood and atmosphere. So whilst Henri did not give his students style or technique he did give them a philosophy; the philosophy that art is life, an expression of life, an expression of the artist and his interpretation of life. Hopper wrote about Henri in John Sloan and the Philadelphian, (The Arts, 11 April 1927), p.p. 168-78 that 'Henri's courage and energy did much to shape the course of art in this country' and asserted that

No single figure in recent American art has been so instrumental in setting free the hidden forces that can make the art of this country a living expression of it's character and people.

Henri taught and inspired almost a generation of American painters. Painters like Rochwell Kent, Glenn O Coleman, Patrick Bruce William Cropper and others. The work of these painters became strong enough to be recognised as a movement and they were labelled the Ash Can school. They were denounced as a revolutionary black gang by the conservative academicians of the time. These realist painters loved life, they saw lusty and vigorous activity around them. They painted scenes from the poorer quarters of New York city.

They defended crudity and ugliness because such things existed and were very much a part of life. Their artistic philosophy was alien to the established aesthetic concepts of the time.

To the realists the decorative picture, slick brushwork, academic formulas, foggy aesthetics were all denials of what was real and earnest. Their art was, in a way, a revolt against genteel vision which sought an ideal and pleasant existence totally removed from the harshness of industrial reality. These influences are evident in Hopper's paintings, but Hopper's work does not concern itself specifically with the social aspects of industrialism, it is more concerned in showing an emotional harshness which exists in an exclusive context. He doesn't depict ugliness or beauty as a part of life. He is not concerned with beauty or ugliness in themselves as themes for his work. His art is like a reality detached from the vigour and vitality of living. His work seems to concentrate on the impersonal in reality, his paintings are like images that record experiences that cannot be put into any particular context, but can be applied to different moments in our own lives. The paintings also dictate our role in them, they pose questions about ourselves more than about society or industry.

Hopper worked out of doors after he left the Henri class. He began to experiment on composing some of his oils based on memories and sketches. He managed to convey in his work a sense of mood which is one of the dominating factors in his work and one which needs careful consideration.

Henri's teachings influenced Hopper a great deal in the early years of development, but Hopper was also influenced by French Painters. He paid tribute to Henri when he wrote in the 11th edition of The Arts (April 1927)

'Henri made the influence of the French Masters of the nineteenth century of vital importance to American Painting'. He left for Paris in October 1906 and did not return until the following August. Whilst there he did not enroll in any school but rather choose to visit exhibitions and paint out of doors in the environs of Paris. He returned to Paris in March 1909 and stayed until 31 July. He made his last trip to Paris in May 1910 but stayed only a few weeks. He also visited Spain and Toledo before returning. While in Europe, Hopper also visited London but found it less impressive than Paris. After his experience in Paris, he found New York crude and raw by comparison. Hopper felt it took him ten years to get over France. The painting Soir Bleu which Hopper exhibited in 1915 reflects his recollections of some of the experiences he had in France. The influence of Degas and the Impressionists are evident in some of his paintings.

For example in the painting New York Pavements (1924), the unusual angle of vision and the position of the nun is similar in ways to some of Degas compositions. The cropped figure of the nun resembles the placement of figures in some of Degas paintings.

By 1925, Hopper's compositions became stronger, the images in his paintings became striking and powerful. For example, the painting House by the Railroad which he may have developed from the etching American Landscape has become more of a powerful personal statement. The starkness of the House by the Railroad is unmitigated by the appearance of other elements like the cows and the background in American Landscape. This painting seems to deal with the past and present. The great Victorian house looms behind the railroad like a haunting icon of the past while the railroad cuts through the landscape. The house almost resting on the railroad tracks symbolising America's rootless society. Hopper's use of light makes this painting so powerful giving the structure of the house monumentality and also a feeling of desolation. It seems tragic and bewildering. Hopper's natural ability to create structure and solidity gave his buildings and composition an expressive quality that dominates and dictates the rest of the images. Hopper was also helped by his experience as an etcher. When working with the etching medium, he had to rely a lot on sketches and memory. This may have helped him to invent and become more selective when working with sketches. He could also experiment with various compositions and concentrate on the effects of light which was to become a very powerful element in his painting.

Already in Hopper's etchings, he began to deal with interior against exterior and the vulnerability of people, as can be seen in the etching Evening Wind (1921). The composition leads us to assume the role of a voyeur. The window and the visible effect of the wind creates a tension between the insecurity of the outside world and the intimacy of the nude in her private world, the painting exploits the vulnerability of the nude. Moonlight Interior (1921 - 1923) is dealing with the same theme, except in the painting the vulnerability of the nude is emphasised more by the interior of a house being seen from the outside through the window. The concept of using the interior and exterior as a method of creating tension and excluding the viewer from the subject became important in Hoppers later work.

iii) HOPPERS AMERICA

Hopper's art focused on the Provincial aspects of American life, portraying depressing features of it's physical appearance. His images deal with old and new, using architectural remains of another age as symbols of a barren and derelict present. In his painting there is a deep attachment for the past and it's place in the present. Hopper's cities are not places where children play on the streets and buildings are alive with people. They are places where one rents a room for a night or eats a lonely meal in a brightly lit cafeteria. Hopper's America is a bleak land, He finds no warmth in it's streets, or it's people. His light illuminates but never warms. His landscapes are dominated by industrialisation and his buildings are closed and forbidding to us. His work has an unsettling and eerie quality that pretend to objectivity but the very aestheticism of his manner assumes a critical significance. His vision is essentially snapshot, but he freezes his momentarily seen images and figures into stern immobility and permanence which tends to reinforce an impersonal and isolated America. His paintings of old Victorian buildings and houses are always illuminated with a harsh cold light that tends to isolate them from the natural environment. Roads and railways separate us from buildings and landscapes. Buildings are like haunting images of the past that appear to be seen at a moment's glance. What is interesting is that he concentrates on a mood of banality. He makes isolation tangible reality. Throughout his scenes there is an enclosed narrowness that reflects the small town and the lonely street of the city. The scenes are intimidating, inducing a feeling of insecurity with these alienating images. They make the viewer feel as lonely as the figures in the paintings.

Another painter who reflects the same critical attitude towards America, especially in relation to industrialisation, is Charles Burchfield (1893 - 1967). His paintings are a combination of romanticism and realism. The realism in his paintings can be seen in relation to his home town of Salem, Ohio, for it was from there that he developed his concept of modern America. Burchfield experienced the post-war industrial depression in Salem. It was the dreary depression of this mining town that formed his critical view of America. Burchfield used Salem to express his feelings about industrialisation. He said

I was not indicating Salem Ohio but merely giving way to mental mood and sought out the scenes that would express it - where I could not find I created which is perfectly legitimate, much however I hated justly and would go on

hating to my last breath modern industrialism the deplorable conditions in certain industrial fields such as steel works and mining sections, American smugness and intolerance and conceited provincialism to mention only a few of our major evils.

Burchfield said this in retrospect in the September issue of Creative Art 1928. Burchfield was the first artist to depict the untrammelled industrial expansion, the poverty and absence of beauty that small town America experienced through these post first world war years. Burchfield blamed industrialism for having created haunting ruins of the past and in the process having produced nothing but a shell of material existence which from it's very inception seems like a ruin. One of Burchfields paintings, Watering Time (1925), depicts the disintegration of an agricultural era which has been built on the riches of soil. The Barns which were once monuments to labour, fruitfulness and stability are crumbling into dilapidation and the horses which can also be seen as great symbols of strength and dignity of the land are now weakened animals around an old watering tub surrounded by these crumbling ruins. This painting is very similar to Hopper's etching American Landscape. This etching can be seen from the same point of view, the railroad cuts horizontally across the picture, acting as a barrier to the cows from a farmhouse which is behind it. The railway splits the scene into two, acting as an intrusion, devastating the landscape, the animals struggle over an endless railway where a Victorian house stands starkly alone as if it has already become a remnant of the past signifying the changes that industrialism brought to society.

Although both painters are dealing with the same issues, their approach to them is totally different. Charles Burchfields painting is very romantic and the painting reflects this love of the picturesque and the romantic. Everything in the painting has a personality of it's own. some of the images are like animation. Burchfields painting is full of movement and life, whereas Hopper's etching is treated in an entirely different way. It's straight lines and sharp lighting reflects a detached point of view and the image is seen more as just another phenomena of American life. In some ways Burchfields paintings concentrate more on the depression and it's effects, whereas Hopper's paintings do not specifically deal with any single theme relating to the depression. The ambiguity of his paintings allow them to be seen in different ways, but they still have the same feeling of desolation and dilapidation. What Hopper and Burchfield had in common was their ability to use building fronts and Victorian mansions as typical ingredients to convey nuances of American life, even though their

utilisation of that material was different. Burchfield never treated his settings with the same objectivity as Hopper. His places are frequented by people and every object in the paintings has personality. Burchfield, with all his critical attitude, is warmly human and very romantic. Another common factor in the work of both painters was their inability to handle beauty in the abstract. Their technique was purely expressive. Beautiful painting to them, especially with Hopper, could only be a frivolous intrusion upon a profound thought. The strength of their art depended on their ability to express their attitudes, emotions and ideas. Beauty for it's own sake did not enter into their motivation as painters. As might be expected, both painters were particularly American in their subjects and attitudes. There is a deep attachment for the past and the depressing aspects of the present. Hopper's and Burchfield's search for depicting life lay in recognising the native characteristics which were to be found in small town America rather than large cities, where other painters of the Ash Can school found their inspiration. Hopper's city scenes were seen as though from a strangers point of view and he looked at the physicality of the city, finding windows, doorways and shopfronts more interesting than crowded streets. He searched for the intimate moment within the city. He had the ability to paint one building or street corner and through that create the atmosphere of an entire and vacant city. He did this by drawing the viewer into becoming part of the city, taking part in the impersonality of it.

Hopper was praised as one of the finest painters of the American scene by the late 1930's. This was a time when cultural nationalism came into full flower. Painters like Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood and John Stewart Curry were celebrated. Also in literature, Sinclair Lewis and other writers sought a particularly American form of life. They sought a native tradition, a centre of life without sophistication and typically American. These artists attempted to find a core or base within a world of shattered illusions, but not to regard this attachment for the past with nostalgia or sentimentality but to regard it as something native and symbolic of a stable and more perfect era. By this time, Hopper had matured as a painter and his paintings became personal and introspective. However they were interpreted in the context of American Scene painting, nevertheless Hopper's work transcended this categorisation. Painting, for him, was too private an experience to allow it to be assessed in terms of political, social or other extra aesthetic critical concerns. He saw his art primarily as a reflection of his own psyche. He said this in a statement he made for the first retrospective in the Museum of Modern Art

in 1933

I believe that the great painters, with their intellect as master, have attempted to force this unwilling medium of paint and canvas into a record of their emotions. I find any digression from this large aim leads me to boredom.

Hopper wrote this in a letter to his sister on November 29th 1906. Hopper attempted to escape this characterisation of his work by including paintings he did in Paris in some of his exhibitions, in 1941 he chose to show work from 1907 - 1914 and this included eleven scenes from France. Some of the critics recognised this but the French work was soon forgotten. Hopper found it difficult to accept this one-sided approach to his work. He write about this in a letter to his mother

The thing that makes me so mad is the "American Scene" business. I never tried to do the American Scene as Benton and Curry and the mid-western painters did. I think the American Scene painters caricatured America. I always wanted to do myself. The French painters didn't talk about the "French Scene" or the English painters about the "English Scene".

Hopper's vision of America was a totally individual vision motivated by his own emotions. He felt the expression of the subconscious to be of equal importance as the conscious intellect when painting. He was painting America and American culture, but from his own unique point of view.

iv) HOPPER AND INDUSTRIALISATION

Many of Hopper's landscapes and cityscapes deal with a culture transformed by technology. Many painters during the twenties and thirties were more interested in glorifying the machine, but Hopper deals with it's everyday existence in a culture that has been consumed by industry. Hopper's vision is unique in this way, because he makes the individual viewer experience this lifeless existence by placing them in this new and unsettling technological era. His landscapes are scattered with roads, cars, railroads and buildings. They seem to impose themselves on the landscape and dominate the natural surroundings. There is always a certain amount of conflict in his paintings but they are dealt with in a very subtle way. He juxtaposes nature with the machine and puts old against new and tensions in the paintings arise from this. This is not altogether obvious because the mood he creates from his brilliant use of light dictates a lot in his paintings. His paintings focus on the disinterested glance of the twentieth century person, the experience of nature to him becomes secondary to the experience of his own synthetic world, the uneasiness in their posture and their stifled expressions never gives us the feeling of comfort or happiness. The experiences of this modern culture seems lifeless and desolate in their own way. The illusion of progress through industrialisation is no longer operative in his paintings, it has become a stifling and inhibiting fact of life. His buildings and architecture symbolise the isolation of modern America.

Certain elements of his cityscapes isolate the viewer while at the same time it restricts their curiosity. The scenes are viewed through man-made lines which Hopper uses to lead the viewer into a picture where they are met with closed windows and dark doorways. Windows are very important in Hopper's paintings. He uses them in an interesting way. Sometimes we can see what is happening inside a building and other times dark and closed windows tell us nothing. Many of his interiors are illuminated by light through windows, more of his paintings are about illuminated rooms seen through the window from the street at night. This alienates the viewer from the picture and the figures from the outside world. In more of his paintings the vulnerability of his figures becomes important, like the painting Moonlight Interior and the etching Evening Wind, which I have already mentioned. It is interesting how he exploits the viewers curiosity and vulnerability. He can make the viewer feel vulnerable as well as turn them into voyeurs. Another example of this is Night Windows where we see a woman slightly bent over, with her back to us. We are looking down at this scene, probably

from an apartment block across the street. The woman's body is more or less in the centre of the painting, one of the side windows curtains are blowing in the wind. The angle of vision towards the woman, her pose and the open window suggest certain kinds of erotic possibilities and she is vulnerable because of the windows, but the viewer always remains detached from these people, we are never closer than looking on from a lonely place. The fact that we look from these lonely places make us feel the impersonal lonely aspects of the city. The intimate viewpoint becomes important in Hopper's cityscapes. He is concerned with the immediate familiar surroundings of everyday life in the city. He concentrates on the masses of concrete, the forms of buildings, their surfaces and textures and life inside seen through windows and glass fronts.

The people of the city he portrays are usually alone. They are only parts of the places he depicts. Their role is no more significant than the furniture or the concrete walls in his paintings. They usually reinforce the impersonality of the city. The most intimate of his cityscapes are those of women in the interiors. In paintings like Moonlight Interior, Night Windows, Eleven Am and Morning in a City, the women appear in realistic situations, probably dressing or undressing or naked by a window. The intimacy of the naked or half naked women contrasted with the impersonal nature of a city give these images a deep sensuality. There are no obvious erotic connotations in the images of the female. Their solidity and presence are treated with almost the same detachment as the buildings, but their context brings sensualism to Hopper's objectivity. His use of intimacy seen amidst the large city emphasises the individuals insignificance in relation to the vastness of the city. The individual is always outweighed by the city that appears to dominate and dictate a lifestyle.

Some of Hopper's paintings generate tensions between man and woman. For example Office at Night, the painting shows a man at his desk and a woman standing at a file drawer behind him. The physical and sexual tensions are implied by the curvaceous secretary. Her body language and dress, together with the perspective line of recession that aligns her with the man sitting at his desk, the open door, file drawer and the window, may allude to her openness to the possibility of an erotic encounter. In some of his paintings there is no communication between the people. An example of this is Room in New York. The male sits on the left of a room viewed from the outside reading a newspaper, while the woman seated opposite him turns to a piano, seeming resigned and melancholy to the complete lack of communication between them. Another painting that deals with this lack of

communication is Nighthawks, it seems to epitomise the American city of the 1940's. It shows a modern diner set amongst older buildings in the background. It signifies the beginning of a new era. The background is in total contrast to the diner, the garish colours of the florescent lighting in the diner juxtaposed to the equally strong tones of the background, highlights the contrast between old and new. The old cash register in the background suggests the family business. The diner which is circular in form acts as an island to it's surroundings. The florescent lights create an atmosphere of artificial warmth. The atmosphere in the diner is clinical and alienating, it is a move towards mechanisation. The people appear detached and slightly restless and again there is no real communication between the people. They appear unfamiliar to each other and their environment. The man and woman almost touch hands opposite a solitary figure with his back to us. This increases the feeling of unease and vacancy.

The light becomes the principle element in Hopper's night scenes. He can increase the atmosphere and pictorial drama of his images by the interplay of light from various sources and in varied colours and intensities.

Another aspect of Hopper's cityscapes is the way in which he composes the main structures and the relationship between a figure and a structure. One example where he uses the architecture very effectively is in the painting Manhattan Loop. The horizontal format of the painting emphasises the uneventful alienating aspects of the large city. The main horizontal lines of the painting are hardly interrupted from the edges of the painting. These tend to reinforce the monotony of the city and make us conscious of the space beyond the limits of the scene itself. Hopper emphasises the dehumanising aspects of the city by using scale and strong horizontals in the composition. The figure in the painting is completely overshadowed by the structures and cut away from the apartments by this huge concrete wall that appears to go on endlessly. Hopper frames our view of the city with man-made structures, his paintings are mainly built on straight lines. The overall shape of his paintings are almost always horizontal. The horizontals act as foundations for the overall design, they are crossed and interrupted by strong verticals, the horizontal lines could be railroad tracks, highways, streets or sidewalks. These all act as a basis for the more complex vertical elements in the painting. Hopper had doubts about his design being too limited but he achieved a very strong thoroughly planned and fully realised method which gives the images strength and character. All these elements influence the atmosphere of loneliness and isolation in his paintings but Hopper felt that people over-

emphasised this aspect of his paintings. Hopper's art concentrated not so much on humanity but on it's setting, on the buildings and structures that man had built and among which his life is spent. Hopper concentrated on the poetry of place.

All of Hopper's city scenes present curious situations that are relevant to the feelings of somebody as detached as a traveller or stranger. Hopper frequently got his subjects while driving. He once said 'You realise the quality of a place most fully on coming to it or leaving it'. So many of his paintings include roads and railways and things that one relates to travel and movement. As well, his rooms are never people's homes, they all appear like rented rooms, apartments or offices. These places are never peoples permanent living quarters. The people seem misplaced and disinterested with their surroundings, usually gazing out of windows preoccupied with their own dreams and emotions. The situations that these paintings are about are transient in themselves. He presents temporary situations, but then treats them with solidity and immobility. He not only freezes these moments but recreates them, giving them a permanence that is almost sculptured. The solidity of his forms and structures gives an eerie permanence to the transience of the situations. Everything in his paintings appears motionless and indifferent, but yet we can identify with the situations and the emotions they incite in us, because the moment becomes timeless. The situations in the paintings become universal, we can relate to them through our own experiences. His use of moment, light and structure gives his paintings a quality that confronts the vulnerability to loneliness in everybody's lives.

v) HOPPERS LANDSCAPES

Hopper's landscapes also deal with the relationship between nature and man-made structures. He seldom painted a landscape without roads, railroads, buildings or some indication of the structures of humanity. He was one of the first artists to deal with such things as the automobile and its effect on the landscape. Many of his landscapes depict empty roads and buildings that become poignant expressions of solitude and many of his landscapes reflect the feelings and moods of his cityscapes. He portrays the strong sunlight of his landscapes. Where the impressionists he saw in France dissolved objects in the sunlight, Hopper sharpened form with light. He used the sun to project sharp patterns of light and shade clarifying everything in his paintings. Moulding and solidifying them with light. The scale of values in his paintings ranges from white to the near blacks of his shadows unlike any of the impressionist paintings he would have been familiar with. Hopper's colours were more like the realist fore runners to Impressionism like Gustave Courbet, Winslow Homer and Ehins. But like the Impressionists, he concentrates on light. Many of his landscapes are influenced by the time, for example evening and morning light. These effect the mood of many of his paintings, the paintings are filled with a sense of silence and calm but with grim and desolate overtones.

Again the viewer sees the images superficially as if we were being taken for a drive through this landscape and these images flash by. We are ignorant of any reasons for the grim buildings and the prevailing isolation in the images. The sense of emptiness and silence is usually heightened by the long evening shadows in the paintings. The buildings are usually stark and alone, placed on hilltops reflecting the sunlight that only reveals its isolation. The evening time becomes important to the mood of the rural scenes, for example in the painting Gas (1940) it shows a gas filling station on the side of a country road. The evening time gives the painting a strange melancholy feeling, it is as if the gas station is becoming more significant than the surrounding nature. The road cuts into the foliage into a darkness that appears to be taking over the whole scene, it's as if conflicts exist between nature and industry. The man attending the petrol pumps has a weary posture probably tired and bored with the monotonous duties of the quiet filling station. The painting seems to place movement and permanence together, the sign, the road and the lights placed against the haunting solitude of the station and the occupant. There seems to be an curious sort of hope and yet a disillusionment about the painting. The colours of the painting also

contribute to this atmosphere, the red autumnal colouring of the grass at the side of the road together with the oncoming darkness suggest a certain melancholy, the approaching darkness of night and winter. The strange quality of the painting is influenced by this placement of objects that symbolise different things. The placement of the signpost over the darkness of the roadway and the pumps against the trees and foliage. The painting contains the ideas of transience and permanence, nature and industry. The pumps and signpost may symbolise progress, movement and discovery, but yet the reality is a solitude. It is as if the painting shows the reality of what modern America symbolises, the reality of the American Dream etc.. The ambiguity of Hopper's paintings make it difficult to be specific about the meanings in his paintings but his places are dealing with man's environment within nature and the situations they create for us.

Another of his paintings of Cape Cod was Cape Cod Evening (1939). It is a very unusual painting, a Victorian house is shown standing in a field of grass, the house seems to be overgrown, a woman is standing beside a man sitting on the back porch and a dog in the foreground looks out of the picture away from the two people. The two people appear out of character with their surroundings. The old house and the surrounding foliage that is almost overgrowing the once inhabited house. There seems to be a conflict between obsolete life styles and nature. The couple don't appear to belong, seeming to intrude on a world they know nothing of. The situation in the painting seems to reflect the loss of a viable rural America, focusing on those people and places that have been left in the wake of progress. It is as if the painting has all the ingredients of a home or a family situation but everything in the painting contradicts this, even the couple seem unfamiliar with each other, the woman appears more unsettled and suspicious. The painting has almost the same feeling of displacement and vacancy as the painting Nighthawks.

Hopper used to move up to Cape Cod with his wife Jo, during the summers. While Hopper continued with his studio work in Cape Cod, he also painted outdoors, often in watercolours and oils. His sketches and watercolours are beautifully fresh and painterly, especially his paintings of Morhegan Island. He produced many views of the Islands dramatic shoreline. These paintings have a brilliant sense of structure and sunlight. There is a brilliant textural quality about them. The bold confident brushwork and the vivid powerful colouring of these images are different than anything he may have done in the studio, they are spontaneous and rugged. The paintings are all very small but in them he achieved a

great sense of scale and structure. As a purely observational painter Hopper was excellent. His ability to describe surface quality and the play of light on buildings and structures with such simplicity in both watercolour and oils reinforce the fact that he had a natural ability to paint form and light. He write in 29 October 1939 to Charles H. Sawyer, then director of the Gallery of American Art,

My aim in painting is always, using nature as the medium, to try to project upon canvas my most intimate reaction to the subject as it appears, when I like it most, when the facts are given unity by my interests and prejudices. Why I select certain subjects rather than others, I do not exactly know unless it is that I believe them to be the best mediums for a synthesis of my inner experiences.

Hopper painted as a craftsman and as an artist was concerned with developing cogent symbols of the present. In Hopper's landscapes and cityscapes of the 1930's he sometimes concentrated on pure form seen in the sunlight. He sometimes focused on the power and sharpness of objects in the sunlight and often some of the paintings are verging on abstraction. But he knew that a painting can work on several different levels - those of content and associative values as well as those of more abstract elements. He believed there was no need for conflicts to exist between representation and design. In some ways the paintings of Charles Sheeler resemble some of Hopper's later work, although Sheeler's work was different in that Sheeler was more a precisionist painter. Mechanical forms and the industrial scene were what his work revolved around. Sheeler stripped his industrial landscapes of it's rough edges, it's people and all signs of activity to create an airless world of pristine purity, but he was also concerned with the reality of form. He enhanced the architectural quality of the real, he intensified structure through an insistence upon it's basic solid form and through a simple and precise rendering of reality. Sheeler's work was sometimes poised between abstraction and reality because of this simplification of form. An example of this is Ore into Iron (1953). This painting displays the interest in overlapping transparent displays, he transforms mechanical forms into artistic ones. Sheeler was also a professional photographer and the clarity and precision in his style of painting is probably related to the photographs. His vision is greatly influenced by the camera, but outside of that, the cold objective honesty in some of his works, for example River Rouge Plant, is similar to some of Hopper's paintings, even though Sheeler's paintings treat the machine as something brand new and metallic, something incapable of aging or decaying in any way. Almost like a vision of a

brand new America, strong, clean and incapable of breaking or failing. This of course is totally different to Hopper's vision of America.

vi) HOPPER AND SOLITUDE

Hopper had his own unique way of looking at the world and in some ways his art is a commentary on solitude. It is as if all these paintings are about himself. They confront the world as somebody detached from it would and in this way his art becomes universal, it is about life seen purely from this solitary point of view. Hopper's couples reinforce the lack of emotional interaction. His people are always psychologically alone. Even in company they seem preoccupied with their own thoughts. Hopper's paintings are preoccupied with the psychology of people in strange environments. Many of his paintings of railroad tracks, roads and rented rooms express symbolic significance, reflecting the mobility and rootlessness of modern life. He focuses on the situations where the people are as unfamiliar with each other as they are with their own surroundings, by placing the viewer in these roles he intensifies the situation. One of his paintings Hotel Lobby (1943) is typical of this, in that it focuses on the moment where communication is stifled by the circumstances. In the painting an old man stands beside a seated woman, probably his wife, he looks blankly ahead. Across the room a younger woman sits relaxed, reading a paper or magazine, disinterested in the couple. The older woman sitting beside the man looks up at him but he does not respond to her glance. He seems to be more conscious of the other woman. In this painting Hopper tries to intensify the uneasy atmosphere of the situation by making the figure of the man self-conscious. In one of the preparatory drawings for this painting, Hopper had the couple engrossed in conversation while a man sat across the room staring blankly across the room and another woman sits beside the couple. This was probably the reality of the situation and Hopper turns the situation around to intensify the tensions that might exist in a situation like this. Because he dictates the role of the observer, his paintings are powerful, there is nothing to separate the viewer from the paintings. They are no longer protected by the security of being an uninvolved onlooker. The paintings give the same disconcerting experience to the viewer as they have within their own narrative. In this way they have been given a new realism. The paintings become part of the realities and discomforts of modern life and the viewer is subjected to the human dilemmas of alienation. In this way Hopper transforms the mundane into something haunting and disturbing. What is interesting is that he is able to communicate these feelings of insecurity by painting places. His places are devoid of his personality but his presence and our presence are felt in them. It is the lack of humanity that effects our perception of these places.

Hopper is important as a painter because he is faithful to nature and reality. He uses sunlight and form in a symbolic way. Light could become a symbol of spirituality and rooms as symbols of the soul. Paradoxically the deliberate lack of emotion in Hopper's art gives his paintings a deep emotional content. The meanings of the paintings are not entirely accessible to us, but he may have intended the enigmatic qualities that make the content impossible to be clearly interpretable. His paintings work partly because of this ambiguity. The paintings make us draw our own conclusions. Hopper himself was a very private individual. Over the years he tried to limit access to his personal life. He preferred to hide behind a controlled public image of an uncultivated self made painter, working within the bounds of the American realist traditions. His work reflects his disposition: private and introspective. His paintings are concerned with a number of different things. Some of them deal with security and insecurity. This can be seen in the way in which he contains some of his figures. They have their own space, and with that their own security, yet in that seclusion they look away through windows and doorways with a sense of longing or anticipation, searching for some kind of escape. They are always seen in the context of their environment. It is as if they have become obsolete, materialism has obliterated their individuality. In paintings like Morning Sun (1952) and Woman in the Sun (1961) the sun becomes a seducer. In these paintings the women seem drawn to the sunlight. It is as if they surrender to the ambient air of the sunlight. Light becomes the common denominator in most of his later paintings. It becomes the lifeline in these paintings. In Second Story Sunlight (1960) Sun in an Empty Room (1963) and People in the Sun (1960), light takes on the role of some kind of saviour, especially in the painting People in the Sun, the people come across as almost worshipping the light. In Second Story Sunlight the sunlight seems no longer ephemeral, in some ways it creates tensions in this painting, possibly between old and young. The freshness of the young woman is reflected in the opulence of the trees behind the house. This is intensified against the permanence and restraint of the twin gabled house where the older woman sits. In the painting Sun in an Empty Room, Hopper gives us the main ingredients of his art: the light, the room and the window to the outside world. The painting can be read in different ways, these elements could be of symbolic significance dealing with solitude. Gail Levin described the room as the soul and the light as spirituality. But the painting can also be seen purely in terms of design through form and light. Through Hopper's career solitude becomes a recurring theme in his work. This may reflect his own position as an artist observing society as an outsider, maybe it is a reflection of the whole human condition.

interest in human interaction within specific environments deals specifically with their solitude in the enthrallment of society. Some of his paintings of the theatre characterise this, especially the paintings Intermission (1963) and New York Movie (1939). In the painting Intermission a woman sits alone in a row of empty seats. She sits almost uncomfortable and self conscious. You almost think that she is aware of us looking at her, it is not so much her face that shows discomfort, it is her posture and the fact that she seems to be looking at nothing in particular. What heightens the tension in the painting is the row of empty coupled seats. The woman sits alone in this socially conditioned environment. In this painting the woman's solitude is made more poignant by the fact that she sits alone in a double seat. The sloping angle of the room creates a slightly disorientating effect that increases the woman's insecurity or discomfort in the environment. The painting New York Movie is also dealing with this social solitude. Architecture remains important in this painting. I think it's significance in the painting is partly because it alienates the usherette who stands alone, leaning against the wall separate from the audience. Hopper looks at this whole social setting from a peculiar point of view. What becomes important in the painting is the usherette and her relationship to the audience and the way she is almost weary of the whole situation. Again Hopper focuses on the individual in a social setting. The cinema is no longer an escape from the mundane. There is a certain anxiety in this painting which is emphasised by the way Hopper places his people. The usherette is almost trapped in this environment, it becomes the mundane for her and an excitement for the audience. The tension is increased because we see the reality and the fantasy working against each other. Hopper's realism depends on how he depicts the commonplace, he infuses suggestions of eroticism, loneliness, anxiety and loss, in this way he is dealing with more than representation. Hopper never found it easy to paint because he was dealing with thought. Representation and design came almost naturally to him. For Hopper the metaphysical aspect of his painting was the most difficult, but this is what gives his paintings a strange silence that is poetic. In his paintings solitude becomes something that is almost romantic. Solitude seems to have the same purity as the sunlight, it is as if the cleanliness and liberty of solitude reflects the purity of the sunlight. This gives his paintings a poetic reality rather than a dramatic reality. Everything in his paintings work together transforming the pictorial representation of reality in such a way as to make visible the concealed reality that lied beyond. Everything in the paintings have their own space and in that they become more clearly defined. I think Hopper uses space very effectively because he can

change the meanings of some situations by giving it a space within the picture plane, by doing this he can separate us from the situation and place different situations together. Everything in his paintings becomes fully realised because of this individual space, giving everything it's own descriptive quality. In Hopper's paintings rooms, cafeterias and porches are almost like stages, the light is contained in these spaces, this increases the dramatic effect of the light and gives space itself an almost dramatic quality. Hopper uses space to detach his figures and isolate them from the natural environment and the rest of society. But then everything in his paintings is isolated, light illuminates and isolates everything in the paintings, but it also gives the images a poetic uniformity through spatial relationships and the tonal values in the images.

vii) HOPPER AS AN ARTIST

Hopper's importance as a painter lies in the way in which he used reality as a medium. He used physicality and reality to express his own emotions as an artist. His paintings are more than just descriptive or topical, they deal with our perception of the twentieth century and our perception of reality. In many ways we become the subject in his paintings, they challenge our vulnerability to all the suggestive qualities in his paintings. Hopper uses nature to create different sensations in his paintings. He had very definite associations with various times of day. Evening, night morning and midday have symbolic significance to his paintings.

Night seems to reinforce the anxiety in the paintings Night Windows and Nighthawks. The morning seems to evoke feelings of longing, this seems especially apparent in the paintings Eleven Am (1926), where a naked woman sits alone in a room looking out the window, and in the painting Morning in a City (1944) where a naked woman stands by a window with a towel in her hands, and the painting Cape Cod Morning (1950) where a woman leans out looking through a bay window. The women in these paintings all have a sense of longing in their postures and expressions. His paintings in evening light always have a sense of impending loss, paintings like Gas (1940). By refusing to be narrative and aiming at suggestive content, Hopper's realism takes a special form. It is not as objective as it first appears because he finds external equivalents for inner experiences in the form of buildings, street corners and overgrown country houses and roadways - in this way his work is timeless. It is as significant today as it was forty or fifty years ago. His work transcends the "movement" or "ism" because he was able to achieve this within the boundaries of realism. But Hopper was also appreciated among the proponents of abstract art. Although he dismissed abstraction, many of his images were appreciated by abstract artists and critics for the aesthetic qualities of his composition, form and light, and some of his later paintings have a strange intensity that is almost separate from reality. Hopper was a viewer of twentieth century life but not so much a participant in it. Through his art he was able to communicate the quality of America in its landscape and the character of its landscape and the character of its urban desolation. He also recorded personal aspects of modern life, his characters record the apathy and isolation of a modern America. It is difficult to find any other painter who can communicate these aspects of a society in such a realist but yet an elusive way.

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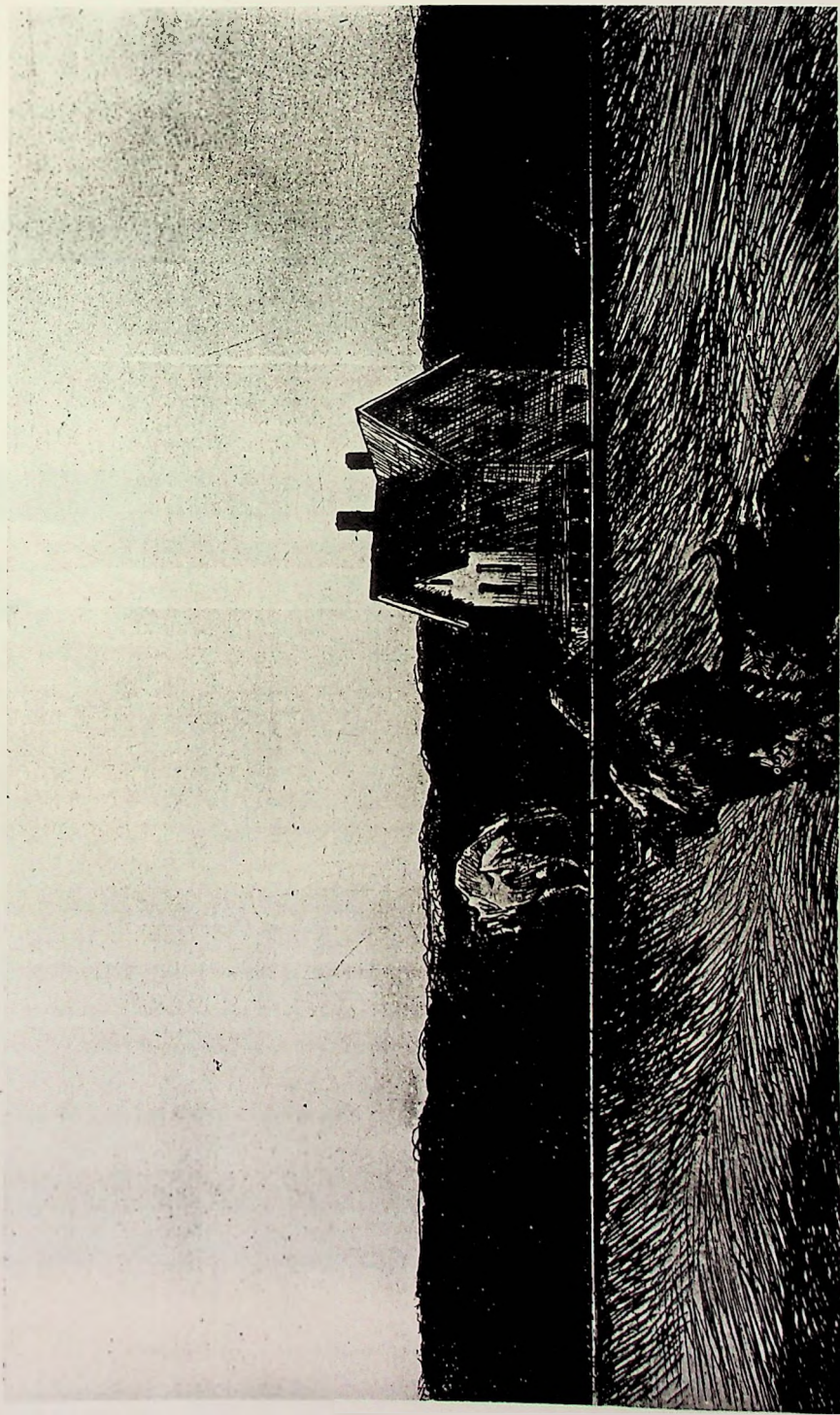
Pl. 378. *Soir Bleu*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper.
70.1268



Pl. 237. *New York Pavements*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 inches. Chrysler Museum at Norfolk, Virginia; on loan from the collection of



Pl. 264. *House by the Railroad*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



AMERICAN LANDSCAPE. 1920. Etching, 7 1/2 x 12 1/2"



Evening Wind

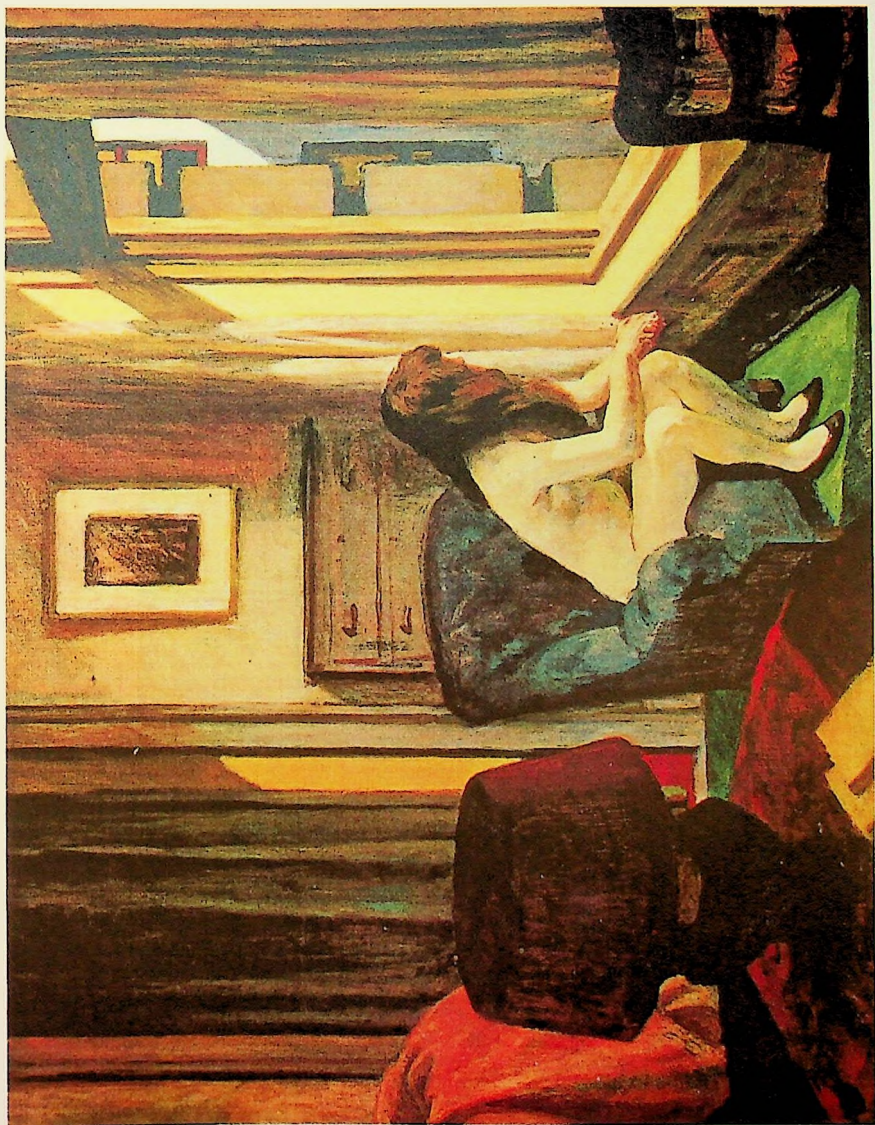


Pl. 980. *Moonlight Interior*, 1911-23. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 inches. Private collection.

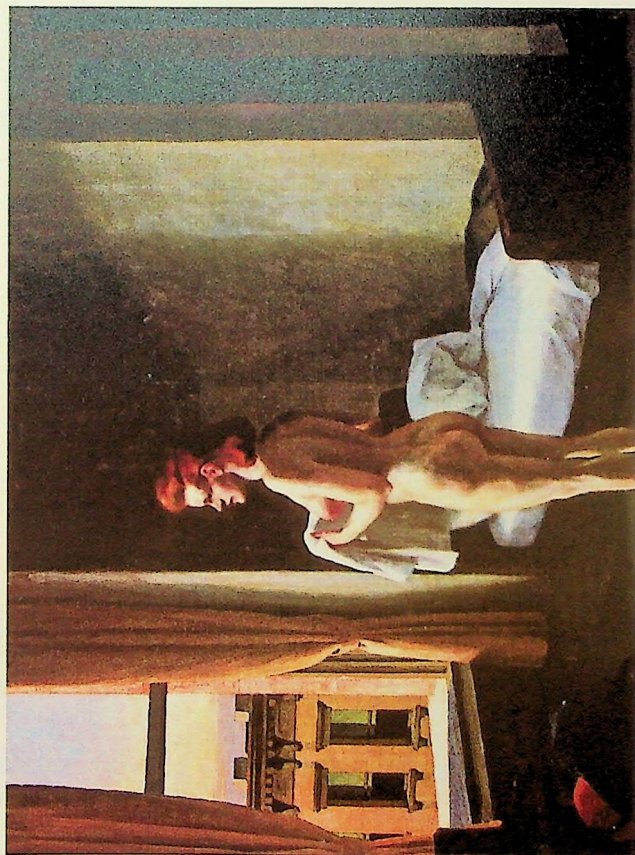




Charles Burchfield, *Watering Time*. Santa Barbara Museum



Pl. 393. *Eleanore J.M.*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 28 x 96 inches. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Pl. 394. *Morning in a City*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 41 x 60 inches. Williams College Museum of Art, Williams-town, Massachusetts.



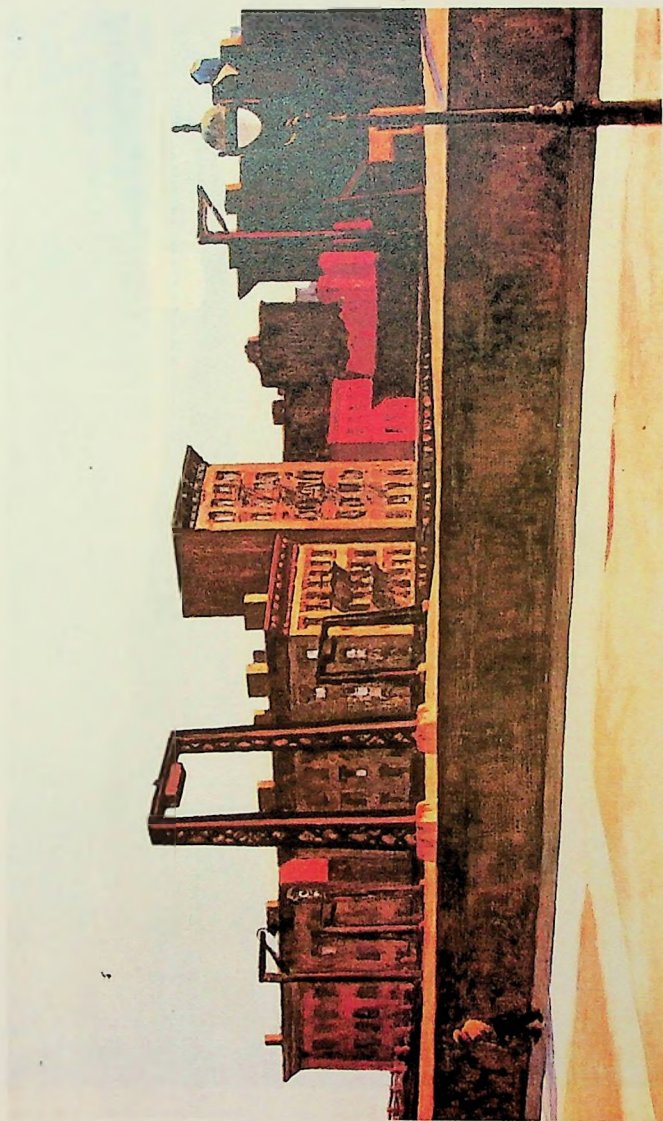
PL. 856. *Office at Night*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 22 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 25 inches. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Gift of the T. H. Walker Foundation.



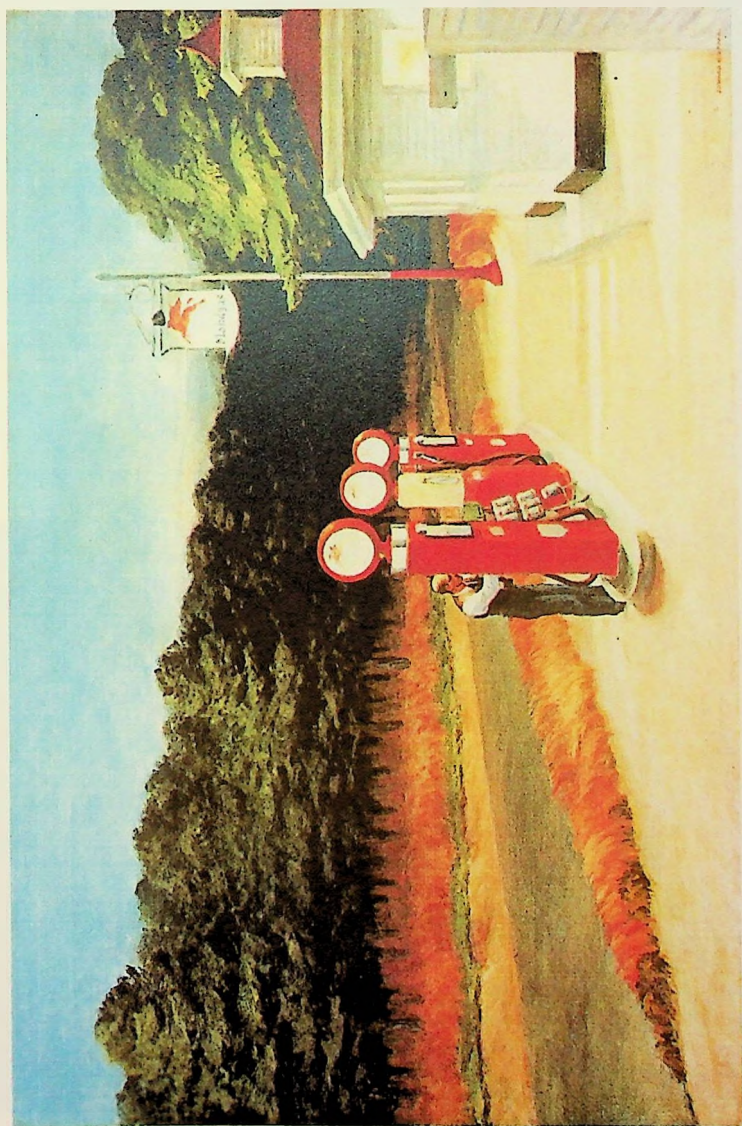
Pl. 366. *Room in New York*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 inches. F. M. Hall Collection; University of Nebraska Art Galleries, Lincoln.



Pl. 986. *Nighthawks*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 60 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The Art Institute of Chicago; Friends of American Art.



21. 247. *Manhattan Bridge Loop*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 35 x 60 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts; Gift of Mr. Stephen C. Clark.



THE MESSAGERS OF MODERNITY. BY J.M.W. TURNER. THE MESSAGERS OF MODERNITY. BY J.M.W. TURNER. THE MESSAGERS OF MODERNITY. BY J.M.W. TURNER.





Pl. 140. *Blackhead, Monthegan, 1916-19*. Oil on wood, 9½ x 13 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.1317



Pl. 139. *Blackhead, Monthegan, c. 1916-19*. Sanguine on paper, 12¼ x 16 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.967



Pl. 141. *Blackhead, Monthegan, 1916-19*. Oil on wood, 11¼ x 16 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine

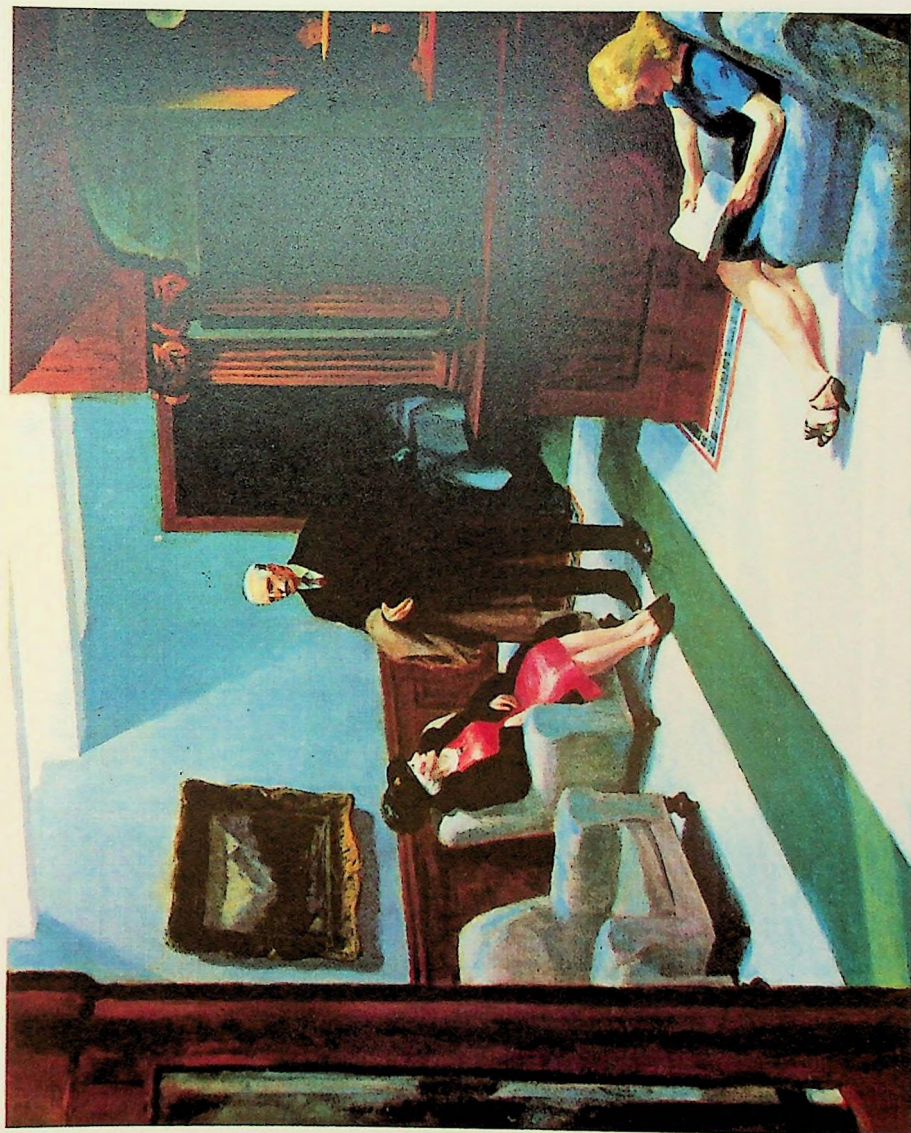


Pl. 142. *Blackhead, Monthegan, 1916-19*. Oil on wood, 11¼ x 16 inches. Private collection.





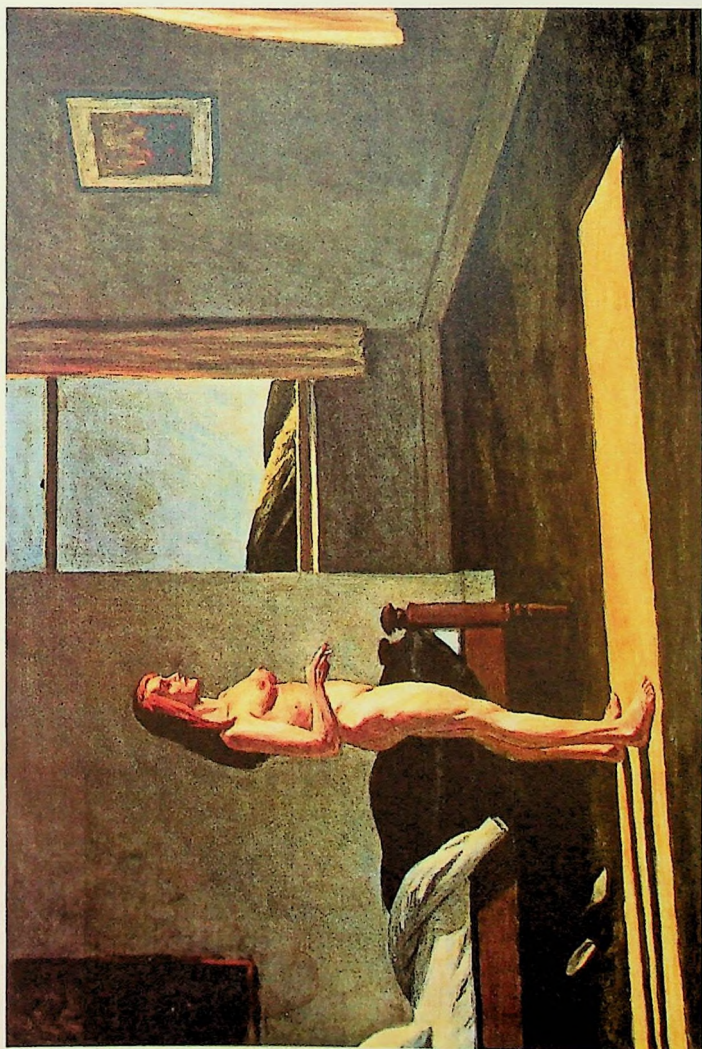
RIVER ROUGE PLANT



Pl. 283. *Hotel Lobby*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 32½ x 40¾ inches, Indianapolis Museum of Art; William Ray Adams Memorial Collection.

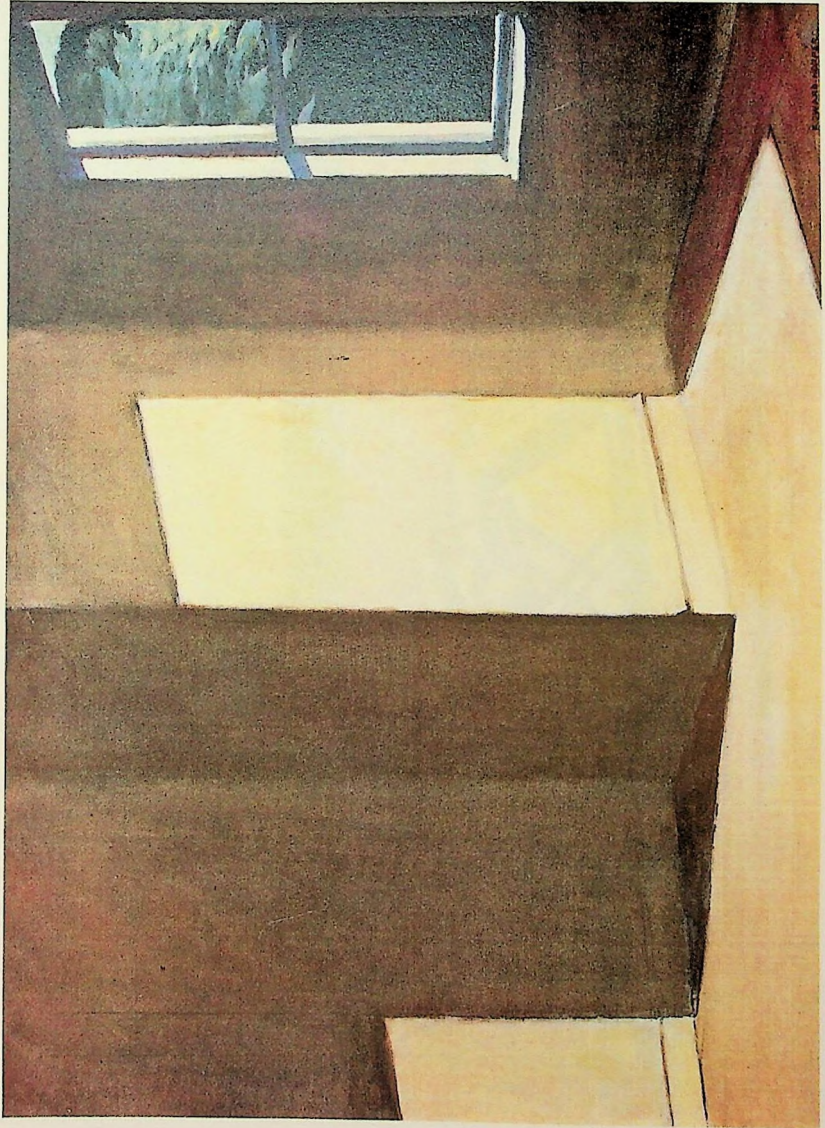


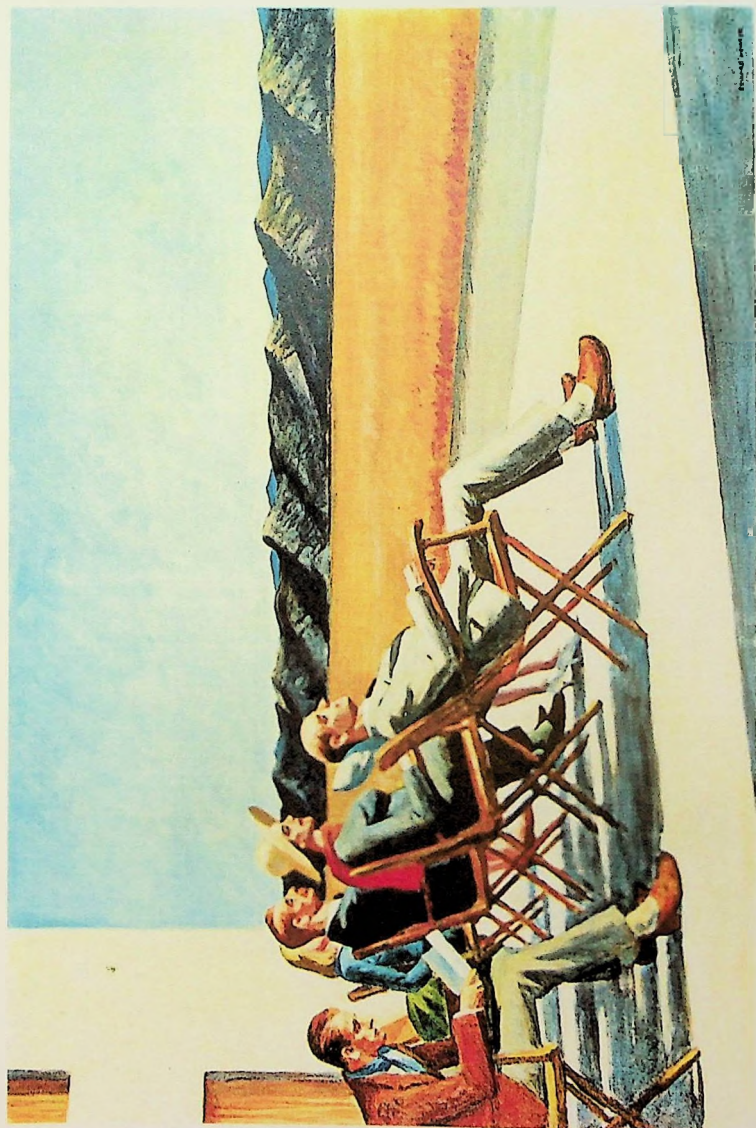
Pl. 400. *Morning Sun*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Howard Fund Purchase.



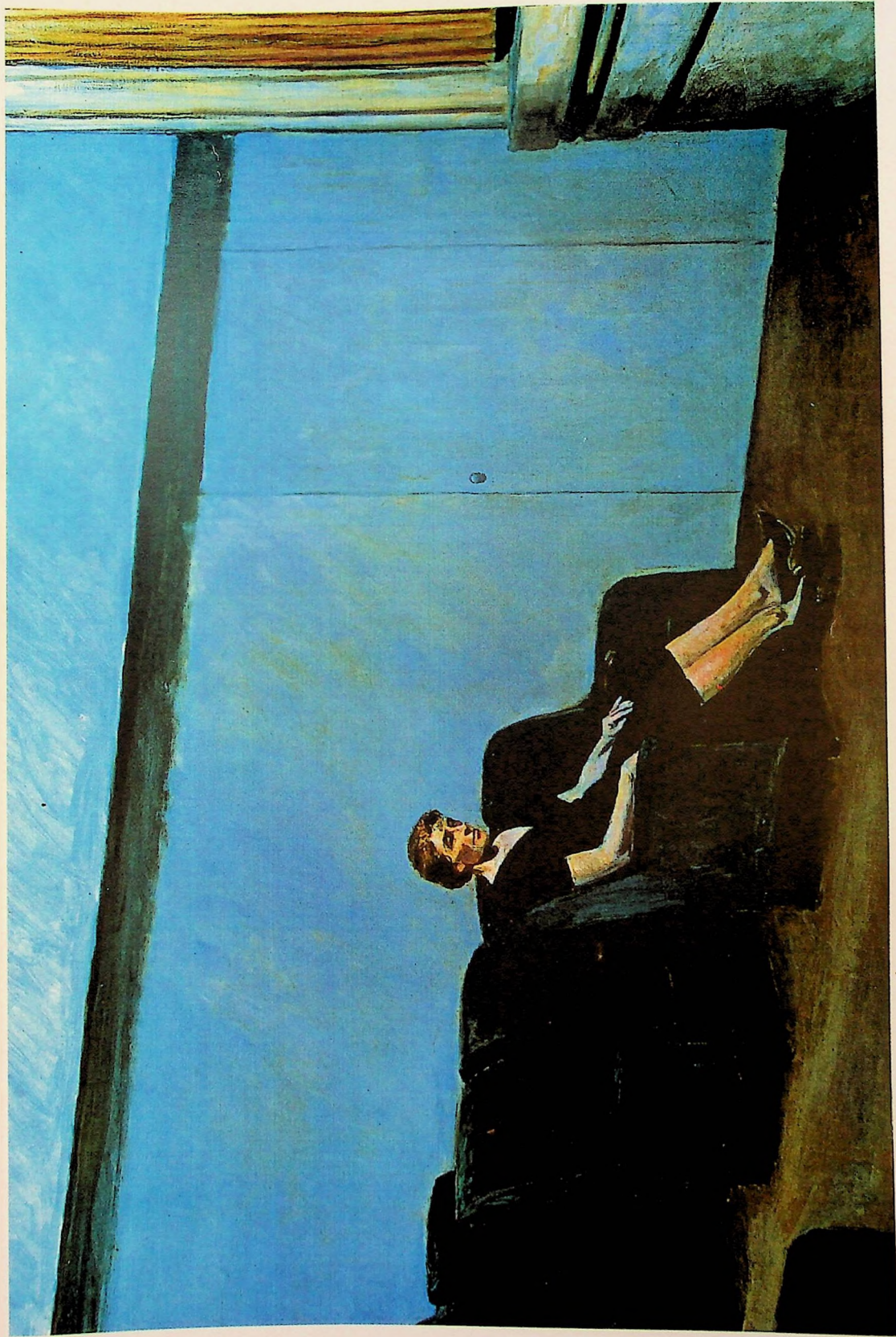
Pl. 427. *A Woman in the Sun*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Promised and Partial, 50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Hackett in honor of Edith and Lloyd Goodrich. P. 18.80



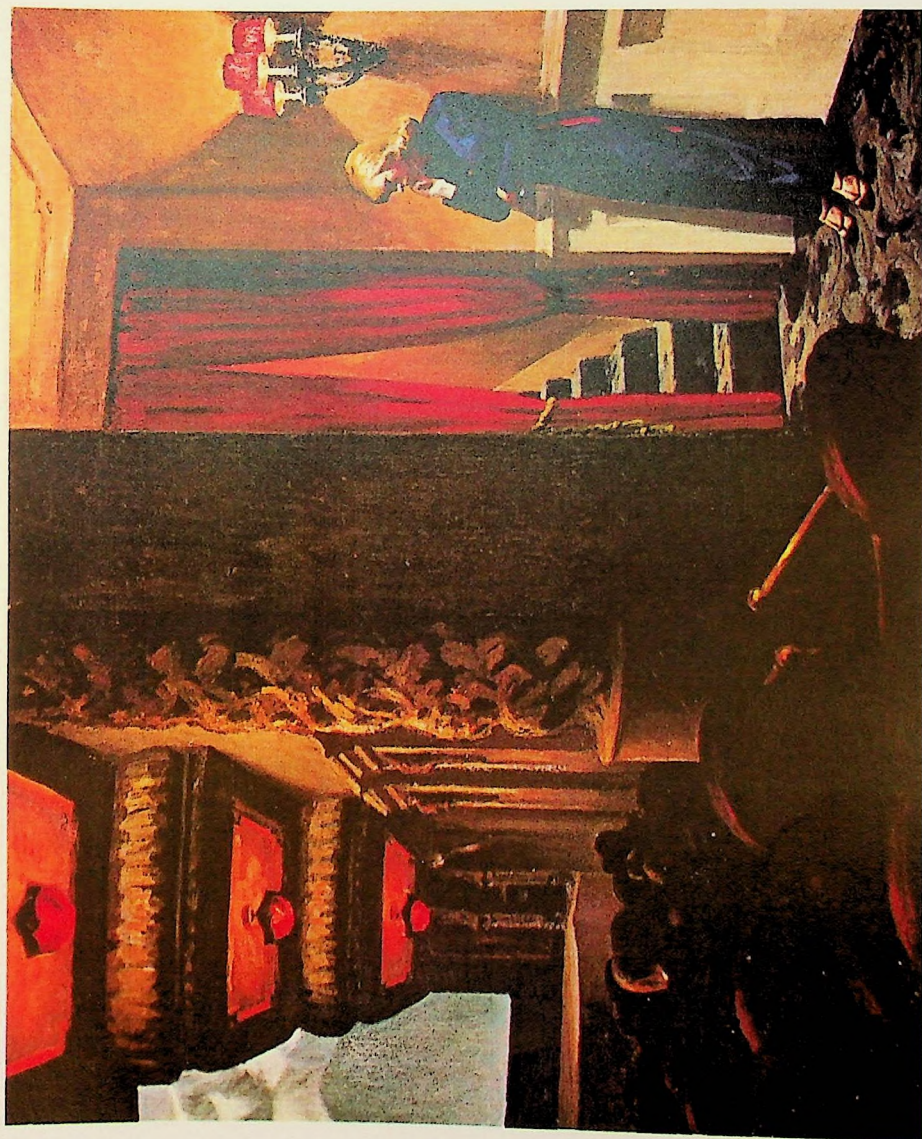




Pl. 426. *People in the Sun*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches. National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of S. C. Johnson and Son, Inc.



Intermission



Pl. 340. *New York Movie*, 1939. Oil on canvas, $32\frac{1}{4} \times 40\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

