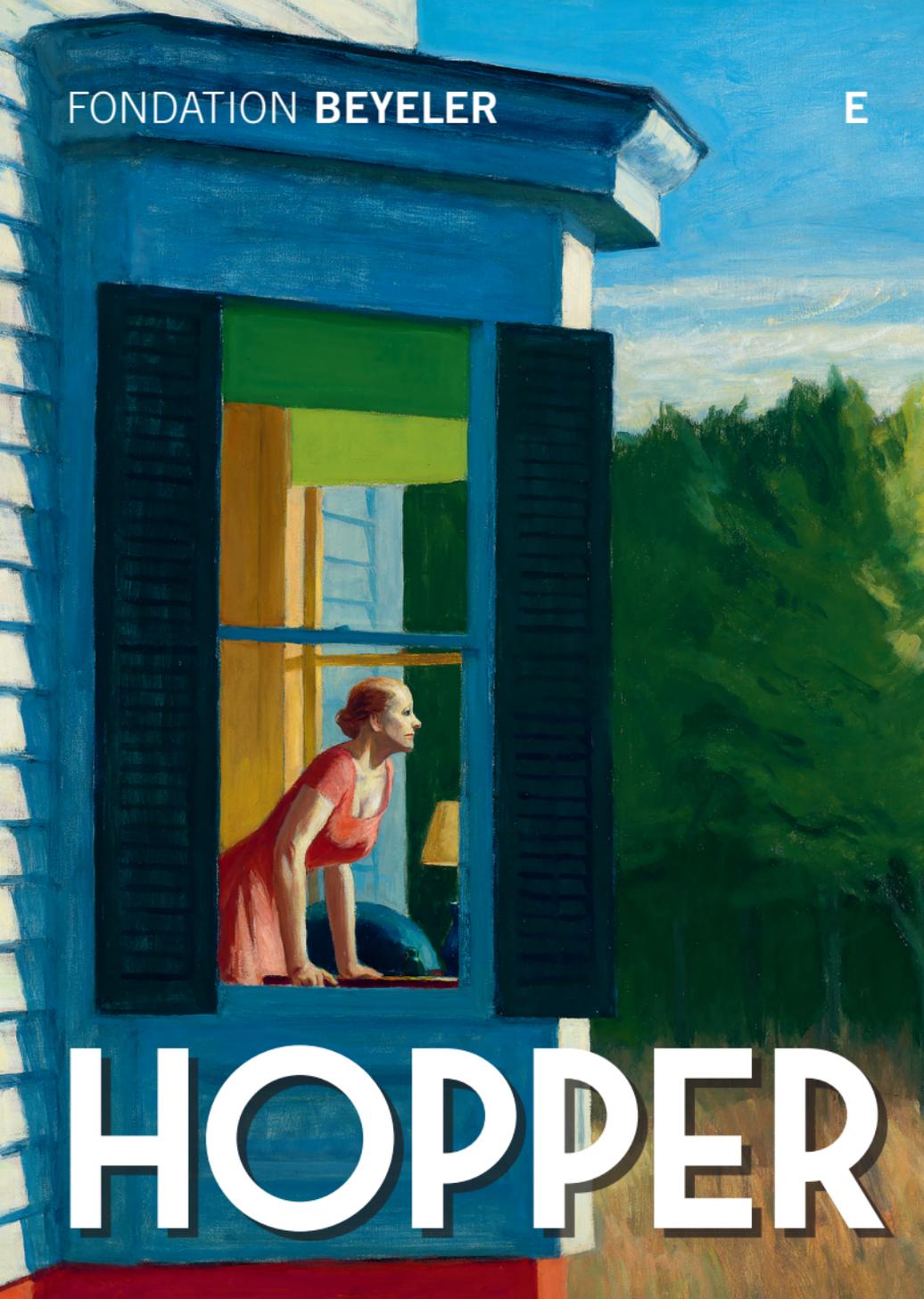


FONDATION BEYELER

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HOPPER

EDWARD HOPPER

26 January – 17 May 2020



Cover: Edward Hopper
Cape Cod Morning, 1950 (detail)
Oil on canvas, 86.7 x 102.3 cm
Smithsonian American Art Museum
© Heirs of Josephine Hopper/2020 ProLitteris, Zurich.
Photo: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gene Young

INTRODUCTION

Edward Hopper (1882–1967) is one of the great familiar yet ultimately little known exponents of modern art. Some of his works have become exceptionally popular and belong to the cultural memory of our age. Yet some aspects of his work are known only to a few specialists. Many of his paintings, as well as his watercolors and drawings, thus remain to be discovered. Our exhibition makes an important contribution in this respect. For the first time, it brings together Hopper's landscapes, including urban landscapes, providing visitors with deep insights into the artist's external and internal worlds.

Renowned filmmaker Wim Wenders, a long-time, self-avowed Hopper fan, has created a personal tribute to the artist, the 3D film *Two or Three Things I Know about Edward Hopper*, specially for the exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler. Starting with motifs from Hopper's pictures, he revives the artist's characteristic melancholy mood. The film is screened in the last room of the exhibition.

We hope you enjoy the exhibition and would be delighted for you to share your experience with others.

ROOM 1

1

Railroad Sunset, 1929

Railroad Sunset shows the passage from day into night, an evening sky displaying striking light and color mood. The image is built along horizontal bands. Above the gently undulating green hills, the sky is bathed in fiery red, merging subtly into orange, greenish yellow and blue. In the dusky foreground, a small signalman's house and telegraph pole bear lonely witness to civilization. In between, railway tracks span the full width of the image, suggesting the vastness of the landscape beyond. After their wedding in 1924, Josephine Nivison and Edward Hopper undertook several transcontinental train journeys to Colorado and New Mexico. In 1929, the year this painting was produced, they traveled from New York to Charleston, South Carolina, and to Massachusetts and Maine. Yet, rather than specific places, the painting represents the vastness and emptiness of American landscapes. Rather than a field survey, *Railroad Sunset* is a poetic, carefully composed memento.

ROOM 2

2

Square Rock, Ogunquit, 1914

Like Edward Hopper's other landscape paintings, this early oil painting shows only a small excerpt from a landscape. Its composition compels us to imagine the landscape beyond the pictorial space. The wide expanse of the sea, the rocks and the sky seem to reach out of the lateral edges. Edward Hopper painted this oil sketch on canvas in Ogunquit, Maine, where he spent the summer of 1914 and produced several views of the coast. In these rather quickly executed paintings, the artist studied light and shadow effects. He depicted boulders with bold brushstrokes, lending them sculptural corporeality, warmth and cold. Bright and dark patches alternate to dramatic lighting effect. On the left, the image is dominated by the eponymous square rock. Not only does it tower above the horizon line and the other rock formations, it also blocks out the view of the ocean's blue surface.

ROOM 3

3

Road and Houses, South Truro, 1930–1933

An empty road cuts across a hilly landscape dotted with houses. While the buildings nestle among the hill folds, they also stand apart by virtue of their geometrical, angular shapes and their light hues, like alien elements against a backdrop. The landscape is rendered as if viewed from a moving train. It is suggestive, moreover, of a movie scene flitting by: an image is shown briefly, only to disappear the very next moment in a possible, surprising turn of events. By such means and by the juxtaposition of seemingly deserted houses and an expansive landscape, Hopper creates a peculiar tension, giving the scene something fleeting. Ultimately, whatever may be happening inside the houses and in their natural surroundings remains unclear.

ROOM 3

4

Cobb's Barns, South Truro, 1930–1933

The atmospheric lighting and richly nuanced color palette merge the landscape and building into one whole. *Cobb's Barns, South Truro* shows a simple barn with extensions amidst the hilly landscape of Truro on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Here, Hopper and his wife spent their summers and ended up building a studio house. The large-format painting displays impressive brushwork: at the bottom of the picture, rough brushstrokes suggest swaying tufts of grass. The deeper our gaze penetrates the picture, the more delicate the application of paint becomes. On the horizon and in the gold-shimmering pale blue sky, the strokes are gently interwoven. White bands of clouds drift past above the barn's sharply delineated roof lying in shadow.

ROOM 4

5

The Bootleggers, 1925

This oil painting was inspired by the rise in bootlegging at the time of the Prohibition. It shows three men in a small motorboat heading for shore at daybreak. The boat lies deep in the water, its curved shape and high bow hugging the swell. With its tones of red, yellow and blue, it echoes the building sitting up high on a strip of land. In front of the large house with mansard roof and half-lowered blinds, a fourth person is waiting to take delivery of the contraband goods.

The men in the boat function as figures of identification for the viewer, who adopts their perspective and thus becomes part of the suspenseful, illicit events depicted. The painting is a rare example in Hopper's work for the combination of human figures and landscape by means of a narrative framework.

ROOM 4

6

5 A.M., 1937

Lighthouse Hill, 1927

During a stay in Maine in 1927, Edward Hopper devoted a series of images to one of the two lighthouses on Cape Elizabeth, the foundation walls of which date back to the 18th century. Hopper's liking for the lighthouse motif is probably linked to his notion of unlimited landscape depictions: lighthouses provide orientation in the boundless and constantly changing natural world.

Many of Hopper's titles specify times, such as *High Noon* (1949, Room 5) or *5 A.M.* (1937), in which the encounter of nature with civilization is brilliantly illustrated. Although the painting shows a landscape, so actually a static image of nature, the impermanence and changeability of the natural world are clearly visible: in the early morning, a lighthouse stands on an island located in front of the coastline, whipped by the waves, while onshore a factory looms with its high chimney.

ROOM 4

7

Lee Shore, 1941

Edward Hopper's fascination with ships dates back to his childhood. He grew up in Nyack, a small town on the Hudson River, which counted boat building among its key industries. Early on, he produced drawings and paintings of rowboats, sailboats, battleships and steamers. In later years, too, nautical motifs remained a constant in his artistic output. In *Lee Shore*, prominent horizontal lines define the composition. Hopper chose a perspective from land toward the sea and the sailboats. There is a smooth transition between the billowy grass and the rippling water. Like the house to the right, the boats also contrast with the landscape on account of their clearly delineated forms and rich detail. Sunlight and wind unite the various visual elements, however: the boats list dangerously in the fresh ocean breeze, their sails billowing, and the cloud formations are subject to the same forces.

ROOM 5

8

Cape Ann Granite, 1928

The painting shows a coastal landscape on Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Sloping green pastures are interspersed with massive granite rocks that throw slanting shadows, creating dramatic light effects. The blue sky above is streaked with cirrus clouds. The terrain falls sharply to the right, opening a deepening view that gives a sense of the ocean beyond. Hopper produced this oil painting during his stay on Cape Ann in the summer of 1928. Over the period of two months, he also produced numerous watercolors of the local landscape. *Cape Ann Granite* illustrates Hopper's interest in the corporeality of landscape and the intensity of individual perception. The immediacy of light and color gives the painting great expressiveness, allowing nature to come into its own as an important source of Hopper's imaginative power and of his personal vision of American landscape.

ROOM 5

9

Bridle Path, 1939

In this painting, Edward Hopper represents an identifiable site in Central Park, New York's rock-strewn green lung. In the background, we see the lower floors of The Dakota, a legendary apartment building located on the corner of 72nd Street and Central Park West. Three elegant riders, two women and a man, are galloping along the park's bridle path. The horses race toward an underpass crossing the street that connects the West and the East Sides. The white horse rears up and we see the rider struggling to control the animal. Whatever triggers the horse's fear remains hidden to the viewer. Hopper has created an exemplary urban landscape, which illustrates with great subtlety that the forces of nature, often invisible to man, are difficult to control through civilization, epitomized by the city.

ROOM 5

10

The City, 1927

This urban view centers on a house in "Second Empire" style. It is surrounded by plain buildings and its rounded corner faces a large square. The image also shows modern high-rise buildings. However, unlike many painters and photographers of his time, Hopper was not particularly interested in skyscrapers: here, they are radically cut off by the picture's upper edge. The starting point for this painting was New York's Washington Square, near which Hopper's town apartment was located. Yet the view does not exactly reproduce the square, which the artist used more as an inspiration to depict a selection of urban architectural styles from different eras. The high-angle perspective brings into particularly clear focus the multifaceted architectural make-up of the metropolis. At the same time, through muted colors, the square's strictly geometrical design and the isolation of the human figures, Hopper emphasizes that these surroundings offer little room for untamed nature and social interaction to develop.

ROOM 6

11

Cape Cod Morning, 1950

Edward Hopper's representations of female figures are largely based on his wife Josephine Nivison Hopper. Following their wedding in 1924, she served as a model for all of her husband's female figures, her distinctive features always altered or abstracted. In Hopper's images, people are mostly represented alone or in pairs. *Cape Cod Morning* shows a woman in profile. She stands in a bay window, physically shielded from the outside world by the architecture. Her posture is tense: both hands on a table, she leans forward and looks intently outside. Her gaze is directed toward something beyond the pictorial space. This focus on events that remain invisible to the viewer is typical of Hopper's figures. In this painting, it helps him create tension and an eerie atmosphere.

ROOM 6

12

Second Story Sunlight, 1960

Edward Hopper painted *Second Story Sunlight* seven years before his death during his last period of work, in which the perception of light became his main subject. In this picture, too, the houses' facades are drenched in gleaming sunlight. On the second story of the middle house, a woman sunbathes in a bikini, sitting on a balcony railing. A second figure next to her appears to have momentarily dropped the newspaper to enjoy the sunlight on her face. With his depiction of light, the painter creates an impressive interplay of bright and dark. While the colors glow in the intense sunlight, the shadows close by seem ominous. The dark backdrop of the forest brings into stark relief the light-flooded houses' angular shapes.

ROOM 6

13

Two Puritans, 1945

The depiction of houses is one of Edward Hopper's major themes and he almost only painted houses old enough to tell stories or stir viewers' buried memories. For Hopper, houses represent the invisible worlds of those who have lived in them. Some of his houses are even reminiscent of self-portraits – withdrawn and melancholy. The buildings in *Two Puritans* have often been interpreted as stand-ins for Hopper, who was of tall stature, and his significantly smaller wife Josephine. The title, chosen by Hopper himself, may allude to the couple's strict, puritanical lifestyle. Although the two houses are connected by a white picket fence, they seem separate from one another. Their regular architecture contrasts with the natural world around them: the grass, the three evenly spaced trees in the foreground and the impenetrable wood visible to the left.

ROOM 7

14

Study for Solitude # 56, 1944

After Edward Hopper's death, along with many paintings, prints and watercolors, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York also received 2,500 drawings spanning the artist's career. During his lifetime, Hopper had largely kept the drawings locked away. Many had served as preliminary sketches for his paintings, while others had been conceived as self-contained works. In *Study for Solitude # 56*, the viewer stands on a road to nowhere, which leads through an "empty", solitary landscape. In this seemingly minimalist drawing, Hopper does not represent a specific geographic location, but rather captures a mood.

ROOM 7

15

Road and Rocks, around 1962

In *Road and Rocks*, a late drawing, the viewer finds himself in the middle of a road. The landscape appears to be flying by – to the right, a rock face threatens to push into the roadway, to the left bushes or trees pile up in soft forms. Perception takes place from a perspective of fast motion, yet the viewer must keep his eye on the uncertain stretch of road and narrow curve, he must see in time what is approaching. Hopper seems to have stopped or even suspended time. His drawing is reminiscent of a single frame in a filmstrip, yet the actual action does not unfold – at least not on paper. The artist draws no further picture, no next installment. His set remains empty. The drawing sheet becomes a projection surface: spellbound, we look toward what we cannot see, what we imagine and what the next moment holds for us, mentally and emotionally.

ROOM 8

16

Mowfield Plantation, 1942

In this watercolor, Edward Hopper provides a striking image of the family estate of writer Elizabeth Amis Cameron Blanchard in North Carolina. She was one of Hopper's earliest and most important patrons and the watercolor was to serve as an illustration for one of her books. The house's front facade, with its splendid, two-level veranda, as well as wide parts of the park are bathed in sunlight. An impenetrable-looking forest, most likely an addition by Hopper, rises up alongside and behind the building, emanating something menacing. The forest's offshoots have advanced into the garden and throw their shadows onto the house. Dark shadows also appear in the foreground on the well-kept lawn, contributing to the image's eerie atmosphere. Civilization and nature are brought into stark contrast.

ROOM 8

17

Gas, 1940

Hopper's painting of a gas station is among his most important images. The composition is first and foremost a sophisticated orchestration of interpenetrating lighting moods: on the one hand, dusk, the transition from day to night, which defines the work's atmosphere; on the other hand, artificial lighting in the gas station's windows, projecting patches of light outside the building, its source hidden from view. The unfathomability of the forest that lines the road leading into the darkness beyond contrasts with three gas pumps standing in a regular row. Their perspectival foreshortening reinforces the sense of being "sucked" into the picture's depth. Pegasus, the poets' winged horse, symbol of flights in fantasy, seems to rise above the forest. How small and insignificant the pump attendant seems by comparison. While his precise actions remain unclear, he does not seem to be taking part in the flow of thoughts set into motion by this image.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

22 July 1882 Edward Hopper is born in Nyack, New York, a small town on the Hudson River.

1899–1905 To begin with, he studies commercial art, then from 1901 painting at the New York School of Art.

1905–1925 Hopper works as a freelance illustrator and graphic designer for New York advertising agencies. He is already over 40 when he becomes successful as a painter.

1906–1910 Three trips to Europe: Hopper spends most of this time in Paris. Sketches from this time reflect his growing interest in color, light and shadow effects.

From 1912 onward, Hopper often spends his summers on the coast in Maine and Massachusetts.

1923 He begins producing landscape watercolors.

1924 He marries Josephine Nivison. The couple undertakes many train and car journeys across the country. Growing exhibition and sales successes with his watercolors and oil paintings.

1933 First retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1950 and 1964 Retrospectives at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

1967 Edward Hopper dies aged 84. His estate of over 3,000 works is left to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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Further publications on Edward Hopper are available
from our Art Shop: shop.fondationbeyeler.ch

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Upcoming exhibition:

GOYA
17 May – 16 August 2020

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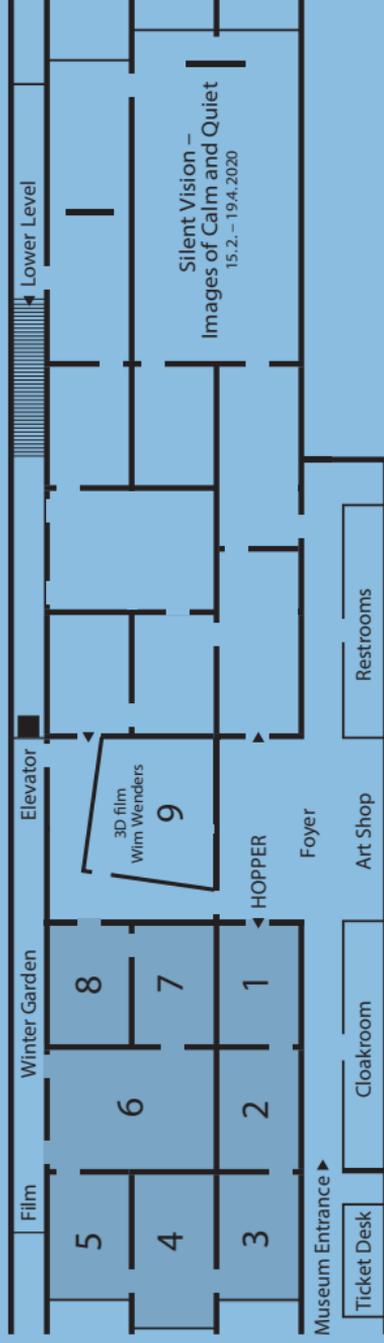
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26 January – 17 May 2020



Caution: please do not touch the works of art!