

WHITNEY

Press Release

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THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT *MODERN LIFE: EDWARD HOPPER AND HIS TIME*

October 28, 2010–April 10, 2011



Edward Hopper 1882-1967, *Woman Walking*, 1906. Oil on wood, 13 x 9 1/4 in. (33.02 x 23.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Josephine N. Hopper Bequest 70.1293. ©Heirs of Josephine N. Hopper, licensed by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Photograph by Robert E. Mates

NEW YORK, August 23, 2010 – As American artists rebelled against the academic art and aristocratic portraiture that predominated at the turn of the twentieth century, they began looking to modern life for their subject matter. One of central figures in this dramatic shift was Edward Hopper, whose work is exhibited in relation to his most important contemporaries in *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time*, opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art on October 28, 2010.

Placing Hopper beside such artists as Robert Henri, William Glackens, John Sloan, George Ault, Guy Pène du Bois, George Bellows, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Charles Demuth, Ralston Crawford, Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, Charles Burchfield, Ben Shahn, Lisette Model, Thomas Hart Benton, and Reginald Marsh, the show traces the development of realism in American art in the first half of the twentieth century. The exhibition, organized by Whitney curator Barbara Haskell and senior curatorial assistant Sasha Nicholas, and shown previously in different form at the Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg, and the Kunsthal Rotterdam, is being installed in the second-floor Mildred & Herbert Lee Galleries, where it remains on view until April 10, 2011.

The work of Edward Hopper (1882-1967) has been presented often by the Whitney throughout the institution's history, beginning with his first-ever solo exhibition, held at the Whitney Studio Club in 1920, but *Modern Life* is the first Whitney exhibition to focus specifically on the context in which he worked. It follows Hopper's evolution into America's most iconic realist painter, tracing his connections to the artistic movements that paralleled his work while also highlighting his development of a singular aesthetic that would ultimately distinguish his art from that of his contemporaries.

Modern Life begins in 1900, the year that Hopper arrived on New York's art scene. In the exhibition's first section, his art is seen alongside the work of the Ashcan School artists, who boldly depicted the changing social and political environment of New York using rapid, loose, impressionistic brushstrokes, heavy impasto, and a dark, gritty palette. In the first decade of the century, Hopper studied with both Robert Henri and John Sloan, and quickly began to exhibit with the artists in their circle. The lessons Hopper learned from them—especially the urge to paint everyday, even mundane subjects, and a passion for capturing dramatic light effects—were immediately evident in his early paintings. Among the wealthy art patrons of the time, only Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney would stake her reputation and fortune on the work of the Ashcan artists and their successors. Her advocacy, crucial to the flourishing of a distinctly American modernism, led to the founding of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1930 and to the formation of the collection on view in this exhibition.

The next section of *Modern Life* examines Hopper's relationship to artists who painted the excitement of urban life in the "Roaring Twenties," including Guy Pène du Bois and George Bellows who, like Hopper, were students of Robert Henri and represented a younger generation of the realist school initiated by the Ashcan group. These artists, together with

sculptors such as Gaston Lachaise, departed from the loose brushwork of the Ashcan aesthetic, instead using smooth curves and monumental, tubular forms to depict their figures. Purged of anecdotal detail, their compositions are balanced between the idealized forms of abstraction and the particularities of realism. Though not as stylized as the work of these artists, Hopper's paintings and prints of the 1920s share a similar approach. Works like his iconic *Early Sunday Morning* are drawn from observed reality and yet are devoid of characteristic details that tie them to a specific place and time. Hopper was not interested in the lively social world depicted by many of his colleagues, but he shared their interest in capturing moments of solitude and in using bold, simplified forms to infuse his scenes with dramatic monumentality.

Also explored are the connections between Hopper's art and that of the Precisionists, who began to paint American factories, skyscrapers, and machine-made structures during the 1920s. Characterized by crisp lines, hard-edged geometric shapes, and flat planes of color, the Precisionist style embodied the sense of order, logic, and purity identified with science and the machine. For many of the Precisionists, including Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, and Ralston Crawford, this style also reflected a desire to create a distinctly American aesthetic rooted in shared national experience. Although Hopper did not share their optimistic embrace of industry and its hard-edged aesthetic, his work of the period shares certain affinities with theirs. For Hopper, as for the Precisionists, architecture offered a means of exploring formal geometries and light effects. In Hopper's paintings of urban scenes and industrial structures, as in those of the Precisionists, the interaction between diagonal planes and expanses of light is often as much a focal point as the subject itself. Both Hopper and the Precisionists depicted recognizable subjects, but their work conveys in equal measure the desire to reduce modern architectural forms to their abstract essence.

The next section of the exhibition examines Hopper's rural paintings of the 1930s in the context of other American artists who retreated to the countryside in search of a reprieve from the commotion of modern urban life. In 1930, Hopper and his wife Jo began spending summers in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where he painted the coastal landscape and scenes inspired by the small town life he observed there. Together with Charles Burchfield, who painted in and around Buffalo, New York, Hopper came to represent the movement known as American Scene painting. Both artists elicited from the vernacular architecture and landscapes of small town America a mood of desolation and melancholy, in part for a way of life that was rapidly being abandoned as more people moved to urban centers. For many viewers, their art captured

the sturdy individualism at the heart of the American ethos, particularly during the hardships of the Great Depression.

The exhibition's final room presents Hopper's urban paintings of the 1930s alongside those of the Social Realists, including Reginald Marsh, Paul Cadmus, and the Soyer brothers, Raphael and Isaac. Hopper was friendly with these artists—all were closely allied with the Whitney Studio Club and exhibited frequently at the Whitney Museum after its opening in 1931. At the time, Hopper's depictions of city life were often associated with those of the Social Realist circle, but his images differ from the work of his contemporaries, who gravitated to the chaos and vitality of urban life in the 1930s. Unlike his peers, Hopper uses the city as a springboard for exploring moments of solitude, transforming scenes of everyday life into meditations on the human condition.

Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time includes approximately eighty-five works in a range of media, primarily from the Whitney's collection, which includes more than 2,500 works from Hopper's estate bequeathed to the Whitney in 1968, and combining well-known works with rarely exhibited early paintings and works on paper. Also featured are several loans of key Hopper paintings from other museums, including The Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum, and the Neuberger Museum of Art. Nearly all the works by other artists in the show are from the Whitney's collection, with the exception of a John Sloan painting, *The Haymarket, Sixth Avenue* (1907), originally owned by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, now in the collection of The Brooklyn Museum. In addition, the exhibition features a case of photographs of Hopper at work, with other artists, and at various stages of his life, drawn from the archives of the Whitney's Frances Mulhall Achilles Library.

Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time is accompanied by a 250-page illustrated catalogue with essays by American and German scholars, produced in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, which appeared at the Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg, and the Kunsthal Rotterdam in 2009-10.

Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time

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About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th- and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is regarded as the preeminent collection of American art and includes major works and materials from the estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, as well as significant works by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in America today. First housed on West 8th Street, the Whitney relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and in 1966 inaugurated its present home at 945 Madison Avenue, designed by Marcel Breuer. The Whitney is currently moving ahead with plans to build a second facility, designed by Renzo Piano, located in downtown New York at the entrance to the High Line in the Meatpacking District.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

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| Jill Magid: A Reasonable Man in a Box | Through September 12, 2010 |
| Off the Wall: Part 1--Thirty Performative Actions | Through September 19, 2010 |
| Christian Marclay: Festival | Through September 26, 2010 |
| Heat Waves in a Swamp: The Paintings of Charles Burchfield | Through October 17, 2010 |
| Collecting Biennials | Through November 28, 2010 |
| Lee Friedlander: America by Car | Opens September 4, 2010 |
| Off the Wall: Part 2--Seven Works by Trisha Brown | September 30--October 3, 2010 |
| Sara VanDerBeek: To Think of Time | September 17--December 5, 2010 |
| Paul Thek: Diver, A Retrospective | October. 21, 2010--January. 9, 2011 |
| Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time | October 28, 2010--April 10, 2011 |
| Charles LeDray: workworkworkworkwork | November 18, 2010--February 13, 2011 |

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only: \$6. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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