

Pre- & Post-visit Materials for Teachers

Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time
October 28, 2010-April 10, 2011



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About these Materials

How can these materials be used?

These materials provide a framework for preparing you and your students for a visit to the exhibition and offer suggestions for follow up classroom reflection and lessons. The discussions and activities introduce some of the exhibition's key themes and concepts.

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Which grade levels are these pre- and post-visit materials intended for?

These lessons and activities have been written for Elementary, Middle, or High School students. We encourage you to adapt and build upon them in order to meet your teaching objectives and students' needs.

Learning standards

The projects and activities in these curriculum materials address national and state learning standards for the arts, English language arts, social studies, and technology.

Links to National Learning Standards.

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Comprehensive guide to National Learning Standards by content area.

<http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/index.shtml>

New York State Learning Standards.

<http://www.nysatl.nysed.gov/standards.html>

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/standards.html>

New York City Department of Education's Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts, grades K-12.

<http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/blueprint.html>

Feedback

Please let us know what you think of these materials. How did you use them? What worked or didn't work?

Email us at schoolprograms@whitney.org.

For more information about our programs and resources for schools, educators, teens, and families, please visit whitney.org/Education.

Cover image: Edward Hopper, *New York Interior*, c. 1921. Oil on canvas, 24 1/4 x 29 1/4 in. (61.6 x 74.3 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Josephine N. Hopper Bequest 70.1200. © Heirs of Josephine N. Hopper, licensed by the Whitney Museum of American Art

At the Museum

Guided visits

We invite you and your students to visit the Whitney to see the *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time* exhibition. To schedule a visit, please visit whitney.org/education/k12. Guided visits are hour-long thematic tours that build upon classroom learning. We introduce students to three to five works of art through careful looking, discussions, and activities that incorporate the artist's voice and process. Museum educators lead inquiry based conversations as well as sketching or writing activities in the galleries.

Guided Visit Themes

School Programs uses a thematic-based approach to teaching in the galleries. We have recently updated our themes in order to create more thoughtful connections between K-12 classroom learning and the art on view. When you schedule a guided visit, you will be able to choose one of the following themes.

Artist as Observer (K-12)

How do artists represent the world around them? How do they choose to show people and places? This theme can address topics including New York City, community, landscape, and portraiture. This is a great thematic tour for first-time visitors as it incorporates visual literacy skills and introduces students to multiple ways of looking at and talking about art.

Artist as Storyteller (K-12)

How do artists tell a story? What is their point of view? This theme addresses ELA concepts such as narrative, tone, character, and setting and is recommended for literacy and writing classes.

Artist as Experimenter (K-12)

How do artists push boundaries and explore new concepts? This theme examines how artists experiment with materials, processes, and ideas. Younger students may look at how artists use formal elements such as line, shape, color, texture, and composition, or how they transform everyday objects. Older students may consider more conceptual questions, such as "What makes this art?" and "Why is this in a museum?"

Artist as Critic (6-12)

How do artists respond to the social, political, and cultural climate of their time? What does their work tell us about American life and culture? How can art serve as a catalyst for change? Students examine how artists respond to the topics that shape history, politics, and contemporary culture. This thematic tour can address subjects such as current events, war, gender, race, politics, and activism.

Working with Museum Educators

If you are scheduled for a guided visit, your museum educator will contact you in advance. Let them know what preparatory work you have done, how this connects to the rest of your curricula, and what you would like your visit to focus on. The more you tell them, the better they can prepare for your visit. Please also let them know if your students have any specific needs. If you are visiting during public hours, you and your students (in chaperoned groups) are welcome to stay after your guided tour.

All educators and students who have a guided tour will receive a pass which offers free admission to the Whitney through the end of the school year.

Self-guided visits

High School students are welcome to visit the museum during public hours in a self-guided capacity. A maximum of 60 students may arrive at the museum together and must then divide into small groups (no more than 4 students) to visit the galleries. One chaperone must accompany 15 students.

Discuss museum rules with students before your visit. We have found that works of art are more accessible if students are provided with some structure or direction, and we recommend giving students a task to complete while in the galleries. You may want to create a worksheet, free-writing or poetry activity, or a sketching assignment. Self-guided visits must be scheduled in advance.

For more information, please visit whitney.org/education/k12.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Whitney!

About the Exhibition

Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time traces the development of realism in American art between 1900 and 1940, emphasizing the diverse ways that artists depicted the sweeping transformations in urban and rural life that occurred during this period. The exhibition highlights the work of Edward Hopper, whose use of the subject matter of modern life to portray universal human experiences made him America's most iconic realist painter of the twentieth century.

Drawn primarily from the Whitney Museum's extensive holdings, *Modern Life* places Hopper's achievements in the context of his contemporaries—the Ashcan School painters with whom he came of age as an artist in the century's first decades, the 1920s Precisionist artists, whose explorations of abstract architectural geometries mirrored those of Hopper, and a younger generation of American Scene painters, who worked alongside Hopper in New York during the 1930s. *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time* includes approximately eighty works in a range of media by Hopper and artists such as John Sloan, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Helen Levitt, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, Ben Shahn, and Reginald Marsh.

Pre-visit Activities

Before visiting the Whitney, we recommend that you and your students explore and discuss some of the ideas and concepts featured in the *Modern Life* exhibition. You may want to introduce students to at least one work of art that they will see at the Museum (see the Featured Artist section of this guide for examples of artists and works that may have particular relevance to the classroom).

Objectives:

- Introduce students to the concept of modern life.
- Introduce students to themes they may encounter on their museum visit such as “Artist as Observer” and “Artist as Critic.”
- Make connections to artists’ sources of inspiration such as the city or industry.
- Ask students to reflect upon what inspires them when they create works of art.

1. Modern Life

Ask your students to define the word “modern.” Modern is defined by m-w.com as “of, relating to, or characteristic of the present or the immediate past.”

The artists in this exhibition are all responding to different aspects of “modern life.” During the first half of the twentieth century, American artists responded in highly complex and personal ways to the profound social and physical transformations in American society—the growth of big cities and modern industry, the arrival of millions of immigrants, and two world wars. Life had changed irrevocably.

As the United States became increasingly urbanized and new products were invented, artists found innovative ways to represent and document this period of change. The huge influx of immigrant groups and new cultures, and the development of technological innovations such as skyscrapers, automobiles, and electricity created a fast-paced, optimistic atmosphere in which American artists sought to express their perceptions of the modern world and the excitement of the new century.

Let students know that the artists they will be studying at the Museum are all working in this new atmosphere and are experimenting with ways to depict the changing world around them.

2. Artist as Observer

Show students George Bellows’s painting *Dempsey and Firpo* (for an image and more information, see page 13 of this guide). Ask them to spend a minute looking at the image. Note the absence of women in this scene, according to social conventions of the time. Ask your students to create a narrative or story around the image. What is going on? What might have happened before the moment depicted? What might happen afterwards?

Alternately you can ask students to pretend that they are the sports announcers at this famous boxing match. They can write down everything that they would say to narrate the event.

3. Artist as Critic

In 1907, the photographer Alfred Stieglitz was on board a ship going to Europe when he noticed the scene depicted in *The Steerage* (see page 16). He photographed a cross-section of the ship—the upper deck where more affluent passengers passed the time of day, and the bottom part of the

ship called steerage, where many immigrants traveled because it was the cheapest option, and where they were forced to endure crowded, unsanitary conditions.

Ask students to look carefully at the image and make a list of five nouns, verbs, and adjectives that describe what they see. Have them use these words to create descriptive sentences. Then ask them to share their writing with the rest of the class.

Ask students to discuss similarities and differences they notice between the people in the top half of the image and the people in the bottom half. Ask them to imagine what it might have been like to travel for two to three weeks in this manner.

Share the following information with your students about immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century. Between 1880 and 1900, about ten million immigrants came to the United States. Many left their homes to escape oppression or persecution, or for the opportunity of jobs, freedom, and money in the United States. By the turn of the century, about one million immigrants arrived annually and immigration had changed the face of America's population, industry, and culture.

4. Sources of Inspiration

Artists including Edward Hopper, George Bellows, Charles Demuth, and John Sloan drew inspiration from a rapidly changing society. For the first time in American art, artists depicted such modern developments as movie theaters, railroad trains, skyscrapers, and factories as primary subjects in their work. Ask students to look outside their school or home and make a few quick sketches of the things they observe that they think are interesting. What types of everyday objects, people, or places are inspiring to them? Why? What do their sketches tell us about life today?

Post-visit Activities

Objectives

- Enable students to reflect upon and discuss some of the ideas and themes from the exhibition.
- Ask students to further explore some of the featured artists' approaches through art-making and writing activities.
- Have students compare what life was like in New York City in the first part of the twentieth century with life today.

1. Museum Visit Reflection

After your museum visit, ask students to take a few minutes to write about their experience. What do they remember most? What did they learn about Edward Hopper and other artists? What new ideas did the exhibition give them? What other questions do they have? Ask students to share their thoughts with the class.

2. Artist as Observer II

Following up on the pre-visit Artist as Observer activity focusing on Bellows's painting *Dempsey and Firpo*, ask students to look through a newspaper and select an article that describes a recent event (either from entertainment, sports, or current news) that they find interesting. Ask them to create a collage or sketch depicting what that event might look like. Ask them to consider the following questions. What will the focus of their work be? Whose point of view will they represent? What details will they add so people know what the event is?

3. Artist as Critic II

In *The Steerage*, Alfred Stieglitz depicted a scene showing travelers on a boat headed to Europe in 1907. The people in the bottom half of the photograph are likely prospective immigrants who have been denied entrance to the United States and are being sent back unsatisfactory or dangerous living conditions in their home countries.

Ask students to discuss how traveling has changed since 1907. The people in this photograph took trains and boats to go from place to place. What are ways that your students have traveled?

Younger students can pretend they are on a journey and write a postcard describing their experiences on a subway, bus, airplane, boat, or car. Ask them to consider what their mode of transportation looks like, what it sounds like, and what it might even smell like.

Ask older students to do some research and write a report about their own family's immigration or migration history. Ask them to interview elders in their families to learn where they came from, when they came to or moved within the United States, and what prompted their journeys. Ask students to present their reports to the class.

4. Timeline

Divide your students into groups and have them research the following decades of American history: 1900-1910, 1910-1920, 1920-1930, and 1930-1940. Ask them to create timelines highlighting the major events of their decade. They may want to focus on the world wars, the Great Depression, immigration, the construction of skyscrapers, or social changes). Use their information to make one big timeline for the class.

5. Views from your window

Edward Hopper, John, Sloan, Helen Levitt, and others depicted what they saw on the streets of New York City. Ask students to build upon the sketch they did in the pre-visit activity and create a work of art inspired by the view from their window. (If they didn't do the pre-visit activity, ask them to first create a sketch before moving to their final project). They can draw, paint, collage, or photograph their view. Ask them to write an artist's statement detailing why they selected that particular view, what significance it has to them personally, and what it tells about contemporary life.

6. Go Digital

If computers and the Internet are available to you and your students, use online resources for student projects and assignments. Make a blog (<http://www.blogger.com/home>) or Flickr set (<http://www.flickr.com>) for student work. Include the assignment instructions and use the text and image features for student work. For student work, you may want to use Blurb, (<http://www.blurb.com>), a site for creating and producing books.

Images and Related Information

We have included some selected images from the exhibition, along with relevant information that you may want to use before or after your museum visit. For larger images to use in your classroom, please visit whitney.org/collection. You can print out these images or project them in your classroom.

Edward Hopper: *New York Interior*



Edward Hopper
New York Interior, c. 1921
Oil on canvas, 24 1/4 x 29 1/4 in. (61.6 x 74.3 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Josephine N. Hopper Bequest
70.1200
© Heirs of Josephine N. Hopper, licensed by the
Whitney Museum of American Art

Edward Hopper repeatedly shaped his view of the city by painting people as they appeared to him in brightly lit windows seen from passing El trains—a view offered to millions of passengers on New York’s public transportation system. The back of the young woman in this New York room is also derived from this experience.

The hair of the woman in her strapless corset is parted at the back, falling forward and giving us a view of her shoulders. Her attention is held by the object she holds on her lap, which is hidden from our view. She is busy sewing a piece of wrinkled white fabric, the hand holding the thread reaching far into the room. The woman’s figure is accented and framed by a brown door. To the right we see a clock on a wooden mantelpiece.

Bright light glows from the fireplace, though the flames themselves cannot be seen. To the left, cut by a dark vertical strip, we see a framed portrait of a man looking to the left. This portrait also appeared in an earlier work by Hopper—in the interior of *Artist’s Bedroom, Nyack* (1903-1906; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York). With these hidden references to his private life, the painter again challenges our impression that we have caught a fleeting glimpse of this scene from a train. By emphasizing the back of the woman’s neck and shoulders, and by using architectural elements to frame her, we can here see the influence of Edgar Degas, an artist recommended to him by his teacher Robert Henri, whose work Hopper studied during his three visits to Paris between 1906 and 1910.¹

¹ Barbara Haskell. *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time*. (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009), 144.

Edward Hopper: *Early Sunday Morning*



EDWARD HOPPER
Early Sunday Morning, 1930
Oil on canvas, 35 3/16 × 60 1/4 in. (89.4 × 153 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase with funds from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney
31.426

Edward Hopper sketched everyday things that he saw and the places he visited, such as restaurants, offices, gas stations, and theaters at different times of day or night. The people and places he saw in the city, the country, on highways, and in trains became the subjects of his paintings. Hopper often composed his paintings by combining drawings completed at different times of day and night, and in multiple locations. He also created his compositions by manipulating light and shadow. Hopper used contrasts between light and dark to suggest a single moment, the passage of time, or a particular mood in his images of the everyday realities in modern America.

For *Early Sunday Morning* he painted a quiet New York street before anyone was up. Originally titled *Seventh Avenue Shops*, the source of this image was an actual row of buildings on Seventh Avenue in New York's Greenwich Village. Hopper used this scene as a point of departure to highlight his painting's content and composition and to portray light, shadow, weight, and emptiness.

Hopper generalized the location by leaving out large areas of detail. For example, the lettering on the shop windows is unreadable in the morning light and its bricks remain undefined. By subtracting rather than adding to the architecture, Hopper transformed the ordinary into the mysterious.

In *Early Sunday Morning*, Hopper manipulated the lighting of the original scene, creating shadows on the top of the building and on the sidewalk from the barbershop pole, fire hydrant, and the curb, causing your eye to move across the canvas. However, these shadows could not exist in reality, as Seventh Avenue runs north to south, not east to west. The absence of pedestrians, apartment dwellers, and traffic communicates a sense of isolation and solitude for which Hopper's art is renowned.

Edward Hopper: *Seven A.M.*



Edward Hopper
Seven A.M., 1948
Oil on canvas, 30 3/16 x 40 1/8 in.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase and exchange
50.8

Seven A.M., depicts an anonymous storefront cast in the oblique, eerie shadows and cool light of early morning. If the fullness of summer is apparent from the clumped foliage at the left, the mood is decidedly off-season and desolate. The clock shows that it is seven in the morning. The first rays of light illuminate the scant goods displayed in the window. It is difficult to tell what the store sells: in the window we see three green glass bottles, the picture of a man on an advertisement that is leaning against the window partition, an object reminiscent of a calendar, and a blue box that is slightly higher than the bottles. In the interior of the store, empty shelves and a cash register are captured in the glow of the sunlight. The last customer was charged twenty cents. To the right, the view of the interior is blocked by the opaque glass door and by a shade covering the display window on the far right.

We know from Josephine Hopper's diary that the painting was created in South Truro. The store buildings at Cape Cod reminded Hopper of those found in his birthplace, Nyack, New York. In his first preparatory sketches for this painting, he combined them with impenetrable woods that give this painting a mood of unreality and transform the subject matter into more than just a store at the end of the road. It is this contrast between geometric order and light on the one hand and the unformed organic darkness on the other that invites speculation. However, the ordered, civilized realm of *Seven A.M.* does not necessarily offer security. At any rate, the viewer does not know what kind of business is pursued behind the storefront's façade.²

² Barbara Haskell. *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time*. Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009, 152.

George Bellows: *Dempsey and Firpo*



George Bellows
Dempsey and Firpo, 1924
Oil on canvas, 51 × 63 1/4 in. (129.5 × 160.7 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase with funds from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney
31.95

George Bellows, a student of Robert Henri at the New York School of Art, became a foremost exponent of Ashcan School realism. To supplement his income as a painter, he worked as a sports illustrator for daily newspapers and the events he covered often found their way into his art.

Dempsey and Firpo, one of George Bellows's most ambitious paintings, captures a pivotal moment in the September 14, 1923 prizefight between American heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey and his Argentine rival Luis Angel Firpo. The frenzy lasted less than four minutes, Firpo going to the floor nine times and Dempsey twice. Although Dempsey was the eventual victor, the artist chose to represent the dramatic moment when Firpo knocked his opponent out of the ring with a tremendous blow to the jaw.

At the match on assignment for the *New York Evening Journal*, Bellows portrayed himself as a balding man at the extreme left of the picture. His geometrically structured composition also creates a low vantage point that includes the viewer: looking up at this angle, we find ourselves among the spectators pushing Dempsey back into the ring. The excitement is further heightened by the chromatic contrast between the fighters, bathed in lurid light, and the dark, smoke-filled atmosphere around them.

Charles Demuth: *My Egypt*



Charles Demuth
My Egypt, 1927
Oil on fiberboard, 35 3/4 x 30 in. (90.8 x 76.2 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase with funds from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney
31.172

Fascinated by the American industrial landscape of the 1920s, Charles Demuth painted a pair of steel and concrete grain-storage elevators belonging to John W. Eshelman & Sons in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They were located in the rural community where Demuth was born and where his family had lived since the late eighteenth century.

This painting consists of geometric shapes—cylinders, cubes, and rectangles—crossed and fragmented by a pattern of diagonal lines that suggest shafts of sunlight. Demuth painted the grain elevators as though the viewer would look up and see the tops of the monumental buildings soaring above a chimney in the lower left corner, and a group of rooftops that extend across the bottom of the painting.

In addition to the towering view of the industrial buildings, the title of the painting —*My Egypt*— suggests that Demuth saw the grain elevators as American monuments, equivalent to the pyramids of ancient Egypt. The pyramids and their association with life after death might also have appealed to the ailing artist. When he made this painting in 1927, Demuth was bedridden with diabetes.

Along with his contemporaries Charles Sheeler and Elsie Driggs, Demuth developed a style of painting called Precisionism. These artists often used objects and buildings of the Machine Age era as their subject matter, arranged in symmetrical compositions, devoid of human presence. They painted in a precise, abstract, style, and used smooth, even color across the canvas to produce a crisp painted surface. In *My Egypt*, the fragmented forms also relate to European Cubism.

John Sloan: *Backyards, Greenwich Village*



John Sloan
Backyards, Greenwich Village, 1914
Oil on canvas, 26 x 32 in. (66 x 81.3 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase
36.153
©2009 Delaware Art Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York

Although no garbage cans can be seen in this painting by John Sloan, it is characteristic of the Ashcan School. The Ashcan artists used life on the streets and the everyday moods of New York in the years after 1900 as the subjects of their paintings, depicting them with an attention to detail that had been schooled in illustration for newspapers and journalism. For urban realism, even a mundane backyard in Greenwich Village was worthy of a painting, as we can see in this view from John Sloan's studio window.

In a snowy yard, two warmly clad children are putting the finishing touches to a chubby snowman, closely observed by the long, sleek black cat on the prowl through the deep cold snow. In the center foreground, another cat watches the viewer from the top of a wooden fence. It in turn is being observed by a small, pale girl eagerly looking out of the window of the neighboring building. A slightly slanted telegraph pole has lost its way in this enclosed, peaceful world; it stands like a spruce tree, its side rungs resembling short, broken branches. The lines of densely hung washing strung across the yard between the upper stories of the building in spite of the cold winter weather reinforce the private aspect of this view.

Although Sloan was a socialist and was working for the leftist newspaper *The Masses* at the time this painting was created, it contains no political overtones in terms of poverty or the crowded living conditions found in the apartment building of the working class. On the contrary, Sloan depicted an idyllic scene of children's play and feline bliss that is not without romantic sentiment.³

³ Barbara Haskell. *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time*. Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009, 82.

Alfred Stieglitz: *The Steerage*



Alfred Stieglitz
The Steerage, 1907
Photogravure, 13 3/16 x 10 7/16 in. (33.5 x 26.5 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of an anonymous donor
77.106
© 2009 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York

In 1907, while he was a passenger on a ship going to Europe for a vacation, Alfred Stieglitz saw a scene that he wanted to photograph. He called his photograph *The Steerage*. The steerage is the lower deck of a passenger ship. Many immigrants traveled in the steerage because it was the cheapest way. It was also the most crowded and uncomfortable. Most steerage passengers were traveling back to Europe after unsuccessful attempts to immigrate, and the poignancy of their experience was not lost on Stieglitz. Embarrassed by the luxury of his first-class accommodations, Stieglitz wandered into steerage, the lowest priced quarters on the ship.

Stieglitz told the story in this way:

"In June, 1907, my wife, our daughter Kitty and I sailed for Europe. My wife insisted on going on a large ship, fashionable at the time...How distasteful I found the atmosphere of first class on that ship.... By the third day I could stand it no longer. I had to get away. I walked as far forward as possible. The sky was clear and the sea not particularly rough although a rather brisk wind was blowing.... Coming to the end of the deck I stood alone, looking down. There were men, women, and children on the lower level of the steerage. A narrow stairway led up to a small deck at the extreme bow of the steamer. A young man in a straw [hat]; the shape of which was round, gazed over the rail, watching a group beneath him.... The scene fascinated me: a round straw hat; the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right; the white drawbridge, its railings made of chain; white suspenders crossed on the back of a man below; circular iron machinery; a mast that cut into the sky, completing a triangle."

Stieglitz went to get his camera from his room, hoping the scene would remain as he left it.

"I had only one plate holder with one unexposed plate. Could I catch what I saw and felt? I released the shutter, my heart thumping. If I had captured what I wanted, the photograph would go far beyond any of my previous prints." Years later he said, "If all my photographs were lost and I were represented only by *The Steerage*, that would be quite all right."

About the Artists

Edward Hopper, 1882-1967

One of the most important realist artists of the twentieth century, Edward Hopper painted intimate scenes of American life in a career that spanned over forty years. His well-known spare and direct manner emphasized the contrast between light and shadow and introduced unusual vantage points through windows and doorways. The isolated figures, estranged couples, empty rooms, and ubiquitous windows imbue Hopper's work with a deep sense of mystery, loneliness, and sadness.

From 1900 to 1906 Hopper attended the New York School of Art, where he studied painting with Robert Henri, the leader of the Ashcan School. Hopper spent the following year in Paris, he visited the Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne, but avant-garde movements such as fauvism and cubism made little impression on him. His work as an illustrator between 1899 and 1924 led him to paint realistic scenes of urban and rural America. Hopper had his first solo exhibition in January 1920 at the Whitney Studio Club in Greenwich Village, a hub for independent artists and the precursor to the modern Whitney Museum. In 1924, a successful New York gallery exhibition enabled him to give up commercial work altogether and concentrate full-time on painting. That same year, Hopper married Josephine Verstelle Nivison (Jo), a painter who was his model for nearly every woman he would subsequently paint.

Throughout his career, Hopper returned again and again to the same subjects. Cape Cod, where he and Jo spent their summers, inspired frequent paintings of sailing ships, lighthouses, rocky coasts, and New England houses. Best known are Hopper's paintings of the everyday and often banal realities of modern America—railroads, streets, theaters, and household interiors. Hopper's urban landscapes have none of the dynamism of other realist painters like George Bellows and John Sloan. Rather, his paintings are imbued with a haunting poetic quality that captures the monotony and desolation of city life.

While American art in the 1950s and 60s was moving away from realism, Hopper had little interest in contemporary movements like Abstract Expressionism or Pop Art. "The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm and does not concern itself alone with stimulating arrangements of color, form, and design," he said. "Painting will have to deal more fully and less obliquely with life and nature's phenomena before it can again become great."⁴

George Bellows, 1882-1925

Painter and printmaker George Bellows was a leading figure in the Ashcan School and won acclaim from opposing sectors of the art world. Bellows was allied with progressive, modernist artists such as Robert Henri, George Luks, and John Sloan because of his gritty urban subject matter. At the same time, his bravura brushwork passed muster with more traditional painters. In 1909, Bellows became the youngest person ever to be admitted to the conservative National Academy of Design.

Best known for his paintings of wrestling matches, prizefights, and other athletic contests, Bellows had dropped out of Ohio University in 1904 to briefly pursue semi-professional baseball. Soon after, he moved to New York and enrolled in the New York School of Art to study with Henri, who urged his students to immerse themselves in the city life around them—in particular, the tenement slums of the Lower East Side.

Bellows' early paintings often employed broad brushstrokes and a limited palette of creams and browns to evoke the dark and tawdry world of illegal prizefighting clubs. While his earlier work offered viewers a glimpse of the violent, underground prizefighting ring, Bellows' later paintings reflect the cultural changes that boxing underwent following its legalization in 1920. The compositional schemes he created demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of geometric logic. Bellows also produced nearly two hundred lithographs, which

⁴ Edward Hopper interview, 1959 June 17, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/hopper59.htm>

were as well received as his paintings. Bellows' unexpected death at the age of forty-two from appendicitis brought a sudden end to an illustrious career. Purchased four days before the Whitney Museum opened its doors in 1931, Bellows' *Dempsey and Firpo* fetched the highest price the museum would pay for a work of art until 1960.

Charles Demuth, 1883-1935

Charles Demuth was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where his family had lived for generations and he himself would live for most of his life. Lancaster would be the setting of many of his paintings, including *My Egypt*, which depicts a grain elevator owned by a neighbor.

While studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Demuth took many short excursions to Europe. Settling in Paris after graduation in 1912, he fell in with many of the revolutionary artists of the time, including Picasso and Henri Matisse. He also befriended artists at the forefront of the Dada movement like Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. Dadaism would be an influence on Demuth's work, along with European cubism and futurism.

Returning home, Demuth was introduced to photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz, who quickly included Demuth in his circle of artists. By 1918, Demuth's work began taking a distinctly American approach known later as Precisionism, a style influenced by Cubism and Futurism but taking as its subject the modern, industrial landscape of the growing United States. Fellow artist and Stieglitz associate Charles Sheeler explored a similar style at this time, depicting heroic architectural landscapes, and the two exhibited together along with photographer Paul Strand and Georgia O'Keeffe.

Demuth would go on to create a series of abstract portraits of several of his friends, including *The Figure Five in Gold* – possibly his most famous work, a portrait of author William Carlos Williams. Although best known for his Precisionist works, Demuth also produced a number of watercolors of flowers, still-life and landscape paintings, in addition to watercolor illustrations for stories and plays.

John Sloan, 1871–1951

John Sloan's artistic vision and imagination were shaped by early twentieth-century American popular culture. At a time when the majority of American artists went abroad to study art, Sloan forged a vision of American art.

Sloan grew up in Philadelphia. His artistic training was within the commercial realms of advertising, journalism, and publishing. From 1892, when he joined the art staff of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, until 1916, when he was hired to teach at the Art Students League in New York, Sloan made his living as a commercial artist. His work for these publications was of great value to his future artistic career because he was able to experience and see firsthand every angle of urban society. In later years, rather than dismissing this experience, Sloan maintained that his work as an illustrator taught him to go into the streets and look at life.

While he worked as an artist-reporter on several Philadelphia newspapers, Sloan attended night classes with Robert Henri at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where he met William Glackens, George Luks, and Everett Shinn. Following the lead of Robert Henri, Sloan moved to New York City in 1904 and began depicting its lively street scenes.

From his years as an observer of urban life came frank and unforgettable images, such as lively crowds on election night and laundresses hanging out their wash. Sloan's works were rejected as offensive by several exhibiting societies, and he, Robert Henri, and six other artists decided to organize on their own. The Eight, as the group was called, first exhibited at the Macbeth Galleries in 1908, beginning a long fight for artistic independence that continued with the Armory Show of 1913. Highly political, Sloan was a socialist and the art editor of a radical magazine, *The Masses*. From the 1920s until his death, he produced figure paintings and landscapes.

Alfred Stieglitz, 1864-1946

Alfred Stieglitz bought his first camera at the age of nineteen. Soon after, he realized that he wanted to become a photographer. He was the first photographer to do what others thought couldn't be done with a camera, taking pictures at night or in snowstorms.

Stieglitz had a profound impact on American art in the first half of the twentieth century. Born in New Jersey, he traveled to Europe to study engineering, during which time he became an amateur photographer. On returning to the United States, Stieglitz formed a society called the Photo-Secession in 1902 to promote photography as fine art rather than a documentary tool. To this end, he published a magazine, *Camera Work*, and opened the Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York City.

At the gallery, which later became known simply as 291, visitors and artists alike saw the groundbreaking works of European modernists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Constantin Brancusi. After 1914, Stieglitz devoted the gallery almost exclusively to pioneering American artists, among them Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Max Weber, and Georgia O'Keeffe. After divorcing his first wife, Stieglitz married O'Keeffe in 1924, forging a personal and professional relationship that proved extraordinarily productive for both of them. Through his roles as photographer, gallery director, and magazine editor, Stieglitz helped shape and define modern art in America.

Glossary

291

291 Fifth Avenue, New York was the address of photographer and publisher Alfred Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, also known as 291. Stieglitz, together with photographer Edward Steichen, founded this exhibition space in 1905 to exhibit and promote Pictorialist photography. In 1907 Stieglitz expanded the gallery's program to include painting and other art forms.

American Scene Painting

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, a number of artists sought to portray distinctly American subjects in paintings that did not rely on European styles. While some artists continued to depict urban life, others looked to rural folk traditions and small-town life for subject matter that portrayed a more nostalgic view of America. American scene painting is also known as regionalism.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_scene_painting

Ashcan School

A group of eight artists who created a style of painting to depict turn-of-the-century urban life. They were also known as The Ashcan School because of their portrayal of real-life content such as gritty street scenes and city dwellers. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashcan_school

Cubism

A style of art that simplified subject matter into geometric shapes and forms. Cubism questioned traditional perspective and ways of seeing things. Cubist artists sought to reproduce multiple viewpoints of figures and objects simultaneously, and flattened out the pictorial space. Figures, objects, and background merged into one surface of shifting planes. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cubism>

Degas, Edgar. 1834-1917

French artist associated with Impressionism. http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/degas_edgar.html

Dempsey, Jack. 1895–1983

American boxer and world heavyweight champion. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Dempsey

Fauvism

An early twentieth century art movement and style of painting in France. The name Fauves, French for "Wild Beasts," was coined by a French art critic for a group of artists who used strong contrasting colors in painterly, expressive ways. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fauvism>

Firpo, Luis Angel. c. 1894–1960

Argentinian boxer, well known throughout Latin America. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis_Firpo

Futurism

An Italian art movement that focused on the speed, sound, and motion of modern society. Futurist artists often merged objects or figures with their environments. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futurism>

Henri, Robert. 1865–1929

An influential teacher as well as an important American painter in the early part of the twentieth century.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Henri

Precisionism

A style of art that portrayed the modern American landscape and industrial progress, including skyscrapers and machinery, in sharp lines and clean, geometric forms. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precisionism>

Realism

A style of art that focused on the accurate depiction of recognizable subjects. In nineteenth-century Europe, realism also portrayed everyday, down-to-earth subjects. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_\(visual_arts\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_(visual_arts))

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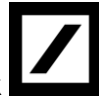
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Credits

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