



EDWARD HOPPER
AND HIS INFLUENCE ON THE
INDUSTRY



Edward Hopper is widely recognised as one of the most influential artists of 20th-century America. Hopper's work is a reflection of not only his own emotions, but that of the American population during the Great Depression, the time period in which he was most active in the art community. There is a great emphasis in his work on his use of colour which is further supported and highlighted by the pieces' compositions, a feature which makes his paintings so impactful and memorable.

Hopper's influence is so widespread that the techniques he used have had an impact in film and cinema to this day. The way he utilised light, composition and his use of colour has been referenced and incorporated in film for years.

In many ways, Hopper's influence is apparent in a large majority of films and media. His works had a particular influence on filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, who often took inspiration from the compositions of Hopper's house paintings. Seemingly inviting and pleasant, though with not a single person in sight, this technique was effective as it allowed viewers to draw their own conclusions about what may be happening inside.



One of Hopper's most influential pieces in film is *House by the Railroad*, which simply depicts a large house standing by itself beside a set of railway tracks. Similar to his other pieces, the windows and doorways are obscured by darkness, and it is up to the viewer to create their own interpretation of what, if anything, may be happening inside the house. One of the most notable references to this piece in film is *Psycho* (1960), where this same technique is utilised. Another suggestion created by the pieces where Hopper depicts large buildings is abandonment; typically, in these works, the impression created by these large houses is cold and disconnected rather than cosy and inviting, leading the viewer to question whether there is life present inside the house and almost creating a feeling of fear and danger. A common theme among many of Hopper's pieces is isolation. Whether it is just a piece containing a single building or person, or an otherwise busy composition with a lack of human life, in his pieces there is always a suggestion of this isolation. This is evident even in his vibrant pieces, such as his 1929 painting *Railroad Sunset*, where this theme is continued by a single desolate signal tower.



RAILROAD SUNSET

EDWARD HOPPER, 1929



Edward Hopper's *Railroad Sunset* depicts a signal tower standing solitary against a vibrant sunset. Such a colourful sky creates a stark contrast, with the almost pitch-black tower in the shadows and the aforementioned colours of the sky. These vibrant tones are predominantly present in this piece but are overshadowed by the drastic contrast of the tower and hills.

Hopper had always had a fascination for trains since his childhood. After his marriage to Josephine Nivision Hopper, the year he painted this piece, the two travelled from New York to South Carolina, alongside South Carolina and Maine. This painting did not depict the places they visited, but rather focused on the desolate landscape in between. As with many of his pieces, Hopper painted this once he returned to his New York apartment and created a scene that did not necessarily show a record of a specific place, but rather a scene created by fusing his memories with imaginary details.

Looking at this piece, the viewer may feel a sense of serenity followed by unease. The comfort created by the beautiful colours combined in this piece is overshadowed by how lonely it feels with a great lack of life. There are no humans depicted in this piece, not even any animals (or, ironically, vehicles – despite this painting presenting train tracks, there is not one train in sight), there is just a single lone signal tower surrounded by foreboding hills.

Hopper's railroad paintings suggest a lack of any particular destination. The tracks in this piece have no beginning nor end, relating to Hopper's own feelings of hopelessness and depression.

Many of Hopper's works take influence from artist Robert Henri, who created pieces such as *Night on Boardwalk* and *Snow in New York*. After he had attended high school, Hopper had the opportunity to study with Henri, who had a great impact on Hopper's development as an artist.



***“FORGET ABOUT ART
AND PAINT PICTURES OF
WHAT INTERESTS YOU
IN LIFE.”***

ROBERT HENRI



SNOW IN NEW YORK

ROBERT HENRI, 1902



Snow in New York depicts a street scene in the wintertime. In this piece, similar to Hopper's style, a sense of loneliness and isolation are apparent. This sense of isolation is created by the lack of life in the painting, with a lone horse-drawn carriage descending from the right-hand side of the image. This is the only aspect which provides any hint of a narrative element – the rest must be inferred through the viewer.

This piece represents a literal depiction of a common New York street side in the wintertime – nothing about said street side is glamourised or changed – it is presented exactly how it would be seen in real life, which is particularly impactful as it shows the reality of life of the working-class in New York at the time.

This piece has very loose and harsh brushstrokes, which resembles that of a study rather than a finished oil painting. Henri's preference for using dark, muted colours in this piece creates a foreboding and almost oppressive atmosphere, with the aforementioned reality of the working class being reflected by these muted, bleak colours. This shows to the viewer that life during this period was not something to be glamourised or romanticised and the piece can be seen as a statement proving this.

An interpretation of this piece relates to the hopelessness felt about the general population at the time it was painted. The road depicted in *Snow in New York* splits and veers off into the distance, creating the suggestion of a "road that leads to nowhere." This suggestion is also highlighted by the foreboding and looming buildings on either side of the road, which travel up off the canvas; to the viewer, this creates a feeling of being trapped within this bleak environment.

This piece is similar to that of Hopper's with the way colour and tone is a main influence on the mood created. Given this, the piece simply just feels "cold", an apt feeling for its name. It is reminiscent of Hopper's 1946 painting, *Approaching a City*; despite its different themes and subject matter, there is a feeling of familiarity created when viewing the two images.





APPROACHING A CITY

EDWARD HOPPER, 1946



This piece depicts a lone train track descending into a darkened tunnel, surrounded by beige, neutral-toned buildings. There isn't a great amount of contrast in this painting, as many of the tones are harmonious and complement each other, however the focal point (the entrance to the tunnel) is created by Hopper's use of shadows and leading lines. The railway tracks leading inside the tunnel draw the viewer's eye towards it as it is a change in the piece – it's different than the buildings in the back which makes it so effective. Hopper also employs the use of the rule of thirds here; vertically, in the first third of the image, the viewer's attention is again drawn to the tunnel's entrance, and horizontally, in the bottom two thirds of the image the viewer's eye is drawn towards the railway tracks and the wall surrounding it.

During his life, Hopper travelled very frequently. He liked to document these travels in his paintings, a recurring theme in Hopper's art. This suggests the idea of a journey, as most of his pieces were created through memories of places he had been.

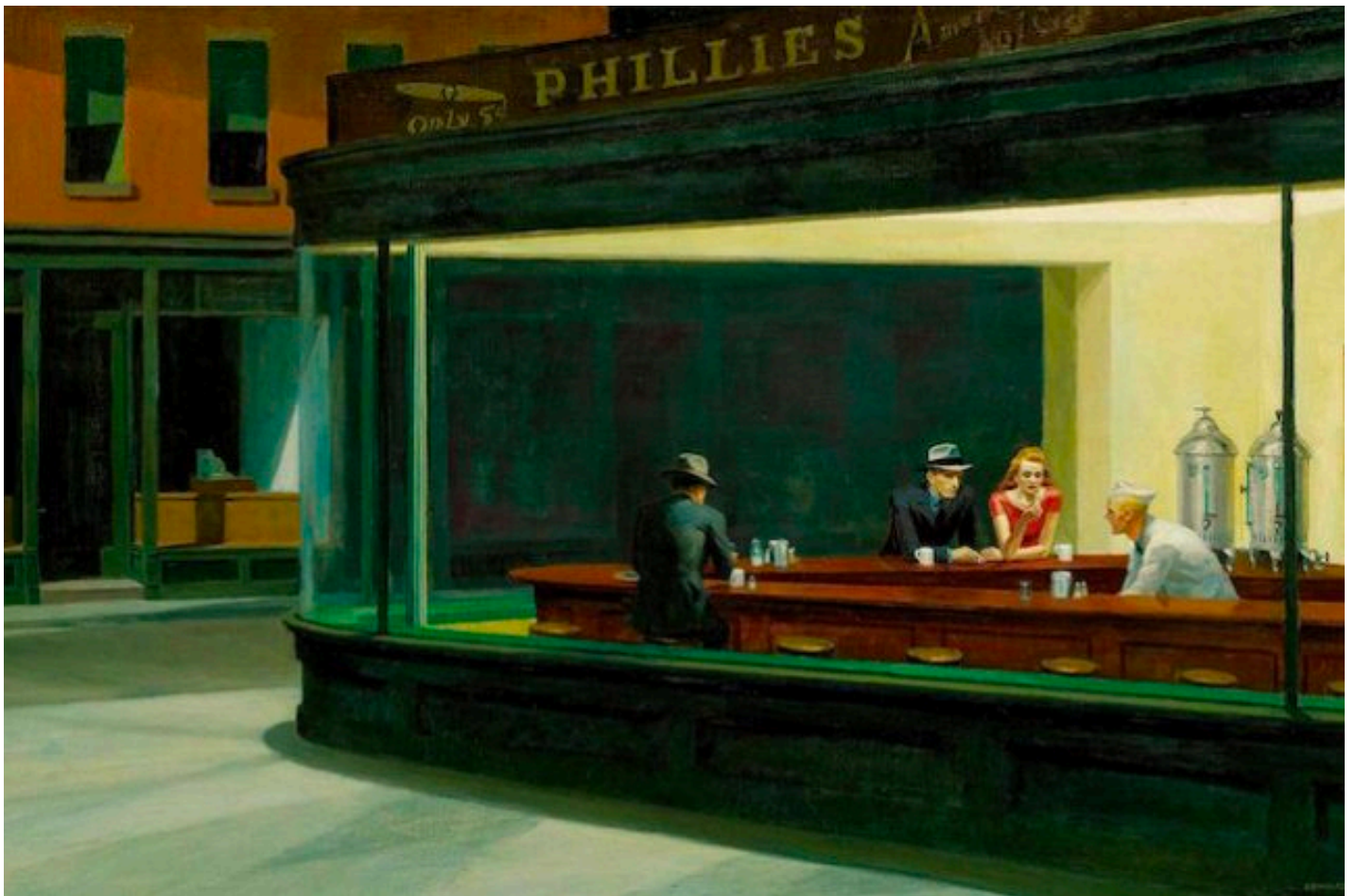
This piece has a sense of unease. The eerily dark, beckoning tunnel entrance alongside the murky, foreboding blocks of buildings creates a feeling of alarm. There is not a single person in sight, even the buildings seem vacant, which is common in Hopper's landscape work, however in such an environment it simply feels secluded and even somewhat scary. This lack of life feels ironic, as the railway and buildings people know are typically bustling and always busy with people commuting to work. Here, there is none of that – it just feels almost scary.

An interpretation of this piece is the suggestion that this bland, dismal atmosphere is a reflection of everything humans have become. It is a scene many are familiar with, maybe not literally, but the idea of a dreary railway track and an even more dreary workplace is the stark reality many live with. The railway tracks almost make a bleak statement concerning the passage of time, suggesting that human life goes by as fast as a train would – one moment you are at the start, then your destination the next. The suggestion of this piece is continued on through to Hopper's 1942 painting *Nighthawks*.



***“MY AIM IS TO CAPTURE
ALL THIS SAD
DESOLATION OF OUR
SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE”***

EDWARD HOPPER



NIGHTHAWKS

EDWARD HOPPER, 1942



Nighthawks depicts four people sitting in a diner at night, and as the viewer, we are looking in through the glass. There is a lone man sitting by himself on one side of the diner, while what is presumably a couple are on the other side of the diner alongside a bartender.

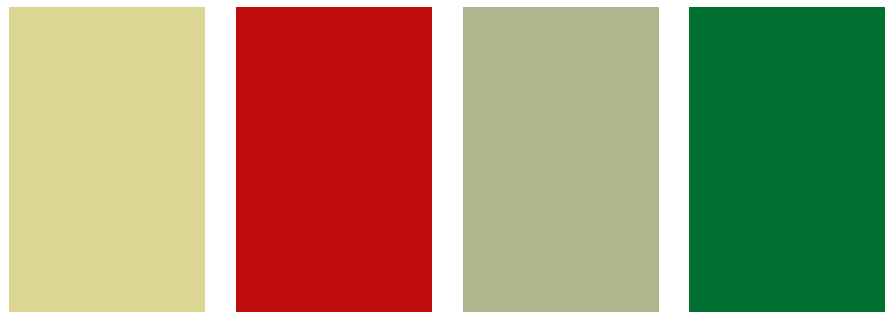
The dramatic lighting in this piece makes it easy for the viewer to place themselves actually in the scene. The colours together, despite being vastly different, all complement each other and intensify the idea of a well-lit café illuminating an otherwise pitch-black street. Hopper does not use any specific compositional techniques here – the impact is all created by the lighting.

Despite these people populating the diner, it still feels incredibly lonely. This is ironic we one would expect loneliness to come from outside, in the gloomy late-night streets, however that is not the case here. The diner, although its light is on, seems cold and uninviting – a thick tension can be felt even by just looking in. The woman, sat next to her husband, seems dissatisfied and bored, an expression shared by her spouse. However, despite all this, there is a strange sense of community; they are all sat in a diner late at night, each mulling over the same feelings.

This piece can be seen as a representation of loneliness. Hopper did not intend to give the piece this feeling, though because of it, *Nighthawks* is considered the “incarnation of existential art”.

This painting was finished just before the bombing of Pearl Harbour during World War II, when the threat posed by this was becoming very real. Fear over a second attack was prominent in New York at the time, a feeling which was represented in this piece. It symbolises wartime alienation – both the confusion and fear that came about by living through such an event.

As with many of Hopper’s pieces, this diner was not actually a representation of a real place. It was inspired by a restaurant he had visited in New York, however he “simplified the scene a great deal and made the restaurant bigger”. This manipulation of scenery is common in any of Hopper’s pieces, as the majority of his paintings are based on, and are an amalgamation of, the memories of places he had visited.



***“ U N C O N S C I O U S L Y ,
P R O B A B L Y , I W A S P A I N T I N G
T H E L O N E L I N E S S O F A L A R G E
C I T Y ”***

EDWARD HOPPER

It is no surprise that Edward Hopper is one of the 20th-century's most impactful realist painters. His paintings reflecting current events, and his composition techniques which have been referenced in film for years both during his lifetime and following his death, all have influenced his name as an artist and will continue to do so for years to come.

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Word Count: 1,964