

- Edward Hopper is perhaps the **best known** early 20th century American artist. As we shall see, his **realistic depictions** of everyday urban scenes shock us into recognising the **strangeness of our familiar surroundings**. He was what is known as an **American Realist**, a term that includes artists such as **George Bellows** and the **Ashcan School of New York** but he was never a member of a group of artists and described himself as an Impressionist [1]. He produced some of the **best known and most recognisable American art** and strongly influenced later artists.

NOTES

AMERICAN REALISM

- The term includes music and literature but in the arts it describes the representation of the everyday lives of ordinary people and the cultural and social environment in which they lived. One sub-group was the Ashcan School which was a group of artists who captured the atmosphere of early-20th century New York. Important American Realist artists include:
 - George Bellows (1882-1925) who painted contemporary life in New York and is best known for his violent boxing scenes.
 - Robert Henri (1865-1921) was a member of the Ashcan School who portrayed sympathetic portraits of individuals in the streets of New York.
 - Everett Shin (1876-1953) was a member of the Ashcan School and is best known for his depictions of the theatre, its audience and performers, in New York, London and Paris.
 - Edward Hopper (1882-1967) who became the best known of the American Realists and the most contemporary.

BIO:HOPPER

- **Edward Hopper**, (born July 22, 1882, Nyack, N.Y., U.S.—died May 15, 1967, New York City), American painter whose realistic depictions of everyday urban scenes shock the viewer into recognition of the strangeness of familiar surroundings. He strongly influenced the Pop art and New Realist painters of the 1960s and 1970s.
- He was born in a small town north of New York City to parents who were both well-off. His mother's inheritance enabled his father to retire at forty-nine and he and his only sibling Marion went to both private and public schools. He showed a talent for drawing when he was five and his parents encouraged his art. He began signing and dating his work when he was 10 and by his teens he was working in many media such as pen-and-ink, charcoal, watercolour and oil painting as well as drawing political cartoons.

- He copied his first oil painting *Rowboat in Rocky Cove* from an art magazine.
- He was extremely tall at 6' 5" and was already six foot tall when he was 12. His classmates called him 'Grasshopper' because he was tall and skinny.
- He went to Paris in 1904 and loved the city. He said, "**I do not believe there is another city on earth so beautiful as Paris nor another people with such an appreciation of the beautiful as the French**".
- He had a lifelong and wide ranging love of the theatre, movies, literature and poetry. He once remarked, "When I don't feel in the mood for painting, I go to the movies for a week or more."
- He carried a quote from Goethe in his wallet which describes the basis of his own artistic approach "**The beginning and end of all literary activity is the reproduction of the world that surrounds me by means of the world that is in me, all things being grasped, related, recreated, molded and reconstructed in a personal form and an original manner.**"
- He and his wife lived very frugally throughout their lives except for the purchase of books and tickets to the cinema and theatre. They lived in a top floor apartment and ate out in inexpensive diners and shopped at Sears and Woolworths often only buying new clothes when theirs became threadbare.
- The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, holds more than 3,100 works by the Hopper—the world's largest collection of his work.
- Some famous works include:
 - *Nighthawks*
 - *Automat*
 - *Chop Suey*
 - *House by the Railroad*
 - *New York Movie*
 - *People in the Sun*
 - *Early Sunday Morning*
 - *Rooms by the Sea*
 - *Gas*
 - *Cape Code Morning*
 - *Cape Cod Evening*
 - *Girl at Sewing Machine*
 - *Ground Swell*
 - *The Lighthouse at Two Lights*
 - *Railroad Sunset*
 - *Sun in an Empty Room*

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[1] Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, New York, 1980, p. 27

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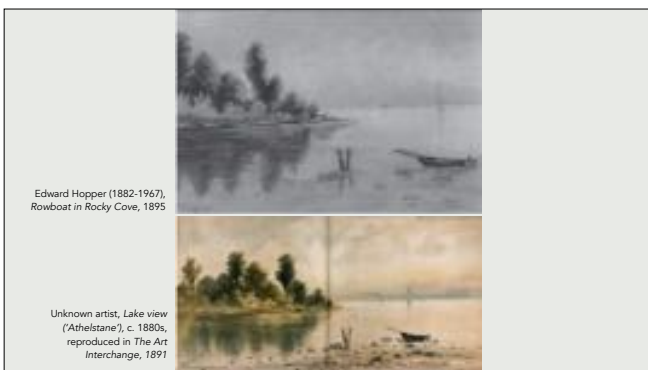
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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Realism

<https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/21-facts-about-edward-hopper> (21 facts)

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- The notes are based on information found on public websites including Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- Some analysis is based on conversations with OpenAI's ChatGPT (Jan 9, 2023).
- If a talk uses information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced either at the beginning of each talk or in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are based on an exhibition use the booklets and book associated with the exhibition.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License.
- If I have forgotten to reference any work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Rowboat in Rocky Cove*, 1895, oil on canvas, 25.4 × 34.9 cm, black and white photo courtesy of the Frick Art Reference Library, New York.

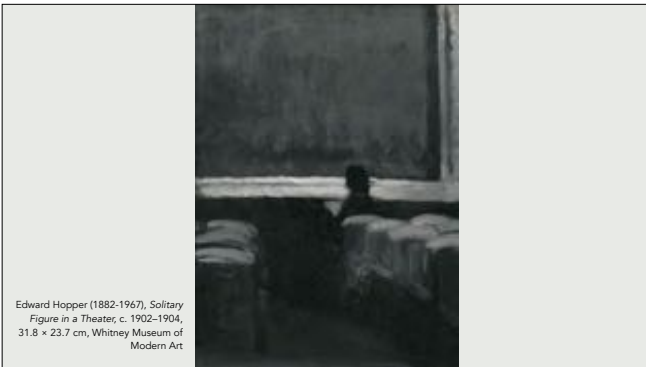
Unknown artist, *Lake view ('Athelstane')*, c. 1880s. Reproduced in *The Art Interchange*, February 1891. Photo by Louis Shadwick.

- Let us start at the beginning. **This is his earliest surviving work which was painted when he was 13.** (CLICK) A research student at the Courtauld Institute discovered this page from a book that teaches you how to paint. It is possible he did not paint any original works until he joined the New York School of Art in 1900 when he was 18.
- He was born into a **well-off family in Nyack**, about 15 miles north of Manhattan on the Hudson River. His father was a dry goods merchant and although he was not particularly successful he was able to retire when he was 49 because of his wife's inheritance. Hopper and his sister Marion both went to private schools and he showed a **talent for drawing when he was five**. He was encouraged by

his parents and started to **sign and date his work when he was 10.**

- He attended the **New York School of Art from 1900 to 1906** and he was taught by the American Impressionist **William Merritt Chase** and by a leading member of the Ashcan School **Robert Henri** (pronounced HEN-rye not the French pronunciation On-REE). Chase encouraged him to follow the style of **Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas** and Henri taught the life class which initially proved shocking for the quiet, homely and conservatively brought up Hopper.
- Henri encouraged his students to "**make a stir in the world**", advised, "**It isn't the subject that counts but what you feel about it**" and "**Forget about art and paint pictures of what interests you in life.**"
- However, we shouldn't overstate these influences as Hopper said, "**The only real influence I've ever had is myself**".

REFERENCES



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Solitary Figure in a Theater*, c. 1902-1904, 31.8 x 23.7 cm, Whitney Museum of Modern Art

- This is *Solitary Figure in a Theater*, Hopper's **first surviving oil painting** that he painted when he was at **art school**. It gives an early indication of his future use of interiors and solitary figures.
- In 1905 he got a job with an advertising agency where he created covers for trade magazines. He came to hate the job but it was a financial necessity. He managed to **travel to Paris three times** to study the art but he was not involved in all the exciting new developments and said later he didn't "**remember hearing of Picasso at all**".
- He was highly impressed by Rembrandt, particularly his **Night Watch**, which he said was "**the most wonderful thing of his I have seen; it's past belief in its reality—it almost amounts to deception.**" That comment reflects his interests and the influences. He sketched and painted street scenes but did not imitate the work of the Cubists and Fauvists who were the leading edge of modern art in Paris.

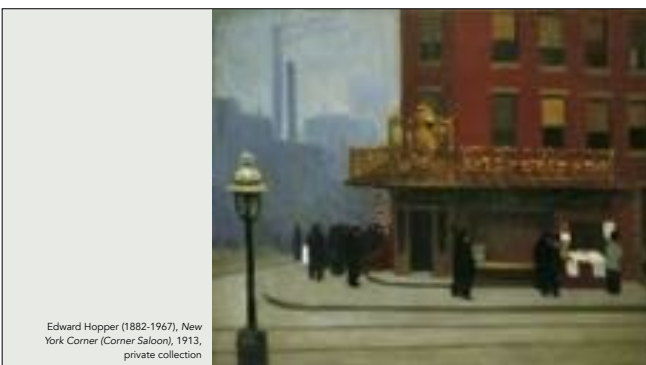


Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Sailing*, 1911, watercolour, 61 × 73.7 cm, Carnegie Museum of Art

- **Hopper did not burst onto the art scene.** He worked for **fifteen years as a commercial illustrator** before he **sold his first work**, this watercolour called *Sailing* and it would be **another 10 years** before he sold his second work.
- This was not for **want of trying**. He had a studio at 53 East 59th Street, New York and exhibited his work in several galleries. Typically at one exhibition he exhibited five paintings alongside well-known artists such as **George Bellows** and **sold none** of them. He had to tramp the streets and knock on the doors of magazines and advertising agencies to try to find commissions for illustration work to make money. The time he had for his **personal painting declined**, he said, "**it's hard for me to decide what I want to paint. I go for months without finding it sometimes. It comes slowly.**"
- Then in 1913 there was the **Armoury Show in New York**, an 'Exhibition of Modern Art' organised by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors and held in the city's 69th Regiment Armory building. **1,300 art works were exhibited** and the artists sounds like a role call of the founders of modern art—including **Degas, Cézanne, Seurat, Van Gogh, Matisse, Brancusi and Marcel Duchamp**. It was a **culture shock and a wake up call** for the art world **but it was mostly derided** by the press. It was here that **Hopper sold *Sailing* for \$250** to the textile manufacturer Thomas Viator; a **conservative work** that did not reflect many of the European works on display. The most shocking of which was Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912).
- **In 1913 Hopper moved to Greenwich Village**, an artists' quarter in New York, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_Descending_a_Staircase,_No._2



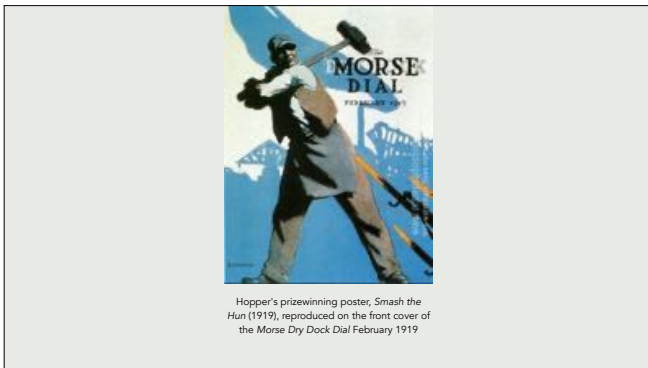
Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *New York Corner (Corner Saloon)*, 1913, private collection

- **Hopper struggled to produce any work.** He friend described how "**he suffered from long periods of unconquerable inertia, sitting for days at a time before his easel in helpless unhappiness, unable to raise a hand to break the spell**".
- In 1915 this work was praised by critics as a

"perfect visualisation of New York atmosphere". However, they condemned a café scene in the style of Manet. It seemed he was on the **verge of a breakthrough** and he took up etching and printmaking so he could sell multiple copies of his work. However, **he made no sales and was forced to try to sell prints door-to-door.**

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<https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/edward-hopper.html>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Smash the Hun* (1919), reproduced on the front cover of the *Morse Dry Dock Dial* February 1919, Hopper's prizewinning poster,

- When the **First World One started** he was 32 and too old to enlist. Instead he created this war poster. *Smash The Hun* won **first prize of \$300 in 1918** through an open competition with 1,400 entries.
- It was reproduced on the **front cover** of the February 1919 edition of *The Morse Dry Dock Dial*, the internal house organ of the Morse Dry Dock and Repair Company of Brooklyn, where Hopper worked as an illustrator and it was exhibited in the window of a department store.
- Until he was in his forties he struggled to define his style. He did not produce this prize-winning poster until he was 37.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Hopper#/media/File:Smash_The_Hun_-_Dry_Dock_Dial_cover.jpg



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Night Shadows*, 1921, etching on paper, 17.8 x 21.1 cm

- His painting was at a complete impasse. **He was surviving financially and was able to take a holiday.** A friend arranged a solo **exhibition** and although **he sold some prints he sold no paintings so he turned to etching.**
- During the early 1920s his **etchings began to receive public recognition** and this etching shows how he creates an **atmosphere of suspense.** We are looking down on a solitary figure at night. The **stark contrast of black and white** (known as **chiaroscuro**) **adds to the mystery.** His subjects at this time included isolated houses, vacant rooms and lone figures isolated in a harsh modern world.

NOTES

- "In *Night Shadows*, Edward Hopper creates an atmosphere of suspense by placing the audience at a high vantage point, looking down on a lone figure at night. The print demonstrates the vigorous cross-hatching, deeply bitten lines, and heavy

inking that are typical of Hopper's etchings. The starkly white paper and shades of black ink represent an effect called *chiaroscuro*, which is Italian for "light-dark." The subjects most identified with Hopper are empty scenes—an isolated house, a vacant room, an abandoned street. These eerie settings, amplified by manipulation of shadow, unusual vantage points, and simple composition, add to the mystery and psychological tension in his work. When Hopper does include figures in his art, they are often alone, weighted by solitude or dwarfed by their modern environment." [1]

REFERENCES

[1] <https://wam.umn.edu/education/artful-writing/artwork/edward-hopper-night-shadows-1921/>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Girl at Sewing Machine*, c. 1921, 48.3 × 46 cm, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

- Here we see for the **first time a mature Hopper subject and style**. A single figure in a room near a window. The sun streams in and the outside is all blue sky but there is a loneliness in the solitary occupation of the woman. It was 1921 and Hopper was 39 years old.
- The painting is an example of American Realism but it is a particular Hopper form of realism that can be recognised instantly. He is not attempting to capture a photographic representation but a subtle feeling that through the subject, the colours and the painting technique infuse the painting.
- (CLICK) Note that the brushwork is intentionally visible, as is the weave of the canvas. He never used a final varnish and he rarely used glazes. He used a simple painting technique, he stated,
 - **"I have a very simple method of painting. It's to paint directly on the canvas without any funny business, as it were, and I use almost pure turpentine to start with, adding [linseed] oil as I go along until the medium becomes pure oil. I use as little oil as I can possibly help, and that's my method. It's very simple."**
- He used twelve or thirteen different Winsor & Newton artist-quality pigment colours and a high-quality ready-prepared linen canvases from the same company. He said, **"I trust Winsor & Newton and I paint directly upon it."**

- The method he describes is known as "fat over lean" which is a standard method taught to students. The artist only ever paints slow-drying thick or thickened oil paint, that is 'fat', over the top of fast-drying, possibly thinned oil paint, known as 'lean'. Thickening is done with an oil such as linseed and thinning is done with a solvent such as turpentine. If the opposite is done the lean, thin top layer will crack as it will dry more quickly.

NOTES

- "American Realism was a style in art, music and literature that depicted contemporary social realities and the lives and everyday activities of ordinary people. The movement began in literature in the mid-19th century, and became an important tendency in visual art in the early 20th century ... The Ashcan School was a group of New York City artists who sought to capture the feel of early-20th-century New York City, through realistic portraits of everyday life." [1]
- Edward Hopper is sometimes included in larger Ashcan School group with George Bellows but Hopper rejected their focus, never used the term for himself and he said he painted in a different spirit "with not a single incidental ashcan in sight".

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Realism#Ashcan_School_and_The_Eight

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_at_Sewing_Machine



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *The Mansard Roof*, 1923, 35.2 x 50.8 cm, Brooklyn Museum

- **In 1923 he bumped into an artist and former fellow student Josephine Nivison (known as Jo), and they started a relationship.** When she was invited to exhibit she persuaded the organisers to exhibit his work as well and this painting, *The Mansard Roof*, sold for £100 to the Brooklyn Museum. The sale received **wide acclaim** and this moment **was the start of his career as a painter.** **They were both 41 when they married in 1924.**
- **They were opposites: she was short, open, gregarious, sociable, and liberal, while he was tall, secretive, shy, quiet, introspective, and conservative.** She subordinated her career to his and shared his reclusive life style. The rest of their lives revolved around their spare apartment in the city and their summers in South Truro on Cape Cod. **She managed his career** and his interviews, was his **primary model**, and was **his inspiration and life companion.**

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<https://wam.umn.edu/education/artful-writing/artwork/edward-hopper-night-shadows-1921/>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Automat*, 1927, 69.9 × 90.5 cm, De Moines Art Center

- This is regarded as **one of his great works**. It is an early example of his trademark features.
- A solitary woman holds a cup of coffee in an automated self-service restaurant. The **lighting is harsh and her blank look** reflects the lives of millions of New Yorkers going to work and back each day. She is **smartly dressed** and may be waiting for someone or catching a coffee during a short break. The bowl of fruit behind her is incongruous but their colour balances the radiator on the floor.
- Again we see not a realistic representation but a work of retained memory. This is best described in the words of **Edgar Degas**, "**It is very well to copy what one sees. It's much better to draw what one has retained in one's memory. It is a transformation in which imagination collaborates with memory. One reproduces only that which is striking, that is to say, the necessary. Thus one's recollections and invention are liberated from the tyranny which nature exerts.**"
- What about the subject matter? It can be said that, in a way, **all his painting are about death and decay** in the sense that they are **frozen moments recovered from his imagination and his memory**. By capturing and freezing a moment he draws attention to the normal way we live our lives with its onward rush towards decay and death.
- The idea of using recovered moments from memory suggests the work of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) who wrote his poem 'Burnt Norton' in 1935-6. The poem starts, "**Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past./ If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable.**" This suggests that past, present and future are interconnected and that our actions in the present have an impact on the future and that everything that has happened in the past is always present with us and cannot be changed. In our present, we are creating what will become our past and our memories and it haunts us and cannot be altered,

as Eliot said, "**All time is unredeemable**".

NOTES

- Hopper has said that much modern art does not have imagination, it is full of "**cerebral invention**" but contains no imagination and so is "false" as "It has no intimacy".
- 'Burnt Norton' became part of *Four Quartets*. The other three parts, 'East Coker', 'The Dry Salvages', and 'Little Gidding', were written between 1940 and 1942.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automat_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automat_(painting))

<https://www.edwardhopper.net/automat.jsp>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Chop Suey*, 1929, 81.3 x 96.5 cm, private collection

- Here is **another Hopper classic, *Chop Suey***.
- It is daytime and **there is more social interaction**. Two young women are **drinking tea in a Chop suey restaurant**. There is a coat hanging up behind them and another couple are eating at another table.
- These were cheap eating establishments often situated above shops as here. Hopper would often eat in a restaurant similar to this one and for this painting his **wife Jo was the model for both women**.
- The two women have been described as doppelgängers but one has a scarf and a different top. The similarities accentuate the anonymity of the scene.
- The people hardly interact and convey a **feeling of isolation** as found in the modern city.
- The woman in the green dress facing us wears **harsh makeup** making her white face the same colour as the background and therefore it becomes more **anonymous**. Her tight fitting sweater and heavy makeup would have signified her sexual availability in the previous era but **by 1929 is was simply fashion**.
- Notice the areas of the painting that do not draw out attention are **more loosely painted**. It is like a **half-forgotten memory** where certain details stand out clearly but the background fades into obscurity. Painting itself is like memory in that it captures a moment in time but Hopper reminds us that

memory is not like a photograph as the details are only partly remembered just as in this painting they are simplified and sometimes indefinite.

- This painting sold for **almost \$92 million in 2018**, becoming the most expensive of the artist's work to be acquired at auction.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chop_Suey_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chop_Suey_(painting))

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<https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/edward-hopper-scli->



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *The Lighthouse at Two Lights*, 1929, 74.9 x 109.9 cm, The Met

- This is **another subject he painted**, his work included city interiors often with isolated individuals, rural America and scenes near the sea. It is situated on the rocky coast at **Cape Elizabeth, near Portland Maine**.
- Notice that in his street scenes and landscapes there are **rarely any people**. We see a single individual in some of his rural scenes such as **Gas**, 1940 **or a couple as in Cape Code Evening**, 1939.
- **In 1927, when he was 45, a small family inheritance enable the couple to buy an old Dodge car** and this opened up new scenes and possibilities for his work. This lighthouse was built in 1828 and is called 'Two Lights'. Jo found lodgings and he painted a number of scenes of the area such as *Coast Guard Station*, *Two Lights*, Maine. They met the lighthouse keeper who became very interested in his work. This was painted two years later on another trip.
- Later **Jo would write that the lighthouses are self-portraits, a metaphor for his impenetrable ego**. What did she mean? Well, a person's ego, like a lighthouse, **can be unyielding and resistant to change** making it hard for **other people to penetrate and understand them**. A lighthouse can be seen from afar and in the same way a person with a **strong ego is easily recognisable and hard to ignore**. A lighthouse is **independent and isolated, self-reliant and autonomous** like a person with an impenetrable ego. A lighthouse **guides and enables a safe journey but is not part of that journey** like a person with an impenetrable ego who can be a **force that guides** another person through life but can also be a **barrier that keeps them isolated** from others and resistant to change. (Analysis thanks to ChatGPT)

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<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/489258>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Railroad Sunset*, 1929, 74.5 × 122.2 cm, Whitney Museum of Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Railroad Sunset*, 1929, 74.5 × 122.2 cm, Whitney Museum of Art

- With a **more regular income** from the sale of his work they were able to go on long road trips to find new locations to paint.
- Hopper had long been **fascinated by trains**, and after his marriage the couple went on their **first transcontinental train trip**, travelling to Colorado and New Mexico.
- This was **sketched on a trip from New York to Charleston, South Carolina** and Massachusetts and Maine but it is not a specific location but a memory of scenes from a railway carriage, the lonely landscape between cities, with the railroad cutting across the canvas.
- He painted it in his **New York studio** on his return and **he combined multiple scenes and memories with imaginary details**.

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<https://www.edwardhopper.net/railroad-sunset.jsp>

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *House by the Railroad*, 1929-30, 61 × 73.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *House by the Railroad*, 1929-30, 61 × 73.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art

- This is an early work and the **first to be acquired by the Museum of Modern Art**. It is a house in Haverstraw about 10 miles north of his hometown of Nyack. Its form and colour create a sense of foreboding as if something bad could happen there. It was praised at the time as "**one of the most poignant and desolating pieces of realism**". The label 'realism' attached to him even though he always maintained he was an impressionist. I think that just shows the problem with labels of any kind.
- (CLICK) Do you recognise the house? Have you seen the film *Psycho*? This painting inspired **Alfred Hitchcock to design the house above the Bate's Motel**, in the 1960's horror film.
- As a brief aside, in 1991 a court ruled that a house in Nyack was legally haunted. The owner organised haunted house tours and an article about it appeared in *Reader's Digest*. The court ruled that the haunting had to be disclosed to future

prospective purchasers. However, after the house was sold there were no subsequent reports of any hauntings.

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, 89.4 × 153 cm, Whitney Museum

- Hopper depicts a section of **Seventh Avenue in New York** located near his studio (3 Washington Square North). The lettering on the windows is illegible and there are **no people visible**. Hopper **originally painted a figure in one of the upper windows** but he decided to paint it out. There is a **red and white barber's pole** outside one shop and a **fire hydrant** on the left. Hopper said that it was originally called *Seventh Avenue Shops* and someone else called it *Early Sunday Morning*.
- It was painted during the Depression and its sense of **barrenness and isolation** has been seen as a comment on the time.
- It was **bought by the Whitney Gallery for \$2,000** a few months after it was painted and **it jump started his career**. His reputation was building rapidly at this stage; **he was 48**.
- It has since inspired other works of art and two poems of the same name.

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Ground Swell*, 1939, 91.92 cm × 127.16 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

- **Hopper's home town of Nyack** is on the Hudson River and the name used by Native Americans literally means the fishing place. **Hopper built his own boat when he was 15 and had a lifelong love of the sea and sailing**. In 1934, he and his wife built a house and studio in South Truro, Massachusetts, where he produced a number of oil

paintings and watercolours expressing this love.

- It is typical Hopper, at first the painting looks like a **happy holiday scene** but the figures **do not relate** to each other and **appear preoccupied** with the buoy. The cirrus clouds are indicators of a **coming storm** and the **bell buoy is there to sound a warning** of imminent danger. It was painted **just as World War II broke out in Europe**.

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Edward Hopper
(1882-1967), Cape Cod
Evening, 1939, 76.2 x 101.6
cm, National Gallery of Art,
Washington DC

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Cape Cod Evening*, 1939, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

- His was painted in a **small fishing village on Cape Cod**, Massachusetts. He wrote that the woman represents the **typical blond Finnish-type** found in the area and **the man is a local, Hopper described him as a Yankee**. The dog is listening to a **whippoorwill** which he was originally going to call the work. (CLICK) It is a nocturnal bird known for its distinctive song.
- Hopper made **many preliminary drawings** and spent a long time deliberating. There are a number of **disturbing aspects**, the **uncut grass**, the **couple ignoring** each other, the **alert dog** signifying **imminent danger** and the **approaching twilight**.
- Hopper's paintings **shout out for a narrative**, a story that explains what is going on. Hopper knew this and because there is never a single, true explanation he makes that clear by choosing the **blankest of titles**, as here *Cape Code Evening* tells us little. It is where he spent his summers, it is a rural environment and night is falling but there are no clues about why he painted a couple and a dog. One exception to his bland titles is a painting titled *Excursion into Philosophy* which we will see later although even there the meaning is ambiguous.

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967), New
York Movie, 1939, 81.9 x 101.9 cm,
Museum of Modern Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *New York Movie*, 1939, 81.9 x 101.9 cm, Museum of Modern Art

- This is a painting about the **loneliness of the human condition**. People go to the movies to enter an **imaginary world**, to take them out of themselves and their day-to-day existence. You the **cinema is poorly attended** so it is lonely inside. The usherette, who was modelled by his wife Jo standing under the **wall light in their apartment**, is

lost in thought. **She may be bored** having seen the film many times or **simply in a day dream** or perhaps she signifies the **endurance of the human spirit** in the **midst of the dehumanising aspects of modern living**.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Movie

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79616>



Edgar Degas (1834–1917), *Interior* (also known as *The Rape*), 1868-9, 81.3 x 114.3 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *New York Movie*, 1939, 81.9 x 101.9 cm, Museum of Modern Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *New York Movie*, 1939, 81.9 x 101.9 cm, Museum of Modern Art

Edgar Degas (1834–1917), *Interior* (also known as *The Rape*), 1868-9, 81.3 x 114.3 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

- There is another angle on this work. Hopper said he was inspired by Edgar Degas's *Interior* in terms of its composition and lighting in a nighttime interior and the painting was **praised** for its handling of **multiple light sources**.
- However, this raises further questions as *Interior* is one of Degas most **puzzling pictures**. Some interpreted it as the **uneasy wedding night scene** in an Émile Zola novel and others as depicting a prostitute following sexual violence. The painting is also known as **The Rape**. Which Hopper would have known as he was cultured, sophisticated and very well-read and he continued to be inspired by the work of Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Movie

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79616>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interior_\(Degas\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interior_(Degas))



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Gas*, 1940, 66.7 x 102.2 cm, Museum of Modern Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Gas*, 1940, 66.7 x 102.2 cm, Museum of Modern Art

- "The subject was a composite of several gas stations Hopper had visited. According to Hopper's wife [Jo], the gas station motif was something he had **wanted to paint for a long time**. Hopper **struggled** with the painting. He had begun to produce new paintings at a slower rate than before, and had **trouble finding suitable gas stations** to

paint. Hopper wanted to paint a station with the lights lit above the pumps, but the stations in his area only turned the lights on when it was pitch dark outside, to save energy." (Wikipedia)

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<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80000>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gas_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gas_(painting))



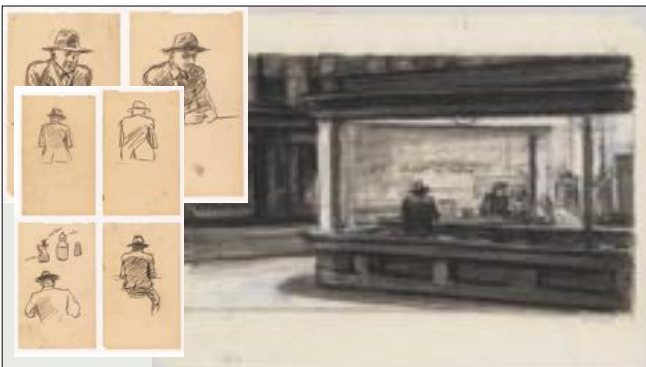
Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Nighthawks*, 1942, 84.1 × 152.4 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Nighthawks*, 21 January, 1942, 84.1 × 152.4 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

- **One of his best known works**, he wrote that he, "**didn't see it as particularly lonely**" but later added "**unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city**".
- There are three customers in a diner and the two that appear to be together are lost in thought and disengaged. Again, the painting is based on a memory he had of a restaurant in New York but it is not intended as an actual place.
- Hopper posed for the two men using a mirror and the model for the woman was Jo.
- The customers are night owls but this became night hawks because (CLICK) of the man's beak-like nose and the two words were later joined together.
- It was bought by the Art Institute of Chicago for \$3,000 within months of its completion.

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nighthawks_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nighthawks_(painting))



Edward Hopper, *Study for Nighthawks*, 1941 or 1942, fabricated chalk on paper, Whitney Museum of Modern Art

- We have a lot of information about the technicalities of his painting as shortly after their marriage in 1924, Edward Hopper and his wife Josephine (Jo) **kept a journal** in which he would use a pencil, make a sketch-drawing of each of his paintings, along with a detailed description of specific technical details. Jo Hopper would then add additional information about the theme of the painting. He also draw **many sketches** which were donated to the **Whitney Museum** on his death.
- Hopper was a methodical artist who planned and thought about each work before starting. He tried many arrangements for the composition and thought about each colour and how the tones would interact.
- Many people have tried to find this diner but as Hopper said, it was not a particular restaurant elf said the painting but "**was suggested by a**

restaurant on Greenwich Avenue where two streets meet". Additionally, he noted that "I simplified the scene a great deal and made the restaurant bigger".

REFERENCES

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/how-edward-hopper-storyboarded-nighthawks-2276/>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Office at Night*, 1940, 56.4 × 63.8 cm, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

- **An attractive woman is standing by a filing cabinet** looking at a man in a three-piece suit seated at a desk. There is a **typewriter** on the desk opposite his implying that she might be his **secretary** and has just gone to the filing cabinet to **file or retrieve some papers**. She has stopped and is **looking at him or down on the ground** while he is engrossed in reading.
- Hopper said he was inspired by **riding on the elevated train** in New York and **looking into the offices** as he passed. Notice the **blind and its draw string have been blown** into the room, perhaps by a passing train. **Did the gust of wind blow the sheet of paper onto the floor** and is the woman looking at the paper and deciding whether to **pick it up**?
- Some commentators gave **created a narrative** that involves the woman bending down to pick up the paper and **attracting the man's attention** leading to a closer relationship between them. Others see **the opposite, the man is isolated and concentrating** on finishing his work so he can go home. The woman bends down, picks up the paper, returns it to the desk and **he carries on reading**. The loneliness created by the pressures of business or perhaps, the inherent loneliness of our lives.
- As always Hopper was concerned with the **technical difficulties rather than the meaning**. **In this case handling three sources of light**, the central room light, the intense light from the man's desk lamp and the light coming through the open window. He had to use **different shades of white** to convey the idea of the different shadows. Notice that behind the woman there is a weak shadow created by the ceiling light.

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<https://walkerart.org/collections/artworks/office-at-night>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Eleven A.M.*, 1926, 71.3 × 91.6 cm, Hirshhorn Museum, Smithsonian, Washington D.C.

- This is another theme, he returned many times to the **solitary female nude seated in an interior alongside a window**.
- Here, sitting forward is a woman naked except for her **flat outdoor shoes**. Her white body is high-lit by the sun streaming through the window contrasting with the dark blue of the chair. Like all his interiors it **raises many questions**.
 - It is eleven a.m. (according to the title) so why is she sitting naked?
 - Is she waiting and looking out for someone?
 - Has her lover just left?
 - But why is she wearing shoes? **Shoes are often the first piece of clothing removed** on getting home and the last to be put on before leaving.
- There is a **poem in the *New Yorker*** about this painting and it speculates that she is **waiting for her lover who didn't arrive last night**. There is the chance he might come this morning which he has done more than once before. She will give him **ten more minutes**. The only mention of the shoes is in the first line:

She's naked yet wearing shoes.

Wants to think nude. And happy in

her body.

- Nakedness suggests **vulnerability** as we may be spied upon. It has been suggested he minimises the threat by keeping his female nudes in a domestic interior. However, one must be wary about speculating on an artists intent although Hopper did say "**Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world.....**The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm" (*Reality*, no. 1, Spring 1953, p. 8)." But with his 'impenetrable ego' as his wife put it, it is difficult to know anything about his inner life.

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<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/08/27/edward-hoppers-11-a-m-1926-a-poem-inspired-by-the-painting>

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Morning in a City*, 1944

- **The model was always his wife Jo**, who was an **artist and an active participant** in his work. He painted this when **she was 61** and he has given her a **younger figure**. Years later his dealer asked who the young woman was and he replied, "**That's Jo, glorified by art**".
- For this work he produced at least **twelve preparatory sketches** in charcoal and conté crayon and they show how he reworked the composition to intensify the drama. (CLICK) This is one of the sketches. Note the slight turn of the head engages us more. (CLICK)
- In addition he made detailed **studies of the bed**, her figure and **her hands holding the towel**. He considered seating her on the bed and looking out of the window. (CLICK)
- We are made voyeurs and **she is trapped** by having her feet removed. The curtains are drawn back and the building opposite has two windows with dark interiors looking like two eyes. Her front is partly covered by a towel but we see her naked back. Jo explained later that her husband's favourite part of her anatomy was her 'bottom'.
- To the right of the unmade bed is a mirror which reflects no image. Twelve years earlier Hopper was accused by a critic of copying what he saw rather than using his imagination. It is clear that this is far from true. His paintings are hardly representational at all, they are simplified and constructed to appear like realistic images but they are more like memories with some objects shown in detail, but other like the wall shown sketchily and other like the mirror shown simple as a blank area. The bed is also too short for her body but has been created to fill a space and create a particular effect.
- The woman is not looking out the window but to the side. (CLICK) If we superimpose the sketch we can see it is a close match but the hair is different and the woman is looking out of the window. It was a carefully considered decision to change her gaze.

REFERENCES

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160301-the-dark->



Edward Hopper, *Morning Sun*, 1952, Columbus Museum of Art

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Morning Sun*, 1952, Columbus Museum of Art

- "Hopper's 1952 painting ***Morning Sun*** strikes a particular chord—in fact, it's been called it one of "**the ultimate images of summer.**" I don't think I agree, I would call it the "**ultimate image of loneliness**".
- In it, a woman, modelled on the painter's wife, Jo, is pictured in a short pink slip, arms bare. She's

sitting up in bed with her knees pulled up, looking out of her bedroom window into a city sky. Dramatic shadows are cast on the bare walls behind her.

- The painting—in the collection of the **Columbus Museum of Art** since 1954, when it was **scooped up for just \$3,500**—is Hopper at his best. It hints at the bare bones of a narrative with the kind of **spare, evocative style** that has since influenced filmmakers and photographers including Alfred



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *A Woman in the Sun*, 1961, 1101.9 x 152.9 cm, Whitney Museum of Modern Art

- **A final example** of a nude woman in an interior space with a window. **She seems at ease with her nakedness**, she is relaxed, smoking and appears to have **just got out of bed**. The sun streams in the window sharply delineating her anatomy and creating a bright patch of sunlight on the floor and two thin shadows of her legs behind her.
- The walls are plain except for a **landscape painting and what could be a mirror**. A second window provides a view of two pea green hills in the distance like two giant breasts.
- **The face is resigned although not despairing**. She is at rest, caught by a patch of light which frames her, contains her and spotlights her like an actress on stage.
- This is a later painting

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<https://whitney.org/collection/works/1337>

<https://nypost.com/2020/04/11/woman-who-made-edward-hopper-famous-finally-seizes-the-spotlight/> an article about Josephine Nivison, his wife, the model and an artist



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Cape Cod Morning*, 1950, 86.7 x 102.3 cm, Smithsonian American Art Museum

- **A woman leans forward** looking out of her window as if **she seeks to escape from the claustrophobic interior** in which Hopper locks his women away.
- She looks towards the **rising dawn sun** which starkly illuminates the house.
- Hopper and Jo rented a cottage on Cape Cod in 1930 and returned there for their summer holiday

every year for the rest of their lives. In 1934 they built a house on Cape Cod which may be the one shown here. This was painted much later in his life.

- The trees and grass have a similar tonal balance to *Gas*, the gas station he painted ten years before which we saw just now.
- Notice how he has caught the sunlight at the point where the side of the bay window is in shadow but the shadow on the wall is small leaving a large area of alternating striped bands representing the sun



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Excursion into Philosophy*, 1959

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Excursion into Philosophy*, 1959

- This is one of the few works with a title that conveys more than a mere description of what we see. Hopper's wife Jo wrote, "**The open book is Plato, re-read too late.**" At the time, Hopper said this was **potentially his best work** and it contains mature themes of sexual and psychological tension.
- The woman has her back turned to the man and her **lower half is naked**. The man is **fully dressed** including his shoes and he is **staring at a patch of sunlight**.
- In *Plato's Dialogues* he uses the metaphor of a cave to explain his ideas about ideal forms. Socrates explains that it is as if we have spent our lives in a cave perpetually facing the cave wall onto which are projected a shadow play, which is our lives. Socrates wants us to break the bonds that bind us, stand and leave the cave when we will see the real world as it really is, the world of eternal forms.
- **Has the man been reading Plato?** Is he contemplating how he can **see the real world** and not the play of light and shadow on the floor? But **what is the woman doing** and what, if anything, have they been **doing together**. Her backside mirrors the fold and the lighting of the open book, does this signify a connection?
- He seems to be contemplating the meaning of his life and his relationship with the woman. Does he see a conflict between the inner world of the mind and the physical world of sexual relationships?
- There is another painting *Summer in the City* which is the mirror image of this painting, although there is no book. A clothed woman wearing shoes sits on the edge of a bed on which a naked man lies face down with his face buried in the pillow.

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *People in the Sun*, 1960, 102.6 x 153.4 cm, Smithsonian American Art Museum

- This is a **large painting and is unusual for having five people present**. They are sitting on the terrace of a hotel in the sun looking towards some distant mountains. It was originally inspired by people sunbathing in **Washington Square Park** near his apartment in New York.
- It oscillates between a **real view and a movie set**. Like many of his paintings it is a **recovered memory of the sunbathers in New York and places he visited in the American West**.
- The people are **strangely formally dressed**. It is as if they are attending a conference and have come out to admire a famous scenic view but actually have little interest in the view. They appear to be staring directly into the setting sun except for one person who is engrossed in a book.

REFERENCES

<https://www.edwardhopper.net/people-in-the-sun.jsp>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Rooms by the Sea*, 1951, 74.3 x 101.6 cm, Yale University

- "As a mature artist, Edward Hopper **spent most of his summers on Cape Cod**, Massachusetts. There, he **designed and built a sunny, secluded studio at Truro**, on a bluff overlooking the water. The view in *Rooms by the Sea* resembles what Hopper would have seen out the back door of his studio. But the **description that he gave** this painting in his notebook—"The **Jumping Off Place**"—suggests that the image is more a **metaphor of solitude and introspection** than a depiction of the actual place. Like Hopper's most arresting images, this scene seems to be realistic, abstract, and surrealistic all at once." (Yale)

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<https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/52939>



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Sun in an Empty Room*, 1963, private

- This is **one of his last paintings painted four years before his death aged 84**. People and objects have disappeared and **what remains is patterns of light**. There is an interior, a window through which the sun shines but we have now reached a level of abstraction and all that remains is a **pattern of light and dark patches on a wall and floor**. A small

- note of green nature remains outside the window.
- Asked about what his paintings talk about, once he said, "**They talk about me. The picture is my inner, an immense floating ocean, a self-portrait in search of himself**", adding "**All the answers are on the canvas. The man's the work. Something doesn't come out of nothing.**"
- You might wonder what is he trying to say? Hopper's answer was, "**If I could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint**".



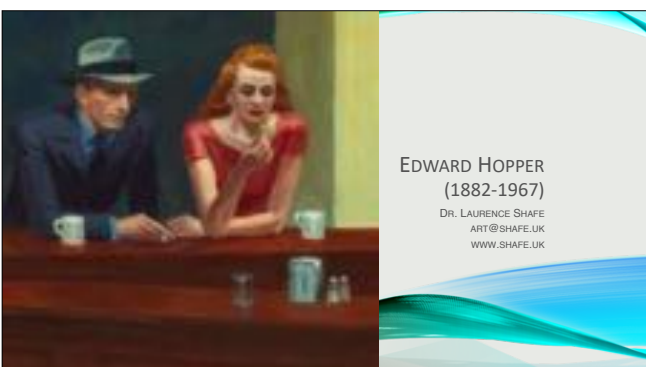
Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *Two Comedians*, 1966, private collection

- I was going to end with the previous semi-abstract work but I had to add this, his final work, called *Two Comedians* (1966). It was painted one year before his death and it shows his love of the theatre and it harks back to one of his earliest works *Solitary Figure in a Theatre* (c. 1902-4).
- Two pantomime actors, one male and one female, both dressed in bright white costumes, take their bow in front of a darkened stage. **Jo Hopper confirmed that her husband intended the figures to suggest they are taking their life's last bows together as husband and wife.**
- "**All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.** They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts." (*As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 7)
- "Life's but a walking shadow, A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (*Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5)

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- **He died in 1967** aged 84 and his wife donated some **3,000 of his works to the Whitney** Museum of American Art. **She died less than a year later.**
- I have so much more to say but I must now end our journey through Hopper's life and works.
- Thank you for your attention.

NOTES

- He painted just 366 canvases in his lifetime but thousands of sketches.
- His work rarely appears on the market. In 2006,

Hotel Window, sold for about \$27 million at Sotheby's. In 2018 *Chop Suey* sold at Christie's for **almost \$92 million in 2018**. "The \$91,875,000 paid for the work set a world auction record, not only for Edward Hopper but for any piece of pre-war American art. (The figure was more than double Hopper's previous best: \$40.5 million, realised at Christie's New York in 2013, for *East Wind Over Weehawken*.)" [1]

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