

Dada thinker, and of our own changed conceptual climate for looking at art at the end of the twentieth century. This is to see the paintings as being as conceptual in their function as Duchamp's readymades (perhaps even more intellectually intricate, in that the works here mischievously deploy the conventions of oil painting, ostensibly a genre in which aesthetic virtue is inherent in the performance, and even the formal substance, of each piece). Such is largely the theoretical basis, conscious or otherwise, of his current vogue and the ironic painting 'revival' it fuels.

Another view, though, which the authors here fall short of fully venturing, is that while the above terms are indeed in play (as intentionality and contextuality have always functioned in the interpretation of painting, even before post-modernism), yet Picabia remains a naturally visual talent, in a way that Duchamp, arguably, never was. Even his nudes or his most flippant abstracts can reflect this. Picabia's perverse project is in fact not an utter denial of the notion of 'virtue' in art, but an exercise in subjecting it to the fiercest test, one which shows inherent aesthetic qualities capable of enduring, of making certain works more effective than others. It is such qualities that distinguish the best of Picabia's works from their sources and elevate them to a rôle in which they genuinely 'reference' pornography, or 'primal' archetypal symbolism, rather than merely framing within a conceptual art context. This view, however, demands a discriminating sifting of the works and an on-going, unfashionable critical evaluation of which paintings combine colour, texture, structure, pictorial convention, illusionistic light, associations of imagery, plus a complex of other features, in significantly striking, new or individual ways. It does not accord with the current ideological climate, nor aid the wholesale reflation of the market in Picabia's once discounted stock.

MERLIN JAMES

Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné. By Gail Levin. 4 vols. + CD-Rom. 994 pp. incl. 600 col. pls. + 900 b. & w. ill. (Whitney Museum of American Art and W.W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 1995), \$750/£450. ISBN 0-393-03786-X.

Near the start of Gail Levin's otherwise resolute catalogue raisonné of Edward Hopper's illustrations, water-colours and paintings a poignant note is sounded. Levin remarks in the acknowledgments that the work had been begun in 1976 and that the manuscript was 'essentially finished by June of 1984'. In other words, almost two decades elapsed between the actual appearance of the publication and its inception, while during half of this period the enterprise seems to have been in some kind of limbo. Behind this terse point lurks a larger one concerning the special terms that apply to great scholarly projects of the magnitude of most catalogues raisonnés.

The reader must guess at whether there is

a workaday tale here of institutional travails insofar as Levin was a curator at the Whitney Museum, dovetailing her personal commitment to Hopper with the museum's own lengthy involvement with his art. Indeed, in 1980 Levin curated its large Hopper retrospective, but she then left the museum for academe. However, these complications point to a larger paradox at the core of the idea of a catalogue raisonné. Aiming to establish what ought to be a more or less timeless canon, this is among the most vulnerable of art-historical genres to the vagaries of time, fortune and obsolescence. Furthermore, recent intellectual trends have even doubted the relevance of such catalogues, questioning their assumptions about objectivity and authorship. The sturdy tan-coloured boxed set that now records Hopper's *œuvre* in great detail therefore inevitably presents multiple aspects. Its wealth of facts vindicates the author's tenacity, the good reproductions establish once and for all the strengths and limitations of this iconic American painter and its format adds another variation to the ongoing specialist debate over how such material is best configured.

The design of the volumes has an overall feel that is consistent with their subject. Clear and conservative, the layout, typeface and other elements are neither gimmicky nor dramatic. Instead, the principal innovation has been a decision to include a CD-Rom. This is a mixed blessing. First, it means that the whole product uneasily straddles the divide between the computer screen and the standard demands of book reading. While the printed entries for each work contain some of the information – titles, dimensions, dates and so forth – that one would expect to find there, other routine data such as the exhibition histories and provenances are confined exclusively to the CD-Rom. This division is troublesome because neither the disc nor its printed counterpart are self-sufficient, causing the inconvenience of having to sally back and forth between the two. Secondly, one of the most obvious bonuses of a computerised format could be the chance to scrutinise the high-resolution images in depth. On the contrary, we are told that these pictures have been deliberately scanned at a 'low resolution' in order to protect the owners of Hopper works from their 'unlicensed use'. Thus do legalities cancel the delights of technology.

Advising the introduction of the CD-Rom is the assumption that this is where the future of the catalogue (and all similar ones for that matter) lies, not least because its information is apparently 'more current' than that of the three printed volumes (periodic updates are promised). Here two unfortunate beliefs are active. The narrow thesis is that a catalogue raisonné is nothing more than a tool of archival research. The broader ethos supposes that the book is dead, or ought to be. Both are mistaken. The subtle physical pleasures of engaging books – catalogues raisonnés included – will survive as long as reading itself does. Nor can the 'facts' about works of art always be distinguished from the shifting ambient fields of interpretation, theory and subjectivity with which they intersect. On this

score, nevertheless, Levin's cut-and-dried standpoint follows that of the 'record book' kept by the Hoppers themselves. Each evokes an impartial, value-free method. Hence Levin, for example, says little about her reasoning for assigning dates that do not derive from the record book and she eschews – no doubt wisely – the fraught topics of stylistic attribution and fakes,¹ just as there is no statement regarding how many of the items included were examined in the original. Of less moment are the inevitable and occasional typos or errors and omissions² plus the need for an update of the Bibliography, which ends at 1986.

These minor gaps in the otherwise admirable factuality of the whole are more than compensated for by its comprehensiveness and such bonuses as being able to access pages from the record book on the CD-Rom. Still, the impact of the images would have benefited further from being reproduced to scale, especially since critics have rightly observed how their dimensions tend to be different in the original from what we might expect. But an arguably far more serious concern attaches to Hopper's drawings. Are they all reproduced here in the catalogue proper? Apparently not, because the introductory text incorporates various marginal images of drawings that surface nowhere else (e.g., figs. 116 and 117) and additional ensuing references are made to items that are evidently not illustrated, like the Whitney sketch (WMAA 70.235) for the 1928 canvas *Manhattan bridge loop*. What heightens this quandary is that the prints have been catalogued elsewhere³ and presumably for that reason are not included in the present set whereas the many magazine illustrations, comprising its first volume, on the whole replicate Levin's own 1979 catalogue of them. If these scenes constitute a requisite, though somewhat indigestible and repetitive side to understanding the total corpus, the drawings proper would appear to encompass some fascinating clues to the artist's themes and iconography. The aforementioned fig. 116, for instance, is a 'Father Time' from c.1901 that Levin cites as one of the earliest indications of Hopper's recurrent association of death with waiting. As far as can be seen from the thumbnail reproduction, the depiction also rhymes the V-shaped hourglasses at its left and right with the pointed physiognomy of Time himself. Half a century later, those sharp angles were to be assimilated to the gabled architecture in compositions such as *Second story sunlight* (1960; Fig. 41) as well as to the hatchet features of the people in *Four lane road* (1956) and the artist's last oil, *Two comedians* (1966). By enabling connexions of this order across the decades the catalogue makes its most valuable contribution of all to framing the complex equations in Hopper between style, biography and iconography.

Through a bold manoeuvre Levin has herself contextualised the laudably objective stance taken throughout the catalogue by the near-simultaneous publication in 1995 of *Edward Hopper: an intimate biography*. The latter study revises the accepted view of Hopper's sensibility through the lens of his wife Jo's vengeful, shrewish temperament. Apart from the biography's feminist bias

– decried by even a sympathetic female friend of the Hoppers, the art historian Barbara Novak⁴ – one consequence of the interface between Levin's twin, contrasting perspectives is to refract much of the visual record of the catalogue through the emotional text of the biography. Our 'intimacy' with Hopper over the *longue durée* thereby assumes something of a double meaning.

Notwithstanding a timely, even possibly time-bound, requirement to add a feminist facet to the Hopper mosaic, the lesson of Levin's lucid introduction to the catalogue and of the large output she traces thereafter is to strengthen her subject's classic status further – classic in the sense that the work invites constant reinterpretation by successive generations and in a plurality of ways. Not for nothing do Hopper's paintings intimate narratives that beckon the viewer to complete them.⁵ Insistent on telling stories in paint, pencil or ink, Hopper emerges over a creative span of six decades as someone drawn to an emblematic, anti-narrative symbolism. His genius was to collide these abstract realms of geometry, light and blank flatness with impossibly unregenerate everyday things, leaving the onlooker uncertain as to which world the images owe their loyalty.

Although the 357 water-colours and 366 oils contain few revelations – a result of the success of Hopper's appeal to the popular imagination a mere thirty years or so after his death – their totality reveals the mingling of opposite impulses that goes far to account for his idiosyncratic achievement. At one extreme, *Le Parc de Saint-Cloud* (1907) almost foretells Richard Diebenkorn, just as a 1926 water-colour of rocks (W-144) has the monolithic frontality of a Clyfford Still. At another extreme, some of the landscapes feel as banal as postcards and Hopper doubtless knew that his illustrative paraphernalia – the cloche hats, Ex-Lax signs, crimped hairstyles, snap-brim fedoras and Western motels – would be as dated soon after he had chosen them as yesterday's fashions. That was their point: Hopper fathomed the essence of 'retro' long before it yielded our contemporary taste for nostalgia in the ploys of late twentieth-century marketing and design.

For Hopper, the modern human condition itself could be deemed 'retro', its temporality marked by a radical slippage between the here-and-now and a vision that yearned to place it *sub specie aeternitatis* – under the light, both literal and metaphorical, of metaphysics. Accordingly, he once remarked that the open book discarded by the disillusioned male in the late *Excursion into philosophy* (1959) 'is Plato, reread too late'. Here, as in countless other respects, Hopper approached the dramaturgy of illusion and absence that was explored by his coeval, Mark Rothko. But Hopper deplored the quest for the absolute which pushed Rothko towards the limits of pictorial abstraction. In Hopper's own more hybrid aesthetic scenario transhistorical qualities such as light, emptiness, eroticism and time envelop figures, buildings and places that look all too site-specific, yoked as they are to the flotsam and jetsam of American life. A typical meeting occurs in *Shakespeare at dusk* (1935) wherein a statue of the



41. *Second story sunlight*, by Edward Hopper. 1960, 101.6 by 127 cm. (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York).

poet faces an unlit neon sign displaying the letters 'U.S.' across a twilight Central Park.⁶ Or liminal times of day – signalled by titles like *Five a.m.*, *Early Sunday morning*, *Railroad sunset* and *Night-hawks* – at once freeze and unsettle things that are either forsaken (empty streets), anachronistic (American Gothic vernacular) or transient (passers-by, a movie intermission). Elsewhere the mix of daylight and dream narrative renders reality strange and, in the process, creates an art of formidable elusiveness. The literature to date has consequently treated Hopper in relation to affinities or antecedents as diverse as Luminism, French Symbolism, the Ashcan School, American Scene painting, surrealism, film noir, the Freudian 'uncanny', abstract expressionism, photo-realism and pop art, among others. Now that we have Levin's catalogue raisonné, the dialogue between Hopper's silent images and their numerous interpretative voices can continue to grow upon the firmest of scholarly bases.

DAVID ANFAM

¹An Appendix gives a mere two canvases that may be by Jo Hopper.

²A *Tavern Topics* illustration (I-381: vol.I, p.254) is manifestly signed at lower left and not lower right as the entry states, and the unidentified oil portrait (O-316: vol.III, p.280) is likewise signed at lower left rather than unsigned as given in the accompanying data. I was mildly surprised to find that the otherwise very far-reaching Bibliography still omits my own review-article (*Art History*, IV [December 1981], pp.457–61) of Levin's 1980 Hopper retrospective and three of her catalogues.

³G. LEVIN: *Edward Hopper: The Complete Prints*, New York [1979] and C. ZIGROSSER: 'The Etchings of Edward Hopper' in C. ZIGROSSER, ed.: *Prints*, New York [1962].
⁴See B. NOVAK: 'The Posthumous Revenge of Josephine Hopper', *Art in America*, 84 [June 1996], pp.27–31.

⁵On this aspect of the 'classic' as modern because it accommodates an indeterminacy that elicits multiple re-readings, see F. KERMODE: *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* [New York and London, 1975].

Kermode's linkage of the classic to imperialism also elucidates a trait in Hopper that reflects a specific American ideology: the stress on loneliness. Loneliness is, after all, the flip side to a nation that has recurrently sought to stand alone in shaping its empire.

⁶Wallace Stevens, whose name is often linked with Hopper's, makes the same type of alienated contrast in the selfsame year with his poem *Mozart, 1935*.

Publications received

Matrici Metalliche Incise: il problema della conservazione e restauro dalla Calcografia Romana all'Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica. By Anna Grelle Iusco. 45 pp. incl. 14 b. & w. ills. (Artemide Edizioni, Rome, 1998), L.It.15,000. No ISBN.

This pamphlet describes itself as an off-print of the introduction to a not-yet-published volume, *Per un Atlante Morfologica dei Degradati delle Matrici Calcografiche*, written by Anna Grelle Iusco with Giuseppe Trassari Filipetto. The text addresses itself to the scientific problems of conserving and storing copper plates – a problem that few institutions in the world need to worry about except the three great national Calcographies in Rome, Paris and Madrid. The Calcografia in Rome has faced and surmounted the numerous difficulties with admirable zeal. Fig.14 of the pamphlet shows the astonishing store that has been constructed with special sliding presses, and a method of attaching the plates vertically to the backing so that they can be inspected with a minimum of handling. Apparently the weight of the copper was so great that the foundations of the building had to be strengthened.

ANTONY GRIFFITHS

Drawing 1400-1600 – Invention and Innovation. Edited by Stuart Currie. 237 pp. incl. 68 b. & w. ills (Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, 1998), £45. ISBN 1-85928-364-0.

Spanning from the late fourteenth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, this book brings together a group of papers given in 1994, for the