

Edward Hopper In Vermont
Middlebury College Museum of Art
May 23rd - August 11th, 2013

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Published in *Art New England*, 2013

Is there anything new that can be learned about Edward Hopper (1882-1967), arguably one of the most visible, well documented of American 20th century artists? Mention of his name conjures up iconic images of urban isolation, such as *Nighthawks* (1942), showing three patrons sitting at the counter in a harshly lit New York City dinner. Greenwich Village, the Manhattan neighborhood where Hopper and his wife Jo (Josephine Verstill Nivison) spent most of their time, strongly influenced this and other works featuring brick walls, rooftops, pavement and images of lonely woman glimpsed through hotel windows, staring vacantly at what, we don't know. This is the Hopper who is most familiar.

But, to return to my opening question, there are lesser known aspects of Hoppers oeuvre still to be discovered and to this end I offer the exhibition: *Edward Hopper in Vermont*. As a former city dweller and new transplant to Vermont, I eagerly looked forward to the exhibition and attending the lecture by Bonnie Tocher Clause, an independent scholar who wrote the book of the same title upon which this show was based. Not an art historian by training, Tocher Clause (also a new-comer to Vermont) was driven by curiosity to find authentic images that reflected a strong sense of place with which to decorate the walls of her new home. An initial Internet search led her to an out of print poster from the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Edward Hopper's *Barn and Silo, Vermont*. She, like most of us, was surprised that Hopper had painted a Vermont scene, and she next turned to Gail Levin's extensive Hopper biography to learn more.

Clause's lecture echoed her enthusiasm as we followed the search that uncovered more than three dozen Hoppers, little known watercolors of Vermont painted between 1927 and 1938. It became apparent that the paintings Hopper made in Vermont were virtually unknown, not only to most art historians, but also to people in Vermont who may have lived near those places where the Hoppers visited and painted. Clause, along with her husband Mike Hogan, took to retracing what might have been the Hoppers same path as they drove the backroads of Vermont, searching for inspiring scenes to paint in the summers of 1927 and 1937/38. It soon became apparent that there was enough rich material for a book that would hopefully resurrect Hoppers Vermont works from oblivion.

Much to his credit, Richard Saunders, Director of the Middlebury College Museum of Art, recognized the potential for an exhibition as soon as he encountered Tocher Clause's book at an academic conference in 2012 and

immediately put the wheels in motion to make this show a reality. Those of you in museum work know how difficult it is to mount an exhibition in the 3-4 year window usually allotted for such planning, but a little more than a year after the book's publication, most all of the watercolors and drawings Hopper made in Vermont were gathered together for the first time in this show at Middlebury.

Arranged chronologically in two small galleries, the works, not large, having been done mostly on the spot from the back seat of the Hoppers parked roadster, are generally 14"x 20". They often reflect this perspective, as the 6 foot 5 inch artist would have had more room to stretch out there than scrunched in the front, next to his wife, Jo, who was also a painter.

There are no people in any of the Vermont paintings and when structures are depicted like *Red Barn in Autumn Landscape* 1927 or *Near the Connecticut River, Bellows Falls Vermont* 1927, details are obliterated and execution is spare. Most intriguing was the deceptive complexity of the landscapes where Hoppers focus on trees and light used as structural elements become apparent. This summer, the Whitney drew from its extensive Hopper collection to mount a show of drawings that have never been the subject of an in-depth exhibition. Combined with the Middlebury revelations, it was a summer of discovery.