Information on



Edward Hopper
American, 1881–1967
Corn Hill (Truro, Cape Cod), 1930
Oil on canvas, 28 1/2 x 42 1/2 in.
Mary and Sylvan Lang Collection
1975.35

Subject Matter

Hopper's painting of Corn Hill in Truro, Cape Cod, shows a hillside in sunlight with rows of small houses set side-by-side atop the hills. The sky has an expanse of cirrus clouds across it, with a faint pink haze on the left side. The deep shadows on the green hillside and the houses suggest late afternoon or early morning sun. Hopper's colors are yellows and yellow greens, with some areas of red and light orange.

According to legend, on Corn Hill, the Mayflower pilgrims found a cache of Indian corn that saved them from starvation. Edward Hopper and his wife Jo had spent several summers on Cape Cod staying two or three summers at Bird Cage Cottage, so called because "wind, rain and animals entered it with equal freedom." After an especially rainy summer in 1933, they built their own home with space enough to paint indoors.

On the Cape, Hopper indulged his love of sunlight in an area where the summer light is especially intense. In an old interview with Katherine Kuh (1930), when asked if living on Cape Cod in the summer had effected his work, he replied, "I don't think so. . . I choose to live there because it has a longer summer season. There's something soft about Cape Cod light that doesn't appeal to me too much, but there's a beautiful light there—very luminous—perhaps because it's so far out to sea; an island almost."

About the Artist

Born in Nyack, New York, Hopper demonstrated an early interest in drawing. After graduation from high school, he enrolled at the Correspondence School of Illustrating in New York to study commercial art. Dissatisfied, he transferred to the Chase School where he was influenced by his teacher, Robert Henri. He was friends with The Eight but was never an Ash Can artist. Between 1906 and 1910, he made three trips to Europe. While in Paris he became interested in the Impressionist use of light in their paintings. From 1913 to 1923, he earned a living as a commercial illustrator. In 1924, a solo exhibition of Hopper's watercolors would be a sell out and he was established at last.

His works from the 1920s on are considered central examples of American Scene painting, expressing the loneliness and stillness of town life, though Hopper claimed that he had not set out to capture such a mood in his work. The quality of light in these works is the major factor in capturing this mood.

Physically tall, Hopper was 6'4". Moody, he wasted no words or gestures, and was deliberate in response. He possessed a Yankee characteristic of brevity and understatement. He read avidly—poetry, fiction, philosophy, and English literature, as well as French and German writers.

He painted slowly, one or two paintings a year. Interested in architecture, he said that people did not interest him—empty streets did. He also became absorbed with technical problems: how to shape shadow, how to reconcile multiple sources of light, how to find forms for subjects such as railroads, tunnels, and highways.

Edward Hopper
Corn Hill (Truro, Cape Cod), 1930

Quote from the Artist

My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most ultimate impressions of nature. If this end is unattainable, so, it can be said is perfection in any other ideal of painting or in any other of man's activities.

Strategies for Tours

Primary Grades (ages 6–8): Is this a portrait, a still life or a landscape? If there were people inside the houses, what would they be doing? Is it hot outdoors? Or cool? Is there a breeze? is the sun beating down?

Upper Elementary (ages 9–11): Look carefully at the surface of the painting, without touching, of course. List the colors you find. Which colors dominate? What part does the red play? How would the impact of the painting be different if there was no red? If this artist had used color the way the Fauves used color?

Is the paint applied thickly? Where? Is it very thin anywhere? Did the artist use a dry brush anywhere?

What do you think about the absence of people? Who might live in these houses? Do they look luxurious or simple? What might the people in the houses be doing at this time of day? What do you thin the artist enjoy most about this scene?

Adolescents and Adults: [Use questions above as appropriate. Discuss Hopper's rejection of abstraction, which so many artists of his generation adopted. Discuss Cape Cod scene and the absence of figures, sense of loneliness.]

Sources Worth Consulting

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