



ART IN THE MAKING

Edward Hopper

+ intro by Steven Foxon, Curator BFI National Archive, producer Patsy Nightingale and director of photography Patrick Duval

A contemporary review

‘Where to start?’ muses the narrator-director at the outset of this study of the American realist painter, adding with the feigned air of one contemplating some extraordinary last resort, ‘Of course, there are always the paintings’. Such a statement might almost be intended to parody the efforts of some recent Arts Council films to break away from what has been seen (by a certain latter-day critical orthodoxy) as the discredited form of the art documentary.

A sense of prevarication persists with an interminable motorist’s-eye-view of New York traffic, and with an on-camera conversation, rather fumbling in its pretended spontaneity, between Ron Peck and Gail Levin, the Whitney Museum’s resident Hopper expert. But as the film discards existential gestures for exegetical demonstration, it moves on to much more rewarding ground. In fact, it seems a pity that Levin’s remarks could not have been more extensively incorporated into the continuing commentary, since she proves not only critically incisive but anecdotally witty on the biographical background-disclosing, for instance, in illustration of Hopper’s conservatism, that he was prepared to cut short a vacation in order to return home and cast his vote against Roosevelt.

The film’s essential interest is the series of analogues it proposes, and for the most part, fortunately, the pace is sufficiently unhurried to allow them to register convincingly. Thus, Hopper’s early work in advertising and magazine illustration is shown to have influenced not only the technique but the content of his paintings. In particular it is intriguing to discover that, according to the artist, *Office at Night*, a picture which might seem to contain strongly dramatic elements – and which, indeed, the art critic William Feaver has discussed in terms of American hard-boiled fiction – chiefly had to do with the deployment of office furniture, an earlier subject of his labours in a series of advertisements. The pull in Hopper towards abstraction, and away from either the documentary or the populist is succinctly highlighted by visual comparison with, respectively: Walker Evans’ photography and Norman Rockwell’s illustrations.

Peck – whose preoccupation with Hopper is attested by his borrowing of the title from one of the artist’s best known works, *Nighthawks*, for the feature he co-directed with Paul Hallam – then proceeds by way of the contention that Hopper’s paintings often resemble stage or film sets, with people placed like actors, and items like cigarettes and coffee cups utilised in the manner of props, to assert the notion of a ‘fictionalised’ vision. This in turn leads to the invocation of cinematic fiction – Hopper was, we learn, an inveterate moviegoer – and to the submission in evidence of assorted movie stills. Both Nicholas Ray’s *They Live by Night* and *Party Girl* yield startlingly Hopper-like images, though it is a pity that – whether unavoidably or not – the latter should be represented, as is Minnelli’s *Home from the Hill*, only in black-and-white reduction. (Moreover, at the risk of appearing pedantic, it might be objected that the use of a still of the newshounds’ bar in Lang’s *While the City*

Sleeps is a bit of a cheat, since despite an isolated visual resemblance, the atmospheric context is appreciably different from Hopper.)

Despite a few loose ends, this film would have made an admirable introduction to the Hopper retrospective which recently visited the Hayward Gallery. The circumstantial snag is that it has, rather, become a postscript to that event; as such, however, it is well worth having.

Tim Pulleine, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1981

Night Works

One of a series of films combining music and images: an office cleaner, and what happens to some of the people who work in the building.

EDWARD HOPPER

Director: Ron Peck
Production Company: Four Corners Films
Sponsor: Arts Council of Great Britain
Executive Producer: Rodney Wilson
Producer/production Co-ordinator: Patsy Nightingale
Production Manager: Robert Epstein
Location Manager: John Wright
Production Assistant: Ilene Sunshine
Script: Ron Peck
Photography: Patrick Duval
Camera Operator: Derek Little
Editor: Wilfried Thust, Margaret Dickinson
Assistant Editor: Joy Chamberlain
Titles: Frameline
Music: Ron Peck, Gail Levin, David Graham Ellis
Sound Recording: Derek Williams, Roger Ollerhead
Sound Re-recording: Richard King

With

Ron Peck
Gail Levin

UK 1981
47 mins

NIGHT WORK

Director: Miranda Pennell
©: BBC, Arts Council of England
An *Illuminations* production
For BBC and the Arts Council of England
Executive Producers: Peter Maniura, Rodney Wilson
Producer: Terry Braun
Editor: Budge Tremlett
On-line Editor: Darren Jonusas
Production Designer: Charlotte Watts
Art Director: Gavin Fitch
Costume Design: Annie Symons
Make-up and Hair: Thelma Matthews, Amanda Wallburton
Sound Composer: Barry Adamson
Sound Recordist: Ian MacPherson
Dubbing Mixer: Steve Bray

Cast

Andree Evans (*cleaning lady*)
David Gillies (*office clerk*)
Garard Greed (*company director*)
Alison Lintott (*secretary*)
Denise Stephenson (*career woman*)

UK 1998©
14 mins

REGULAR PROGRAMME

African Odysseys: Free Renty: Lanier v. Harvard + intro and Q&A

Sat 11 Feb 14:00

Silent Cinema: Neil Brand Presents Laurel and Hardy

Sun 12 Feb 16:00

Woman with a Movie Camera: Galentine's Day: The Parent Trap 25th Anniversary

Mon 13 Feb 20:15

Projecting the Archive: I'll Get You for This (aka Lucky Nick Cain) + intro by Rosie Taylor, Curatorial Archivist, BFI National Archive

Tue 21 Feb 18:20

Experimenta: Right of Way + Q&A with artists Dan Guthrie, Ufuoma Essi and Arjuna Neuman, hosted by Jonathan Ali

Thu 23 Feb 18:10

Film Wallahs: Kekee Manzil: House of Art

Fri 24 Feb 20:40

Course: Filmmaking for Artists: Beginners Filmmaking Workshop

Sun 26 Feb 10:30-16:30

Relaxed Screening: Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jō) + intro and discussion

Mon 27 Feb 18:15

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