
Near the start of Gail Levin's otherwise resolute catalogue raisonné of Edward Hopper's illustrations, water-colours and paintings a poigniant 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. The first is 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 diversity of a catalogue raisonné is an overall factor that Levin renders to the fiercest test, one which shows in fact not an utter denial of the notion of 'primal' archetypal symbolism, rather than merely framing within a conceptual art perspective, but she then left the museum in Picabia's once discounted stock. Hence Levin, for example, says little about Hopper's sensibility through the lens of his wife Jo's vengeful, shrewish temperament. Of less moment are the omissions plus the need for an update inevitable and occasional typos or errors. Nevertheless, Levin's cut-and-dried 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 which do not derive from the record book and she eschews – no doubt wisely – the fraught topics of stylistic attribution and fakes, 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 omissions 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 genuine? Levin's commitment to Hopper's sensibility through the lens of his wife Jo's vengeful, shrewish temperament. Half a century later, those sharp angles were to be assimilated to the gabled architecture of 'time itself. 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 omissions plus the need for an update of the Bibliography, which ends at 1986.

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 American, whose considerably narrower study revises the accepted view of the latter study revises the accepted view of the artist's themes and iconography. The aforementioned fig.116, for instance, is a self-portrait from '38 as a particularly early example 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 itself. Apart from the biography's feminist bias
decried by even a sympathetic female friend of the Hoppers, the art historian Barbara Novak – one consequence of the interface between Levin's twin, contrasting perspectives is to refract much of the visual record of the catalogue through the emotive text of the biography. Our 'intimacy' with Hopper over the longue durée thereby assumes something of a double meaning.

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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. 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 strategy. In her lucid introduction to the catalogue and of the large output she traces thereafter (1907) almost foretells Richard Diebenkorn, subsequently marked by a radical slippage between the here-and-now and a vision that 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 formable 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

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

s, 1998), £45. ISBN 1-85928-364-0.


This pamphlet describes itself as an off-print of the introduction to a not-yet-published volume, Per un Atlante Metodico dei Degradi delle Matrici Calografiche, written by Anna Grelli Iusco with Giuseppe Trissari Filippetto. 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 Calografie in Rome, Paris and Madrid. The Calografia 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


Spawning 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

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.

Wallace 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 Italice: il problema della conservazione e restauro della Calografia Romana all'Estatuto Nazionale per la Grafica. By Anna Grelli Iusco. 45 pp. incl. 14 b. & w. ills. (ArtemiEdizioni, Rome, 1998); L.It. 15,000. No ISBN.

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