ART JOURNAL, SUMMER 1981

John Clancy: But he was very frugal. In fact I never told this, but during the depression things were pretty bad. He came to Rehn one day and said, "I know that you have pretty tough going, you know I've saved my money. I'd be glad to loan you some if you need it."

HH: Well, that was you see after, after—maybe that's what he was going to lend him, what he got for our house. It was just after the depression. However, it seemed terrible to me that he was in a position where he had to spend his genius on something he disapproved, like me doing "The New Penny," the radio show. I guess I had sort of a kindred spirit for him. That is the story of *Pretty Penny*. Now it's in this exhibition, and I'm so glad that people are seeing it, enjoying it. I gave it away years later, after my husband had died. I was going to move away from my house out there in Nyack and then to a small apartment in New York, and I wanted to find a good place to leave it. I asked Theodore Rousseau at the Metropolitan for the names of small museums that might need some additions to their collection, and at the head of the list was the museum of Smith College, in Massachusetts, in Northampton. Smith had been practically the first important educational institution to give me an honorary degree and take a chance on me; I settled to give it to them. I gave it to them so that it would be a part of their permanent collection. The terrible thing is, I'm told by people who have been to that collection over the years, that it's never been shown in the collection. It's in somebody's office. Therefore, it's very, very pleasing for me to know that it's here and being seen in this great exhibition in New York.

Actress Helen Hayes is the only patron to have commissioned a painting from Hopper.

Raphael Soyer

When Gail Levin asked me to participate in the symposium on Edward Hopper, I readily agreed, since I knew Hopper. I painted him several times, and we were both involved in the magazine *Reality*.

When I say "I knew Hopper," what does that mean? Did anybody really know this silent, noncommunicative man? To me he represented the type of humble, honest American painters who worked daily, steadily, in their modest, even austere, studios—like Henry Varnum Poor, Edwin Dickinson, Guy Pène du Bois. I had great feeling for these people—they were so intelligent and so unpretentious.

Fig. 8

Fig. 8 Raphael Soyer Homage to Thomas Eakins, 1964 – 65, oil 88 x 80". Washington D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Smithsonian Institution

My comparatively close relationship with Hopper began about 1963 (even though ten years earlier we had worked together on *Reality*). At that time, in 1963, I embarked upon the project of painting *Homage to Thomas Eakins* ***(Fig. 8)***. Two events inspired me to attempt this ambitious work: seeing Fantin-Latour's *Homage to Delacroix* in Paris, and the great Eakins exhibition, organized by Lloyd Goodrich, in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. And, besides, I always had a desire to do a large group painting. Now I would fulfill it.

I contacted a few artists. I wrote first to Edward Hopper, describing what I wanted to do, saying, "I'm writing to you first, because I cannot conceive this composition without you in it. I consider this projected painting not plausible without you." I promised to use as little of his time as possible. I remember Hopper's answer. He would gladly pose for me. He liked the idea, but he warned me that there might be some artists who would want to be included not for their love of Eakins, but for reasons of publicity.

May I quote from my diary about Hopper's first sitting for the oil study:

Curved and bent though his body is, his height comes through. I imagined him in the role of those fantastic saints who flagellate themselves or meditate in deserts in the paintings of Carpaccio and De la Tour. There is a loneliness about him, an Habitual moroseness, a sadness to the point of anger. His voice breaks the silence loudly and sepulchrally. He posed still with folded hands on the table. A few times he raised his folded hands and scratched his ear with the tip of one of his intertwined fingers. We hardly conversed.

Hopper came to pose three times. Gradually we became less shy of each other and began to talk during the sittings, about Eakins, art critics, photography, but never about his own work. He thought Eakins used photography to some extent. "But Goodrich says 'No—he did not.'" "His [Eakins's] paintings are so dark, it's a disadvantage," Hopper said. He wondered how a comprehensive Eakins exhibition would be received in Europe. He told me that Forbes-Watson wrote that when a painting by Eakins, the *Concert*, was shown in Italy the spectators didn't know what to make of it and laughed. "They simply laughed at it," he repeated worriedly a few times. "I don't know." Ever so often Hopper ended a statement uncertainly with "I don't know."

We happened to mention Kuniyoshi, and Hopper said, "His work is oriental, and oriental painting doesn't go so far as western art—it stops. . . . Of course, it's

a very formalized art. Hiroshige is more realistic because, I think, he was influenced by western art."

We talked about photography again, and I said photography could be helpful sometimes. "Your jacket, for instance, does not retain the same folds each time you come to pose," I said. "I took a photo of a landscape once," Hopper replied, "and I couldn't use it. Photography is so light. No weight to it." When I named the well-known American photographer Matthew Brady and the Parisian Atget, Hopper ponderingly insisted, "They can't get the same weight as painters can. I don't know."

When once Hopper was asked to participate in an art symposium with some nonrepresentational artists, he refused. He told me, "I said 'Nix.' Painting has become a matter of words to such a great extent."

We talked about writers on art and art critics, we discussed their merits and shortcomings. "They don't seem to write what they think," Hopper said broodingly. "Of course there are pressures. They weave a fabric of words that don't seem to have much to do with painting. . . . I don't know. They don't actually paint themselves. They're looking inside from the outside, you know." "Did you know Henry McBride?" I asked. "He wasn't bad." "He was amusing," said Hopper. "Guy Pène du Bois was better." He mentioned Du Bois's name several times with something like fondness. "Du Bois and I studied with Henri, who was a good teacher. He talked about life in connection with art . . . but he was a limited painter—just the model and the background. All of them—Henri, Bellows, Sloan, Glackens, Luks—their movement was important in American art, but they were not great painters at all. Du Bois had no use for Bellows. Glackens became arty after awhile."

We talked about Italian art. "It's too lush and sweet at times," I said. "Mantegna is very masculine and vigorous," Hopper said. "Piero della Francesca seems to be the idol today." Then he described a Dutch or Flemish painting he had seen at a dealer's: "I don't remember the artist's name. It was just a square, a beautiful sunlit pavement and houses—no figures."

He talked about Mexico, where he had painted some watercolors. Had he met any of the Mexican painters who were quite popular in the U.S. at that time? "No. At a hotel where we stayed once, Siqueros stayed, too. I did not meet him." I asked him if he had met any of the French painters when he lived in Paris. "No. I did not know anyone. Gertrude Stein was on the throne when I was there."

After two and a half hours I asked Hopper if he was tired. "No," he said, "I can pose more. You don't have to hurry." Just at that moment my wife came up to the studio, carrying our one-year-old grandson, lively eyed, full of promise and potential, but as yet unable to walk or talk. "May I introduce David to you?" she asked. "This is David. David, say hello to Mr. Hopper." "He doesn't have to say it if he doesn't want to," said the octogenarian in his sepulchral voice. And there was warmth and humor in his eyes, I thought, as he glanced from under his forehead at the infant.

To go back now, about ten years previously, to the publication of *Reality* and Hopper's participation in it. In the first issue of that slim magazine Henry Varnum Poor tells "how this group began." I quote: "The first meeting of this group was in response to a postcard from Raphael Soyer in March 1950. We met in a restaurant. I recall Kuniyoshi, Edward Hopper, Ben Shahn, Leon Kroll, Joseph Hirsch, Philip Evergood, Raphael Soyer. We found it very pleasant to sit around the table and talk about what we believed in as painters. We felt that regardless of what might grow out of this, the meeting was worthwhile in just bringing us together. . . . We met again, and the group began growing."

But it was not until 1953, three years after the first meeting, that *Reality—a Journal of Artists' Opinion* made its appearance with a statement signed by forty-six artists. Following are excerpts from that statement:

All art is an expression of human experience. . . . We believe that texture and accident, like color, design and all other elements of painting are only the means to a larger end which is the depiction of man and his world. Today mere textural novelty is being presented by a dominant group of museum officials, dealers, critics and publicity men as the unique manifestation of artistic intuition. This arbitrary exploitation of a single phase of painting encourages contempt for the taste and intelligence of the public. . . . We are asked to believe that only an inner circle is capable of judging contemporary painting, that everybody else must take it on faith.

The statement closes with a quote from the journal of Delacroix: "The men of our profession deny to the fabricators of theories the right to dabble in our domain, and at our expense."

In this statement the artists committed themselves "to restore to art its freedom and dignity as a living language." Among the signers were Milton Avery, Isabel Bishop, Charles Birchfield, Guy Pène du Bois, Philip Evergood, Joseph Hirsch, Edward Hopper, Karl Knaths, Leon Kroll, Kuniyoshi, Sidney Laufman, Jacob Lawrence, Jack Levine, Reginald Marsh, Robert Gwathmey, Maurice Grosser, and Henry Varnum Poor.

There was also an open letter to the Museum of Modern Art, requesting "that representational forms of art be given the same serious and scholarly consideration that the Museum has extended to abstract art recently" and that a conference be called "to help resolve some of the problems involved." Such a conference was later held, but the directors denied they were giving undue attention to nonobjectivism.

The first issue also contained articles by Henry Varnum Poor, Honoré Sharer, Jack Levine, Ben Shahn, and Maurice Grosser. There was a letter from Paris by Guy Pène du Bois and several personal statements by other artists, among them Edward Hopper, whose statement I will quote:

Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world. No amount of skillful invention can replace the essential element of imagination. One of the weaknesses of much abstract painting is the attempt to substitute the invention of the intellect for a pristine imaginative conception.

The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm, and does not concern itself only with stimulating arrangements of color, form and design.

The term "life" as used in art is something not to be held in contempt, for it implies all of existence, and the province of art is to react to it and not to shun it.

Painting will have to deal more fully and less obliquely with life and nature's phenomena—before it can become great.

Looking back it amuses me to think how long it took for us artists to come together, to get to know one another, to air our views on art and events, and finally to produce once a year the three slim issues of *Reality*. Our purpose was to discuss the changing and confusing art situation of the moment, to try to understand the abrupt ascendancy of abstraction and its wholehearted promulgation by museums, art dealers, and critics.

We did not foresee the furor, the furious reaction our little publication would arouse on the part of the Museum of Modern Art, of art critics, and of art publications. The museum sent a letter to the editorial board of *Reality* in which was implicit a warning against Communist influence. At the same time some lunatic organization sent a letter wanting to join us in the war against the ungodly communists of the Museum of Modern Art. These were the McCarthy days. Some artists, afraid to lose standing with the Mu-

...um of Modern Art, resigned from the ...roup. But Edward Hopper stayed on the ...ditorial board and, although he seldom ...ook part in the discussions, he never ...issed a meeting.

Now, more on Hopper. In the sixties, during the time of the cultural exchange between our country and the Soviet Union, I was informed one day by Anton Refrigier that a Russian art historian, the author of the first history on American art in Russian, who was touring with a Russian group in the U.S., wanted to meet some of the contemporary artists he had written about. Would I invite some artists to meet Professor Chegodaev in our home?

On very short notice about sixteen artists showed up, among them Edward Hopper. Chegodaev spoke English, and a warm relationship was established between him and the Americans. In the hubbub of the general conversation, I heard the loud voice of the until-then-silent Edward Hopper: "What would your government do if your country had a Daumier at this time?" The Russian's voice was low, and I could not hear his answer to Hopper's stern question. But I did see them shake hands. After a while my wife brought out refreshments, and Hopper, who had again lapsed into silence, exclaimed at the sight of a tray of cookies, "Oh, little cakes!"

The frugality of the Hoppers amused us. When they invited us out to dinner once in Truro, it was not to any of the restaurants generally frequented by artists and their friends, but to the nondescript Bill's Diner on the road. "The food here is better than in the high-tone places," Jo Hopper said with conviction.

For several years Rebecca and I would dutifully make a yearly visit to the Hoppers, climbing up the four steep flights to their home on Washington Square. We would phone several times before each visit, and Jo would invariably try to dissuade us from coming, either because the "house was in disorder," or they "had not yet unpacked from their return from Cape Cod," or simply because "Eddie isn't up to it." Finally she would consent to our coming, and would receive us with her fussy cordiality into her light studio. We always brought some memento—a catalog on Thomas Eakins, or some publication with a reference to Hopper.

In Jo Hopper's studio there was a permanent, never changing exhibition of her paintings—pictures of her small, crammed world, of Truro, flower pieces, interiors of her room, and pictures of cats and potbellied stoves. Only once did we see Edward's studio—a large, whitewashed, bare room, with an etching press, an easel, and nothing on the walls. Jo would daintily serve us bread-and-butter sandwiches, and tea, fragrant with a clove in each cup.

Once, years ago, we visited the Hoppers in their summer home, a lonely house on one of the hills in Truro. Jo sent us directions how to get there and emphasized the difficulty of driving up the almost perpendicular narrow road to the top: "Keep in the ruts," she warned. When we reached the house, there was Hopper sitting in front of it, looking out over the hills. We found Jo sitting in the back, looking over the bay. "That's what we do all the time," she said sharply. "He sits in his spot and looks at the hills all day, and I look at the sea. And when we meet there is controversy, controversy, controversy."

Their country house, too, was stark and bare. In the large room stood a huge easel, which Hopper said he had made himself, pointing to a box in the corner containing his tools. There was not a painting, not even a bare canvas in sight. When I asked what he was working on, he said, "I'm worried like hell. I haven't begun to paint this year. But I'm waiting for November, when the shadows are longer, and the landscape is more interesting, in fact, beautiful." But I believe that Hopper painted mentally all the time. The content had to be clear and accurate in his mind before he began to compose it on the raw, white canvas.

I was flattered and moved by the friendship of this seemingly unfriendly, aloof old man. I liked him and admired him, and I recognized his intelligence. In any exhibition of American art, a Hopper stands out, weighty, lonely, and unadorned, like his house, like his easel, like himself.

Painter Raphael Soyer was, with Hopper, a member of the editorial committee of* Reality *magazine.

Brian O'Doherty

Hopper wrote that the inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm. How much of his did I see? As far as I could see, his public and private faces differed not a bit. His silence was formidable, as you've heard today. It was a rich, active, and companionable silence. It gave extra meaning to what he said or did, the kind of meaning that occupies every recess of his great paintings.

When he did talk he was very sparing. I wrote a long piece on him and Mrs. Hopper I brought it down and read it to them, warts and all. She liked it at once, even when it hurt. He didn't say anything. Several months later he brought it up to say just three words: "You got me." That was all.

Barbara Novak said, "He was economical about everything but time—he was prodigal with that." He used all the time in the world to clarify his perceptions, testing them all the way. There was that curious coexistence of complete certainty and complete doubt. The "I don't know" reported by Raphael Soyer is very familiar. Somewhere a cynic manqué was restrained by his stoicism.

Mrs. Hopper had a poor opinion of Carlyle but Carlyle's descriptions of people are among the best I know. How would he have described Hopper? Perhaps something like this: He was very tall, stooped, slow-moving, deliberate. Though patient and stoic, he was always observant and quick-witted. He was courteous and well-dressed, often in Norfolk jackets. His gestures were few. He rarely crossed his legs when he sat down, perhaps because they were so long. He clasped his hands on his lap, or held the left arm of his chair while rubbing his cheek gently with the first and second fingers of the right hand. Sometimes the forefinger would hover in front of his lips in the gesture that indicates silence. Sometimes both forefingers, arising out of his clasped hands, would touch his lips and he would gently nod his head in a reflective manner. He said little; after he uttered a phrase or two he looked to see your response before you formulated it. He read a great deal, particularly Emerson, went to a great many films, possessed a radio but no television. He liked French culture, was conservative in politics, disallowed the premises of abstract art, was self-deprecating, distrusted fame, would not sign autographs, and had a deep pessimism about human nature, which he liked to observe endlessly. He was sensual, puritanical, highly principled, direct, honest, generous, and he kept his word. He was not religious—he admired Renan's *Life of Jesus*— and he had a full knowledge of the messiness of life.

Of the many stories that could be told, I'll limit myself to two. One he told on himself. When *Time* magazine gave that famous party for its cover story subjects, he spotted one of his heroines—Bette Davis. He went up, plucked her dress, and when he had her attention said, "I like your movies." She responded "So?" and returned to her conversation. He'd laugh at that point. The other story arose out of several parties we threw in the sixties to which the Hoppers came. The room would quickly fill up except around the Hoppers, who sat on the couch. A space would form around them. From this he would survey the party. People would cross over, pay their respects, and exit. I thought him very comfortable in this isolation, his hands clasped on his stick, which was standing on the floor between his legs. Mrs. Hopper, who loved parties, would leave, have a conversation,