

Back to the light

By Brent Gregston



Edward Hopper's masterpieces arrive in Paris

The first retrospective of Edward Hopper in Paris is also one of the most ambitious ever, a look at the artist "in all his complexity" as a painter of light and architecture as well as the loneliness of modern life.

There are no less than 128 Hopper works – masterpieces like "Gas," "Hotel Room" and "Soir Bleu" – as well as 35 works from other artists. And "Nighthawks," of course, the icon of urban alienation showing four figures in an all-night diner with No Exit. Brian O'Doherty, an art critic

who was a friend of Hopper's in the last years of his life, describes the exhibition at the Grand Palais as the most beautiful and elegant display of Hopper's works he has ever seen.

Part of the exhibit is a special tribute to the painter's cinematic vocabulary. Hopper had a deep influence on popular culture in the 20th century, on film in particular. Alfred Hitchcock said that Hopper's work was an inspiration for *Rear Window* and *Psycho*. For this show, the Grand Palais invited eight





directors to make short films inspired by one of eight Hopper paintings.

The first part of the show covers Hopper's formative years (1900-1924), comparing his early work with that of his contemporaries and what he saw in Paris. A lifelong Francophile, Hopper first visited the French capital in 1906, just after a major exhibition of the Fauvists. For most of that year, he spent the mornings painting on the banks of the

Seine and the rest of the day visiting museums and galleries. Edgar Degas, in particular, seems to have been an inspiration. His last visit was in 1910. "It took me a decade to get Europe out of my system," he would later say.

The "mature years" refer to four productive decades beginning with "House by the Railroad" (1924) and ending with his final canvas, "Two Comedians" (1966). Curator Didier Ottinger claims that no other exhibit has ever brought together as many mature works. "In the last 40 years of his life he produced 100 paintings. We have 55 of them here." Seeing so many of them in the order they were painted leads you to appreciate how Hopper turned again and again to his favorite subjects: abandoned houses, women in hotel rooms, train stations, solitary figures sunk in thought, the grit of the modern city.

Again and again, Hopper returns to the solitary figure in the window, illuminated by a shaft of light. In "Morning Sun" (1952), the figure is a girl in her bedroom, nude in front of an open window in the brilliant light of day. "This, I think, is the real subject of Hopper's painting," says Ottinger. "You see people who are awakened by the sun and taken out of their condition, which is very poor and very ordinary. This is the hope that is expressed in Hopper's painting."

The Edward Hopper exhibit is on view until January 28 at the Grand Palais, Avenue du Général Eisenhower, eighth arrondissement, Paris, tel. 33.1.44.13.17.17, www.grandpalais.fr