

Study for *Nighthawks*

ca. 1941-1942, fabricated chalk and charcoal,
11¹/₈ x 15.

All artwork this article collection
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,
New York, unless otherwise indicated.



HOPPER DRAWING

An exhibition organized by the Whitney Museum reveals how this 20th-century master used drawing to explore, organize, and refine the ideas expressed in his paintings.

BY JERRY N. WEISS

Edward Hopper was famously taciturn. His wife, Jo, once said that “sometimes talking with Eddie is just like dropping a stone in a well, except that it doesn’t thump when it hits bottom.” Hopper’s oils are as reserved as the man, with nonessential information trimmed like so much visual gristle in order to convey mood with the greatest possible concision. Sparsely populated and spare of sentiment, his paintings are lean evocations of the solitude of urban spaces. They account for some of the most haunting and memorable images of 20th-century American art.

If all Hopper (1882–1967) had left us were a few iconic canvases, we’d have a perfect romantic legend of the terse and enigmatic poet. But it happens that, in terms of creative output, Hopper was prolific. When Jo Hopper died in 1968, a year after her husband, she bequeathed their collection to the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York City. Included in the bequest were not only a great many important oils but watercolors, etchings, and a staggering number of drawings—more than 2,500 in all.

Forty-five years after receiving these works, the Whitney has installed the succinctly titled exhibition “Hopper Drawing.” It includes some 200 works, with watercolors and oils displayed alongside numerous related studies; an entire gallery is devoted to the preliminary drawings for the painting *New York Movie*. The drawings range from stand-alone works to quick and abstract studies to the downright quotidian—there’s a small study of a fire hydrant that’s unremarkable except for its relation to one of Hopper’s masterworks, *Early Sunday Morning*.

Taken together, these drawings expose the full scope of Hopper’s invention and allow for a remarkable understanding of his working process—as well as an interesting glimpse into his private life. The exhibition also functions as a showcase for the art of drawing, revealing points where its utilitarian and aesthetic paths intersect.



**Study for
*New York Movie***

ca. 1938-1939,
fabricated chalk,
8³/₈ x 10¹⁵/₁₆.