

5.

Narrator: Listen to a discussion in an art class.

Professor: Hello, everyone . . . today I'm going to be showing you some slides of . . . well, I'm just going to project a slide on the screen and see if you can tell me who the artist is and what the name of the painting is. This is his most famous painting. Here we go. Anyone know?

Student A: Yeah, I've seen that painting before . . . I don't remember the name of the artist, but I think the painting is called Nighthawks at the Diner.

Professor: Yeah, that's . . . well, a lot of people call it that, but the real name of the painting is just Nighthawks. Anyone know the artist? Anyone? No? The painter is Edward Hopper. Now tell me . . . what sort of a reaction do you have when you see it?

Student B: It's kind of . . . lonely . . . kind of depressing, and, uh, bleak. It's so dark outside, and inside there are these bright lights but . . . but they're kinda harsh, the lights are, and the people in the diner seem . . . well, to me, they look really lonely.

Professor: A lot of Hopper's works show . . . loneliness, isolation. He was a very realistic painter. One of the reasons he was so realistic, maybe, is that he started off as an illustrator, a commercial artist, and you know, of course, a commercial artist has to be able to paint and draw realistically. In fact, Hopper spent most of his early career doing illustrations and just traveling around. He didn't develop his characteristic style, his mature style, until, I'd say, not until he was in his forties or maybe fifties. Anyway, most of his paintings show empty city streets, country roads, railroad tracks. There are paintings of storefronts, restaurants, and . . . let me show you another, this is the first one of his mature paintings, and the first one that really made him famous. It's called The House by the Railroad. It's pretty bleak, too, isn't it? You'll notice as we look at more slides that, uh, well, there aren't many people in the paintings, and the ones that you do see, they look . . . you could almost say impersonal. Melancholy. That's the . . . mood he tried to convey. Wait, let me back up just a second. He, Hopper, always said he was just painting what he saw, that he wasn't trying to show isolation and loneliness but . . . one look at his paintings tells you he wasn't being completely honest about this.

Student A: Some of these paintings remind me of . . . of those old black-and-white movies from, like, the thirties and forties.

Professor: Yeah, I agree. That type of movie, that style of moviemaking is called film noir. And yeah, it does have that same feel, doesn't it? And it's interesting that you should say that, because Hopper did have an influence on some moviemakers. On the other hand, he did not have much of an influence on his own generation of painters. Nobody else painted the way Hopper did, at least not until . . . well, until the photorealistic painters in the sixties and seventies. But his contemporaries weren't interested in realism. They were . . . well, we'll see some of their works next week when we talk about abstract expressionism.