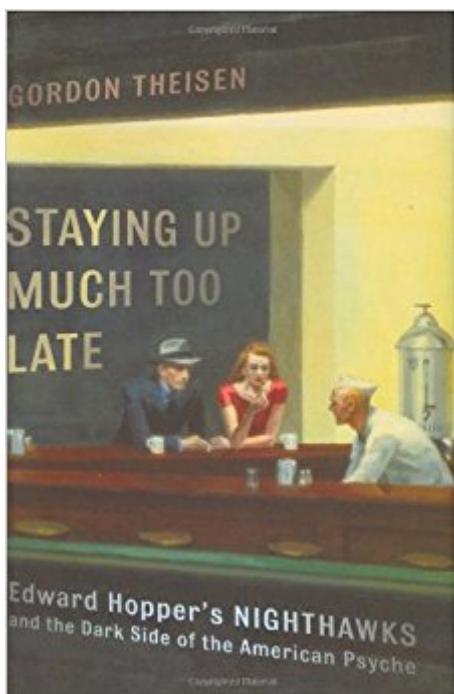


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Staying Up Much Too Late: Edward Hopper's Nighthawks And The Dark Side Of The American Psyche



Synopsis

A fascinating study of Edward Hopper's iconic Nighthawks painting and its deep significance for understanding American culture. Staying up Much Too Late discusses the painting Nighthawks and the painter Edward Hopper and their central importance to twentieth-century American culture. Topics include individualism, New York City, Arthur "Weegee" Fellig, diners, pornography, capitalism, advertising, cigarettes, American philosophy, World War II, Gravity's Rainbow, Blade Runner, Pulp Fiction, Russ Meyer, R. Crumb, David Lynch, and film noir. What links these together is the painting's pessimistic take on American culture, which it also seems to epitomize. Despite its desolate feel, Nighthawks has become a familiar icon, reproduced on posters and postcards, in movies and on television shows. But Nighthawks is more than just a masterful painting. It is a portal into that rarely acknowledged but pervasive dark side of the American psyche.

Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Thomas Dunne Books; 1St Edition edition (June 13, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312333420

ISBN-13: 978-0312333423

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 0.9 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars. See all reviews (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #756,132 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #31 in Books > Arts & Photography > Graphic Design > Airbrush #3880 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > Criticism #5728 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > Cultural

Customer Reviews

Edward Hopper's paintings, well known to almost everyone in this country, are unique in that they convey a sense of loneliness, yearning, suggestions of dark thoughts, pessimism, and hopelessness - not exactly the moods one would want to examine on a daily basis, but certainly painterly images that cause us to pause when we encounter them in museums and collections. Gordon Theisen is a fine writer and in this book STAYING UP MUCH TOO LATE: EDWARD HOPPER'S 'NIGHTHAWKS' AND THE DARK SIDE OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHE he manages to successfully use the famous night diner painting of the artist to address the current mental state of affairs seeping into our consciousness. He wisely covers every aspect of the artist's

life and work, giving us the necessary details of his life and his idiomatic stance in American art, spreads those ideas into his output thus assuring us that the one painting of the title is not an isolated image, and then begins to apply his ideas to our cultural status - at times not comfortable, but always creatively informative. If Thiesen strays a bit too far from his title subject, drawing on his own interpretation of concepts he perceives as more than just legitimate diversions, then he can be forgiven by the reader who want more from an author than a term paper presentation. Thiesen indulges in reminiscing about our cultural icons such as diners, cigarettes, coffee, plastic, jazz, war, sex, film noir, and personality disintegration in a time of easy drugs AKA medications. Perhaps these are topics many would not elect to explore, but then they are bookmarks to the greater understanding of where our current culture stands. If indeed our artists are our shamans then Hopper as Thiesen presents him is a prophet of sorts.

I found the last chapters of the book fairly⁸ helpful--with their discussion of the films noirs and how Hopper's works fit into that framework. The book, for the most part, however, is disjointed. It reads like the term paper of a smart but procrastinating college student who needs to finish a term paper by a deadline and doesn't spend time polishing his thoughts or meshing them with the subject at hand. The author gets into manifold discussions about numerous icons of American life--and loosely links them, at the end of the section, to Hopper's work. He also tosses his own biases into the discussions, mainly dealing with his opinions on George W. Bush and the War in Iraq--half baked thoughts that date the book unnecessarily. He takes for a given, for example, that Bush's tax program is aimed at aiding the rich (and screwing the poor?). One does not have to be a Bush supporter to think of other reasons behind the tax plan (monetary policy, for example?). The author also throws in a bit too much slang into his discussions--especially sexual slang. This self-conscious "with-it-ness" diminishes the author's rhetorical power and is off-putting. The book was fairly interesting, although I found it not to be a page turner. Instead, it was similar to sitting next to a bright undergraduate at a dinner party and listen to him ramble on until you feel you have to get up and leave the table for a while. He has some noteworthy points to say about Hopper's life, especially his abusive relationship with Jo. For the most part, Hopper was a taciturn man. Unlike, say, Salvador Dali, who never ceased talking about himself and everything else that came to mind, Hopper was fairly much a closed box.

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