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qualify for admission to the *École des Beaux Arts* and his hopes of becoming an artist seemed dashed, his father, a minor police functionary, advised him: "The person who wants to succeed will attain his goal, but he must desire it seriously. In this way he will achieve the will to do it, that is to say, a kind of male energy, not female." Rodin's father, Bell says, was expressing the dominant view of his time: "Achievement was the proof of male virility." The son was driven by "the need to realize himself as a man by means of his genius." His early sculpture was almost entirely restricted to the male figure.

Not until his midlife love affair with Camille Claudel, one of his students, was "his encounter with femaleness . . . so profound an experience that it finally released him from his troubled preoccupation with being masculine," Bell speculates. "It was then that he began that development which amounted to identification and participation in the feminine, and it was then that images of women began to flow from his hands."

*Iris, Messenger of the Gods* (1891) was the "most astonishing" of Rodin's sculptures of women, Bell says, with the headless female body being "a proclamation of exuberant life announcing itself, as the dancer holds her own outward flung leg aloft and widespread, her opened vulva proudly displayed." The other elements of the body are not conventionally beautiful but "subordinated in their plain vigor to the sexual center." The sculpture's title reinforced "the statement that sexuality is the origin, the source, of human radiance."

Rodin was also reacting to larger forces at work in European culture. His rejection of conventional poses in the depiction of the female body, "those false modesties of concealment," was probably related, Bell believes, "to the opening of the fine arts to the forbidden subject matter and imagery abundant in the media of mass-circulation engraving and, soon, photography." Other artists of the period, from Edouard Manet to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, responded to the same influences. The poet Charles Baudelaire, says Bell, called for a sculptor "who would fully render the subversive female subject," a sculp-

tor who "had the courage and the wit to seize hold of nobility everywhere, even in the mire." Rodin, Bell concludes, "became that sculptor."

## A New Jazz Age?

"Stop Nitpicking a Genius" by Frank Conroy, in *The New York Times Magazine* (June 25, 1995), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

When jazz becomes completely respectable, does it cease to be jazz? There are many who think so. But Conroy, author of *Stop-Time* (1967) and *Body and Soul* (1993), and for five years in the 1970s a professional jazz pianist, is not among them. "There is a French expression, *nostalgie de la boue*, which means nostalgia for the gutter," he says, "and it is perhaps that preoccupation [that is] slowing down so many jazz fans, observers, and writers from recognizing reality." That reality, he contends, is that a new day is dawning for jazz.

The traditional image of jazz musicians as dissolute and self-destructive is badly out of date, he observes. Today's young players "are, by and large, educated, cultured people in their twenties," he says, "more likely to be vegetarians than drug addicts, more likely to run three miles a day than smoke cigarettes, and more likely to be carrying an organ-donor card than a gun." They include such rising talents as Eric Reed, a "very young and very brilliant" jazz pianist.

The venues in which jazz is being played are also different. Institutions such as New York's "Jazz at Lincoln Center" have been springing up, jazz clubs have gone upscale, and jazz programs have come into being at many colleges and universities. While club dates remain important to the musicians, they are no longer the summit, Conroy says.

These changes in the public face of jazz are now being matched by profound innovations in the music itself, Conroy argues. In the past, jazz was "based on two short forms—the blues (usually, but not always, a 12-bar structure) and the ballad or tune (usually, but not always, a 32-bar structure)." The short forms,

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## Night Thoughts

"It's not hard to paint a design," artist Edward Hopper (1882–1967) once told Alexander Eliot. "Nor to paint a representation of something you can see. But to express a thought in painting—that is hard." Writing in *Parabola* (Summer 1995), Eliot, author of *Global Mythology* (1993), looks at Hopper's painted thoughts.

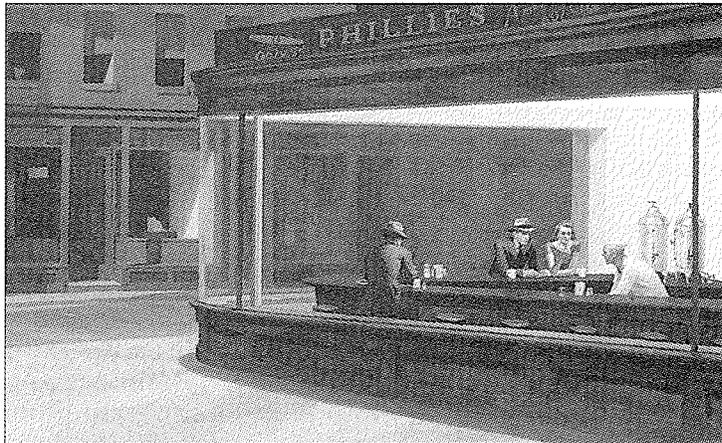
*Tearless nostalgia, the ache of loneliness, and finally the sense of romance just beyond reach, inform Hopper's creative work. Each of his great canvases is narrowly but brilliantly staged, emptied of trivial details, and subtly distorted for dramatic impact. Each one tells a wordless story, but they're not illustrations of anything. Rather, they project strangely splendid insights into secret America.*

Consider his "Nighthawks," for example. This canvas, at the Chicago Art Institute, dates from 1942. We're out near a city corner, at a midnight hour, looking across the street and in through the plate glass window of a brightly-lit fast-food joint. Hopper may well have passed a place like this on his frequent prowls around Greenwich Village, but he had his own means of transposing the scene to

a legendary realm. Thus he enlarged the empty pavement and the dark building, so that they seem broadly sweeping gestures of the night itself.

Contrastingly, the four figures at the counter inside appear small, crisp, courageous, and half-conscious of their isolation—marooned in light. The customer with his back to the street sits gazing across at the tensely close couple opposite and the priestly counterman in his starched white vestments. These four figures all display the same angular, dimly repressed body language.

*This awkward stiffness is theirs, not Hopper's, yet the artist himself abjured gesture as a general rule. The flamboyance of the surrealists and the abstract expressionists alike repelled him. His own art has the stillness of a dreamer in bed. It doesn't express emotion; rather it projects a mood peculiar to this artist alone. The mood is bleak and yet tender at the same time. It conveys a quality of casting-about*



for one knows not what; like an inch-worm at the end of a twig. "Self-seeking" was a synonym for selfishness in Hopper's time, and generally frowned upon. Yet Hopper insisted that he was in fact "a self-seeker" . . .

Looking at "Nighthawks," I sense an invisible fifth participant who hovers on our side of the street. A passerby like us, he observes the action from the dark, and in through the plate glass, with appreciative and yet rather terrible detachment. Darkly shimmering, mercurial, and soon gone again is the artist's self, the actual nighthawk.

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and the challenge of working with them and within them, will always belong to jazz, Conroy says. But now trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, the controversial 33-year-old director of Jazz at Lincoln Center and a leader of the new generation of artists, is taking the music into relatively unexplored territory: "long forms, forms of a length we usually associate with so-called classical music."

Marsalis's *Blood on the Fields*, which premiered at Lincoln Center last year, marks this expansion, in Conroy's view. A three-hour secular oratorio in 20 sections, it presents a narrative about slavery in the South and transcends the old division between classical jazz (Dixie) and modern jazz. "The new generation of jazz players and composers feels free to draw from everywhere, the more sources the better. Dixie, Bartok, be-bop, regional music—all grist for the mill," Conroy says.

Critics charge that Marsalis is leading jazz toward a lifeless classicism. But *Blood on the Fields* shows "how jazz conventions and jazz 'feel' can retain and renew energy while expanding into large forms that contain other elements and other traditions," Conroy writes. "Jazz need no longer be marginalized, neither in its structures nor its emotional and intellectual ambitions."

## **The Avante-Garde Walt Disney**

"Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century" by Steven Watts, in *The Journal of American History* (June 1995), 1125 E. Atwater Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47401-3701.

Walt Disney's name today is indelibly linked to a corporate entertainment colossus, embracing everything from theme parks to television networks. It was not always so. Disney (1901-66), notes Watts, a historian at the University of Missouri, Columbia, "was once taken quite seriously as an artist."

Throughout the 1930s and early '40s, intellectuals joined millions of moviegoers in praising Disney's innovative animated fantasies. Impressed by his Silly Symphonies series,

his Mickey Mouse shorts, and feature-length animations such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Pinocchio* (1940), critics hailed Disney as an artistic genius and modernist pioneer—the most significant figure in graphic art since Leonardo da Vinci, said political cartoonist David Low.

Disney's pioneering work in animation drew on the culture of modernism for much of its "atmosphere," Watts argues. Emerging in opposition to 19th-century Victorianism, modernism challenged "the ascendancy of reason and judgment over impulse, of educated taste over folk and popular preferences, of the adult over the childish, of the conscious over the preconscious mind." In Disney's animation, "the line between imagination and reality" was continually being blurred "to produce a wondrous universe where animals spoke, plants and trees acted consciously, and inanimate objects felt emotion."

Two short films show "the full emotional spectrum of Disney's modernist vision," Watts says—and his awareness of Freudian themes. In *Flowers and Trees* (1932), two young trees fall in love and, with the aid of their forest friends, the wild birds, overcome adversity to marry, before a celebrating audience of wildflowers. In *The Mad Doctor* (1933), by contrast, "Pluto is kidnapped and hauled off to a castle where a crazy physician and vivisectionist will use his body parts for macabre medical experiments." (It all turns out to have been a nightmare.)

Yet Disney was also moving, Watts observes, toward "greater and greater realism in animation. Increasingly, the object of Disney's aesthetic quest was a sunny, naturalistic style with roots in the Victorian 19th century . . . a 'realistic' depiction of people, objects, and scenes where dark or messy dimensions of reality had been wiped away." As the critics caught on, their misgivings about Disney mounted. By the late 1940s, they were portraying him as an innovative artist who had squandered his talent. His films, sneered Manny Farber in the *New Republic*, had degenerated into "lollypop art." Disney deserves more credit, in Watts's view. He was a rare hybrid: a "sentimental modernist."