



Edward Hopper (American, 1882–1967) was an extremely influential artist who was best known for his Realist oil paintings and watercolors of urban and rural scenes.

Edward Hopper 1882-1967 was one of the twentieth century's most significant artists; he produced seemingly mundane yet mysterious and disquieting images of American life. Throughout his career, his compositional style and emphasis on architectural structures over human figures distinguished him from his contemporaries.

Hopper studied the Civil War for much of his life and regularly consulted Brady's documentary photographs, which depict towns preparing for combat, camp life, and the people of the war, but never the battle itself. There is a relative absence of protest and conflict within Hopper's paintings, his focus instead is on the individuals and scenes we may imagine as coming before and after conflict.

Dawn Before Gettysburg was one of Hopper's few historical paintings and one of only two Civil War paintings that he produced. He painted it in 1934, nearly 70 years after the end of that war. The battle would be considered the turning point and one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

Hopper does not create a violent bloody scene, but conveys to the viewer a great feeling of anticipation. There is stillness in the air as the sun begins to rise. Deliberate light and shadow are missing from the white house (or barn), probably to focus on the troops.

Nine soldiers are seated on a grassy bank along a dirt road in front of a white house trimmed in blue with a white picket fence. One has a blister on his foot from marching. Another has just vomited and is leaning on his friend, deathly ill. Each man is engaged in some activity, one is tying his shoe, and another has fallen asleep. The individual soldiers are just that, individuals. In contrast to the seated soldiers, there is a tenth rigid standing soldier- an officer getting orders ready. He stands looking off into the distance representing duty to his country. The officer has his sword either in his hand or hanging loose on the belt on his left side, ready to go. The method of wearing those swords involved a long dangly pair of leather strips that loop into the scabbard. This, unless you're on horseback, which was their intended use, means the sword is hanging down about two feet lower than your hip, and very wiggly, and very not well balanced. So, you wrap it around, and clip it back onto itself, onto your belt loop, backwards (the manual states that it is to be done backwards), with the blade poking forward, like in the painting.

Hopper incorporates a series of metaphors into the picture. The picket fence, perhaps representing Picket's deadly Charge, each fence top possessing an eerie resemblance to a headstone. The road, whither it leads these men and to what fate? The dawn itself, perhaps their last, splashed with blood-red color in the sky.

Hopper himself relayed a story in a 1959 interview, told to him by a guard at the Museum of Modern Art, about Albert Einstein's viewing of 'Dawn Before Gettysburg' in a show at MoMA.

"Einstein, in going through the galleries, had stopped a long time before this picture of mine,'and I suppose it was his hatred of war that prompted him to do this as these men were evidently all ready for the slaughter."

From the late 1920s onward, he produced works which created the coherent style and mood he's known for today, ranging from "Automat", (1927) to "Second Story Sunlight", (1960). Hopper died on May 15, 1967 in New York, NY. Today, his works are held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Tate Gallery in London, among others.