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Dennis Hopper, Photographs 1961–1967, edited by Dennis Hopper and Tony Shafrazi. Taschen, 2018 (484 pages).

Joanna Elena Batsakis

For fans of the prolific Hollywood artist Dennis Hopper, the re-release of *Dennis Hopper, Photographs 1961–1967* is a sensational addition to the growing Hopper canon within Western film scholarship. Originally, the book was published as a limited-edition collector's item in 2011, with a small run of 1,500 copies. Each copy was signed by Hopper himself, and there was an alternative option to purchase its even more prestigious version entitled *Photographs 1961–1967 Art Edition,* which included a gelatine print of Hopper's infamous photograph *Biker Couple* (1961). In collaboration between The Hopper Art Trust, gallerist Tony Shafrazi, and Dennis Hopper, this original volume was massive in size: with 544 pages, its hardcover measured 30 centimetres in height by 33 centimetres in length and weighed 5.5 kilograms. The volume displayed dozens of black-and-white photographs Hopper had taken between 1961 and 1967, all on his Nikon Tri-X camera which was gifted to him by his first wife Brooke Hayward. The book also included introductory essays by Hopper's long-time friends, such as Shafrazi and West Coast art pioneer Walter Hopps, as well as an extensive photographic biography authored by filmmaker and journalist Jessica Hundley. In 2018, Taschen and The Hopper Art Trust have co-operated to release a slightly smaller, unlimited trade edition of the same book, which is the subject of this review. Even though this year's edition of has now been reduced to 484 pages and weighs 3.5 kilograms, the book is still an extremely ambitious project and integral to the Dennis Hopper canon. The essays written by Hopps, Shafrazi and Hundley are highly personal, written with flair and poetic licence and, while still taking cues from history, they lead the reader towards new interpretations of Hopper's filmmaking and artistic philosophies. I argue this style of writing, where history, personal reflection, and poetry combine, resembles the approach adopted by recent studies that intertwine with traditional film theory and art history, in which scholars are challenging conventional theoretical discourse by reading film history through the prism of art or contemporary media theories. The present work is not only important for Hopper's enthusiasts, but it is fundamental for the development of areas of scholarship that examine the intersections between cinema and visual art. The readers who may be already aware of Dennis Hopper's work know that the artist was not just a Hollywood actor and a revolutionary film director. Over his six-decade career in Hollywood, Dennis Hopper was a versatile artist; an established photographer, an abstract painter, a screenwriter, an assemblage artist, a highly influential and prolific art collector. Within the history of contemporary Western film scholarship, it is highly unfortunate that very few academics have addressed Hopper's cultural legacy. To this day, there are no landmark texts exclusively devoted to analysing his directorial work—thus, Hopper remains a Hollywood director who has not been extensively analysed as an auteur, nor have any regular attempts been made to contextualise his work within a specific frame of genres or film movements. The only exception is represented by Hopper's feature debut *Easy Rider* (1969), which is considered as a hybrid of a revisionist Western and road movie within the New Hollywood movement (Macklin; Orgeron; Campbell). However, we might consider this

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volume as the first text which combines examples of Hopper's incursions into the fields of photography and assemblage with extensive analytical essays on Hopper's work. The book is organised in seven chapters, six of which are dedicated to showcasing the thematic developments of Hopper's photography, with the inclusion of a detailed biography and exhibition list in the book's final chapter.

The first chapter is entitled "Visions of Dennis", which aims to reveal the origins of Hopper's obsession with photography and includes two separate essays: Walter Hopps's "The City of Fallen Angels" and Tony Shafrazi's "Double Standards". Walter Hopps was the original founder of the radical FERUS Gallery in Los Angeles, and one of Hopper's long-time friends. Hopps's reflective essay is primarily focused on himself, as opposed to Hopper. The essay is a condensed biographical recount revolving around Hopps's birthplace, the foundation of FERUS Gallery, and the numerous artists that would later show at FERUS—to name a few, Andy Warhol and Ed Kienholz. Occasionally, Hopps includes some references to his friendship with Hopper, but while brief these anecdotes provide crucial details about Hopper's artmaking influences in the early stages of his career. Hopps notes that Hopper became associated with the Los Angeles gallery scene when he was eighteen-years old, and credits his close friendship with the legendary actor James Dean as notable gateway into the art business. Hopps states that Dean would bring Hopper along with him when he visited local art galleries and jazz clubs around Hollywood, and it was Dean who encouraged Hopper to experiment with the fine arts, outside of his acting career. Hopps's essay also mentions the first purchases Hopper made for his private art collection during the early 1960s, such as Andy Warhol's *Soup Can* (1962), for US$75, and Ed Ruscha's *Standard Station* (1966). Hopper's enthusiasts, after reading through Hopps's essay, might feel as though Hopps's recount of the 1960s glosses over Hopper's early interests in the American fine arts. For example, in the gallery catalogue *Dennis Hopper: The Lost Album*, published in 2014, the curators revealed that, as mentioned, it was Hopper's first wife Brooke Hayward that gifted Hopper his first camera, a Nikon Tri-X. Hopper only worked with this type of camera for three decades, until he switched to colour film in the 1990s. (2). This anecdote is unmentioned by Hopps, who credits Hopper's pursuit of photography solely to James Dean. Interestingly, Hopps's essay also prefers to gloss over some of the less glamorous details of Hopper's artistic life during the 1960s. For example, in other publications that document Hopper's experiments with photography such as 2000 *Dennis Hopper: 1712 North Crescent Heights,* it is revealed that, due to his (first) blacklisting from Hollywood, many of the art purchases made by Hopper and Hayward during the 1960s were completed thanks to Hayward's unemployment checks (Hopper and Hopper 8).

In comparison, Tony Shafrazi's essay "Double Standard" sheds light on totally different aspects of Hopper's life. Shafrazi's poetic essay also focuses on the friendship between Hopper and Dean, but here he argues that their bond mirrored the infamous literary and emotional companionship between the American novelist Jack Kerouac and his friend Neal Cassidy. By making this reference to Kerouac, Shafrazi explains that Hopper's black-and-white photographs exist now as timeless American images, with Shafrazi going so far as to say that one can see Hopper's photography as a kind of "Cinema without Walls", echoing André Malraux's famous remark that a photograph is a "Museum without Walls" (65). Shafrazi contextualises Hopper's experiments with photography against the correct historical backdrop. The author brings together art history with film theory in order to assess the importance of Hopper's photography; while also introducing biographical details about Hopper's childhood that allows one to make the appropriate connections between Hopper's early life as a middle-class farm-boy in Dodge City, Kansas, to his turn as a Hollywood actor. Shafrazi writes that the included photographs were "taken at a pivotal moment in history, the crossroads of the birth of a new independent cinema and postmodern art" that are "too sophisticated, too personal and too complex to be grouped by mere dates on a calendar" (65). While Hopps's essay mostly

mentioned artists who were part of the Californian scene, Shafrazi instead highlights the beginnings of the Pop Art movement during the 1960s, noting that it was Hopper's growing friendships with Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenberg, and Jasper Johns that contributed to his obsession with creating art. Shafrazi adds that it was the financial accessibility of the early Pop Art Movement that allowed Hopper to begin collecting famous artworks, and that he was not the only actor doing it. More specifically, the author pinpoints that Hopper was deeply inspired by Vincent Price and Edward G. Robinson.

By providing the theoretical groundwork to understand Hopper's black and white images, at the end of his essay Shafrazi invites to see Hopper's photography through a cinematic perspective. This is a highly intriguing interpretation, as Shafrazi's use of the term "cinematic" describes Hopper's process in which "these cinematic images are infused with his own distinctive characteristics [thus] by infusing his work with himself, a Dennis Hopper photograph becomes a record of a Dennis Hopper performance" (64). This idea that Hopper's photographs could provide an alternative mode to analyse his approach to Method Acting, his directorial style and his aesthetics is fascinating; however, it also reminds the reader that this kind of multidisciplinary approach is difficult to define within the field of film scholarship. In this respect, Shafrazi does not mention any of the buzzwords that allude to the study of film and visual art theory, such as intermediality, intertextuality or even the lesser known interartiality theories. Nonetheless, Shafrazi's poetical essay points future work written about Hopper in the right direction, highlighting that, in order to assess his career as an actor or director, one must also take into consideration Hopper's extensive creative outputs within other visual art fields.

The remaining chapters of the book are entirely devoted to showcasing Hopper's photography, which are divided by thematic content. It is a true testament to Taschen publishing, as the reproductions of Hopper's photography are printed on high quality, glossy paper, and almost all of the photographs are printed without margins, so each image takes up the entire 30cm x 33cm dimensions. The high-quality printing of each image is absolutely integral for the design of each chapter and allows the reader to examine the photographs in close detail. This lends considerable haptic quality to the book's design, giving the feeling to sift through Hopper's personal archive and examining treasures that were previously hidden within unmarked boxes. In the chapter entitled "Abstract Expressionism", the photographs find Hopper obsessively zeroing in on street walls and graffiti in California, where extreme close-ups resemble intentionally abstract expressionist paintings. This kind of abstract photography is most evident in the photograph *After the Fall* (*Torn Girl)* (1964), in which Hopper depicted a tin surface with multiple layers of ripped posters on top of it. The face of a blonde-haired woman can just be seen; her right eye is blacked out and her lips are hidden with glue paste. In following sections entitled "On the Road" and "Close to the Border", the photographs collected find Hopper obsessed over capturing people and places mid-movement. We see Hopper documenting the Sunset Strip from inside a car, and men and women eating in cafes. Here we also see examples of Hopper's location scouting in Mexico before the filming of *Easy Rider*. This section features stills of local graveyards, cultural celebrations and bullfights in Tijuana, which remind the reader of the moving images within the iconic film. Finally, the book's last section, aptly titled "Inside Hollywood", is dedicated to showcasing how Hopper documented his experiences within the Hollywood industry. These photographs are arguably Hopper's most famous and well-known works and consist mostly of portraits. A nonexhaustive list of famous portraits photographed by Hopper include *Paul Newman* (1963), *Andy Warhol* (1963), and *Jane Fonda* (1965). In addition to these images, many of Hopper's friends are portrayed, together with the artists whose work he ended up collecting, such as Ed Ruscha, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein.

The only downside of the book's design is represented by the fact that photographic series are not accompanied by a relevant contextualising essay. The addition of precise contextual and biographical references would have provided scholars with reliable information to use as the groundwork for any future studies on Hopper's cinema. However, at the end of this chapter readers will find a glossary of all the images included in the volume, each one followed by a relevant quote regarding its backstory. Fortunately, the glossary seems to make up for the lack of contextualising written pieces; nonetheless, the small font and placement of the text underneath the images might be off-putting.

The final pages of the volume are highly intriguing, as they display an unpublished interview conducted by filmmaker and journalist Jessica Hundley, recorded before Hopper's death in 2010. The biographical description is rich and counts several memories and reflections from Hopper's childhood in Kansas, his films, and his involvement in the world of fashion photography. The interview showcases a number of unreleased pictures from Hopper's early life, such as family portraits and yearbook photos. Hundley's contribution is therefore an excellent addition, as it offers a comprehensive overview of Hopper's origins. Hundley is a true connoisseur of Hopper's work and has recently co-operated with The Hopper Art Trust on many endeavours, such as the 4K restoration and the theatrical re-release of Hopper's second directorial effort *The Last Movie* (1971), in addition to editing a new volume about the same film which will be released later this year.

Altogether, *Photographs 1961–1967* is essential reading for those who are interested in approaching Dennis Hopper's work. It is characterised by a firm, engaging writing style that allows readers to gain familiarity with his artistic experiments and biography. Its poetic and reflective essays are—hopefully—only the beginning of a resurgence of scholarship on Hopper's cinematic opus.

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