

# On View: Windows in Art



A **SPACE** *for* **DIALOGUE** 113

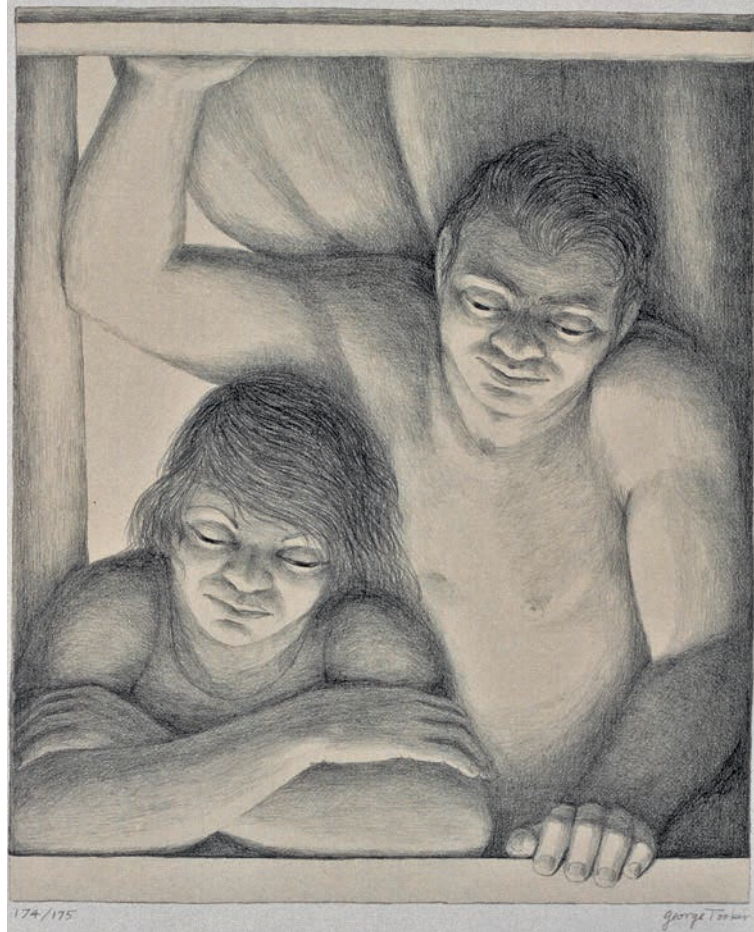
HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH

*On View* explores the depiction of windows in art through three central themes: a view into the private world, a view into the public world, and the abstraction of the window itself. Despite the variety of functions, both the window frame and what lies within impact our perception of each piece.

Several works in this exhibition are small and require the viewer to engage with the piece up close. Edward Hopper's *Evening Wind*, Z. Y. Casper's *Reflections*, and Larry Colwell's photograph *Nude Looking Through Open Window With Sculptural Chandelier Above Head* each depict rooms with figures in the typically private acts of being naked or looking at their reflection. Though Frank Bird Master's *Untitled* has no figures, the empty chair reminds us that we are viewing a private interior which belongs to someone. The viewer's proximity to these personal scenes encourages a sense of intimacy. By depicting them, the artists put otherwise private moments into public view.

George Tooker's *Window* (right) also contains an intimate scene, but in a much larger scale. This work belongs to a series depicting the domestic lives of Brooklyn residents through their open windows. The viewer need not be close to the work to understand it, and what could be a private moment instead acts as a naturally public one. Other large-scale works depict the public world outside the window rather than the private world inside. The size of Robert Birmelin's *Watcher at the Window* (cover), Madeline Johnson's *From a Window in Boston*, and Richard Estes's *Movies* makes the city scenes they contain feel expansive. The viewer can notice each individual building or person in the crowd, but the details also add together to form the larger structures of the outside world.

The viewpoint of a work influences our perception of the piece. *Watcher at the Window* situates the viewer inside a room, behind a figure who is looking down at a protest. Both the Watcher and the viewer observe the activity below from the same vantage point. And yet, while we may both occupy a place of privilege within the larger scene, we cannot see the central figure's face nor understand what they think about the view. By contrast, Tooker's *Window* places us outside the frame, showing the faces of a couple looking down on the street below. We



see only what is visible through their window; we can understand how they might feel, but not the broader context of their world. Similarly, in Colwell's photograph, we are outside looking in at a naked woman staring back at us. Her direct gaze and nudity expose her emotional state; we see tightness in her muscles, her solemn expression. We know she is aware that we see her. In Hopper's *Evening Wind*, we are inside with a naked woman whose face turns away, so we must infer how she feels based on body language. We cannot know if our "presence" is known or welcomed.

The inclusion of a window frame alters our perception of the subject. In Estes's *Movies*, we see the world beyond the window at street level, through a reflection. Buildings, overlapping reflections, and the framing wall crowd the work. In Johnson's *From a Window in Boston*, we view the city from a high building window, and half the piece is sky. The side of the window

frame is cut off, and the buildings are not as crowded, but the frame bisects the work and defines our view: we only see what is visible through the window and the window itself. Zoe Leonard's *Untitled* depicts an open, uncrowded sky through an airplane window, but the window frame is surrounded in darkness. Each piece places the viewer at different heights and depicts scenes with different levels of crowdedness. Yet rather than feeling immersed in a crowded city or an open sky, the window frames each view, cramping the otherwise uncrowded skies and separating us from the world.

Despite our intimate relationship with the subjects in this exhibition, each artist denies access to certain information in one way or another. The flat, overlapping elements of Estes's piece obstruct each other, confusing our conception of the street layout. Where we look through glass in Birmelin's window, the view is obstructed—the glass is smudged. Colwell, Tooker, and Casper's works all depict figures inside their dwellings, and yet the rooms themselves are not shown in detail. Both Masters and Leonard's *Untitled* pieces feature bright exteriors that blend into nearly solid objects.

There is no world visible through the window in *Evening Wind*, only whiteness. Johnson's sky acts as a solid wall of color. The rectangles in Ellsworth Kelly's piece, when on the side of a building, are perhaps the closest in the exhibition to occupying the same space as a true window. Yet the panels are entirely opaque and thus the windows offer little information. In contrast, Richard Stankiewicz's sculpture includes nothing directly in the frame. The viewer fills the space with whatever the frame captures from their perspective.

Whether the works focus on exterior or interior, an individual or a broader landscape, objects or light, each artist has left a portion of the view out of range. While windows can offer insight into small, private moments and frame large, public structures, they also create boundaries between us and the view, and can only offer a certain perspective. The unrevealed portions of these views remind us that we must always consider: What can we not see?

Leigh Smith '23  
Erbe Intern



## CHECKLIST

Richard Peter Stankiewicz, American, 1922–1983. *Untitled*, 1979, steel. Gift of the artist; S.979.137

Ellsworth Kelly, American, 1923–2015. *Dartmouth*, 2011, lithograph on Rives BFK paper. Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund; 2013.10

Zoe Leonard, American, born 1923. *Untitled*, from the portfolio *The Renaissance Society*, negative 1998; print 2011, gelatin silver print on glossy archive paper mounted on archival board. Purchased through gifts from Morton D. May, Class of 1936; Mrs. Walter L. Weil; Vernon F. West, Class of 1909; Sarah Branch Jackson Coonley Morgan Doyle, daughter of Robert Jackson, Class of 1900, by exchange; 2014.26.9

Frank Bird Masters, American, 1873–1955. *Untitled*, about 1910, cyanotype. Anonymous gift in memory of Janice Colburn Hart and Rilla Reed MacAdam; PH.2001.31

August Robert Birmelin, American, born 1933. *Watcher at the Window*, 2012, acrylic on canvas. Gift of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York; Hassam, Speicher, Betts and Symons Funds, 2014; 2014.63

Madeline Johnson, American, active mid-20th century. *From a Window in Boston*, not dated, watercolor on paper. Purchased through the Julia L. Whittier Fund; W.953.19

Richard Estes, American, born 1932. *Movies*, from the portfolio *Urban Landscapes No. 3*, 1981, screenprint on wove paper. Gift of Judith and Eugene H. Kohn, Class of 1960; PR.982.63.2

Z. Y. Casper, American, active 20th century. *Reflections*, not dated, etching on wove paper. Bequest of Jay R. Wolf, Class of 1951; PR.976.156

George Tooker, American, 1920–2011. *Window*, 1994, lithograph on wove paper. Purchased through the Virginia and Preston T. Kelsey 1958 Fund; PR.2000.6

Edward Hopper, American, 1882–1967. *Evening Wind*, 1921, etching on wove paper. Purchased through the Julia L. Whittier Fund; PR.956.26.5

Larry Colwell, American, 1911–1972. *Nude Looking Through Open Window with Sculptural Chandelier Above Head*, about 1960, gelatin silver print. Gift of Harley and Stephen Osman, Class of 1956, Tuck 1957; 2019.89.23

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The exhibition *On View: Windows in Art*, part of the museum's student-curated *A Space for Dialogue* series, is on view at the Hood Museum of Art, July 1–August 12, 2023.

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Cover image: August Robert Birmelin, *Watcher at the Window*, 2012. © A. Robert Birmelin

Inside left: George Tooker, *Window*, 1994. © George Tooker

Inside right: Richard Peter Stankiewicz, *Untitled*, 1979.  
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