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## Places

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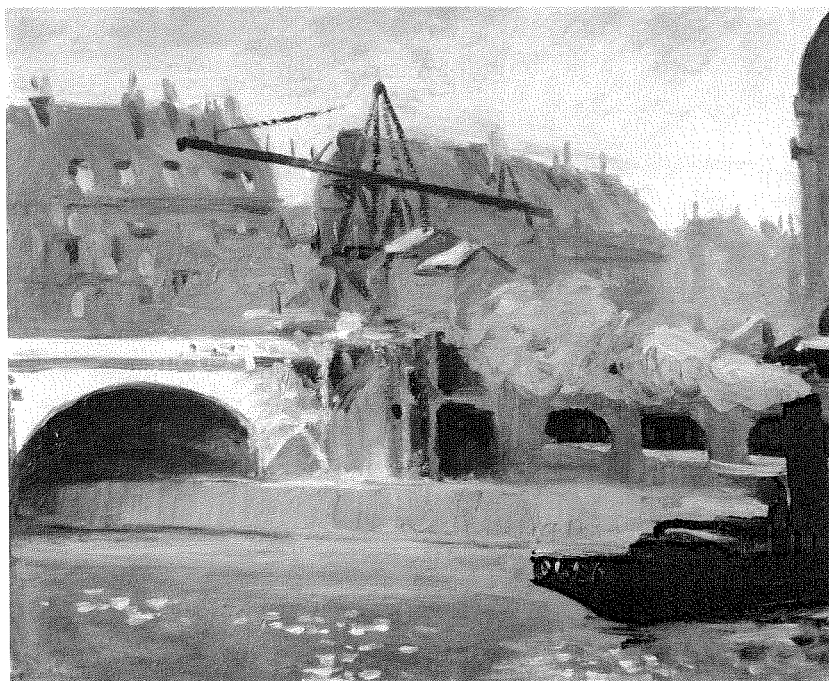
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## When Places Include People: Edward Hopper and George Segal

### Glenn Robert Lym

The location of the body depicted in space, the location of the viewer in space, and the evocative quality of the body's posture are powerful techniques used by the painter Edward Hopper and the sculptor George Segal to give structure to space. Contrast this to an architect confined to creating building spaces by manipulating surfaces and openings without being able to control the position and action of people. Architectural space becomes dependent on the placement of physical elements only. It makes sense, then, that architectural space so conceived is photographed without people. People distract from the enduring physical character of architectural space. It becomes all too easy for people to be considered as a disturbing blur in front of space otherwise conceived.

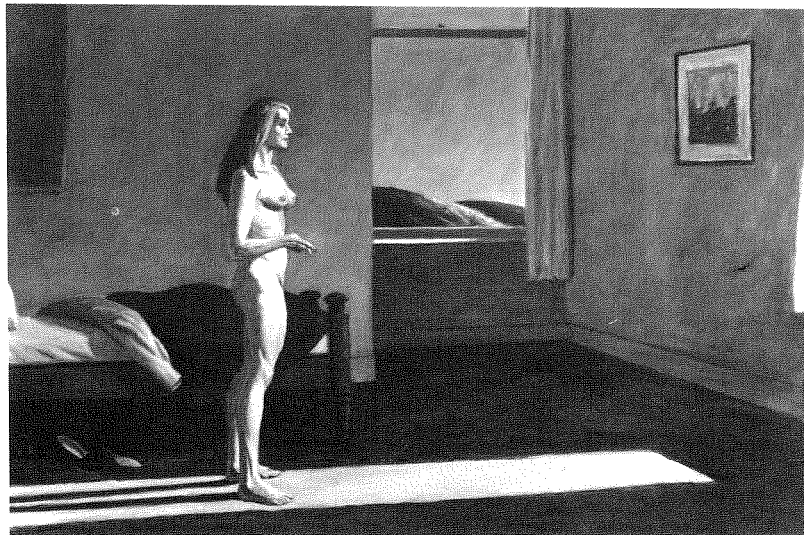
My paper is not meant as art criticism, but is offered as an architectural appreciation of how two artists create space. I begin with Edward Hopper (1882–1967).



**I Tugboat at Boulevard Saint Michel**  
Edward Hopper  
1907  
Oil on canvas. 23 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 28 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches.  
Collection of Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York  
Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper  
Acq#70.1250



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**2 Girl at Sewing Machine**

Edward Hopper  
1921  
Oil on canvas. 19 × 18 inches.  
Thyssen Bornemisza Collection  
Lugano, Switzerland

**3 A Woman in the Sun**

Edward Hopper  
1961  
Oil on canvas. 40 × 60 inches.  
Collection of Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York  
50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert  
Hackett in honor of Edith and Lloyd  
Goodrich. Acq#84.31.

**Edward Hopper:  
The Place In Between**

As a painter, Edward Hopper has the pleasure of positioning the frame of his canvas wherever he wishes. He can include or exclude whatever he wants from his paintings of interior and exterior scenes. Many of his early paintings are technique and composition studies. Yet, occasionally, these paintings include a transitional element that moves the eye from the main scene to another place beyond the canvas. That element could be a dark window seen on a sunny Parisian apartment façade, a cave beneath Maine coastal rockscapes, or a shadowed vault beneath a Paris bridge, as in *Tugboat at Boulevard Saint Michel*.

After age 40, Hopper begins to depict a central place and its transition to another. Transitional elements such as windows, doors, and tunnellike forms become important. The human body now has a crucial role as a moderator between this central place and its adjacent area. In some paintings, the human form is intent on activity within the main area and ignores a suggested exterior area. In other paintings, the human form is oriented to activity outside the main area. In both instances this modulation of attention at the point between inside and outside has great consequences for the content of the scenes.

**From Within A Private Place**

*Girl at Sewing Machine* frames an interior room at its juncture with

an exterior window. Soft sunlight penetrates from an exterior light-yellow brick window-jamb and washes across a maroon plaster wall. At the window, a young woman in white, with soft, red-brown hair, is sewing. Her activity is supple and private. Our eyes are drawn to the completeness of this warm interior scene, set at the juncture of inside and outside. How different this is from *A Woman in the Sun*.



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In *A Woman in the Sun*, the focus is outside an interior room. The naked woman is as much bathed in sunlight as called from bed by that light. You sense the origin of the light from without the room but do not see the sun. Paintings hang on the wall, but are mere decorations. Through another window, we see dark ridges in the distance that are also sunlit. Her attention is not on these ridges but on the sunlight itself. There is warmth emanating from without. Within there is melancholy.

Both these paintings concern two adjacent areas, a seen interior place set in reference to an unseen exterior place. The human form is placed and its posture configured to indicate whether the outside is to be ignored or embraced.

### From The Outside Looking In

Some of my favorite Hopper paintings are based on the transition from inside to outside as viewed from the outside. Here, interior places are put within larger, balancing contexts. Human form is again used in conjunction with windows and doors to modulate



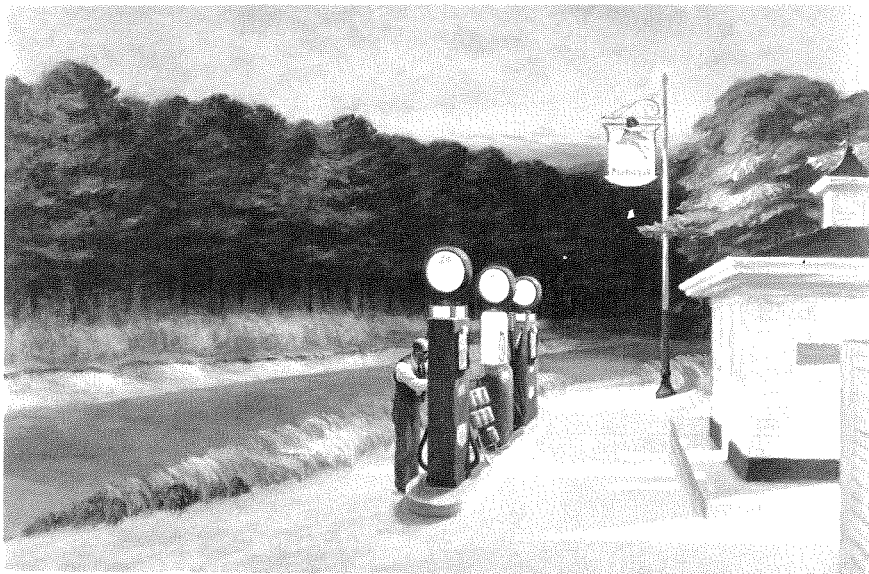
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**4 Apartment Houses**  
Edward Hopper  
1924  
Oil on canvas. 25½ × 31½ inches.  
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy  
of the Fine Arts

**5 Cape Cod Morning**  
Edward Hopper  
1950  
Oil on canvas. 34¼ × 40⅞ inches.  
National Museum of American Art; gift of the  
Sara Roby Foundation



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**6 August in the City**

Edward Hopper, 1882–1967  
1945  
Oil on canvas. 23 × 30 inches.  
Norton Gallery and School of Art,  
West Palm Beach, Florida

**7 Gas**

Edward Hopper  
1940  
Oil on canvas. 26¼ × 40¼ inches.  
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund.

attention to the interior or the exterior. Because the viewpoint of these paintings is now from the outside, this modulation can have particularly haunting qualities.

In *Apartment Houses* we see a sitting space separated by sun and air from neighboring windows. Our focus is on the interior room where a maid is arranging and fluffing up furniture, with her back to the scene outside. The occupant of the room is not at home. Perhaps he or she is working. Ironically, we see this leisure sleeping room during its working “off hours” with an employee in it. The sun backlights part of a curtain and lights a windowsill, a connection to the darkened, autonomous silhouettes out across the alley. As in *Girl at Sewing Machine*, inward activity is present here. But the exterior vantage point places the scene within a context. The observer wonders what lies behind the other windows. It is as if we see private lives strung out like clothes across a building façade—lives that are hidden during daily working hours.

In *Cape Cod Morning* we see into a bay window and an interior room set against a forest. The interior is warm and lit by the morning rays of the sun. Perhaps a meal is cooking in the kitchen. The dark forest is a cold and brooding presence in the early morning. A woman leans forward, orienting herself toward something beyond her room and the forest. She is interested in the sunrise, which we are not allowed to see. Instead, Hopper presents us with a meadow and a dark forest



beyond, which take up the right half of the canvas.

*August in the City* is one of my favorite Hopper images. Heavy architectural elements delineate an especially urbane relationship between interior and natural landscape. A sunlit, human interior—this time a luxurious sitting room—is portrayed adjacent to a dark forest. The sunlit fireplace, tables, and sculpture of a woman looking outwards, suspended in time, are wrapped by the heavy walls of the house. Outside, a path wraps by the forest and the room, to descend past the doorway portal, further isolating the interior from its context. The building is the keeper of a sunlit and timeless interior domain set in contrast to the unknown forest beyond. The thick windowed turret surrounds the interior as if it were a jewel, separating yet opening it to nature. The eye focuses evenly on both the interior and exterior as no live person is depicted.

### Public Places Outside

In some of his paintings of exteriors, Hopper leaves his concern with the private sphere and examines public space. Yet he continues his interest in the transition between spaces, now transformed into a contrast between areas of routine versus ambiguous human activity.

In *Gas*, we see a gas station and forest set alongside a dark road. The road is barren and suggests movement out of the painting. The



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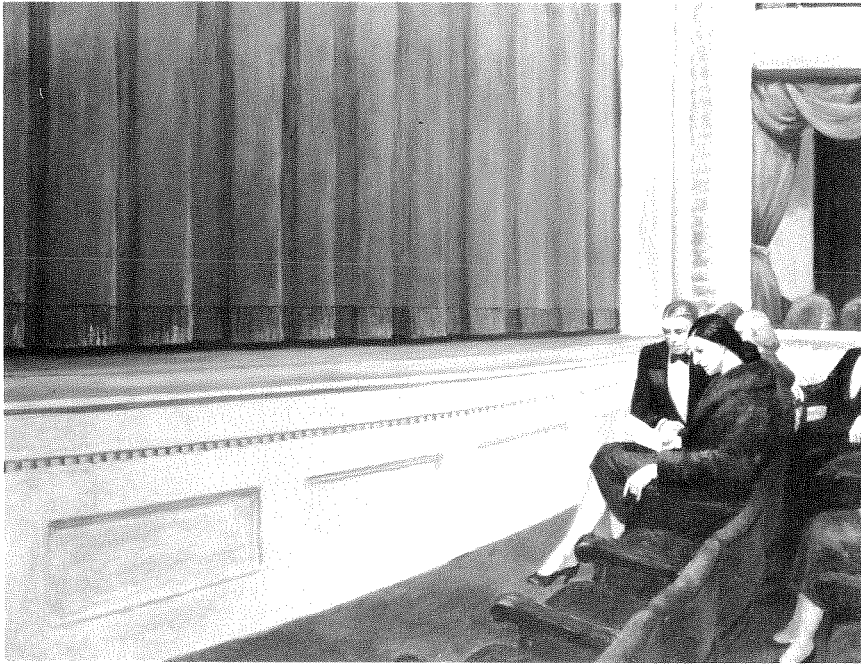
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### 8 The Bridal Path

Edward Hopper  
1939  
Oil on canvas. 28 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 42 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches.  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Anonymous Gift

### 9 Hotel Lobby

Edward Hopper, American, 1882–1967  
1943  
Oil on canvas. Acc. #47.4  
Indianapolis Museum of Art,  
William Ray Adams Memorial Collection



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road has no focus, only destinations and departures. The sun has set, yet Hopper's trees seem radiant. The attendant tinkers in the territory that he knows near his pumps, his back to the road and the forest. The elements of the station are held together by artificial light. Hopper's canvas sets the road and forest in taut contrast to the station.

*The Bridal Path* depicts two exterior places—the first, an energetic, rock-lined horse-path with three riders who are about to enter the second, a darkened tunnel. The rough rock-lined path faces the cut-stone tunnel. The buildings above grade contrast with the path below grade. The sunlit place is set against the dark tunnel. The rocks push up against, and then seem to fall into, the tunnel. Here Hopper places great movement and flurry in the form of three galloping horses with riders. The horses are ambiguous in their emotions. They are either spirited or hesitant to enter the tunnel. The female riders orient their bodies and their horses towards the tunnel. The male rider (or is it his horse?) expresses hesitation. This image uses human and animal forms to call out and to intensify the transition between what is known and what is not known.

### Public Interiors

Hopper's paintings of public interiors are taken as pictures of lonely crowds, of individuals lost in their own thoughts, which are unrelated to the people with whom they rub elbows. To my eyes, his public interiors are remarkable for

#### 10 First Row Orchestra

Edward Hopper

1951

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden  
Smithsonian Institution

#### 11 New York Movie

Edward Hopper

1939

Oil on canvas. 32¼ × 40¼ inches.

Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York. Given anonymously.

their structural similarity to the spatial arrangements found in his other paintings. He depicts a single, public interior that hints of spaces beyond.

Though peopled, *Hotel Lobby* speaks of an empty interior space caught between an outside space and deeper interior spaces. The lobby is a transitional space that lacks its own focus. Its main element is an unoccupied aedicula-like reception desk. Like the highway in *Gas*, *Hotel Lobby* has a carpet stripe that proceeds past a forest, this time one painted on the wall. The stripe makes its way inward from the lobby's front door, past the dark reception portals and a darkened and empty dining area to terminate in a warmly lit, back-wall niche containing guest mail—the guests' connection to home. The placement and activity of the people emphasize the lobby's unfocused and transitory nature. The couple to the left are about to depart down the stripe to the exterior. The woman to the right is at home in the hotel yet her presence is not enough to bring life to this lobby. There is no connection between these two groups. Hopper's lobby is a waiting station, an interior roadway.

The left two-thirds of *First Row Orchestra* is a bare stage curtain about to go up at the beginning of a performance. Here is the interior equivalent of *The Bridle Path*. Instead of a rocky horse path, we have a theater with seats oriented forward. Instead of the dark tunnel, we have a lit proscenium arch with a blue-velvet curtain about to open.

Hopper has depopulated the audience to concentrate on their expressions and activity. The vacant seats underscore the tension surrounding the performance before it begins. As in *Bridle Path*, there is a mixed reaction to this uncertainty. Some study their programs while others stare patiently.

In *New York Movie*, the curtain has already lifted, and the performance has begun. To the left we see darkened individuals in the audience viewing a fantasy—the lit image of people on film. To the right, a female form is lit, caught in her own thoughts, her own images. Yet her reveries are simply pastimes within the labyrinth of the movie house, as stairs to her right wander up to the balconies. Selecting a remarkable vantage point, Hopper frames two interior areas, softly juxtaposed—to the left, outer-directed, and to the right, inner-directed reverie. This is a painting of our everyday lives.

Hopper's canvas examines the qualities of transition between distinct areas. Whether at a window, a door, a highway, a carpet stripe, a tunnel entrance, or a stage curtain, he uses the posture, gaze, and activity of the human form to develop qualities among these areas of lasting psychological power.

## George Segal: No Space without People

In a Hopper work, there is the sense of physical space being modified by the presence of human occupants. In contrast, a sculpture by George Segal (born in 1924) seems to originate from people, to be modified by elements such as walls and signs. Remove people, and the physical elements cannot in themselves define space. Space, in a Segal sculpture, stems from the human body—its posture, the axis of its gaze, its front versus back, and the direction of its walk. Segal is a master at locating and positioning people in a way that generates space out of thin air with little need for physical elements.

### The Unaccompanied Body

In *The Costume Party*, fantasy and life intertwine. The piece creates a body-derived space that explores gazing and its objects. Body height, body axes, and pecking order create a composition with mystical overtones. Are the couple in the same party as the fantastic beings or is one group set in the imagination of the other? If so, which group imagines the other? The couple in white lie on the ground. The man looks into the distance, perhaps daydreaming, while the woman looks past him out of concern or caught in her own reverie. Standing above them are four surreal individuals whose gaze is not casual. A man in red, to the right, looks straight ahead. Around his neck hangs a man's photograph. Another individual, dressed in black and wearing a cycle helmet,





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**12 The Costume Party**

George Segal  
 begun 1965  
 Acrylic on plaster, metal, wood, and  
 mixed media. 6 × 12 × 9 feet.  
 Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery,  
 New York City

also stares ahead. A yellow woman sits in a chair softly looking past the others in the same direction, just as the woman on the floor looks past the man in front of her. Meeting the surreal stares is an entity, to the left, dressed in a blue cape and an animal's head—the pagan god or fantasy figure that is the object of the yellow, black, and red stares.

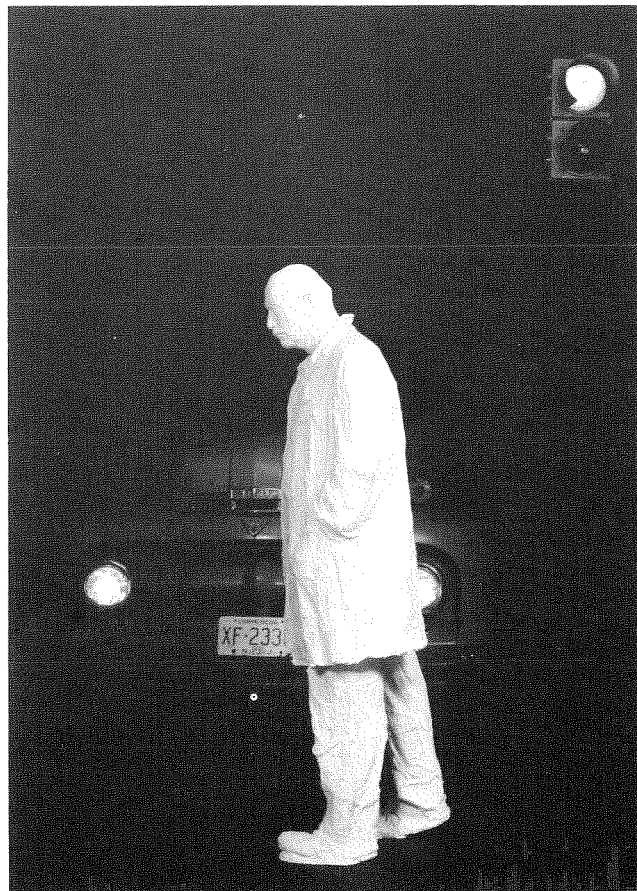
In *Robert and Ethel Scull*, the themes of separation and togetherness are developed spatially through the use of a wall and a sofa in conjunction with two figures. The man and the woman are remote, yet they stare at us. The woman, wearing dark glasses, is seated in a semirelaxed, semiglaring, possibly bored posture. The man is standing above and behind her, his hand on her sofa;

his position suggests social reserve as well as protection of the woman. The red wall adds a challenging tone to this scene. The couple is brought together by their mutual distance and aloofness from us and not by their physical closeness to each other. There is an implied boundary between them and us that pulls them together.

*The Red Light* is a simple yet powerful scene. The white figure of a man walks perpendicularly across the path of a dark truck-grill. The truck is actually hung, cableless and driverless, from a dark museum wall. A red stoplight shines above, identifying this as a nighttime street corner scene. The truck's headlights glare into our eyes, light the man, and underscore the tension. The truck is a large



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driverless, mechanical beast about to rip the man out of its way. Yet there is no animal snarl, no loud noise. In reality there is only the silence, the lights, and the sound of a museum's air-conditioning system.

### Bodies and Buildings

When Segal places architectural elements near the human figure, a special symbiosis occurs. The architectural setting provides a painterly background that comments on that figure's state of mind. Likewise, the figure gives the architectural setting a focus, a human form upon which to elaborate. The figure and the background fuse to create space.

In *The Parking Garage* the attendant is slumped over his seat in

front of a fragment of a larger wall, waiting. He, too, is parked here. Though he helps others drive up and be on their way, he is bored and stalled; he melts into the wall. The fragment of the building behind him performs double duty. It calls out and comments on his job. The wall itself is a wonderful composition of wood, metal, paint, and light-bulb textures that frame the figure. On the wall is a sign, "park," commenting on the scene. Yet, it is a painting—a deep and dreamy blue surface to the right, framed in black, adjacent to the jarring yellow and black diagonal stripe, with the parking sign rectangle juxtaposed to the top left. A metal bumper protects the wall from the absent automobiles.

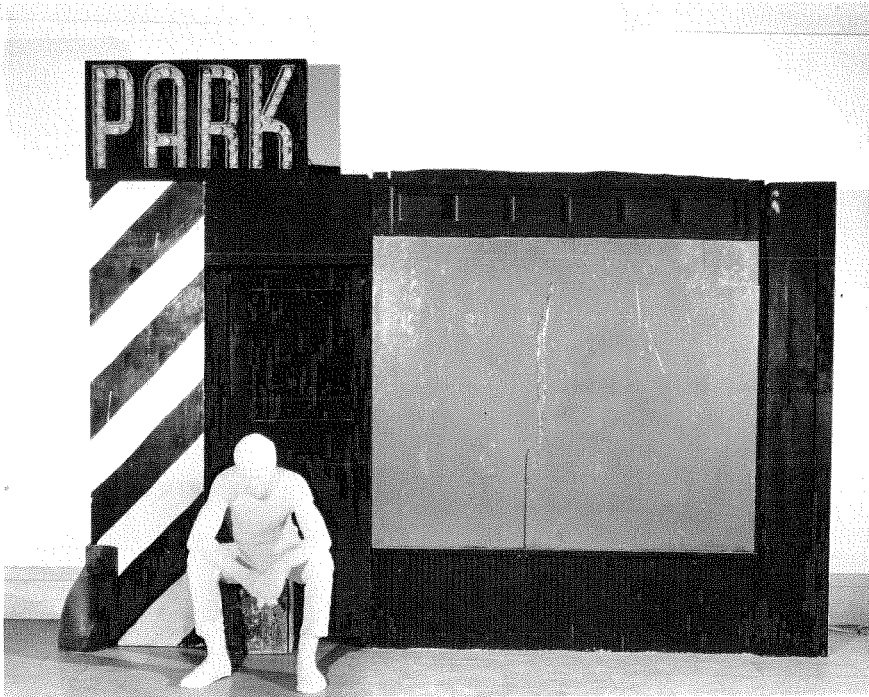
*To All Gates* uses architectural elements to create a classic spatial

### 13 Robert and Ethel Scull

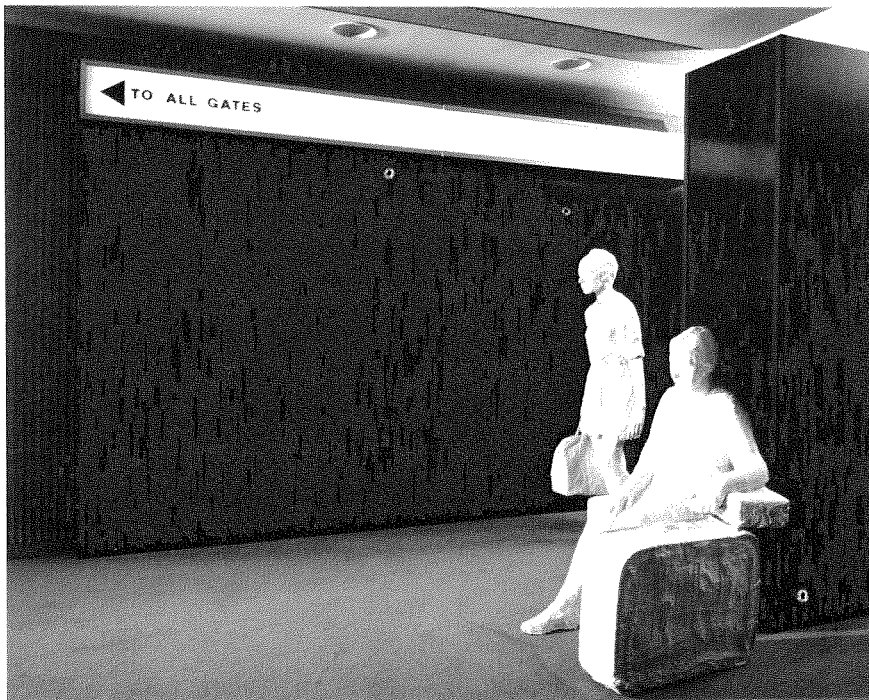
George Segal  
1965  
Private Collection

### 14 The Red Light

George Segal, American (b. 1924)  
1972  
Plaster and Mixed Media.  
H. 114 × W. 96 × D. 36 inches.  
The Cleveland Museum of Art,  
Purchase, Andrew R. and Martha Holden  
Jennings Fund



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contrast that reinforces the figures' posture. Segal has placed a stationary black column in front of a running black wall having a long, narrow, red-lit, arrowed sign. The column stakes out a point on the ground in contrast to the wall that moves to the left down the corridor "to all gates." Human figures develop this contrast. A heavyset woman rests by the stationary column. She sits on her baggage and leans against the column. Behind her, a thinner woman holds her own luggage while she walks along the wall to be whisked to some far-off destination. The scene is about rest and movement, as told by body postures and a building.

Space can be generated by human form alone in Segal's work. Great demand is placed upon the human body to create space through body axiality, gait, and stance. Yet when architectural elements are used, they supply spatial, social, and textural elaboration on these human forms. The human forms, through their posture and activity, provide a point of discussion for these architectural elements.

**15 The Parking Garage**

George Segal

1965

Plaster, wood, metal, and electrical parts.

117¼ × 155 inches.

The Newark Museum

**16 To All Gates**

George Segal

1971

Plaster, wood, plastic, and lights.

243.8 × 365.8 × 228.6 cm.

Coffin Fine Arts Trust Fund

Des Moines Art Center

## Place in the Eyes of the Artist

In the work of Hopper and Segal, space develops in relation to human occupancy. In Hopper's paintings, the human figure is arranged and framed in relation to transitional elements—windows, doors, or a stage curtain—to create a subtle depiction of inside versus outside or known versus unknown. In Segal's sculpture, the human body is carefully placed in relation to other figures to create spaces of great poignancy. When architectural elements are used, they frame and comment on human lives. By including people in their work, Hopper and Segal open space to a wealth of emotional, bodily nuances.

How different this is from architectural expression, an expression that does not often depend on human form to shape space. Current architecture often makes reference to past spaces in creating a new place. Hopper and Segal make no effort to refer to other times and places. Their images celebrate everyday places, yet capture moments that reveal fundamental human character. In an era of architectural one-liners, the work of Hopper and Segal is open to many levels of viewing. They depict physical elements yet understand their relation to the human soul. They understand the inseparability of physical artifacts from their human contexts. Architecture becomes alive when human drama is entwined in its physical features.

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