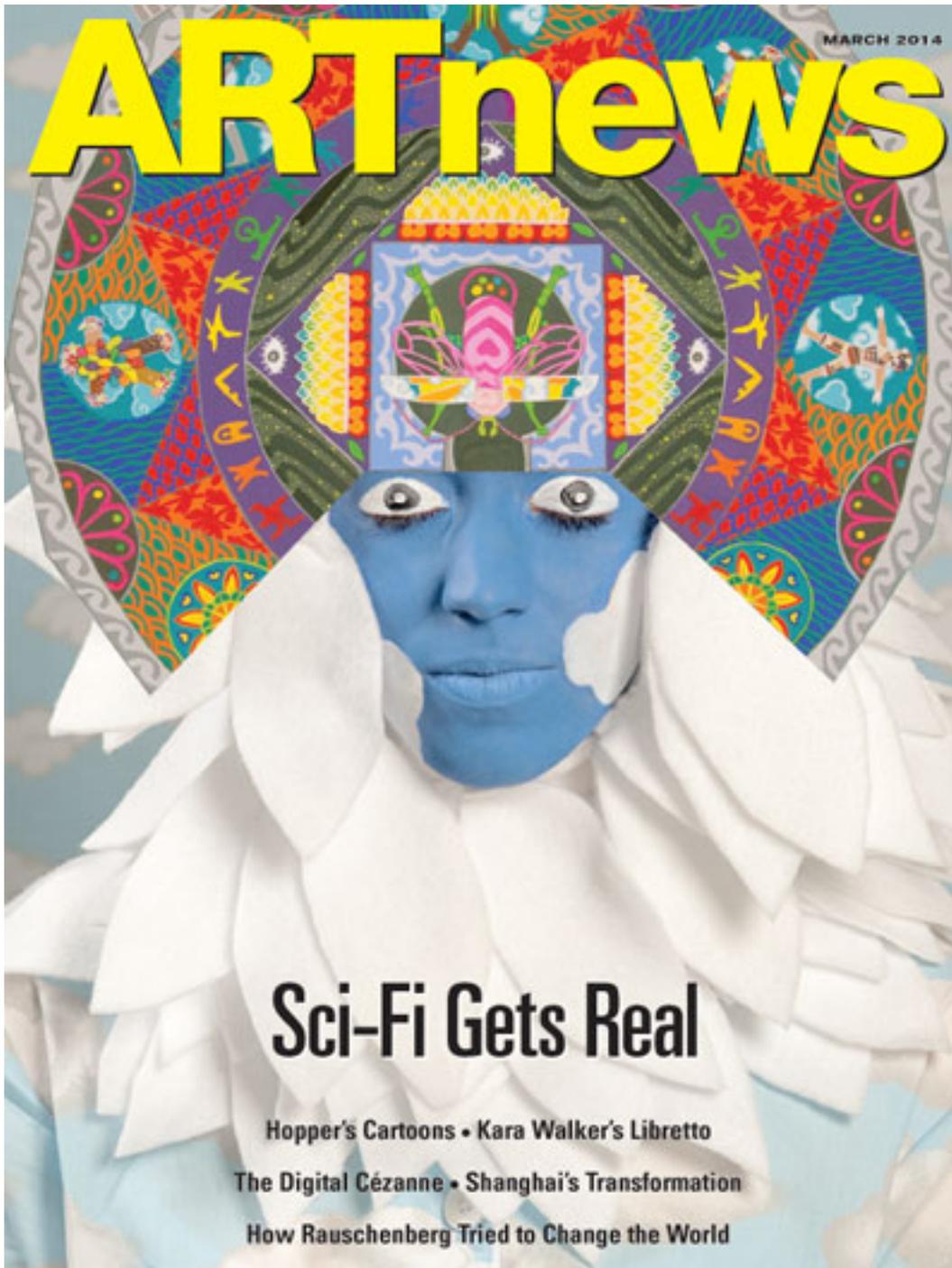


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LOOKING AT ART MARCH 2014



## Scenes from Edward Hopper's Marriage

BY *Stephen May* POSTED 03/10/14

A show features the artist's sketches of domestic life with his wife, Jo—bickering and squabbles included

Like 36 1

It is well known that the 43-year-long marriage between Edward Hopper and Josephine Nivison Hopper was filled with tumult and strife. Edward, a dour, reticent, towering figure, constantly belittled and denigrated his assertive, diminutive wife, who responded with verbal assaults of her own.



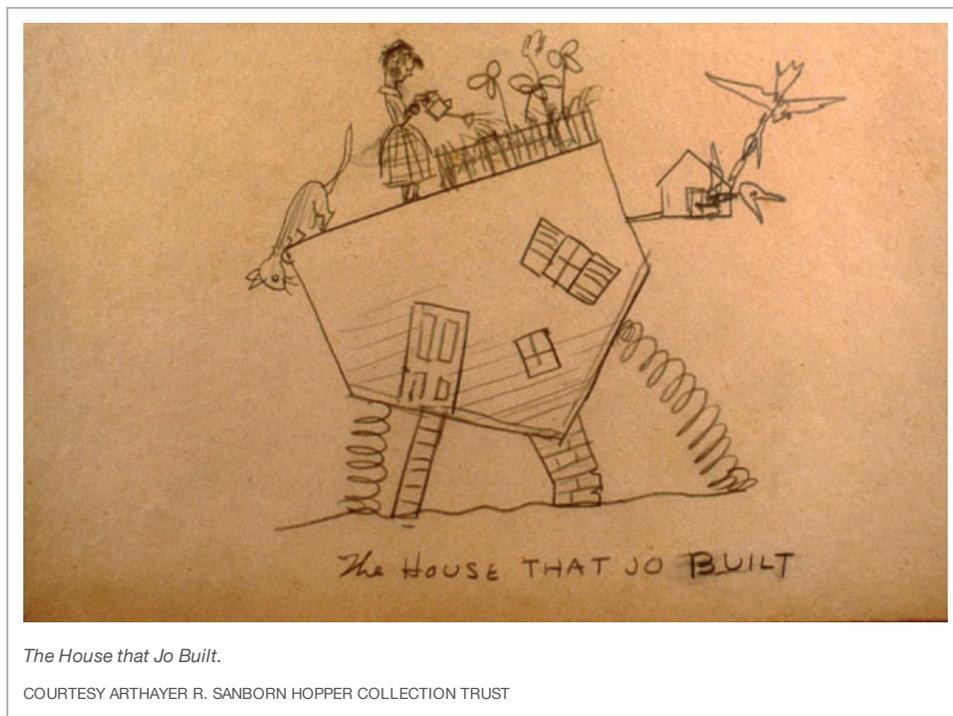
Edward Hopper drew caricatures to express sour feelings toward his wife, Jo, as seen in "He can not choose but hear." All sketches ca. 1933–52.

COURTESY ARTHAYER R. SANBORN HOPPER COLLECTION TRUST

The exhibition “[Edward Hopper’s Caricatures: At Home with Ed and Jo](#),” on view at the artist’s boyhood home in Nyack, New York—now called the Edward Hopper House Art Center—offers visual documentation of the Hoppers’ sometimes nasty, occasionally humorous marriage. The 15 small pencil sketches, made between 1933 to ’52, were drawn from the collection trust of the late Arthayer R. Sanborn, a family friend.

Rather than express his feelings in words, Edward would often dash off sketches when Jo was out of the room and leave them on a table for her to find when she returned. In spite of their many shared interests, both Hoppers harbored resentments: Jo because her own artistic career (she studied with [Robert Henri](#)) was overshadowed by Edward’s, and Edward because he felt Jo was an inadequate wife. The caricatures are one-sided, of course, with Edward portraying himself as the victim of his wife’s aggression and alleged failings as a homemaker (she often refused to cook), as well as mocking her artistic efforts.

The longevity of the sniping is suggested by *Chez Hopper—The Eternal Argument*, in which he depicts the couple as squawking chickens with ferocious beaks. It conforms to descriptions of their bickering in Jo’s diaries. Edward’s indignation over Jo’s dislike of their home and its upkeep is expressed in *The House that Jo Built*. That drawing shows their newly constructed abode on Cape Cod as an upside-down structure on giant springs, with the doors and windows askew and Jo tending her garden atop the convoluted house.



The caricatures convey a sense of alienation and stoicism—the hallmarks of Edward’s career—that resonates with such familiar paintings as *Room in New York* (1932), *Cape Cod Evening* (1939), and *Four Lane Road* (1956). “Clearly, the dynamics of his complex relations with Jo informed his paintings,” says Carole Perry, executive artistic director of the Hopper House, where the drawings are on view through April 13.

But Edward also executed “several watercolors of Jo painting, capturing intimate moments that are sensitive to

the subject,” Perry adds. Such works are reminders that for all their squabbling, the Hoppers bonded for many years, during which Edward created —with Jo’s help as model, muse, record keeper, and protector—the masterpieces that have long captured the American imagination.

A version of this story originally appeared in the March 2014 issue of *ARTnews* on page 56 under the title “Scenes from Edward Hopper’s Marriage.”

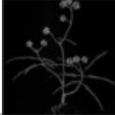
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