Daniel W. Dietrich II ’64
EDWARD HOPPER’S Road and Trees, amazing to say, returned to Hamilton for this exhibition. It was here long ago in 1964 at the Root Art Center among a group of Hopper oils, watercolors and etchings all assembled on loan in a major show. Upstairs and downstairs throughout the center’s lovely rooms was a wide array of work to explore, and it was required of the art history students to choose a Hopper and write about it.

W H E N T H E E M E R S O N G A L L E R Y celebrated its 20th anniversary this spring with the exhibition Hamilton Collects American Art, not one, but two collections emerged—a collection of rarely seen paintings by prominent artists and an equally compelling collection of stories reflecting the exploration and discovery processes of the collectors themselves.

The exhibition included 62 works from 30 Hamilton lenders, many of them alumni whose love and appreciation of art was first inspired while they were students on College Hill. With pieces by such renowned artists as George Bellows, Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper and Norman Rockwell, the exhibition offered a fresh look at the history of American art and its role in shaping our national identity.

“The drive to collect is probably as much a genetic disposition as blue eyes or premature graying, but the collector’s focus and the skills he or she brings to the enterprise are products of personal environment and education,” noted William Salzillo, acting gallery director and professor of art. “One of our hopes for this project is that the current generation of Hamilton students will be inspired to appreciate the rewards of living with art and work to accumulate the intellectual and creative tools necessary to embark on a collecting career.”

Prior to the exhibition’s opening, lenders were invited to share their thoughts about the works they loaned, the formative influence of their Hamilton experiences and what they have learned from friends and family about collecting. Here are excerpts from just a few:

Daniel W. Dietrich II ’64
I did my paper on some classic, forthright painting well inside the mainstream of his art. No fool I. But it was this Road and Trees I kept circling back to. It was not yet two-years-old, and had a scumbled and unashed — even raw — look. It seemed oddly thin and nearly without consequence, like a cartoon. Comparing it at that time to the great Second Story Sunlight of 1960 (oh, just down this hall, and one room over!), Road and Trees looked oddly cuedled and dissolvent and slightly sour and somewhat empty. Missing were the Hopper regulars, his usual stawlars — the totemic, stunned people; the white clapboard facade cut on the bias by that Hopper sunlight; the hard-won balance wherein a highway or a mass of trees might just play a supporting, voice-in-the-drama. Usually the Hopper road served to take us, by diagonal, to the upstage action. Typically Hopper trees gave distance and space to some scene, which might otherwise atrophy, of unbudging, ton-solidness, the eternal. Were 1967 his great razing adventure? His spurning as applied grace notes of poetry?

In 1967, the year of Road and Trees, Hopper was 80-years-old. One or two new pictures surfaced each year. To find a subject for big work had become very difficult and to paint at all was physically challenging. He would create just five more pictures before his death in May 1967.

Road and Trees is almost three feet high and a full five feet in length. In its shallow space, a narrow road and trees run together across the whole canvas. Seen straight on, without beginning or end visible, it seems Hopper has chosen a segment of a whole running frenzy as his subject to paint. Perhaps this is the middle of the flow. There is no defining incident to focus on. Along this continuum, he will paint exactly where he wants, here. Why we here!

It has been, of course, a great joy to puzzle over Road and Trees these three years now. I once did ask the man himself, a very kind, quite genial, Hopper, why this painting wouldn’t resolve, come clean, settle down. His thought was that whatever question Hopper painted Road and Trees to answer, he left there at the finish. Warren Hohrer, why this painting wouldn’t resolve, come clean, settle down. I was driven to the question. So, one could say Hopper poses some question, and it is still hovering, unanswered, in this very moment, in him and Trees.

In this moment, it is right down there, or here, somewhere, even now causing a stir. The question, it would appear, is simply: here, not anywhere else along here where Hopper took a fancy to paint a no-name location, which contains an ever-extending view.

Stephen and Mary Craven P’99

COLLECTING ART is like studying history. Art tells a story; our collection tells the story of America from 1800 - 1950. We started collecting when we were first married. Stephen had a love for art, having majored in painting in college, and I had a love for shopping. It was a perfect match that has sustained us for 30 years. In the first years we couldn’t afford significant pieces, but loved visiting the galleries and learning all we could. Our first major acquisition forced us to eat macaroni for four more months to pay for the painting. We would forgo vacations and dinners out just so we could acquire another painting. We read about art, visited galleries and poured over auction catalogs.

As the years passed an actual collection started to take shape. We limited our acquisitions to American oil paintings from the first half of the 20th century. We began, in the early ’70s, by buying American Impressionist paintings. These were affordable then and the later work was very difficult to find.

I have a love for William Glackens’ work; I already had acquired two of his paintings when the beach scene became available. It is thought to depict a Cape Anne scene near our summer home in Rockport. One of my husband’s favorite artists is John Sloan. He would love to do an entire room with his paintings. He even named our son Sloan! Dogtown Common, ca. 1919 oil on canvas, 20 x 34 in., Collection Stephen and Mary Craven.

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There is such fun in the hunt. We would love to find a wonderful Marin oil or a Hartley or a Kuhn circus painting. But there is the fun.
DURING THE 1930S Norman Rockwell lived in New Rochelle, N.Y., and was a customer at my father’s drug store, the Beechmont Pharmacy. My father and Rockwell became friends, and Dad would, from time to time, provide him with props for his paintings. One in particular that I remember was his pharmacy license, some test tubes, beakers and flasks that appeared on a Post cover in 1939 involving a rather rumpled pharmacist compounding some syrup for a little girl. Rockwell had said he would give the pharmacist painting to my Dad, but it was either destroyed in a studio fire or asked for by one of the people at Curtis Publishing. Norman felt badly about this and resolved to give my father the Barbershop Quartet painting. I feel, a better painting since it contained four and not two figures.

I remember him visiting our house to deliver the painting and explaining some of its composition to my parents. He said that rendering hands is a most difficult task. The detail is quite extraordinary including items one might say are throw-aways, such as the cloth on the floor, the cracked shoes and the comb with missing teeth, the diagonal line from the upper right to the lower left razor handle and the extensive use of triangles in spaces between the figures.

My dad tells me that the short fellow on the left was actually a barber in New Rochelle. The taller figure next to him was a policeman; the third, a fireman; and the seated man, an artist friend of Rockwell’s named Walter Beech Humphries, who later painted a portrait of my mother.

Rockwell has been criticized by many art critics as being nothing but an illustrator who produced work solely for reproduction. It is, of course, true that much of his work is illustration, but much of it is also art. One proponent of Rockwell has suggested that with his work “what you see is what you get.” His pictures tell a story which requires no interpretation or intermediation, so the art critic is not needed, and therefore, they denigrate him for all the good trade union reasons. I subscribe to this later theory. The painting is, I feel, an allegory for harmony and hangs in the dining room of our house, a room where, we feel, harmony is important.

Over the years, my wife and I have enjoyed the museums in New York where we live including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. The museums of Paris, particularly the Musée d’Orsay and the Musée national des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, are familiar haunts, as is the Museo del Prado in Madrid. The Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, N.Y., was an important part of my education when I was an undergraduate.

My wife and I have somewhat different tastes. She prefers figurative art, which I enjoy, but she is less enthusiastic about the more abstract works that are attractive to me. We have compromised on some works by Marin, Stuart Davis and Max Weber that appeal to both of us. We collect because we enjoy having art in our home for our pleasure and for our family and friends. We are happy to lend our art for museum shows, and the Winslow Homer watercolor, How Many Eggs?, in this exhibition has just returned from a year-long Homer

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Their library boasted the great illustrated works of Rouault, Derain and Shahn, and the hallways and staircases were lined with the sculpture of Renoir, Degas and Matisse.

As a family the Bakwins traveled to Europe every summer visiting and talking to the living artists they collected, as well as the major collectors, dealers and scholars. In time their children came to understand that the main purpose of collecting was to acquire beautiful items to decorate the home and to achieve an understanding of what the artist had intended to impart with his work. This was a philosophy very different from that of many of the well-known collectors of the time who seemingly collected only with an eye for fame, market value and popularity.

Pat purchased her first painting at the age of 18, a Vlamink, when her family was visiting that artist’s studio. Later when we married we started collecting together: our first joint selection was a small Renoir oil, Head of Gabriel. It is still our favorite painting.

As a son of the Reverend Grant Selch ’28, widely known as “the puppeteering parson,” I was exposed to a style of collecting connected primarily to his activities as a latter-day Cappetto and producer of amateur theatricals. Our house was filled with every kind of collectable thing in the world, and everything we ever brought there was intended to be used as a prop, a stage decoration or a costume for either his human or his doll players. But to him I guess I owe my more controlled habit of collecting the materials — musical instruments, books and prints — related to my obsessive study of music history.

Pat’s parents were prominent New York pediatrists and collected famously the paintings, sculpture and art books of the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Their public rooms were filled with eye-boggling canvases by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Modigliani and the like.

Patricia Bakwin and Frederick Richard Selch ’79,88

AMONG THE MANY HAPPY DISCOVERIES that Pat and I made when we married nearly 50 years ago was that we both liked gardening and children. Another was that we both liked to collect. Frankly, our shared love of collecting was in our blood, since both our families collected actively. However, the type of collecting of the two families was very different.

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