

## **A Philistine Shrug for a Droopy Idea**

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# **A Philistine Shrug for a Droopy Idea**

Edward Hopper's great talent as a painter was to reveal both the outer form and inner life of cities like New York. He turned the commonplace into haunting art. And the Hopper retrospective now at the Whitney Museum celebrates that vision. An artist named simply Christo also transforms the commonplace, but in a more controversial way. He "wraps" buildings, or mountains, turning them into strange temporary monuments. He also runs miles of fabric "fences" across country, changing natural scenes into Christo landscapes. Now he wants to do his thing in Central Park.

Hopper took his places as he found them. His New York is a record of silent streets, deserted offices, all-night restaurants, storefronts stopped in time. The inhabitants are solitary figures, making the isolation of city life as much a presence as the furniture in rooms.

The city observed by Hopper becomes an image of the human condition.

Christo would merely use New York as a prop for his own visions. In Central Park, he proposes to raise 11,000 flags and thus turn 27 miles of paths, for two weeks, into a golden or heroic passageway. His 11,000 banners would require 11,000 supports, actually steel gates, which is a luxurious lot of work and wear for such a fleeting event in an already fragile place.

So we are challenged to play the Philistines to resist this avant art. Very well, we accept. Central Park is already a work of art — arranged by Olmsted and Vaux. Their design has been endlessly, often needlessly violated. But does that justify another violation merely to impose one new artist's vision on another's? Central Park needs loving hands of restoration, not of exploitation.

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