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By VIVIEN RAYNOR

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ART

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NEW BRUNSWICK

THERE is much to be seen these days at Rutgers' Zimmerli Museum. Some of it is unusual and instructive, and some of it is mysterious. All of it can be seen through Nov. 3.

In the first category is "Hopper's Places," a show that is as much about its guest curator, Gail Levin, as about its subject, and it comes with a recently published book of the same title (Alfred Knopf, \$10.95).

During her term at the Whitney Museum in New York City, Miss Levin produced monographs on abstraction, but her specialty was the great realist Edward Hopper.

This is understandable, since she was curator of the museum's vast Hopper estate from 1976 to 1984. With six books on the artist to her credit, including the catalogue raisonné, which W.W. Norton will publish in 1987, the writer is now at work on a seventh, a critical biography.

At the same time, Miss Levin has been building a small reputation as a photographer, and it is partly in this capacity that she now contemplates her subject.

Hopper and his wife spent a lot of time on the road, painting landscapes all over the country, but chiefly New England, especially its coast. Visiting one of his sites in Maine and, later, seeing the French countryside immortalized by Cézanne and Gauguin, Miss Levin became interested in the means whereby artists — Hopper in

particular — transposed their subjects.

A result is this show and its book, in which the contrast between Hopper's canvases and Miss Levin's color photographs permit the workings of Hopper's mind and imagination to be glimpsed.

Although such investigations do not lend themselves to verbal documentation, Miss Levin's deductions are invariably enlightening, as when she infers that Hopper's tendency to elongate structures was a reflection of his own great height. All the same, the show has it over the book for being primarily visual proof of change, whether wrought by time or the artist's conscious and unconscious editing.

For example, when Hopper did his choice watercolor of Captain Strout's house in 1927, the roof tiles were a muted red-brown. Now they are a horrendously bright red.

Also, the white porch, which in the painting is cast into a lavender shadow by an oblique sun, is now trimmed in an equally disagreeable ochre. Gentrification also has interrupted Hopper's swath of lawn with a flower bed and has gussied up the simple white guard rail with inserts of wire mesh.

Yet these alterations, if anything, point up the assets that surely attracted the artist in the first place: The disproportionately large roof that undulates so caressingly around the porch's two arches, the one large and two very small gable-like forms interrupting it and, standing guard in the background, the lighthouse that's still



A painting by Edward Hopper and a photograph of a house on Cape Cod.

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microfilm.

black and white.

More often than not, the houses that were painted drab earth colors in Hopper's time are uniformly white today, and where once stood only telephone poles and street lamps there are now also traffic lights.

Still, these aren't the significant differences between "East Wind Over Weehawken" and its photographic counterpart. Always attuned to weather, Hopper conveys it here by way of cirrus clouds and the angle of the long, sere grass around the house. Since these auguries are absent from the photograph, so, too, is the tension.

Hopper did not paint from photographs but, says Miss Levin, would use them occasionally for architectural reference. While he contended that the camera's images did not have "enough weight," he was impressed by the personality that "a good photographer can get into a picture," citing Atget as an example.

As it happens, the concurrent show of prints drawn from the Zimmerli's photography collection and, in effect, unveiling it, includes a sublime Atget. One of about 60 prints spanning the last hundred years, this is a study of a tree's roots seemingly clawing the ground, as if in a spasm.

Roughly 25 artists are represented, including Berenice Abbott, Barbara Morgan, Philippe Halsman, Aaron Siskind, Gary Winogrand, Elliott Erwitt, Naomi Savage and William Eggleston. Considering that their prints come as gifts from various collectors, they cohere surprisingly well.

Even so, it is the unfamiliar images by the obscure and unknown that

stand out, including the aerial shots of a crowded lifeboat floating on an oily Pacific swell and of myriad uniformed men surging out of a mess hall. Both were taken by the Navy Photographic Unit under the command (and influence) of Edward Steichen.

The most extraordinary picture, however, is by an early 20th-century photographer of whom nothing is known but his name, Leopold Hugo. A view of brown-black trees — possibly umbrella pines — bent by the wind against a yellowish sky, it looks more like a monotype than a photograph and is nothing short of hypnotic.

The mystery alluded to earlier is contributed by Leo Amino, a 74-year-old sculptor who, although he is well known as a teacher at the Art Students League and is represented in the Whitney Museum, has kept himself out of the public eye for most of his career.

Recently donated to the Zimmerli by the artist's wife, Julia, the 45 works comprising this show cover the last 40 or so years and reflect Amino's abiding interest in materials, from wood to the plastic he is said to have been one of the first to use.

The sculptor's imagery, on the other hand, is for some of his influences, which range from Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore to Surrealists such as Miro and, finally, to constructivism.

Unimaginatively displayed, the show is predominantly about technique and comes with a catalogue that discusses little else. ■