



George Bellows
American, 1882 - 1925

Maud Murray Dale (Mrs. Chester Dale)

1919

oil on wood

overall: 101.5 x 85 cm (39 15/16 x 33 7/16 in.)

framed: 125.1 x 108.6 x 5.7 cm (49 1/4 x 42 3/4 x 2 1/4 in.)

Inscription: lower left: Geo Bellows.

Chester Dale Collection 1944.15.1

ENTRY

Agnes Maud Murray Thompson Dale (1875–1953) was born in Rochester, New York, the daughter of a compositor for a local newspaper. The Murrays moved to New York City in 1886, and Maud enrolled in the Art Students League in 1893, where she studied with James Carroll Beckwith. She later went to Paris and studied with painter and printmaker Theophile A. Steinlen. In 1898 she married Frederick M. Thompson, a former classmate at the Art Students League who had foregone art for a legal career. In 1899 the couple had a son. Maud divorced Thompson in April 1911, and several weeks later married the stockbroker Chester Dale.

Maud Dale commissioned George Bellows to paint her portrait in the spring of 1919, at the time of his successful solo exhibition at Knoedler & Company. He experienced considerable difficulty with the portrait; Chester Dale recollected that the artist “spent the . . . winter mussing up my drawing room . . . but didn’t seem to get anywhere. . . . I asked him what’s the matter and he said I don’t know Chester, Maud seems to be awfully difficult. I can’t get what I want.” [1] Bellows struggled with the portrait from April through June and left it unfinished when he went to

spend the summer in Middletown, Rhode Island. Bellows briefly resumed work on the painting in August, and finally completed it in October. [2] Donald Braider relates that the artist “didn’t much like the arrogant, demanding Maud Dale” and was annoyed by her request to include her pet dog in the picture and her insistence that the sittings take place in her apartment at times that were inconvenient to him. [3] To make matters worse, the sitter was particularly fond of portraits, which she collected and later described as “documents by which not only the individual but his epoch can be recreated.” [4] She openly criticized this first portrait and let it be known that she considered the artist “a bit vulgar, a bit too loud.” [5] Bellows was also dissatisfied with the painting, which he ultimately destroyed.

While Bellows summered in Middletown in 1919, the Dales were vacationing in nearby Newport. In a letter to his former teacher Robert Henri, Bellows reported that “Mrs. Dale, who has been facing me for two months from the model stand has appeared on my trail from Newport.” [6] Maud was determined to have her likeness satisfactorily painted and prevailed upon her husband to commission two new portraits for a total of \$3,000. In his records Bellows has listed the first of these, the one now at the Gallery, as *Portrait of Mrs. Chester Dale--Purple and Black*, and the second as *Portrait of Mrs. Dale in Red Coat*[fig. 1]. [7] Both were completed at his Middletown studio that July. Braider notes that neither Bellows nor Maud Dale was satisfied with the two later portraits, and that the artist accepted the fee “because he had given the best part of three months to the various efforts.” [8] According to Charles Morgan, Chester Dale was delighted with them, and urged the artist to rework the ill-fated first version. [9]

Bellows represented Maud Dale, as was often his preference, set against a neutral background and in a three-quarter-length seated format. She leans her right elbow on the back of the chair, clasps her gloved hands together, and glances off to her left. She looks every bit the wealthy, cosmopolitan society woman, attired in a purple and gray satin dress, black shawl, pearl earrings, and black feathered hat. When this portrait was reproduced in color on the cover of *Town & Country* magazine in 1922, the accompanying caption gave no hint of the friction that had existed between the sitter and the artist: “Mrs. Dale is a great admirer of the work of Mr. Bellows, as is her husband. This admiration has expressed itself to the practical extent of two portraits by this American master of painting and lithography.” [10]

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American Paintings, 1900–1945

As was so often the case with Bellows, his formal, commissioned portraits are noticeably less successful than the portraits he painted of his family, such as the two portraits of his wife (*Emma in the Purple Dress*, 1919, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and *Emma in the Black Print*, 1919, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and one of his mother (*Grandma Bellows*, 1919, Oklahoma City Art Museum) that all date from this time. [11] Daniel Catton Rich contrasted Bellows’s “unsuccessful and somewhat ‘official’ portraits of the Dales” with Guy Pène du Bois’s *Mr. and Mrs. Chester Dale Dine Out* [fig. 2] and concluded that “the best of Bellows lies in those strong, simple and almost puritanical portraits where a love of painting and the unconscious bond between sitter and painter triumphed.” [12] Despite the criticisms leveled at the Gallery’s portrait, it conveys a strong sense of the sitter’s powerful personality, and confirms Morgan’s statement that “very few people, including her husband, argued long with Maud Dale.” [13]

As Chester’s financial career flourished, the Dales became leading New York socialites, took frequent trips to Europe, and spent their summers in Southampton, Long Island. Maud Dale became interested in late 19th- and early 20th-century French art, and encouraged her husband to become an avid collector. By the mid-1920s the Dales had assembled one of the largest and most important private collections of modern art in the United States. [14] Chester Dale later remarked: “She loved the paintings, I did all the buying.” [15] From 1928 to 1933 Maud took an active role in introducing the American public to modern French art by writing numerous art books, brochures, and articles on the subject. She organized a series of exhibitions at the Museum of French Art at the French Institute in New York, where her husband served on the board of directors. [16] The French government recognized these activities by awarding her the Cross of the Legion of Honor in 1931. A trained artist, Maud Dale also designed stage sets, painted murals, and designed luxury automobiles. Late in life, suffering from ill health, she became increasingly reclusive before finally succumbing to a heart attack in Southampton in 1953 at the age of 77. [17]

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

Maud Murray Dale (Mrs. Chester Dale)

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NOTES

- [1] Chester Dale autobiography, Chester Dale Papers, Archives of American Art, reel 3969, quoted by M. Melissa Wolfe, “Family Life: Portraiture, 1914–1923,” in Charles Brock et al., *George Bellows* (Washington, DC, 2012), 189.
- [2] Bellows has listed this portrait in his “Record Book B. of Paintings,” page 162, as “Portrait of Mrs. Chester Dale with Dog.” The artist’s Record Books can be found at The Ohio State University Libraries’ Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and the Columbus Museum of Art, OH.
- [3] Donald Braider, *George Bellows and the Ashcan School of Painting* (New York, 1971), 119–120.
- [4] Maud Dale, “French Art in the Chester Dale Collection,” *Art News*, Apr. 27, 1929, 55.
- [5] Charles W. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 224–225.
- [6] Bellows, July 1919, quoted in Charles W. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 225.
- [7] Bellows, “Record Book B. of Paintings,” 166–167, The Ohio State University Libraries’ Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and the Columbus Museum of Art, OH.
- [8] Donald Braider, *George Bellows and the Ashcan School of Painting* (New York, 1971), 120. Bellows nevertheless allowed the final portrait of Maud Dale to be illustrated in “Bellows in Chicago,” *Arts & Decoration* 12 (Nov. 1919): 10, where it was described as one “of the latest examples of his always growing art.”
- [9] Charles W. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 225.
- [10] “The Cover Painting,” *Town & Country*, May 1, 1922, 24.
- [11] On the family portraits, see Melissa Wolfe, “Family Life: Portraiture, 1914–1923,” in Charles Brock et al., *George Bellows* (Washington, DC, 2012), 187–212.
- [12] Daniel Catton Rich, introduction to Charles W. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 14. Pène du Bois’s double portrait of the Dales is discussed in Betsy Fahlman, *Guy Pène du Bois: Painter of Modern Life* (New York, 2004), 27; a later version of the subject, *Café Madrid* (1926), is owned by the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, FL.

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- [13] Charles W. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 246.
- [14] See Kimberly A. Jones and Maygene Daniels, *The Chester Dale Collection* (Washington, DC, 2010).
- [15] John Walker, *Self-Portrait with Donors* (Washington, DC, 1969), 162.
- [16] See “Brilliant Series of French Shows Due to Mrs. Dale,” *Art News*, May 28, 1932, 5, 11.
- [17] Biographical information is derived from *Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement Five, 1951–1955* (New York, 1977), 150–151. Her obituary was published in the *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1953.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a panel 5/16 of an inch thick that appears to be a single piece with a 1 ½-inch-wide addition along the right edge. A heavy mahogany cradle was attached to the reverse of the panel consisting of 16 fixed members glued with the grain and 16 members that are meant to slide across the grain. The artist applied a heavy white ground to the painting that goes over all of the edges, including the edge of the added panel piece, indicating that it was added before painting began to achieve Bellow’s intended width. The x-radiograph shows that the ground was applied in one brushy, horizontal application and one brushy, vertical application with an optically dense material. The painting was executed thickly in broad brushstrokes blended wet into wet but this treatment still left highly textured brushmarks. Thick accumulations of paint are found at the edges of each compositional element, suggesting that each area was painted individually in succession but followed a plan laid out on the ground. Several changes are visible in the paint layer by viewing it in strong raking light. The position of the sitter’s right shoulder was lowered and the right forearm was shifted down. The edge of the shawl at the sitter’s left was moved to the right. The hat was also widened. Infrared examination also shows all of these changes and a sketchy underdrawing, probably in pencil, that outlines all the major compositional elements and all the facial features. The underdrawing is particularly visible in the eyes. Ultraviolet light examination shows that the thick, glossy, markedly discolored varnish layer is a natural resin. The painting is in good condition except for a couple incipient thin cracks at the top of the panel and many tiny, discolored retouches scattered over the picture that make it look a little splotchy.

PROVENANCE

Commissioned 1919 by the sitter's second husband, Chester Dale [1883-1962], New York; [1] gift 1944 to NGA.

[1] The artist's Record Book (jointly owned by The Ohio State University Libraries' Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio) documents that the painting was commissioned by Chester Dale, but the Dale collection records (Chester Dale Paper, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington) indicate the sitter commissioned her own portrait (copies of both in NGA curatorial files).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1927 Catalogue of the Twenty-First Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists, Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, 1927, no. 5.

1927 Summer Exhibition of Contemporary American Paintings, Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, 1927, no. 24.

1937 An Exhibition of American Paintings from the Chester Dale Collection, The Union League Club, New York, 1937, no. 50, as Portrait.

1943 Twentieth-Century Portraits, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1943, unnumbered catalogue.

1948 New Yorkers 1848-1948, Portraits, Inc., New York, 1948, no. 5.

1957 George Bellows: A Retrospective Exhibition, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1957, no. 37, repro.

1965 The Chester Dale Bequest, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1965, unnumbered checklist.

2010 From Impressionism to Modernism: The Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, January 2010-January 2012, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

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- 1929 Bellows, Emma Louise Story. *The Paintings of George Bellows*. New York, 1929: 90.
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- 1942 Boswell, Peyton, Jr. *George Bellows*. New York, 1942: 15, 40, repro.
- 1947 Butterfield, Roger. "The Millionaires' Best Friend." *Saturday Evening Post* (8 March 1947): 79.
- 1965 Morgan, Charles H. *George Bellows. Painter of America*. New York, 1965: 14, 224-225, 246, 254-255.
- 1965 *Paintings other than French in the Chester Dale Collection*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1965: 52, repro.
- 1970 *American Paintings and Sculpture: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1970: 16, repro.
- 1971 Braider, Donald. *George Bellows and the Ashcan School of Painting*. New York, 1971: 119-120.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 26, repro.
- 1991 Kopper, Philip. *America's National Gallery of Art: A Gift to the Nation*. New York, 1991: 238, repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 31, repro.
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- Peck, Glenn C. *George Bellows' Catalogue Raisonné*. H.V. Allison & Co. URL: <http://www.hvallison.com>. Accessed 16 August 2016.
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To cite: Robert Torchia, "George Bellows/*Maud Murray Dale (Mrs. Chester Dale)*/1919," *American Paintings, 1900–1945*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/30742> (accessed September 25, 2021).