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*American Paintings, 1900–1945*

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George Bellows
American, 1882 - 1925

# *Little Girl in White (Queenie Burnett)*

1907

oil on canvas
overall: 158 x 87 cm (62 3/16 x 34 1/4 in.)
framed: 171.5 x 107 x 8.6 cm (67 1/2 x 42 1/8 x 3 3/8 in.)
Inscription: upper center reverse: Geo Bellows / 1947 Bdway / [illegible]49 N.Y. / "QUEEN" / "GIRL IN WHITE"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon 1983.1.2

**ENTRY**

In this sympathetic image, the artist has represented the demure laundry girl Queenie Burnett attired in a simple white dress and black stockings, posing with her hands folded before her, set against a dark brown background. Queenie's difficult life as a child laborer is manifested in her gaunt face, exaggeratedly large eyes, unkempt hair falling over her shoulders, and her awkward figure. Bellows has also managed to capture his subject's uneasiness at finding herself in an artist's studio posing for her portrait.

Originally titled *Little Laundry Girl* [fig. 1], [1] this portrait of a figure in a white dress is reminiscent of James McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* , the full-length portrait that had inspired such diverse images as William Merritt Chase's fashionable society portrait *Girl in White* (c. 1898–1901, Akron Art Museum, OH) and Robert Henri's slightly tawdry *Young Woman in White*. In painting the young, working-class girl who delivered his laundry, Bellows, like Whistler, was flaunting the conventions of grand-manner portraiture traditionally reserved for the social elite. He was also following the advice of his friend and teacher Robert Henri, who admonished Bellows to select subjects that reflected the realism of


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modern urban life. Fulfilling that goal, he portrayed the recreational activities of New York City's lower-class children in such paintings as *River Rats* (1906, private collection) and *Forty-two Kids*. In 1907, he began to explore the street-urchin genre popularized in the United States during the last quarter of the 19th century by Frank Duveneck (American, 1848 - 1919) and especiallyJohn George Brown (American, born England, 1831 - 1913). Bellows painted two full-length portraits of individual children, *Little Girl in White* and *Frankie the Organ Boy* (both 1907, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO), and the following year he executed the three-quarter length *Paddy Flannigan* (Erving and Joyce Wolf Collection). Like the other artists in Henri's circle, Bellows eschewed the traditional idealizing approach with his youthful subjects, instead portraying them in a bluntly realistic manner.

The painting's unusual mix of aestheticism and realism is simultaneously appealing and unsettling. A newspaper reporter who visited Bellows's studio in 1908 may have had *Little Girl in White* in mind when he commented on portraits of "street gamins." He noted that although they were "brimming with humor," the images possessed a plaintive quality "which brings tears and sends people to rescue work." [2] However, the blunt realism of Bellows's early works often provoked critics. A reviewer for the *New York Evening Mail* criticized it as a "flat failure, looking as if it were cut out of wooden blocks." [3] Despite the portrait's mixed critical reception, it was immensely popular with the general public. *Little Girl in White* is noteworthy as the first of Bellows's figural works to be widely exhibited throughout the country. He was awarded the first Hallgarten Prize of $300, reserved for artists under the age of 35, when the painting was shown at the National Academy of Design in 1913. [4]

Robert Torchia

September 29, 2016

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**


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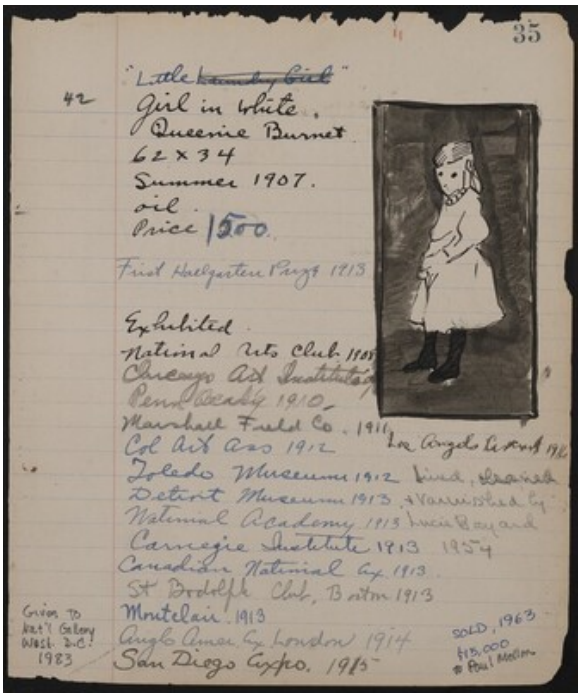


**fig. 1** Entry from artist's Record Book about *Little Girl in White*, The Ohio State University Libraries' Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio

## NOTES

[1] Bellows first listed the portrait in his Record Book A (no. 42, 35) as *Little Laundry Girl*, but the title was later crossed out and replaced with *Little Girl in White* and *Queenie Burnett*. In 1913 he listed it in his Record Book A "Sales and Proffesional [sic] Income" as *Queenie*.

[2] *New York Herald*, quoted in Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven and London, 1992), 131.

[3] Charles H. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 104.

[4] A minor controversy ensued when the academy was accused of nepotism, because Bellows, along with two other award recipients, had also served as jurors for the exhibition. Charles H. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of*


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*America* (New York, 1965), 168, cites various newspaper accounts of the incident.

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**TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

The medium-weight, loosely woven fabric support was at some point lined with a wax/resin adhesive and remounted on a nonoriginal stretcher. Bellows apparently altered the size of the composition at least twice, because the background paint layers extend into the side and bottom tacking margins and there is a set of old tacking holes and a horizontal edge of thickly applied original paint below the top edge. Infrared examination reveals sketchy background details (a higher upper edge of the floor and a vertical architectural element to the right) that are not visible to the naked eye. The artist applied paint vigorously, with highly textured and unblended brushstrokes in the white dress progressing to a much smoother application in the dark areas and background. There are small, scattered paint losses in the middle of the painting, and ultraviolet examination reveals older losses that have been overpainted. In a recent treatment of the painting (2005–2011), in which the old varnish and most of the overpainting was removed, the extent of these losses was revealed. The losses in white dress are rather extensive in the center; they consist of an old, branched tear and numerous little gouges in the canvas that occurred long ago during an effort to scrape off an old patch adhered to the reverse with white lead. Severe abrasion of the background, particularly in the brown areas just to the left of the figure, was also revealed when the overpaint was removed. A newer tear is found in the upper left. Also during this treatment, the wax lining was removed and replaced with a polyester fabric adhered with synthetic adhesive. A new surface coating of synthetic resin was applied after new inpainting of the losses was applied. When the lining was removed, an inscription was revealed on the reverse. [1]

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**TECHNICAL NOTES**

[1] This inscription reads, “Geo Bellows/ 1947 Bdway/ .146.E49. N.Y./ “QUEEN”/ “Girl in White”

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**PROVENANCE**

The artist [1882-1925]; by inheritance to his wife, Emma S. Bellows [1884-1959]; her estate; purchased May 1963 through (H.V. Allison & Co., New York) by Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia; gift 1983 to NGA.

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**EXHIBITION HISTORY**

1908 Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art, The National Arts Club, New York, 1908, no. 56, as The Girl in White.

1909 Twenty-Second Annual Exhibition of Oil Paintings and Sculpture by American Artists, Art Institute of Chicago, 1909, no. 23, as Girl in White.

1910 One Hundred and Fifth Annual Exhibition, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1910, no. 601, as Girl in White.

1911 [George Bellows Exhibition], Madison Gallery, New York, 1911, as Girl in White.

1911 Special Exhibition and Sale of Oil Paintings by George Bellows, N.A., Marshall Field & Company, New York, 1911, no. 14, as Girl in White.

1912 Paintings by George Bellows, Art Students League of Columbus, Public Library, Columbus, Ohio, November 1912, no. 19, as The Little Laundry Girl.

1912 Paintings by George Bellows, N.A., Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, December 1912, no. 19, as The Little Laundry Girl.

1913 American Artists, Department of Fine Arts, Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, Summer(?) 1913, no. 230, as Little Girl.

1913 Eighty-Eighth Annual Exhibition, National Academy of Design, New York, March-April 1913, no. 216, repro., as Little Girl.

1913 Montclair, 1913 [according to the artist's Record Book].

1913 Paintings by Fine New York Painters, Saint Botolph Club, Boston, November-December 1913, no. 5, as Girl in White.


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1913 Seventeenth Annual Exhibition, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, April-June 1913, no. 22, as Little Girl.

1913 Special Exhibition of Paintings by George Bellows, N.A., Detroit Museum of Art, January 1913, no. 19, as The Little Laundry Girl.

1914 American Fine Art Section, Anglo-American Exposition, London, 1914, no. 170, as Little Girl.

1915 A Catalogue of Paintings, Gallery of Fine Arts, Panama-California Exposition, San Diego, 1915, no. 49, as Little Girl in White.

1916 "Los Angeles Circuit", 1916 [according to the artist's Record Book].

1962 Modern American Painting: 1915, The Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, 1962-1963, no. 1, as Little Girl in White.

1963 George Bellows, H.V. Allison & Co., New York, 1963, no. 1, as Girl in White (Queenie Burnett).

1986 Gifts to the Nation: Selected Acquisitions from the Collections of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1986, unnumbered checklist.

1992 The Paintings of George Bellows, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Columbus Museum of Art; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 1992-1993, fig. 10.

2012 George Bellows, National Gallery of Art, Washington; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2012-2013, pl. 12.

2013 The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution, The New-York Historical Society, New York, 2013-2014, not in catalogue.

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1929 Bellows, Emma Louise Story. *The Paintings of George Bellows*. New York, 1929: 4, repro.

1965 Morgan, Charles H. *George Bellows. Painter of America*. New York, 1965: 75, 104, 127, 166-168.

1971 Braider, Donald. *George Bellows and the Ashcan School of Painting*.



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New York, 1971: 42, 86.

1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 28, repro.

1992 Quick, Michael, Jane Myers, Marianne Doezema, and Franklin Kelly. *The Paintings of George Bellows*. Exh. cat. Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Columbus (Ohio) Museum of Art; Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, 1992-1993. New York, 1992: 3, 11, 12, 185, fig. 10.

2012 Brock, Charles, et al. *George Bellows*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2012-2013. Washington and New York, 2012: 9, 49-50, 133, pl. 12.

Peck, Glenn C. *George Bellows' Catalogue Raisonné*. H.V. Allison & Co. URL: http://www.hvallison.com. Accessed 16 August 2016.

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