

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, January 7: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that Mr. Chester Dale, of New York, has given to the Gallery two paintings by George Bellows, one a boxing scene entitled Both Members of This Club and the other a portrait of Mrs. Chester Dale. These paintings are now being placed on exhibition in time for the twentieth anniversary of the death of the artist.

"Bellows' work becomes eligible for the permanent collection of the National Gallery on January 8th, the twentieth anniversary of his death," Mr. Finley pointed out. "This is in accordance with the Gallery's established policy that the permanent collection shall include only such paintings and sculpture as are representative of artists whose merit and importance have been generally recognized for twenty years following their death. It is a source of great satisfaction to the Trustees and officers of the National Gallery that, through Mr. Dale's generosity, we are able to show such distinguished examples of George Bellows' work as soon as this important American artist has become eligible for the Gallery's permanent collection."

These two major paintings reveal Bellows both as an interpreter of the American scene and as a portraitist. Both Members of This Club was painted in 1909, and represents a prize fight at the Sharkey Athletic Club, New York City, between a white and a Negro boxer. It has been suggested that the fighters are Joe Gans, who was lightweight boxing champion from 1901 to 1908, and another less well-known boxer named Russell. The explanation of the title, Both Members of This Club, is that boxing contests, when the picture was painted, were legal only if the contestants and spectators were all members of the athletic association where the contest was held.

"Bellows had an amazing visual memory," John Walker, Chief Curator of the National Gallery, declared in commenting on the picture. "In the painting given by Mr. Dale, one of six canvases that the artist devoted to prize fighting, there is an extraordinary sense of actuality, as though the canvas had been painted at the ringside. In this scene one boxer is shown springing on his opponent and forcing him to his knees, while the crowd roars its approval. The bold draughtsmanship, the slashing brushwork, the violent contrast of light and shade, all convey a sense of fierce, animal energy.

"In such early paintings as this and The Stag at Sharkey's in the Cleveland Museum," Mr. Walker added, "Bellows gave promise of becoming an American Goya. Unfortunately, with time, his gift of visual recollection grew dimmer, and when he returned to the theme of prize fighting, some fourteen years later, he had lost that quality of vivid actuality which makes Both Members of This Club not only important as a painting but also as a document of American life."

The portrait of Mrs. Dale was painted in 1919. In the ten years which intervened between the painting of this portrait and Both Members of This Club, Bellows had changed his style. "He depended less on observation and more on theories of design and color," Mr. Walker said. "Even in portraiture it is apparent that he was less interested in his sitters' features, which are often somewhat generalized, than in certain tonal harmonies and problems of composition. The portrait of Mrs. Dale, for example, is particularly felicitous in its arrangements of silvery gray, lavender and pale blue, and in its simple, yet thoughtful, design."

The two paintings now given to the National Gallery by Mr. Dale illustrate the change in Bellows' style from the self-confident, truculent vigor of his early work to the disciplined, recondite talent of his late painting. Bellows was only 44 years old when he died in 1924, but during his brief life he made a lasting impression on art in this country. In the last twenty years his reputation has gained steadily in importance, and on the twentieth anniversary of his death his pictures will be hung with the greatest masters of European and American painting in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Art.