

Update: May 22, 2012

First Comprehensive Exhibition in Three Decades of George Bellows' Prolific Career to Open at National Gallery of Art, Washington, June 10 through October 8, 2012; Travels to New York and London



George Bellows, *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

Washington, DC—When George Bellows died at the age of 42 in 1925, he was hailed as one of the greatest artists America had yet produced. The first comprehensive exhibition of his career in more than three decades premieres in Washington, DC, from June 10 through October 8, 2012. **George Bellows** includes some 130 paintings, drawings, and lithographs of tenement children, boxers, and the urban landscape of New York, as well as Maine seascapes, sports images, World War I subjects, family portraits, and Woodstock, NY, scenes.

"George Bellows is arguably the most important figure in the generation of artists who negotiated the transition from the Victorian to the modern era in American culture," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "This exhibition provides the most complete account of his achievements to date and will introduce Bellows to new

generations."

The exhibition will travel to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (November 15, 2012–February 18, 2013), and close at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (March 16–June 9, 2013). The accompanying catalogue documents and defines Bellows' unique place in the history of American art and in the annals of modernism.

Exhibition Organization and Support

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

The exhibition is made possible by Nippon Television Network Corporation, Tokyo, Japan. The Terra Foundation for American Art is the proud sponsor of the exhibition in Washington and London. The exhibition and catalogue are generously supported by the Henry Luce Foundation. In Washington, it is also made possible by the Cordover Family Foundation, with additional support provided by The Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Works in the Exhibition

Mentored by Robert Henri, leader of the Ashcan School in New York in the early part of the 20th century, George Bellows (1882–1925) painted the world around him. He was also an accomplished graphic artist whose illustrations and lithographs addressed a wide array of social, religious, and political subjects. The full range of his remarkable artistic achievement is presented thematically and chronologically throughout nine rooms in the West Building.

The exhibition begins with Bellows' renowned paintings and drawings of tenement children and New York street scenes. These iconic images of the modern city were made during an extraordinary period of creativity for the artist that began shortly after he left his hometown of Columbus, Ohio, for New York in 1904. Encouraged by Henri, his teacher at the New York School of Art, Bellows sought out contemporary subjects that

would challenge prevailing standards of taste, depicting the city's impoverished immigrant population in *River Rats* (1906, private collection) and *Forty-Two Kids* (1907, Corcoran Gallery of Art).

In addition to street scenes, Bellows painted more formal studio portraits of New York's working poor. These startling, frank subjects—such as *Paddy Flannigan* (1908, Erving and Joyce Wolf)—reflect the artist's profound understanding of the realist tradition of portraiture practiced by such masters as Diego Velázquez, Frans Hals, Edouard Manet, and James McNeill Whistler.

Bellows' early boxing paintings chronicle brutal fights; to circumvent a state ban on public boxing, they were organized by private clubs in New York at that time. In his three acclaimed boxing masterpieces—*Club Night* (1907, National Gallery of Art), *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909, Cleveland Museum of Art), and *Both Members of This Club* (1909, National Gallery of Art)—Bellows' energetic, slashing brushwork matched the intensity and action of the fighters. These works will be on view together for the first time since 1982.

The series of four paintings Bellows devoted to the Manhattan excavation site for the Pennsylvania Railroad Station—a massive construction project that entailed razing two city blocks—focuses mainly on the subterranean pit in which workmen toiled. Never before exhibited together, these works range from a scene of the early construction site covered in snow in *Pennsylvania Station Excavation* (1909, Brooklyn Museum) to a view of the monumental station designed by McKim, Mead, and White coming to life in *Blue Morning* (1909, National Gallery of Art).

Bellows was fascinated with the full spectrum of life of the working and leisure classes in New York. From dock workers to Easter fashions paraded in the park, he chronicled a variety of subjects and used an array of palettes and painting techniques, from the cool grays and thin strokes of *Docks in Winter* (1911, private collection) to the jewel-like, encrusted surfaces of *Snow-Capped River* (1911, Telfair Museum of Art). While Bellows portrayed the bustling downtown commercial district of Manhattan in his encyclopedic overview *New York* (1911, National Gallery of Art), he more often depicted the edges of the city near the shorelines of the Hudson and East Rivers in

works such as *The Lone Tenement* (1909, National Gallery of Art) and *Blue Snow, The Battery* (1910, Columbus Museum of Art).

The artist visited Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine for the first time in 1911 and returned to Maine every summer from 1913 to 1916. In 1913 alone he created more than 100 outdoor studies. His seascapes account for half his entire output as a painter, with the majority done after the 1913 Armory Show. *Shore House* (1911, private collection) and *The Big Dory* (1913, New Britain Museum of American Art) are among Bellows' most important seascapes and pay homage to his great American predecessor, Winslow Homer (1836–1910).

In 1912 Bellows started working more consistently as an illustrator for popular periodicals such as *Collier's* and *Harper's Weekly*, and in 1913 for the socialist magazine *The Masses*. These illustration assignments led him to record new aspects of American life ranging from sporting events to religious revival meetings, as seen in *The Football Game* (1912, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden) and *Preaching (Billy Sunday)* (1915, Boston Public Library). Along with Bellows' more affordable and widely available lithographs (he installed a printing press in his studio in 1916), the published illustrations broadened the audience for his work.

Bellows supported the United States' entry into World War I, resulting in an outpouring of paintings, lithographs, and drawings in 1918. For this extensive series, he relied on the published accounts of German atrocities in Belgium found in the 1915 Bryce Committee Report commissioned by the British government. The paintings evoke the tradition of grand public history paintings, as seen in *Massacre at Dinant* (1918, Greenville County Museum of Art), while the drawings and lithographs recall Francisco de Goya's 18th-century print series *The Disasters of War*.

Bellows' late works on paper survey modern American life, from the prisons of Georgia to the tennis courts of Newport, and highlight complex relationships between his various media. Taken from direct experience as well as fictional accounts, they range in tone from lightly satirical and humorous (*Business-Men's Bath*, 1923, Boston Public Library) to profoundly disturbing and tragic (*The Lawls Too Slow*, 1922–1923, Boston Public Library).

In *Emma at the Piano* (1914, Chrysler Museum of Art), Bellows depicts his wife and lifelong artistic muse. His portraits of women constitute a larger body of work than his more famous boxing paintings. They cover all stages of life and include both the naive, youthful *Madeline Davis* (1914, Lowell and Sandra Mintz) and the more refined, matronly *Mrs. T in Wine Silk* (1919, Cedarhurst Center for the Arts).

The show will end with paintings in a variety of styles made in 1924, the year before the artist's sudden death from appendicitis. Painted in Bellows' studio in rural Woodstock, New York, these last works, including *Dempsey and Firpo* (1924, Whitney Museum of American Art), *Mr. and Mrs. Philip Wase* (1924, Smithsonian American Art Museum), and *The White Horse* (1924, Worcester Art Museum), will prompt visitors to contemplate the artist Bellows might have become had he lived into the 1960s, as did his friend and contemporary Edward Hopper (1882–1967).

George Bellows and the National Gallery of Art

This exhibition is the latest chapter in the Gallery's longstanding relationship with Bellows. His boxing masterpiece, *Both Members of This Club*, a gift from Chester Dale in 1944, was one of the earliest and most significant works to enter the American paintings collection after the Gallery opened in 1941. Two later gifts from Dale—*The Lone Tenement* and *Blue Morning*—helped establish the Gallery as one of the premier venues in the country for viewing Bellows' art. Due to a stipulation in Dale's bequest, these works may only be seen at the Gallery.

The first one-person exhibition at the Gallery was a retrospective devoted to Bellows in 1957, and in 1982 the Gallery organized a show that brought together all the celebrated boxing paintings along with most of their related drawings and prints. In the mid-1980s a remarkable series of six gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, including *Little Girl in White (Queenie Burnett)* and *New York*, further expanded and enriched the Gallery's holdings of Bellows' work, now totaling 72 works.

Exhibition Curators and Catalogue

The exhibition curator is Charles Brock, associate curator, American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art. Work on the exhibition began in 2007 with Franklin

Kelly, the Gallery's former head of American and British paintings, who became deputy director in 2008.

At The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the coordinating curators are H. Barbara Weinberg, Alice Pratt Brown Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, and Lisa Messinger, associate curator of modern and contemporary art. Ann Dumas is the coordinating curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Published by the National Gallery of Art in association with DelMonico•Prestel, the exhibition catalogue includes an essay by Brock, as well as contributions by Sarah Cash, Bechhoefer Curator of American Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art; Mark Cole, associate curator of American painting and sculpture, Cleveland Museum of Art; Robert Conway, independent curator; David Peters Corbett, professor of art history and American studies and dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of East Anglia; David Park Curry, senior curator of decorative arts, American painting, and sculpture, Baltimore Museum of Art; Marianne Doezema, independent scholar; Sarah Newman, curator of contemporary art, Corcoran Gallery of Art; Glenn C. Peck, editor and manager of online catalogue raisonné of Bellows' paintings, H. V. Allison & Co.; Carol Troyen, curator emerita of American paintings, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Sean Wilentz, George Henry Davis 1886 Professor of American History, Princeton University; and Melissa Wolfe, curator of American art, Columbus Museum of Art.

The 336-page catalogue includes 270 illustrations and is available in both softcover and hardcover for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, please visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov/shop; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov. The hardcover is copublished by DelMonico•Prestel Books.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov