



“Be deliberate.
Be spontaneous.
Be thoughtful, and
painstaking. Be abandoned,
and impulsive. Learn your own
possibilities.” **George Bellows, 1920**

George Bellows, *Blue Morning*
(detail), 1909, oil on canvas,
National Gallery of Art, Wash-
ington, Chester Dale Collection



left: George Bellows.
Peter A. Juley & Son
Collections, Smithsonian
American Art Museum

1 Bellows' New York

Throughout his childhood in Columbus, Ohio, George Bellows (1882–1925) divided much of his time between art and sports. While attending Ohio State University, he created illustrations for the school year-books, sang in the glee club, and played basketball and baseball. Bellows left college before graduating, and even turned down an offer to play professional baseball with the Cincinnati Reds, in order to become an artist.

In 1904, Bellows left the Midwest for Manhattan and enrolled in the New York School of Art. There he studied under the well-known teacher and artist Robert Henri, who encouraged students to look to real life for inspiration: “Draw your material from the life around you, from all of it. There is beauty in everything if it looks beautiful to your eyes.” Bellows became linked with a group of artists inspired by Henri, dubbed the Ashcan School by critics for their portrayals of the grittier side of urban life.

Bellows' early paintings focused on dynamic city scenes: teeming streets, boxing matches, construction sites, commercial docks, and poor neighborhoods. He eventually expanded his subjects to include seascapes, country scenes, and portraits of friends and family. Bellows' work met with popular success during his lifetime. He died at age forty-two from a ruptured appendix.



2 Traffic Jam!

Bellows captured the whirlwind of activity on a winter day in *New York*. The picture is a congestion of buildings, signage, and people and goods on the move. Motorcars mingle with horse-drawn conveyances and trolleys while pedestrians hurry along sidewalks. When Bellows created this work in 1911, the traffic light had not yet been invented. In the painting you can see a policeman trying to direct traffic, a street cleaner busy sweeping, and a woman stopping at a vegetable cart. Bellows' expressive brushstrokes add to the energy of the scene.

“I paint New York because I live in it and because the most essential thing for me to paint is the life about me, the things I feel to-day and that are part of the life of to-day.” **George Bellows, 1915**



above: George Bellows, *New York*, 1911, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

“Some day far in the future it will be pointed out, no doubt, as the best description of the casual New York scene left by the reporters of the present day.” *New York Times*, 1911

Although the painting’s general location is Madison Square, at the intersection of Broadway and Twenty-third Street, Bellows imaginatively combined elements that could not be seen from a single viewpoint. The picture includes many of Manhattan’s iconic attributes: skyscrapers, elevated train tracks, a subway entrance, electric signs, advertising billboards, and a tree-lined park. Familiar as these features may be today, they represented a new and modern experience for most people at the beginning of the twentieth century.

3 Construction Zone

In the early twentieth century, New York was a changing city—transforming into a metropolis with vast building projects, new bridges, and skyscrapers. Construction of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station took place from 1906 to 1910, and this complex endeavor included clearing entire blocks, the excavation of giant pits, and boring several sets of large tunnels under the Hudson and East Rivers. The energy, drama and scope of the engineering project fascinated Bellows, and he began a series of paintings to study construction scenes by day and night, summer and winter.

Blue Morning shows the near-completed station enveloped by morning haze. Construction workers are busy in the excavated pit, a crane arm lifts. The scene is framed by the elevated train tracks and vertical girder. Bellows used tones of blue, lavender, and yellow to evoke the morning light.



above: George Bellows, *Blue Morning*, 1909, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

see more

This summer, take the opportunity to see an exhibition of Bellows' work, which includes some 150 paintings, drawings, and lithographs, representing all aspects of the artists' career.

George Bellows

June 10 – October 8, 2012

National Gallery of Art
West Building, Main Floor

This 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.

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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.

This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

For more information about the exhibition: <http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/bellowsinfo.htm>

learn more



Documenting Changing Times

The Lone Tenement shows a scene under the newly constructed Queensboro Bridge, completed in 1909 to connect the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens. Dwarfed by the bridge, the last remaining row house stands alone, the sole survivor of its former neighborhood. In the shadow of the bridge, people gather around a fire to keep warm. Sunlight sparkles on the East River as a ship passes by. Instead of celebrating the bridge as an engineering and civic feat, Bellows' painting focuses on the lives of ordinary people impacted by it.

above: George Bellows, *The Lone Tenement*, 1909, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

activity

Many artists in the early twentieth century, including Bellows, made illustrations for newspapers and magazines, working as sketch reporters capturing the action of the city's events. Along with many of the Ashcan School artists, Bellows was attuned to the social issues of the time, including poverty and the impact of large building projects that changed neighborhoods.

Write a headline

Write a news story headline (for a newspaper, magazine, or website) for each of Bellows' paintings. Try to summarize the main idea of the picture in a manner that catches people's attention.

Be a sketch reporter

Choose a headline or news story from a newspaper, magazine, or television report. Make a drawing or painting that illustrates the story. Try to capture the key aspects of the story in one picture.