

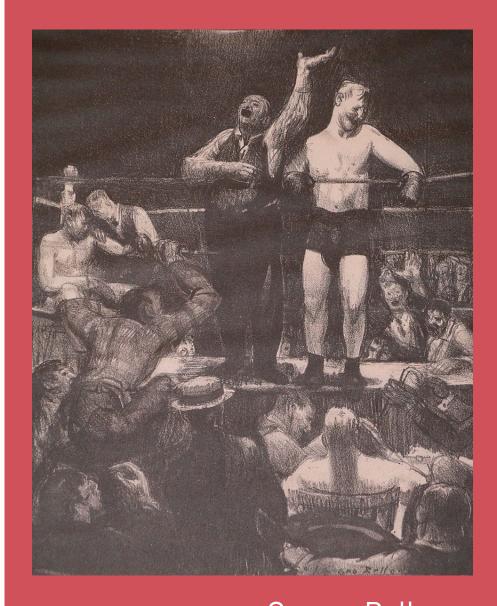
# **About the Artist**



George Bellows (1882-1925) was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, where he originally held a greater interest in sports than in art. At Ohio State University, he played baseball and basketball, but also began creating illustrations for the college yearbook and discovered a passion for art. Eventually, he dropped out of college to enroll in the New York School of Art, studying under famed artist Robert Henri. It was here that Bellows became a prominent member of the American Realism movement and the Ashcan **School**, using his background in sports illustrations to portray the

ordinary lives of everyday people. His subject matter includes scenes of illegal boxing club matches, construction sites, **tenement** life, and youth swimming in the East River. Bellows also created numerous socially-engaged and political prints and drawings. In his later years, Bellows produced landscapes and portraits.

Bellows worked in several media throughout his career, ranging from paint to **stone lithography**. In all of these works, Bellows' style is noted by his characteristic loose brushstrokes and linework, bright colors, and expressive figures. Critics and historians have often considered Bellows to be a distinctly American artist as he never studied in Europe, breaking the tradition that other artists from the United States had followed. Despite this, Bellows undoubtedly was influenced by European artists, such as Frans Hals, Francisco de Goya and Honoré Daumier, which he frequently studied at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These influences are visible in the exaggerated expressions found in the crowds of his boxing images.



George Bellows, Introducing the Champion, 1921. Lithograph.

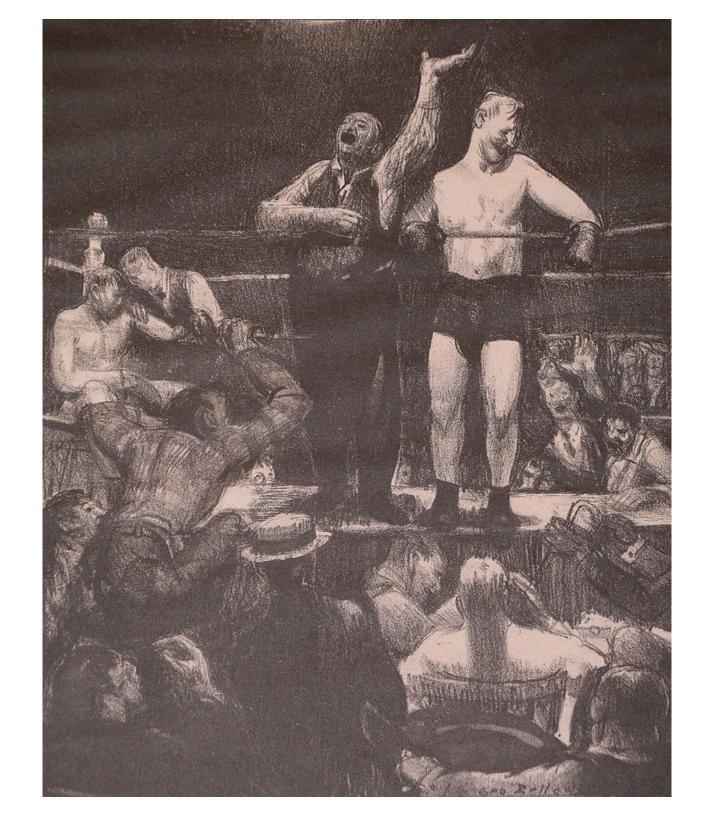
# **Description of Artwork**

This black and white image was drawn with a soft and sketchy style in lithographic crayon. Bellows depicts the moments before a boxing match, when the returning champion is presented to the eager crowd. In the center of the image, the announcer stands with his hand high above the champion's head, his own head tilted back to better project his voice to the audience. The champion, a younger man with light hair, grips the rope with gloved hands and looks down to greet the crowd. Behind these two figures, in the corner of the ring, the champion's opponent solemnly speaks with his manager, who holds the boxer's arm with both hands. From below, audience members on either side of the ring clamor and climb onto the ropes to get a better view of the boxers before them.

# **About the Artwork**

"I don't know anything about boxing, I'm just painting two men trying to kill each other." - George Bellows

A lifelong athlete, Bellows was naturally drawn to creating scenes of boxing. When he moved to New York City, he settled in at the YMCA, which was across the street from former boxer Tom Sharkey's private athletic club. There, he witnessed and illustrated dozens of sketches of boxing matches. In 1900, New York City passed a law that prohibited public prizefighting. Private clubs began selling memberships, instead of onetime admission to fights, allowing their audience to evade the law and gamble on matches legally. At this time, boxing was considered by some to be barbaric, while others—such as President Theodore Roosevelt—believed the sport to be a manifestation of ultimate manliness, and a reflection of survival in modern society. The boxers in these clubs were largely poor immigrants who lived in cramped urban conditions, while the gambling audience varied from middle to upper class men. Introducing the Champion was one of Bellows' first boxing prints. Later, this image was eventually reworked into an edition titled Introductions.



What would it feel like to be in this room, and in this crowd? Describe it in terms of your senses - what smells, sounds, temperature, tastes might you experience here?

What expressions do you see on the faces of the figures in the crowd? How do they compare to expressions of the figures in the ring?

Look carefully at the body language of the figures in this image - what can you infer about their relationship to the boxer? Who knows the boxer and who is a stranger?

How does Bellows use his medium, and only black and white tones, to portray the atmosphere of the scene? How would the image change if it were full color or drawn very precisely?

# Introduce a Champion

Research a real-life champion that you admire and write a speech introducing them to a crowd or audience. Define "champion" however you choose: a winner of a sporting event or hobby, someone who works hard in support of a cause, etc. Include details about their life, the work that they do, and why you consider them to be a champion. Choose a tone for your speech and how you want to affect the audience's mood (uplifting, humorous, serious, etc.).

# **Art from the Ordinary**

Mimic the methods of the Ashcan School artists – find inspiration from the everyday that you can see in your city, town, or neighborhood. Create a painting of a subject that you wouldn't expect to see in an art gallery or a museum, like trash cans. Paint the subject exactly as you see it. Draw attention to parts that you would normally ignore or cover up.

## **Experimental Mark-making**

Using only black colored pencils/crayons/markers, make marks on paper that capture light and movement. Think about the negative space as well as the positive space. How can you represent these concepts without figures or icons?





(left) Attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, Terracotta Panathenaic prize amphora, ca. 500 B.C. (right) George Bellows, *Stag at Sharkey*'s, 1909. Cleveland Art Museum.

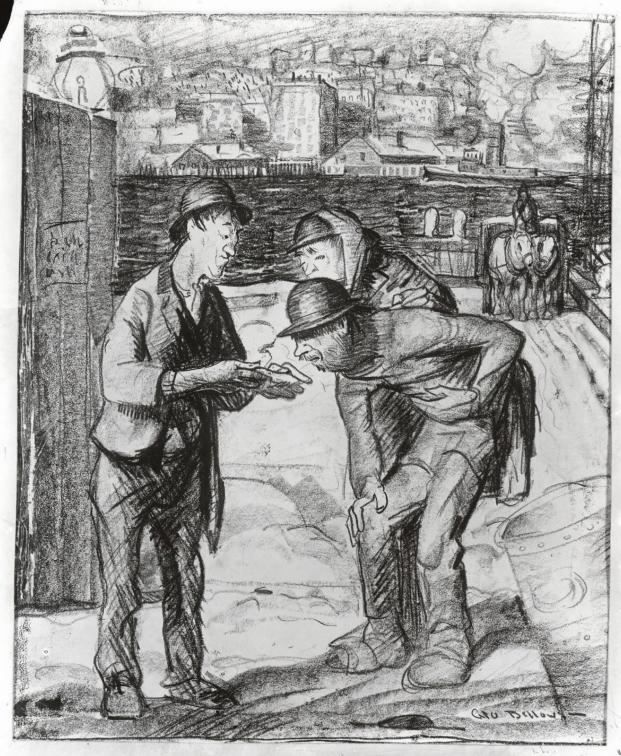
# **Art in Context**

Sports and athletes have been a common source of inspiration for artists since ancient times. The ancient Greeks decorated vases and **amphoras** with images of admired victors, who were celebrated for their physical power. During the early twentieth century, many American artists began depicting athletes in their work. But while they were referencing this ancient subject matter, the fact that their athletes were contemporary, urban, everyday people and not ancients themselves was a departure for art at the time. Artists like Bellows as well as Thomas Eakins created images of athletes for middle class modern society to look to for inspiration, rather than portraits of the rich, powerful, or intellectual. Bellows painted several large-scale boxing scenes, his most famous being *Stag at Sharkey*'s (1909), yet he revisited boxing as a subject in a series of 16 lithographs.



# **Ashcan School**

The Ashcan School artists were led primarily by Robert Henri in the early 1900s in New York City. Their name was suggested by one of Bellow's 1915 drawings captioned *Disappointments of the Ash Can*. The Ashcan artists sought to depict the seediness and vitality of New York City, teaming with immigrants living in crowded tenement buildings. Contrary to their subject matter, the artists themselves were squarely middle class and were aware of but declined to engage in social causes, propaganda or reform efforts. They documented what they saw and considered themselves "urban realists" in opposition to the Impressionists.



George Bellows,
Disappointment of the
Ash Can "Deys Woims in it"
1915

" DEYS WOIMS IN IT "

# Visual Arts & Social Studies Vocabulary

#### AMERICAN REALISM

A style in art, music and literature that depicted the contemporary lives of everyday people in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

#### **AMPHORA**

a tall ancient Greek or Roman jar with two handles and a narrow neck.

#### **ASHCAN SCHOOL**

A group of New York City artists who rejected the elite traditions of artistic subject matter and chose to represent the realness of everyday modern urban life. This lively subject matter was paired with sketchy linework and loose paint application to create a sense of authenticity in the artist's depictions. "Ashcan" may refer to the grittiness of the subject matter as well as the muddiness of the works' color palettes.

#### STONE LITHOGRAPHY

A printmaking process in which a design is drawn directly onto a polished slab of limestone with a greasy medium and etched with a mild acidic solution. Water on the stone repels printing ink while the greasy image absorbs the ink.

#### LITHOGRAPHIC CRAYON

A grease-based crayon that is used to draw on a lithography stone to create an image.

#### **PROGRESSIVE ERA**

an era of intense social and political reform in the United States during the early twentieth century aimed at making progress toward a better society.

#### TENEMENT

A house divided into and rented out as separate residences, especially one that is run-down and overcrowded. In 19th century New York City, these apartments were constructed to house the growing immigrant population.

# **Additional Resources**

## **Bellows: The Boxing Pictures website**

https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/publications/pdfs/bellows-the-boxing-pictures.pdf

## Bellows/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2012/bellows

#### **American Realism Movement**

https://www.theartstory.org/movement/american-realism/

# The Ashcan School/Metropolitan Museum of Art

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ashc/hd\_ashc.htm

## **George Bellows Paintings**

https://www.theartstory.org/artist/bellows-george/

## Athletics in Ancient Greece/Metropolitan Museum of Art

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/athl/hd\_athl.htm

# **Credits**

## Attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, Terracotta Panathenaic prize amphora, ca. 500 B.C.

https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/249067

# Image of NYC immigrants in tenement

https://immigrants1900.weebly.com/living-conditions.html

### George Bellows, Stag at Sharkey's, 1909. Cleveland Art Museum.

https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1922.1133

## George Bellows, Disappointment of the Ash Can, 1915. Photographed by Peter A. Juley & Son, not dated.

https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:siris\_jul\_6851?q=record\_ID%3Asiris\_jul\_6851&record=1&hlterm=record\_ID%3Asiris\_jul\_6851