

THE WORLD
IS TERRIBLE

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The World Is Terrible and It Is Not There at All: *George Bellows* *on Monhegan Island*

Painted on Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine during the summer of 1913, George Bellows's small oil on panel *Churn and Break* (fig. 1) depicts a shore and its surrounding sea. The observer's gaze encounters a mound of dark, almost black, rocks, which glisten with trails of moisture and light. To the left, the sea, sweeping in a great wave up against the rocks, threatens to overtop the ridge. In the midground, further dramatic swells rise and fall, and overhead, in a dreary sky, Bellows's paint describes the insistent perpendicular fall of rain. Above the rocks and to the right, a plume of spray, dense and gray and white, jets up in a balletic swirl of creamy pigment. Bellows's painting uses dazzling mixed brushwork to portray the variety of forms and textures of this scene, from the fluid lines and sinuous handling of the foreground sea to the dragged marks that describe the descending curtain of rain and cast a shadowy veil across the distance.

The world we are confronted by in *Churn and Break* seems to fall into two disparate levels of experience: on the one hand, a discrete, self-contained universe of vital but inhuman matter, formed by the crashing sea and mute shoreline; on the other, an intimately human domain, the gestural runs and virtuoso flourishes of Bellows's hand and brush.¹ Despite this apparently radical division, the two levels also merge fleetingly into a single identity. Each register impresses itself as the primary fact on the observer's attention, and then, at moments when viewing slips between the scene and the paint that describes it, each

George Bellows,
Churn and Break
(detail, see fig. 1).





1
George Bellows, *Churn and Break*, 1913. Oil on panel, 18 × 22 in. (45.7 × 55.9 cm). Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio. Gift of Mrs. Edward Powell, 1948.053.

dissolves and slides away into the other. We are not able as viewers to continuously hold them apart. This fluidity is a process of assimilation, an unresolved and paradoxical one perhaps, in which the registration of the alienness and nonhuman action of the world blends in our viewing with the touch of the artist's hand.

During the summer of 1913, Bellows painted a number of studies like *Churn and Break* featuring the unknowable and varied sea and the shores and landscapes of Monhegan Island.² Working often on a 15-by-19.5-inch surface of panel or cardboard (*Churn and Break* itself is marginally bigger than this at 18 × 22 inches), Bellows deployed anew the fluid impasto of the technique he had evolved between 1907 and 1911 to describe the ferocity, otherness, and romance of the urban world. In paintings of New York and its rivers, like *Winter Afternoon, Riverside Park* (1909), *North River* (1908) (fig. 2), or *Floating Ice* (1910), Bellows had developed a fluent, gestural paint surface through which to evoke the mounds, banks,

and piles of city snow, and through which to conjure the frigid, rippling, colors of the river.³ The watery and natural worlds are in intimate dialogue with the human in these paintings, as tugs float and pirouette on the river's surface, and machinery, figures, jetties, piers, and buildings invest the snowy landscapes. On other occasions, water takes on deeper colors as backdrop and presence in paintings from *Forty-Two Kids* (1907), to *Snow Dumpers* (1911) (fig. 3), *Men of the Docks* (1912), or *The Bridge, Blackwell's Island* (1909).⁴

These mysterious bodies of water are active agents in Bellows's account of the city. On one level, they are utilitarian economic highways, but their darkness and frigidity become in these paintings figures for enigmatic aspects of urban experience, exceeding and qualifying their workaday functions. They become presences that imply other registers, other meanings, and other existences beyond the commonplace human world, which bustles and hums along, seemingly without touching them. In *Snow Dumpers* as much as in *The Lone Tenement* (1909) (fig. 4), the swelling, mobile river is a protagonist at least equal to the human actors. In itself, this is not

2
George Bellows, *North River*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 32 7/8 × 43 in. (83.5 × 109.2 cm). Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Joseph E. Temple Fund, 1909.2.





3
George Bellows, *Snow Dumpers*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 36 1/8 x 48 1/8 in. (91.76 x 122.25 cm). Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio. Museum Purchase, Howald Fund, 1941.001.

entirely unusual. Oceans and the sibling watery worlds of rivers, ponds, lakes, and waterscapes of all types and extents have long played a significant role in the iconography of American painting.⁵ Of enormous economic consequence from the Early Republic to Bellows's lifetime, the waters and waterways of the United States feature in painting from Thomas Cole (1801–1848) and Hudson River School landscape to painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Thomas Eakins and Winslow Homer, Robert Henri and Rockwell Kent.⁶ As in many cultures, in this tradition the sea itself often symbolizes the unruly aspect of the world and experience, what is uncontrolled, driven by mysteries outside the human self, exorbitant, excessive, powerful, and other.⁷ Bellows in New York already takes up these meanings and threads them into his vision of the city as strange and disquieting, a shimmer of the unknown beyond the everyday world and its bustling human actors.⁸

Bellows's paintings of the sea and shore at Monhegan Island pursue this liquid world obsessively. Made almost entirely between 1911



4
 George Bellows, *The Lone Tenement*, 1909.
 Oil on canvas, 36 1/8 x 48 7/8 in. (91.8 x 122.3 cm).
 National Gallery of Art,
 Washington, DC.
 Chester Dale Collection,
 1963.10.83.

and 1917, they amount to some 275 canvases. This is, extraordinarily, a full half of Bellows's total output as a painter.⁹ Several distinct phases can be discerned in these six years, beginning with the mysterious singing emptiness of the Symbolist *An Island in the Sea* (1911) (fig. 5), and ending with the heroic, social, and human world of *Builders of Ships* (1916) (fig. 6).¹⁰ Bellows moves in these paintings between experience of the alien and the human worlds, between the world of representation and knowledge, the world of paint, that is, and its attendant processes of looking and judging, and the difference and otherness of the external world itself, the world of matter and of meaning beyond the human. Paintings like *The Sea* (1911),¹¹ or indeed *Churn and Break*, manipulate perspective and point of view in ways that allow us to entertain the possibility that they might represent something other than human understanding. They propose themselves as fields of difference, registers of the nonhuman world beyond us. By definition, though, such a proposition cannot be realized, and it is accordingly counterbalanced in Bellows's Monhegan paintings by other, human-centered impulses.

Bellows's aesthetics reflect a strong tendency to place the human above the world in his model of experience. "With his soul in activity he has much to say," Bellows's teacher Robert Henri said of his ideal American painter. "The canvas, paints, brushes, hands and brains are but tools to be guided by the soul of man."¹² Bellows's statements about his art suggest the debt he owed this seductive conceptual vision. "A work of art is the finest, deepest, most significant expression of a rare personality," Bellows wrote, so that "it follows that any plastic invention or creative moulding of form which succeeds in giving life to this expression is good."¹³ A painting for Bellows is a record of "the mind and heart of the man who made it," and therefore "an artist must be a spectator of life" so that "the great dramas of human nature will surge through his mind." Bellows's artist is a "reverential, enthusiastic, emotional spectator," and his paints and canvas are the expressions of his "soul's" engagement with the alien world.¹⁴ All these formulations place the human at the center of the account of the world and experience Bellows gives in his art. For Bellows, there is always an observing human presence, and the understanding and encounter with the world that his painting proposes is powerfully indebted to the sense

5
George Bellows,
An Island in the Sea, 1911.
Oil on canvas, 34 ¼ x
44 ¾ in. (87 x 112.73 cm).
Columbus Museum
of Art, Ohio. Gift
of Howard B. Monett,
1952.025.





6
George Bellows, *Builders of Ships*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 30 × 44 in. (76.2 × 111.8 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, 1962.42.

of that human observation and to accommodation of the experienced world to a human scale and calibrated judgment.

Technique and the action of making stand at the heart of the relationship Bellows proposes with the world, “the canvas, paints, brushes, hands and brains . . . but tools to be guided by the soul of man,” in Henri’s words. Part of what drives the Monhegan paintings is Bellows’s powerfully virtuosic impulse to ring the changes on the emotional tone, descriptive possibilities, and expressive potential of his motifs. The canvases he produced present the smashing weight and materiality of the waves in a variety of different keys, and their range encompasses both the high color and bright emotion of *Sunlit Surf* (1913) and the dour pigments and depressive weather conditions of *Lobster Cove, Monhegan, Maine* (1913).¹⁵ Observing an exhibition of the earliest of these paintings in 1911, a critic was struck by this variety; it seemed to him that Bellows already appeared there “in two or three different artistic avatars.”¹⁶ In a related vein, the art historian Sarah Cash has called the “maverick” 1913 paintings of Monhegan the results of a “feverish experimentation with formal issues,” partly under the influence of the Armory Show earlier that year, and partly under the influence of Bellows’s growing procedural fascination with the early

twentieth-century color theory of H. G. Maratta and with theories of the golden section and compositional design.¹⁷ Whatever the immediate resources and provocations on which Bellows drew, the technical research of the sea paintings across the five years of their making gives them a powerful quality of human will and creativity in dialogue with the nonhuman world that many of them take as their subject.

This quality of human will is true as well of the fact that Bellows's Monhegan paintings are profoundly conscious of the tradition of American art, and that they pay close attention to the presence on the island of this history and inheritance.¹⁸ Monhegan Island was not Bellows's discovery; when he began to visit, it had long been a key location for the encounter between American painters and the natural world, a tradition of encounter that has its image and substance in the vivid, propulsive life of the ocean as it breaks against the rocks and shingle of the land. Artists from Winslow Homer to Rockwell Kent and Robert Henri painted this encounter at Monhegan Island, and the result by the time Bellows arrived on the island was an extensive, rich record of experience in the American tradition. The interaction of control, expression, the management of the other, nonhuman world through the interpretative human act of painting, and the fact of tradition as a source of human apprehension of the world presses back in Bellows's work against the core meanings of the experienced world itself as other and as uncontrolled.

Bellows's very highly developed sense of painterliness, his interest in Maratta's theories and in technique, and his intensely personal, autographic brushwork all operate as signs and expressions of human experience and understanding. Against a vision of the watery world as other and alien, a repository of inhuman violence in those crashing waves and obdurate, silent rocks, Bellows poses his paint, the manipulation of pigment itself, as an act of human will, human imagination, and human meaning. By asserting, at moments, the identity of the two—the depicted world and autographic paint—he promises to subdue the nonhuman to the human, the world to the created object. This analysis prompts a further question: Are Bellows's paintings more than expressions of the fantasy of human control over this otherness; do they acknowledge its impossibility? To what extent are such things as sea, waves, or rocks participants—or what have been called “actants”—in the sense that they resist or affect the human world that impinges upon them?¹⁹ The question is really whether Bellows's Monhegan paintings stretch themselves imaginatively into this space of the nonhuman.

Franklin Kelly has seen the story of Bellows on Monhegan Island as one of intoxicating introspection, first in the imagined realm and Symbolist mode of *Shore House* (1911), his first sea painting, and then subsequently in a series of potent canvases when “the intensity of his experiences on Monhegan turned his thoughts even more profoundly inward.” *Shore House*, *An Island in the Sea*, and *Evening Swell* (1911) propose a silent world in which human preoccupations are given evocative and mysterious form in their experience of the natural world.²⁰ Kelly sees these paintings as reflecting Bellows’s mind on Monhegan, “full of thoughts about life and death, love and eternity,” and he relates them to Arnold Böcklin’s (1827–1901) late nineteenth-century paintings of the Island of the Dead.²¹ The mysteriousness and Symbolist qualities of *An Island in the Sea* give way to a more direct interest in the natural—whether in paintings like *Forth and Back* (1913) or *Churn and Break*, or in the vivid palette, sunshine, and calm sea of *Vine Clad Shore—Monhegan Island* (1913) (fig. 7).²² It seems to me

7
George Bellows, *Vine Clad Shore—Monhegan Island*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 20 × 24 in. (50.8 × 61 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Martin E. Segal, 1997.3.



this is a process, in part, of the shedding of meaning. The symbolism of the first paintings Bellows made of the sea in 1911—*An Island in the Sea*, *Evening Swell*, and *Shore House*—invests the natural world with human meaning, as well as the signs of human habitation (which links them to Bellows’s earlier paintings of the North and Hudson Rivers, in which the natural becomes technology and part of the urban fabric of New York City). The world here is saturated with human presence and human experience of its significance. Two years later in 1913, those meanings are suppressed, although not done away with, in the paintings of waves and rocks such as *Churn and Break*. There the human presence inheres in the fact of observation and recording, the flickering presence of the artist’s hand and the identity of paint with the lashing sea and foam. It is manifest as well in the anthropomorphic shapes that appear in these paintings—in the shape to the right in *Forth and Back*, for example, and in the twisting plume of spray and foam that flies up to the right in *Churn and Break*.

The dualities of these titles, too, suggest a net of human meaning placed on the world, binaries of approach and retreat, present and past, momentariness and the paradoxical ability of painting and human interpretation to imagine the seizure of the world, to freeze it at a single instant of the continuous and unceasing passage of time. The very act of imaginatively stilling the world, holding it preserved and incomplete, immobilizing the pitching contour of a dispersing wave or a momentary swell, or the dissolving fragmentation of the weight of water and light as they clash against the rocks, all these things, made manifest in an assertive act of dexterity and creativity, amount to a human intervention in other modes of experience. Paint marks, strokes, and gestures, too, preserve, in the lines and arcs that describe the always-vanishing presence of the human, the constant passing of the moment and the imaginative act of seeking to hold it steady, to make it visible and susceptible to contemplation and understanding. All these things are human meanings, human concerns, and human interpretations, but of acts, conjunctures, and realities of a nonhuman world. Bellows chooses objects and events as emblematic of that world, but cannot escape from the human perspective on what they mean. “What is the sea if it isn’t terrible?” asks Bellows in a letter written the year before he first went to Monhegan.²³ It is a convoluted expression, reflecting the complexity of response and the conceptual difficulties aroused. The sea is the mirror of the self, or it promises an alienness, more “terrible,” perhaps, but more compelling too, that does not mirror our humanity but exceeds it or occupies space beyond it and distinct from it, occupying a disparate

order of being. If it is accommodated to the human scale—if the sea is not “terrible”—then its meanings and the value of our encounter with it are eviscerated, but if it is “terrible,” then it is we who are diminished, hollowed out, and somehow void. The terrible sea is terrifying, but a sea that is not terrible is reduced to a Böcklin-like calmness that is the stillness of death. That perception Bellows finds a hard one.

These stressed meanings bore down on Bellows, and his historians have accordingly been fixated on the psychic troubles he appears to have endured on Monhegan, as well as the wildly overdetermined meanings the island seems to have possessed for him, during his painting campaigns in 1911 and 1913 especially. *Shore House* was made on his honeymoon; and his first extended visit to Monhegan, at Henri’s invitation, in 1911 was made without his wife and while she was pregnant with their first child. While he was on the island, Bellows’s emotions seem to have been exceptionally volatile, influenced not only by his response to the topography and terrain of Monhegan and the continual proximity of the sea, but by the pressures of a startlingly rapid pace of production: “12 pictures, 30 panels now in 3 weeks. Not mentioning what I scraped out.” His state of mind seems to have been such that on at least one occasion he experienced disturbing impulses: “I climbed into the Lair of the sea eagle where human foot had never trod, and then what do you think happened? I lay on the ledge for a while in some soft long grass watching the clouds above and the mighty sea far below, when suddenly the thought got into my head: suppose that—and just as suddenly I arose and climbed out again.”²⁴ Bellows wrote that to his pregnant wife, and she was sufficiently discomforted by another of his letters around the same time to refuse to preserve it. But the day after he sent this missive, he was already at the manic end of the bell curve, celebrating his encounter with nature on Monhegan and the variety of the island’s landscapes as he pushed the count of paintings completed higher and higher.²⁵

Bellows’s tendency to adopt a teasing period tone in his correspondence helps disguise the potential seriousness of some of these episodes, as well as the disquieting implications of their dramatic presentation for his young wife. Much of the reality of these things is unknowable and I am not attempting to diagnose Bellows’s personality. My point is that a lot of experience is going on here, much of it intense. Bellows underwent a sort of love affair with the island and its ocean setting: it seemed to him a compulsive, near-infinite subject, both horrifying and susceptible to understanding. The quivering balance he struck between these two visions is the equivalent of his “suppose that” as he lay above the sea



8
Winslow Homer,
*Breezing Up (A Fair
Wind)*, 1873–1876.
Oil on canvas, 24 $\frac{3}{16}$ ×
38 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (61.5 × 97 cm).
National Gallery of
Art, Washington, DC.
Gift of the W. L. and
May T. Mellon
Foundation, 1943.13.1.

while unbidden thoughts came to him. It is the sea as existential horror and as human solace. Emma Bellows was sufficiently discomposed by all of this to refuse to return to Monhegan in 1912 as Bellows wanted.²⁶ When he did persuade her to do so, in 1913, Bellows went straight into one of the most creative painting campaigns of his career. “What is the sea if it isn’t terrible?” draws on the longstanding connection of the alienness and otherness of the sea and the interior mental world of those who encounter it. For a moment the sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the watery world that dashes itself against the granite rocks and remains perpetually unbroken by the encounter, mirrors the self in a lashing, violent rhythm of surge and ebb, perpetually cresting and then withdrawing. Bellows’s jets of anguish or unbidden impulse are followed by bouts of mania and self-confidence: “I feel a great pride in working so hard in getting stronger and stronger.”²⁷ It is the “terrible” character of the sea that compels paintings like *Churn and Break*.

Those moments in 1911 of self-abnegation and the possibility of the dissolution or sacrifice of self as he lies above the sea on a narrow ledge and thinks “suppose that” reflect an impulse to abandon the human in the face of the world, to fold oneself into it or allow a strange, drifting moment of surrender to the world outside the self and the constraints of human perception and experience. And of course such moments of dreaming disappearance and blending are followed by

counterbalancing assertions of the human and the self, as Bellows reverts to a celebration of his ability to create, to double and treble his output, to capture and capture again his motif, to shout out into the hollow world the commanding fantasy of control and meaning.

If we try to turn that agon, that dramatic, even histrionic, moment of ambition and desire to blend, to melt the human into the other world, to lose, surrender, and renounce, and to become one with, imaged in the fluctuating identity of pigment and watery world, if we try to turn it via the philosopher Jane Bennett's recent propositions about "vibrant matter" into a conjunction of actants in which the sea and rocks might have agency in their capacity to affect and interact with the human observer,²⁸ if we do that, then this strange, broken, and impossible desire to be and not to be, to belong and to observe from outside, to lose and to gain at the same moment, becomes more interesting still, enters a space it could not occupy before.

At this point it may be useful to contrast Bellows with his principal predecessor among the painters of sea and shore in Monhegan Island. Winslow Homer's evocations of the sea show an intermixture of the human and the nonhuman comparable to Bellows's. Ranging from *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)* (1873–1876) (fig. 8) to *Northeaster* (1895–1901)

9

Winslow Homer,
Northeaster, 1895–1901.
Oil on canvas, 34½ ×
50 in. (87.6 × 127 cm).
The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New
York. Gift of George A.
Hearn, 1910, 10.64.5.



(fig. 9), Homer's paintings move between the human worlds and those set apart, in which the world itself occupies center stage. In almost all, however, the human is moving toward the world beyond, dissolving, or threatening to dissolve, into the spaces of the ocean and the alien domain it represents. This is true of *Breezing Up*, with its far-reaching gazes and identification of bodies with the pull and rhythm of wind and sea. It is true of the passionate events depicted in *The Life-Line* (1884) or *Undertow* (1886), of the vanishing selves identified with the natural world in *Fox Hunt* (1893) and *Summer Night* (1890), and of the gazing, distant, shoreside figures in the Cullercoats paintings and works on paper.²⁹ Bellows's painting retains a hold on the point of vantage, a human place from which the alien world is observed and experienced, which is unwilling to contemplate the relaxation of control in the way that Homer seems prepared to broach. Of course, Homer does not realize this melding of human into the experienced world any more than Bellows does, but the argument is not that this concept is achieved but that we can draw distinctions between the ways it is thought, imagined, and approached. Homer entertains that possibility to a degree and in a variety of ways that Bellows does not, even as the younger artist takes the tropes of *Northeaster* and related Maine pictures by Homer and seeks to build on them in *Churn and Break* and other Monhegan works.

When Bellows moves on in 1913 and after to the figure-centered paintings like *The Big Dory* (1913), *Shipyards Society* (1916), or *Builders of Ships*, he pushes back again into the human world. Now we have a heroic version of that world and of authentic human society and action (building, making, a full gamut of social activity).³⁰ The 1911 *Evening Swell*, part of the Symbolist phase, also belongs to this aspect of Bellows's vision, suggesting that it is a consistent element even if he later feels prompted to embrace it more completely. In this context, the 1914 *Summer Surf* (fig. 10) is intriguing, with its tiny figures who look almost as if they have been collaged onto the rocks, sending the perceived scale of those rocks out of true, so that what had seemed comparable to the studies of the year before is now made disconcerting. The effect is to question retrospectively the apparent scale of the 1913 studies. Without this prompt, *Churn and Break* can be read as an intimate image, taking its scale from the observer who is implicitly close to the central action of waves and rocks, in near communication with the scene. Now it seems the observer might be imagined standing back, at some distance, and gazing at rocks and waves hugely expanded in scale. This is a momentary stumble or hesitation on Bellows's part,

10

George Bellows, *Summer Surf*, 1914. Oil on panel, 18 × 22 1/8 in. (45.7 × 56.2 cm). Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Gift of the Friends of Art, 1961, 1961-12.



an insertion of the human subject in the natural in ways that entertain that subject's inferiority or subordination to the world rather than asserting it as triumph.



I have tried to think about what it means for Bellows to take as his motif an image that interpreted experience as violent and nonhuman when his investment was in the human world, of domesticity, of sodality and the social, and above all of control and the centrality of mankind to his understanding of experience and reality. At a moment when he had to face up to the ways in which his predecessors had confronted the world through the same subject, tradition also came to seem an important medium of human interpretation of the world. This essay is about the collision of the two elements in the paintings, of the human and the non-human as forms of experience, as well as about how these things might be imagined and understood.

My argument is that Bellows's paintings glimpse the world that Jane Bennett describes in *Vibrant Matter*, but do not finally enter into it. Like Bellows on his cliff top, they peek, they think "suppose that" and then they retreat, away from the dissolution of the human into the world beyond and back to a reinstatement of the centrality of the

human and its aesthetic investigation or depiction. In the end, the disparate registers of the sea paintings I have been interested in are not so disparate after all. “What is the sea if it isn’t terrible?” asks Bellows. Well, then, it is paint on a support. And yet if we renounce the attempt to identify the act of mastery the artist’s touch carries with it, the world of experience and the world of representation, nonhuman and human, return to their disparate registers. The paintings are the mirror of the self in its movement, and also the mirror of its absence and its vanishing away. The world is terrible and it is not there at all. Bellows’s paintings offer the thought that the natural world imaged by the water is a mirror of the self and an integrated part of human life, or that it is alien, distinct, and other. They do not resolve this thought.

- 1 This quality in Bellows's technique was highly prized by contemporary viewers and critics. See Michael Quick, "Technique and Theory: The Evolution of George Bellows's Painting Style," in *The Paintings of George Bellows*, ed. Michael Quick, Jane Myers, Marianne Doezema, and Franklin Kelly (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992).
- 2 Bellows mounted painting campaigns in Maine in 1911, 1913, 1914, and 1916. He was based on Monhegan Island for the first three of these.
- 3 *Winter Afternoon, Riverside Park* and *Floating Ice* are in the collections of the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, respectively.
- 4 *Forty-Two Kids* is housed at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; *Men of the Docks* at the National Gallery, London; and *The Bridge, Blackwell's Island* at the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio.
- 5 See, for a survey, Arne Neset, *Arcadian Waters and Wanton Seas: The Iconology of Waterscapes in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009). For studies of various aspects of this relationship, see Tom Lewis, *The Hudson: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Elizabeth McKinsey, *Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); John Seelye, *Prophetic Waters: The River in Early American Life and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); John Seelye, *Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan, 1755–1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Derrick R. Cartwright, *Waves and Waterways: American Perspectives, 1850–1900* (Giverny, Fr.: Musée d'Art Américain and Terra Foundation for the Arts, 2000).
- 6 Franklin Kelly, "'So Clean and Cold': Bellows and the Sea," in Quick et al., *Paintings of George Bellows*, 135. See David Peters Corbett, "American Water: Memory and Projection in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Painting," in *Interdisciplinary Encounters: Hidden and Visible Explorations of the Work of Adrian Riffin*, ed. Dana Arnold (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); Derrick R. Cartwright, "'In Ceaseless Flow': Towards a Poetics of American Waves and Waterways," in *Waves and Waterways*, 17–18; Bruce Robertson, "Perils of the Sea," in *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, ed. William H. Truettner and Roger B. Stein (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
- 7 See John Mack, *The Sea: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).
- 8 See, for a discussion of these themes in Bellows's New York paintings, David Peters Corbett, "Decreation and Undoing: George Bellows's Excavation Paintings, 1907–1909," *Art History*, forthcoming.
- 9 Sarah Cash, "Life at Sea," in *George Bellows*, ed. Charles Brock (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2012), 159. Bellows's interest in the sea as a subject continued until 1916 when it declined and when he moved his center of operations outside New York City away from the coast to Woodstock, New York.
- 10 See Kelly, "'So Clean and Cold';" and Cash, "Life at Sea."
- 11 *The Sea* is in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
- 12 Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 50.
- 13 Typescript of the introduction to *The Paintings of George Bellows* (New York: Knopf, 1929), Box 4, Folder 2, George Wesley Bellows Papers, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.
- 14 Bellows, cited in Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 26.
- 15 *Lobster Cove, Monhegan, Maine* is housed at the San Diego Museum of Art. For *Sunlit Surf* see, the Sotheby's catalog entry for the auction from May 13, 2013: <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/american-art-no8996/lot.7.html> (accessed November 18, 2016).
- 16 "George Bellows as Romantic Painter," *Evening Mail*, Jan. 20, 1911.

- 17 Cash, "Life at Sea," 159. See, on the indebtedness of Bellows and others to Maratta's color theory, Elizabeth Armstrong Handy, "H. G. Maratta's Color Theory and Its Influence on the Painters—Robert Henri, John Sloan, and George Bellows" (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1969); and Quick, "Technique and Theory," 42–45.
- 18 See the discussion of Bellows's "awkward" dialogue with tradition and modernity in Robertson, "Perils of the Sea," 160.
- 19 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), vii–viii.
- 20 *Shore House* is in a private collection. For *Evening Swell* see, the Christie's catalog entry for the auction from December 3, 2013: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/george-wesley-bellows-evening-swell-5752402-details.aspx> (accessed November 18, 2016).
- 21 Kelly, "'So Clean and Cold,'" 146–47, 148.
- 22 *Forth and Back* is in a private collection.
- 23 George Bellows to Professor Joseph Taylor, Apr. 21, 1910, Box 1, Folder 11, George Wesley Bellows Papers, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.
- 24 Bellows, cited in Kelly, "'So Clean and Cold,'" 144.
- 25 Kelly notes that at one moment Bellows uses the ambivalent and suggestive phrase "drowned in work." "'So Clean and Cold,'" 144.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 150.
- 27 Bellows, cited in *ibid.*, 144.
- 28 See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.
- 29 *The Life-Line* is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; *Undertow* at the Clark Institute of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts; *Fox Hunt* at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; and *Summer Night* at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
- 30 *The Big Dory* is housed at the New Britain Museum of American Art, and *Shipyards Society* is housed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

