



AN AMERICAN
EXPERIMENT

GEORGE BELLOWS AND
THE ASHCAN PAINTERS

PRESS RELEASE

THE
NATIONAL
GALLERY

AN AMERICAN EXPERIMENT GEORGE BELLOWS AND THE ASHCAN PAINTERS

3 March – 30 May 2011

Room 1

Admission Free

TERRA
FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART



George Bellows, *The Big Dory*, 1913

© New Britain Museum of American Art, Harris
Russell Stanley Fund, 1944-21. Photo: Alex Morganti

This spring the National Gallery hosts a small exhibition of 12 paintings that have never been seen before in the United Kingdom. *An American Experiment: George Bellows and the Ashcan Painters* introduces visitors to Bellows and his artist friends (William Glackens, George Luks, John Sloan and their teacher Robert Henri), and to an important moment in the history of American painting.

The Ashcan School was formed at the beginning of the 20th century as American painters, principally in New York City and Philadelphia, began to develop a uniquely American point of view on the beauty, violence and velocity of the modern world – and a new way to represent them. The most familiar reading of the Ashcan painters is as urban realists who embraced the brutal but vivid life of the city as their subject and found stark visual language through which to communicate their realities to a contemporary

audience (John Sloan, 1907, *Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street*, Philadelphia Museum of Art).

The most prominent member of the group was George Bellows. Usually discussed as an artist of the city, often depicting urban parks, Bellows also enjoyed painting landscapes away from the metropolis. The American master of snow, Bellows seems to offer engagement with the natural world as the main subject of his paintings (*The Palisades*, 1909, Daniel J. Terra Collection, Chicago).

An American Experiment contains seven paintings by Bellows; four of these are scenes of New York State and will be hung together along one wall of Room 1. *Blue Snow, The Battery* (1910, Columbus Museum of Art) depicts the 25-acre public park immediately adjacent to Wall Street at the tip of Lower Manhattan. The bustling Port of New York and New Jersey lies nearby but little of it is evident. Rather, the city is shrouded in snow and it seems as if sounds are muted.

However, Bellows did paint the urban construction of New York City and *Excavation at Night* (1908, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Arkansas) is one of a series of images Bellows made of the building work at the site of Pennsylvania Station. This picture has a long art-historical lineage behind it, recalling the paintings of light-in-darkness by the 18th-century artist Joseph Wright 'of Derby'. Bellows's early 20th-century version capitalises on the compositional and aesthetic means developed by the artists of the sublime, like Wright and Turner, to describe the urban scene.

In the 1910s Bellows increasingly embraced non-urban subject matter, and he spent considerable time on Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine. Here he painted one of his most audacious images, *The Big Dory* (1913, New Britain Museum of American Art), which anticipates the stylisations of Art Deco a generation later, and reflects the radical avant-garde European influences the artist had recently been absorbing.

The Ashcan painters were part of a widespread interest in the quality of life in the modern cities of the early 20th century. Along with British artists like Walter Sickert, they are representative of a strong analysis of urban experience while owing much to old masters such as Velázquez and Manet.

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Organisation

An American Experiment: George Bellows and the Ashcan Painters is curated by Christopher Riopelle, Curator of Post-1800 Paintings at the National Gallery, and Katherine Bourguignon, Associate Curator at the Terra Foundation for American Art.

This exhibition is organised by the National Gallery in partnership with and through major support from the Terra Foundation for American Art. The National Gallery and the Terra Foundation for American Art are collaborating to bring historical masterworks from the United States to audiences in London through a series of focused exhibitions, to be presented over the next several years.

Established in 1978, the Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering the exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States. With financial resources of more than \$200 million and an exceptional collection of American art from the colonial era to 1945, it is one of the leading foundations focused on American art, and devotes approximately \$9 million annually in support of American art exhibitions, projects, and research worldwide. For information on initiatives and opportunities for support, please visit www.terraamericanart.org.

Publication

An American Experiment: George Bellows and the Ashcan Painters

By David Peters Corbett with Katherine Bourguignon and Christopher Riopelle

An accessible, fully illustrated introduction to the American Ashcan painters, exploring key characteristics of their work in gritty scenes of urban life, landscapes and portraits.

David Peters Corbett is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of East Anglia. He has worked on American art of this period, as holder of the Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2008–10) and as Terra Senior Fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C. (2009–10). Katherine Bourguignon is Associate Curator, Terra Foundation for American Art. Christopher Riopelle is Curator of Post-1800 Paintings at the National Gallery, London.

Dates and opening hours

Open to public: 3 March – 30 May 2011

Open daily 10am–6pm, Friday until 9pm

Admission

Free

Images

Publicity images for *An American Experiment* can be obtained from <http://press.ng-london.org.uk>.

To obtain a username please contact the National Gallery Press Office on 020 7747 2865 or e-mail press@ng-london.org.uk

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Trafalgar Square

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An American Experiment: George Bellows and the Ashcan Painters

Exhibits List

X7307
George Bellows
North River
1908
Oil on canvas
83.5 x 109.2 cm
Credit Line: Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Joseph E. Temple Fund

X7308
George Bellows
The Palisades
1909
Oil on canvas
76.2 x 96.8 cm
Credit Line: Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, Chicago, 1999.10

X7309
George Bellows
Blue Snow, The Battery
1910
Oil on canvas
86.4 x 111.8 cm
Credit Line: Howald Fund Purchase, Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio

X7310
George Bellows
Nude Girl, Miss Leslie Hall
1909
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 106.7 cm
Credit Line: Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, Chicago 1995.5

X7312
Robert Henri
Dutch Joe (Jopie van Slouten)
1910
Oil on canvas
61 x 50.8 cm
Credit Line: Milwaukee Art Museum, Gift of the Samuel O. Buckner Collection, M1919.9

X7313
Robert Henri
The Art Student (Miss Josephine Nivison)
1906
Oil on canvas
196.2 x 97.8 cm
Credit Line: Milwaukee Art Museum, MACI Purchase Acquisition Fund, M1965.34

X7314
George Bellows
The Big Dory
1913
Oil on panel
45.7 x 55.9 cm
Credit Line:New Britain Museum of American Art, Harriet Russell Stanley Fund

X7315
William Glackens
Washington Square
1910
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 76.2 cm
Credit Line:New Britain Museum of American Art, Charles F. Smith Fund

X7316
George Bellows
Excavation at Night
1908
Oil on canvas
86.4 x 111.8 cm
Credit Line:Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas

X7317
George Bellows
Three Rollers
1911
Oil on canvas
100.7 x 106.1 cm
Credit Line:National Academy Museum, New York

X7318
George Luks
Knitting for the Soldiers: High Bridge Park
about 1918
Oil on canvas
76.7 x 91.8 cm
Credit Line:Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, Chicago, 1999.87

X7320
John Sloan
Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, New York City
1907
Oil on canvas
61.6 x 81.3 cm
Credit Line:Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Meyer P. Potamkin and Vivian O. Potamkin, 2000

BIOGRAPHIES

WILLIAM GLACKENS (1870–1938)

In his native Philadelphia, William Glackens worked as a newspaper artist and studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where he became friends with John Sloan and Robert Henri. He travelled with Henri to Europe in 1895, finding inspiration in French artists such as Edouard Manet (1832–1883) and Edgar Degas (1834–1917). Throughout his early career, Glackens used dark colours and rough brushwork to capture urban scenes, specialising in crowded views of New York, where he settled in 1896. After a second trip to France in 1906, Glackens adopted brighter hues and softer forms but maintained an interest in the everyday activities of city dwellers. In 1908 he exhibited with the group of artists known as 'The Eight' and remained friends with Henri throughout his career. Glackens joined the effort to bring examples of modern French art to America in the now famous exhibition at the Armory in 1913. His paintings were clearly influenced by these vivid, modernist pictures, but he never abandoned the figure in favour of abstraction. His later works were often compared to Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919). ksa

ROBERT HENRI (1865–1929)

Critical to the development of modernist art in America, Robert Henri was an important painter and teacher in the early years of the twentieth century. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1886, Henri studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia and

later enrolled at the Académie Julian and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. By late 1891 he returned to Philadelphia and began teaching, but soon moved to New York City. Henri began to attract young artists to his ideas. He promoted the depiction of urban realities and encouraged his students to walk the streets of their city and find subjects in the ordinary, everyday scenes around them. He also embraced a subjective, expressive use of paint. Shortly after his election to the National Academy of Design in 1906, Henri grew tired of the Academy's conservatism. In 1908 he staged a protest by organising an exhibition of eight artists at the Macbeth Galleries in New York, who subsequently became known as 'The Eight'.

These painters and others who were associated with Henri would later become known as the Ashcan School. ksa

GEORGE LUKS (1866–1933)

George Luks brought flair and flamboyance to both his personal life and his art. He often invented aspects of his biography and painted rough urban scenes. After an extended early trip to Europe, Luks returned to his native Philadelphia and began working as an illustrator at the *Philadelphia Press*. He became friends with John Sloan, Everett Shinn and William Glackens, fellow illustrators and later members of the Ashcan School. Luks moved to New York in 1896 and continued to work in the newspaper business until 1905 when, increasingly successful, he devoted himself to painting. In 1908 he exhibited at the Macbeth

Galleries in an exhibition now famous for establishing 'The Eight', the group of artists associated with Robert Henri. In fact, it was the rejection of one of Luks's paintings by the National Academy of Design in 1907 that prompted Henri to organise the Independent exhibition the following year. Luks continued to work in oil and watercolour throughout his life. ksa

JOHN SLOAN (1871–1951)

Raised in Philadelphia, a major publishing centre where he learned the art of illustration, Sloan studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and under Robert Henri before relocating to New York in 1904. He arrived in the same year as George Bellows, and the two soon found themselves among a like-minded group of artists in Henri's New York circle, all of them committed to portraying the urban scene. Working as both a painter and etcher, Sloan was soon recognised as a central figure in the so-called Ashcan School. Saturated colours came to play an increasing role in his art, just as Socialism became a prominent component of his highly active political life. His paintings rarely sold and teaching, at the Art Students' League, of which he became director in 1931, was his principal income. A growing concern with formal issues of picture making, and with the art of the Renaissance, dominated the second half of his career. He died at eighty, a hold-out in Abstract Expressionist New York from a bygone era of social realism. cr

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The National Gallery and the Terra Foundation for American Art: An American Experiment

The National Gallery and the Terra Foundation for American Art are collaborating to bring historical masterworks from the United States to audiences in London through a series of focused exhibitions that will be presented over the next several years (details to be announced in spring 2011). These projects will feature the works of some of America's most innovative artists, particularly those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and will offer an unprecedented opportunity to view these paintings within the context of one of Europe's most prominent and popular art galleries.

An American Experiment: George Bellows and the Ashcan Painters is the first in the series, and takes a close look at twelve paintings by George Bellows and his contemporaries Robert Henri, George Luks, John Sloan, and William Glackens. American artists of great influence in New York in the early twentieth century, these practitioners of modernism are perhaps best known for their "realist" representations of urban subject matter that earned them the moniker of "Ashcan School." Close to one hundred years later, their expressionistic paintings continue to command attention and draw admirers. Three paintings in the exhibition are from the Terra Foundation's collection; others are on loan from major museums throughout the United States.

Established in 1978, the Terra Foundation works to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of historical art of the United States. The foundation has made it a priority to create an international dialogue that is lively and relevant, encouraging new perspectives that interpret American art in dynamic ways and making opportunities for engagement that resonate with individuals around the globe. Over the years, the Terra Foundation has supported programs in more than thirty countries.

Within the United Kingdom the foundation has given close to \$3 million in grants since 2007 for American art programs, including exhibitions at the British Museum, Tate, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Whitechapel Art Gallery, and Fruitmarket Gallery; symposia and conferences at the University College London, University of Glasgow, University of Nottingham, and University of York; and teaching professorships and fellowships at The Courtauld Institute of Art. In addition, the foundation continues to loan works of art from its collection to museums throughout the United Kingdom.

The Terra Foundation supports worldwide study and presentation of historical American art through its grants, initiatives, partnerships, art collection, and other resources. For more information on the foundation's activities and opportunities for support, please visit www.terraamericanart.org.

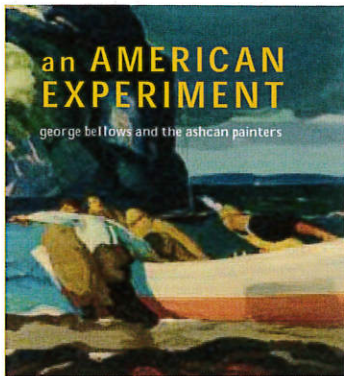
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David Peters Corbett
with Katherine Bourguignon and Christopher Riopelle



**TRANSCENDENCE
AND THE
URBAN SCENE:
GEORGE BELLOW'S
AND THE ASHCAN
PAINTERS**

THIS BOOK IS AVAILABLE WITH THE NEW YORK CITY AND THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART. THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART IS A FEDERAL AGENCY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART IS A FEDERAL AGENCY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART IS A FEDERAL AGENCY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

An accessible, fully illustrated introduction to the American Ashcan painters, exploring key characteristics of their work in gritty scenes of urban life, landscapes and portraits

Published alongside the exhibition *An American Experiment: George Bellows and the Ashcan Painters 1900–1918*, at the National Gallery, London, 3 March–30 May 2011

The Ashcan painters were a group of urban realists whom formed around the teacher and artist Robert Henri during the first decades of the twentieth century, inspired by the older man's insistence that artists should make 'pictures from life'. The group, including John Sloan, George Bellows, George Luks and William Glackens, rejected the polished academic style of the art schools and sought to catch the vitality of everyday existence in urban America. They did so through images of life in the city as a coarse, sometimes brutal, but intimately human place, as well as through vivid landscapes and seascapes, and the use of brilliant, saturated colour.

CONTENTS

- David Peters Corbett's lively essay explores the main themes of the Ashcanners, including scenes from urban life, landscapes and portraits
- Concise commentaries by Katherine Bourguignon and Christopher Riopelle on twelve key paintings by George Bellows, William Glackens, Robert Henri, George Luks and John Sloan
- Short biographies for each artist and recommended further reading

This exhibition is organised by the National Gallery in partnership with the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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BOOK SPECIFICATION

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