

George Bellows in Great Britain

George Bellows (1882-1925) produced the most innovative and forceful realist paintings in America during the first quarter of the 20th Century, following the bold creations of Winslow Homer and leading to the hallowed images of Edward Hopper. All three of these giants of American art painted figure and genre subjects as well as landscapes and have by now achieved international renown, in the case of Bellows quite recently, with two major museum acquisitions. Pursuant to a small focused exhibition of Bellows and his progressive colleagues at the National Gallery in London and the Bellows retrospective presented at the Royal Academy of Arts, the National Gallery made the very notable purchase in 2014 of Bellows's 1912 masterpiece *Men of the Docks*. A year later the Barber Institute of Fine Arts of the University of Birmingham acquired Bellows's rare and striking *Early Standing Nude* of 1906 that had been the centerpiece of Collisart's selection at the Masterpiece fair in 2015. Thus, there are two major examples by George Bellows in two distinguished British museum collections, in each case the first acquisition of a traditional American painting.

Indeed Bellows is a quintessential American artist; while his esthetic in many ways echoes European precedents – from such Old Masters as Velazquez, Goya and Rembrandt to such 19th-Century masters as Courbet and Manet – whose work he studied with great enthusiasm in the Metropolitan and other New York museums, Bellows was intent on creating as purely an American canon of canvases as he could. Collisart has two impressive Bellows landscapes at Masterpiece this year: *Clouds and Hills* of 1909 and *Village on the Green* of 1916. 1909 was in fact in many ways the most important year of the young artist's career, yielding a number of his most admired achievements, including his two seminal boxing pictures, *Stag at Sharkey's* and *Both Members of This Club*. *Clouds and Hills* was painted during a brief stay in New Jersey with his buddy Eugene O'Neill, the future playwright, and it demonstrates the essentials of his emerging style with its slashing and energetic brushstrokes. *Village on the Hill* was painted in Camden, a picturesque village frequented by artists on the coast of Maine. At this time Bellows was developing a brightened palette that, combined with his rich layering of pigment, presents a colorful tapestry of paint.

The endorsement of Bellows by two august British institutions is a welcome sign of the acceptance of Bellows and other American artists in the museum community and, hopefully, beyond that into the collecting community. Both *Men of the Docks* and *Early Standing Nude* hold their own with distinction in their respective galleries; and while they reflect their European heritage they manage to represent a certain "American" character and independence.