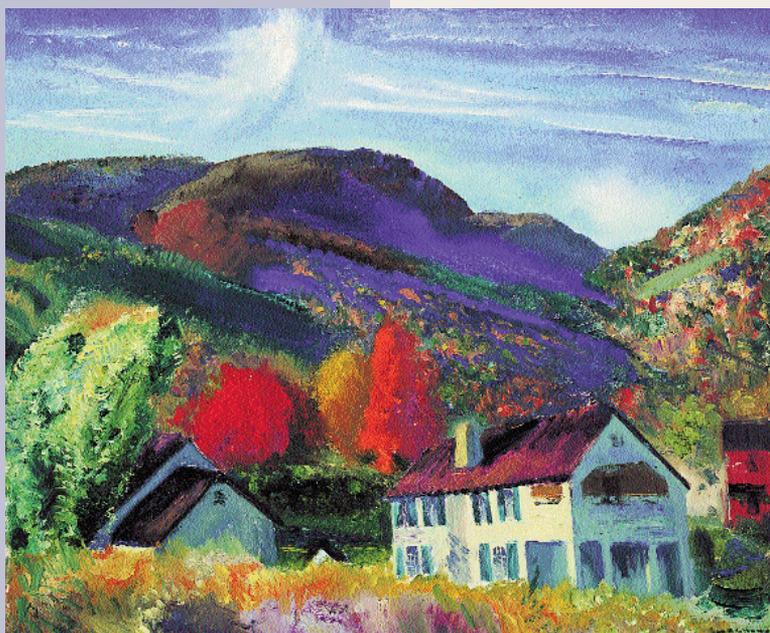


LEAVING

FOR THE

COUNTRY

George Bellows

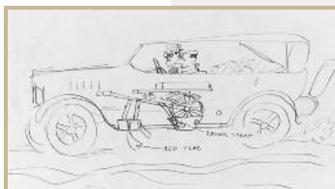


AT WOODSTOCK

LEAVING FOR THE COUNTRY: George Bellows AT WOODSTOCK

*"We are leaving for the country next Friday, and
I am busy as the devil getting everything done."*

— George Bellows to Laura Monett, May 1924

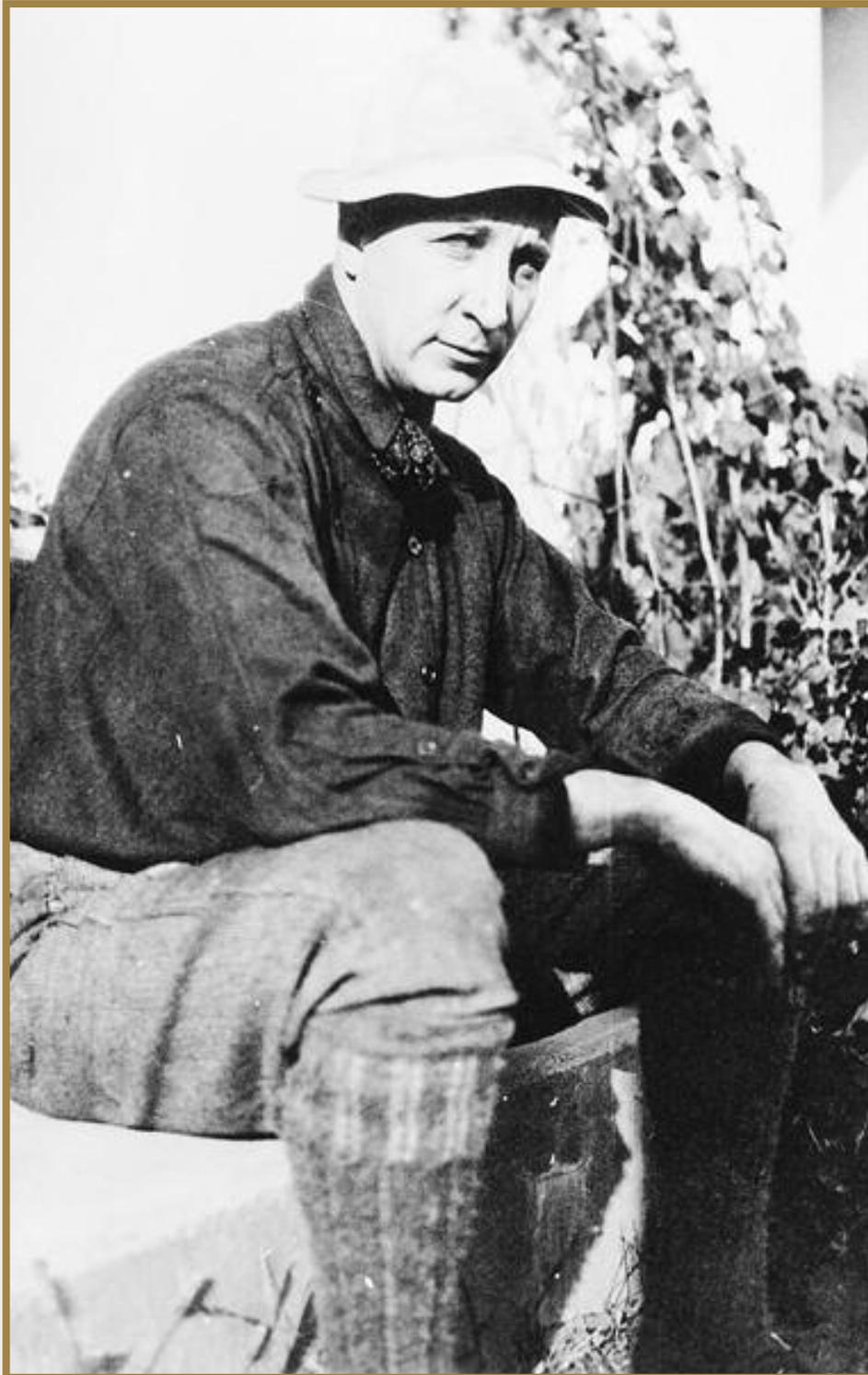


*"We are going to a beautiful mountain country,
famous among artists and where I have procured a wonderfully
fine estate, a very large house in the center of a farm on the slope
of the second highest mountain in the Catskills."*

— George Bellows to Aunt Fanny, May 1920

ABOVE: George Bellows, *Sketch of Bellows and Speicher in a Car* (sketch in a letter to Robert Henri, November 5, 1920). Pen and ink on paper, 5 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. Robert Henri Papers (box 2, folder 27), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

QUOTATIONS: George Bellows Papers, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections



George Bellows in hiking clothes
George Bellows Papers (box 5,
folder 1), Amherst College
Archives and Special Collections.
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Woodstock Landscape and Woodstock Painters

Alf Evers

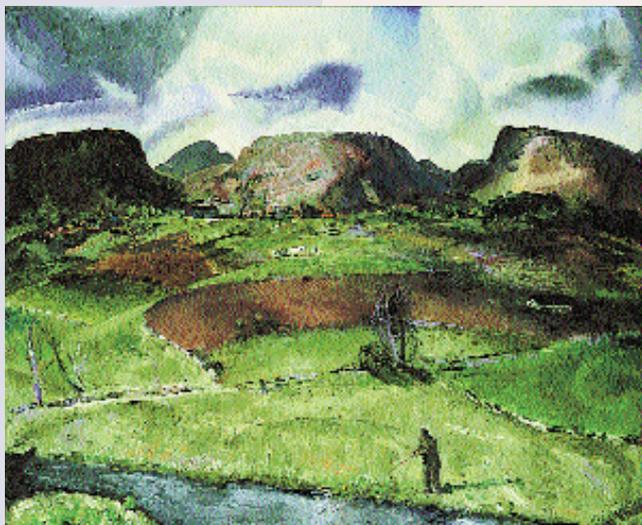


Fig. 4

George Bellows, *Trout Stream and Mountains*, April 1920. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.
Berry-Hill Galleries, New York.

The pride of Americans in being part of a new and independent nation with a marked character of its own drew Europeans who hoped to take part in the expected explosion of prosperity. Among these was Peter DeLabigarre, who was building a chateau on the Hudson River within sight of Woodstock's Overlook Mountain. On April 9, 1793, DeLabigarre climbed Overlook, and came upon a bank of snow lingering in the shelter of a ledge. He mixed some brandy from his pocket flask with some of the snow and enjoyed "a delicious drinking, tenfold better than any ice cream." He predicted that the wild grapes that grew abundantly on the mountainside would someday give rise to a vineyard producing what he called "Blue Mountain-claret." He pushed on, and was rewarded by reaching the topmost ledge from which he "had the pleasure of contemplating a most magnificent prospect all around the compass."¹

He had reached the spot on Woodstock's highest mountain that was to become recognized as the major feature of the town's landscape. It would become a familiar sight from the windows of Hudson River mansions and from studio windows of Woodstock painters of the future. It would also appear in the background of scenes that showed, in contrast to red-jacketed hunters on the alert for deer, Woodstock valleys rich with crops, and upland pastures on which cattle and sheep grazed. It would appear above waterfalls or as a blue background to the gold and scarlet of autumn leaves or the white of newly fallen snow. Or, as a triangular shape, the mountain would serve the needs of a semi-abstract painting.

DeLabigarre's reflections on Overlook Mountain showed the change taking place in the way Americans were thinking about their own landscape. Now they were realizing that the landscape not only had practical values but might yield pleasure as well.

Following the end of the eighteenth century, the surge of patriotic pride in the new and independent nation helped secure the acceptance of landscape as a

subject of American painting. Meanwhile, in the City of New York, a group of young writers known as the Knickerbockers were trying to create a truly American literature using national materials. Among them was James Fenimore Cooper, whose novel, *The Pioneers* (1823), became an instant American classic. Its hero was an American frontiersman named Natty Bumppo, but often called Leatherstocking. The narrative is interrupted to allow Natty to describe with gusto the scenic natural wonders of a charmed place in the Catskill Mountains around 1790—a clifftop called the Pine Orchard, with its spectacular view of the Hudson Valley and beyond.

Before 1825 no landscape painter had discovered the Catskill Mountains as a fit subject for a painting. In that year the discovery was made by a young Englishman, Thomas Cole, born about fifty miles south of the scenic Lake District, the home and inspiration of poet William Wordsworth. After emigrating to the United States Cole became a painter and later a founder of what would be known as the Hudson River School.² In 1825 he journeyed up the Hudson on a sketching trip and came upon the wonders Natty Bumppo had described in *The Pioneers*. He could hardly have avoided having heard of them in New York, where *The Pioneers* was making a great stir.

Several of Cole's paintings, including *Lake with Dead Trees* (1825, Allen Memorial Art Museum) and *Kaaterskill Falls* (1826, Wadsworth Atheneum), were exhibited in a New York shop window. They attracted attention from the Knickerbockers and soon from a wider and very enthusiastic audience. They sold well and were recognized as striking examples of paintings of American wilderness done in a strong, romantic, and original style.

By the 1830s landscape painters were thronging to the now romanticized Catskills in the vicinity of the Catskill Mountain House on the Pine Orchard. On July 4, 1833, a group of local entrepreneurs saw no reason why they could not rival the success of the famous Mountain House by building another “summer mansion” a thousand feet

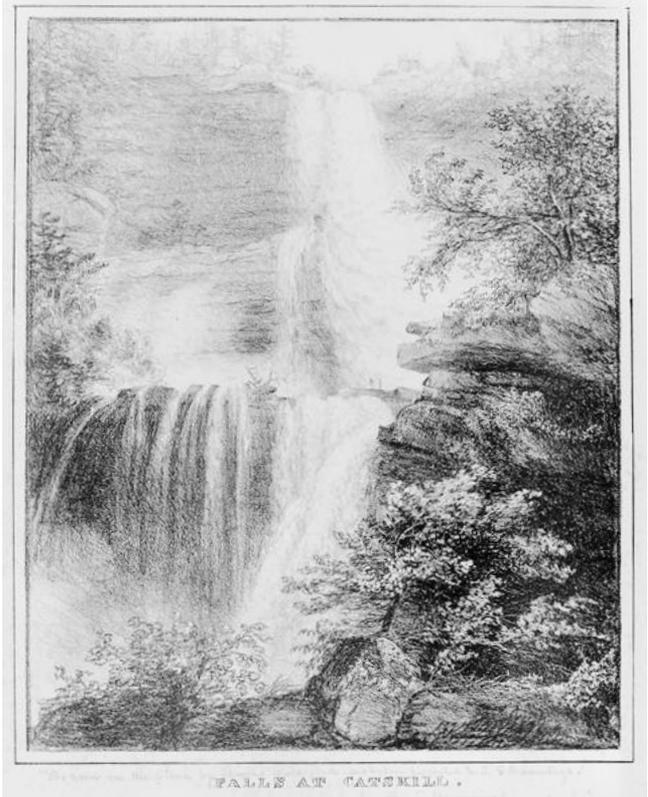


Fig. 5

Thomas Cole (American, 1801-1848), *Falls at Catskill*, ca. 1827. Lithograph, 14 1/8 x 10 3/8 in. Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Gift of Howard and Florence Merritt (97.17).

higher on Overlook Mountain, a few miles away in the Town of Woodstock. The fierce economic depression of 1837 waylaid their plans, but later on, a group of four young artists and poets appeared to put the mountaintop to a new use, and so brought landscape painters to Overlook for the first time.

Near Overlook's base and close to the magnificent series of waterfalls of the Platte Clove the group of four settled for the summer in what they called a brotherhood. The brothers climbed Overlook, prayed on Overlook, sketched on Overlook, sang hymns on Overlook. One was Charles Lanman, a prolific landscape painter, explorer, and travel writer. Among his many books was *Letters from*



Fig. 11

George Bellows, *Stag at Sharkey's*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 48 1/4 in. ©The Cleveland Museum of Art, Hinman B. Hurlbut Collection (1133.1922).

Stag at Sharkey's is perhaps the best-known painting of Bellows's career.⁴ The powerful bodies of muscular men locked in bloody combat is an image that both fascinates and repels. Although it was painted at a moment of transition in the legal and moral standing of the sport of boxing, Bellows ignored the newsworthy aspect of the topic to convey the brutality of the contest. Ringside spectators, many of them in evening dress, are transfixed with bloodlust. The boxers seem ironic pawns in a larger conflict between good and evil that takes place in the darkened reaches of Sharkey's boxing club.

Although Bellows exulted in the city's energy, he also sought solitude in the quiet spaces at the city's edge. For a man who had toyed with becoming a professional baseball player, the outdoors was a constant lure. Perched on a hillside overlooking the Hudson River, he painted another New York. In snowy riverscapes, among

them *North River* (1908, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts), daily anecdote is supplanted by the inexorable movement of the river.⁵ This kind of abrupt reversal characterized much of Bellows's career. With each unexpected shift, he rethought issues and refined his perspective, so that with hindsight, his work shows the nonlinear evolution of a man constantly seeking new ways to express his understanding of the world.

Marriage and Family

In 1910, after five years of pursuit, Emma Story agreed to marry George Bellows. With money from his father, Bellows bought a house at 146 East 19th Street, turned the ground floor into an apartment, the second floor into living quarters, and the third into a studio. The



Fig. 12

George Bellows, *Shore House*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 40 x 42 in. Collection of Rita and Daniel Fraad. Photo courtesy Peter A. Juley and Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Fig. 13

George Bellows, *The Sea*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 34 x 44 1/8 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1966. Photograph: Lee Stalworth.

informality of their wedding day was characteristic of their life. Emma arrived at the appointed time to discover George still in his carpentry clothes. While he dressed, she went to buy her wedding ring.⁶ Bellows painted *Shore House* the following January from sketches he made during their honeymoon in Montauk. A haunting image of a solitary home at the edge of the ocean, it is the first canvas in which he explored man's relationship to the sea.

He and Emma planned to spend the summer of 1911 at her parents' home in New Jersey, awaiting the September arrival of their first child. Bellows wandered about, sketched, and played baseball, but found it difficult to work. In July, when Henri wrote inviting him to the tiny island of Monhegan, Maine, Emma urged him to go. It proved a much-needed change of scene. After three weeks he reported that he had completed twelve paintings and thirty smaller panels. *An Island in the Sea* (1911, Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio), he wrote, was "a real sure enough masterpiece . . . which walks up to The Shore House and says Hello Kid. I'm with you."⁷ *The Sea*, which he painted after his return, is, in Franklin Kelly's words, a "vision of primeval power and force" akin to the

Prout's Neck paintings of Winslow Homer, who had died the previous year.⁸

In July 1913 Bellows returned to Monhegan with his family. Still captivated by the sea, and by the soft colors of the summer landscape, he worked alongside his friend and fellow painter Leon Kroll and spent a night on the equally small island of Matinicus in the home of a local fisherman. In the four months they were away he completed over a hundred oil sketches. At eighteen by twenty-two inches, *The Big Dory* is small by Bellows's standards, but its diminutive size belies the heroic impact of muscular fishermen pushing a boat into the water under a sky filled with dramatic clouds. Here, and in other canvases showing fishermen fixing nets and cleaning fish, Bellows admired the toughness of these toilers of the sea.

The Bellows family, which now included daughters Anne and Jean, returned to Maine in the summer of 1916. An adoring father, Bellows looked at the world through a different lens after the birth of his children. On this trip, he painted seascapes and portraits of his wife and daughters,



Fig. 14

George Bellows, *The Big Dory*, 1913. Oil on panel, 18 x 22 in. New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, Harriet Russell Stanley Fund (1944.21). Photograph: Michael Agee.

GEORGE BELLOWS

Paintings
and
Drawings



Plate 1

George Bellows
Evening Hills, October 1912
Oil on panel, 11 1/4 x 15 1/2 in.
The Doris and Herbert Sloan
Collection. Courtesy of H.V.
Allison & Co.

These were among the ten small paintings Bellows executed during his first known visit to the Catskill Mountains in the fall of 1912. He stayed with friends in Onteora Park, twelve miles north of Woodstock, which was the first arts colony in the region. Although they were small, Bellows did not consider his Onteora paintings to be minor works. One of them, *Evening Glow*, was chosen by Bellows to exhibit at the Armory Show in 1913.



Plate 2

George Bellows
Hills of September, October 1912
Oil on panel, 11 1/4 x 15 1/2 in.
Susan L. Peck. Courtesy of H.V. Allison & Co.



Plate 3

George Bellows

Woodstock Bridge, April 1920

Oil on canvas, 18 x 22 in.

Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Michael Kearney

Photograph: Rick Echelmeyer

Painted in early spring, 1920, Bellows's first Woodstock landscape contains many of the elements that would comprise the visual language of his future Catskill landscapes: dramatic lighting, some detailed painting, and a great deal of expressionistic brushwork.

Plate 4

George Bellows

Trout Stream and Mountains, April 1920

Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

Berry-Hill Galleries, New York

Well before Woodstock became a magnet for artists, the Sawkill and Beaverkill Creeks lured trout fishermen. The drama of color and form in the landscape is enhanced by the El Greco-like purple-gray sky, with hints of blue peeking through angular white clouds.

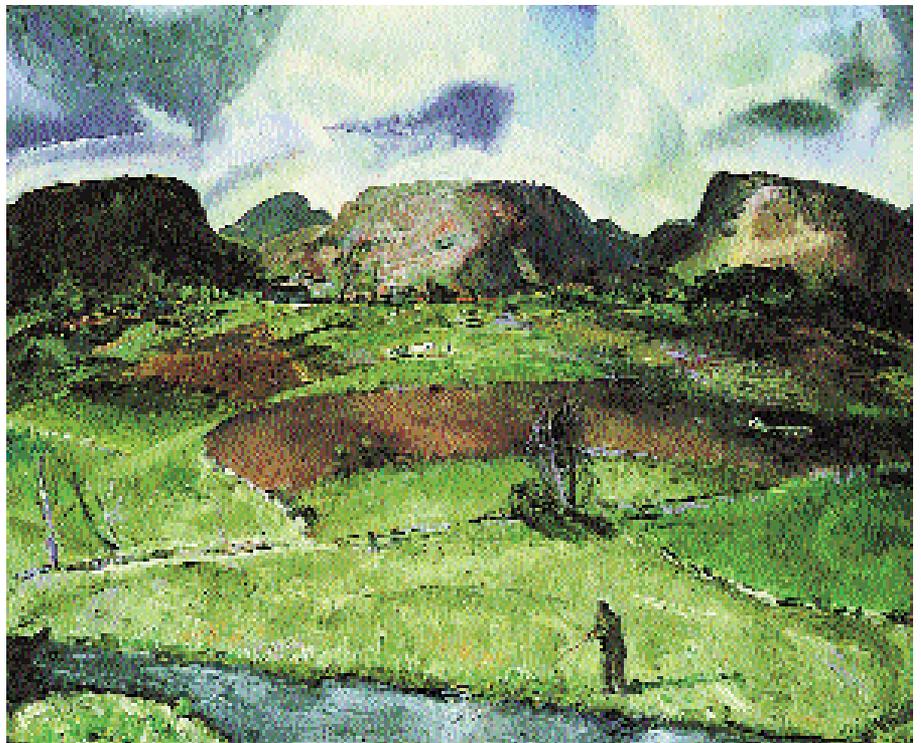




Plate 5

George Bellows

Emma at a Window, June 1920

Oil on canvas, 41 1/4 x 34 3/8 in.

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Emma Bellows was a favorite subject for many of her husband's paintings, drawings, and prints. In this painting, Emma's figure dominates the space; the Woodstock landscape seen through the curtained window and the colorfully upholstered chair in which Emma sits are secondary components.

Plate 6

George Bellows

Miss Ruth, June 1920

Oil on canvas, 44 x 34 in.

Private collection

On August 10, 1920, Bellows wrote from Woodstock to his friend Robert Henri, "I have really finished one ace, a portrait of the mother of Romany Marie." Romany Marie was a self-styled bohemian and restaurateur who lived in Greenwich Village and was known by many members of the Woodstock community. While it is not certain that the subject of this painting, Miss Ruth, was the subject of the painting Bellows speaks of in his letter to Henri, her dress and long braids suggest a connection with the lively artistic outpost, the Maverick, that Romany Marie frequented.





Plate 7

George Bellows

Anne, 1920Graphite on paper, 16¹⁵/₁₆ x 12⁵/₁₆ in.

The Cleveland Museum of Art,

Gift of Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. (1950.451)

Certainly one of the most classic interpretations of girlhood, *Anne in White* was painted by Bellows during the family's first summer at the Shotwell House. Anne was nine years old when she sat for her portrait. Her figure creates a strong triangle centered between the vertical of the door on the right, through which a Catskill mountain landscape may be seen, and the inventively patterned fabric panel on the left which seems to relate to the chair upholstery in *Emma at a Window*. The contrast between the bright and dark verticals anticipates the paired light and dark shutters that Bellows includes in his 1924 works.

The interior, brightly lit by the window, harkens back to Dutch paintings. In their 1995 Winslow Homer catalogue, Nikolai Cikovsky, Jr., and Franklin Kelly comment, "Dark interiors illuminated by brightly lighted windows are a virtual commonplace in Dutch paintings...."¹

Anne and her sister Jean earned small sums of money for posing for their father, to compensate for the hours lost from their playtime.



Plate 8

George Bellows

Anne in White, June 1920Oil on canvas, 57⁷/₈ x 42⁷/₈ in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Patrons Art Fund

Photograph: Richard A. Stoner

Both girls were very imaginative and produced stories and performances for the entertainment of their family and friends. Of the two sisters, Anne was considered the quieter and more pensive.

¹ Nikolai Cikovsky, Jr., and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 123.



Plate 23

George Bellows

Cornfield and Harvest, October 1921

Oil on panel, 17¹¹/₁₆ x 21⁵/₈ in.

Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Museum Purchase, Howald Fund (1947.096)

Over the years, the title of this painting has remained *Cornfield and Harvest*, but in the 1922 exhibition of the Society of Independents Artists, the painting was entitled *Cornfield at Harvest*, which seems more fitting. Is this painting a sly visual pun, a joke on Bellows's part, an example of disorder in order (the cow's in the corn)? Or, perhaps, does the painting simply convey Bellows's delight in the natural abundance of the region?

Autumn Brook contains many of the elements present in Bellows's finest Woodstock landscapes, including water, rolling hills, mountains, animal life, vegetation, and a dramatic sky. Bellows's choice of vivid colors celebrates the magnificence of nature and the artist's joy at finding himself immersed in it. The active brush strokes are indicative of Bellows's ability to project his immediate reaction to a scene directly onto the canvas with a controlled sense of abandon. In the center of *Autumn Brook* is a large evergreen tree stretching for the sky. Bellows provides a lovely counterpoint in the form of two wispy clouds reaching down from above.

A year earlier, Bellows may have been inspired by the same location in his painting *Cornfield and Harvest*, whose foreground bears a striking resemblance to the arrangement of streams and hillocks in *Autumn Brook*.



Plate 24

George Bellows

Autumn Brook, October 1922

Oil on panel, 16¹/₂ x 24 in.

Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Bequest of Muriel Englander Klepper and Marion Stratton Gould Fund (2001.27)

Photograph: James M. Via

George Bellows did not abandon his urban aesthetic when he painted in the countryside. Among his Woodstock landscapes are gritty views of run-down farms like the one he found in Toodleums, eight miles east of Woodstock, today called Veteran. Of all the paintings Bellows executed in Woodstock, *Old Farmyard, Toodleums* is the most close-up and direct view of a scene with very little in the way of background. With its wonderful portrayals of birds in flight, it is also among the most detailed. The barn depicted here still stands on the outskirts of the tiny town. A detail of a similar barn can be seen in the center of Konrad Cramer's abstract *Barns and Corner Porch*, painted the same year (plate 61).

In the circa 1922 records of the Woodstock Artists Association is a newspaper clipping entitled "Third Art Show at Woodstock: Last Exhibition for Season Modern Art Prevails – Many Visitors," which goes on to say "George Bellows, well-known portrait painter, has a large canvas portraying a barnyard scene which seems to be a curtsy to the new school." Presumably, this is a reference to the first time that *Old Farmyard, Toodleums* was on view; the "new school" may be a reference to modernism or abstraction.



Fig. 64

Farmyard in Toodleums, New York, 2002

Photograph: Ronald Netsky



Plate 25

George Bellows

Old Farmyard, Toodleums, August 1922

Oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 57 1/2 in.

Bank of America Art Collection