

George Bellows



Dempsey Firpo, 1924
oil on canvas, 51 x 63 1/4 in
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

The Artist

George Bellows

Born Columbus, Ohio 1882; died Woodstock, New York 1925

George Bellows is one of America's most famous artists and is known as the boy who chose the brush over the ball after he turned down a career in professional baseball to be an artist. He originally attended Ohio State University to play baseball, but had a change of heart and left the university in 1907 to study art in New York. While studying art, Bellows worked as a contributing illustrator to popular magazines like *Vanity Fair*. In 1906, he established his own studio and only two years later won a prestigious award from the National Academy of Design. Once he was an established artist in New York he became associated with the free-spirited group of artists and critics, known as The Eight. He was elected as an associate of the National Academy of Design in 1909. A year later, Bellows became a teacher at the Art Students League. He was also known for being one of the organizers of the avant-garde Armory Show in 1913. Bellows received praise from conservatives and radicals alike for a diverse subject matter, bold brush strokes, and portraits with an "American temperament". Bellows passed away unexpectedly from a ruptured appendix at the age of 43 after a 20-year career.

Art Movement

American Realism

This style of art depicted contemporary social realities and the lives and everyday activities of ordinary people. American realist works attempted to define what was real to the artist.

The Artwork

Dempsey and Firpo

This painting shows a critical moment in the famous Dempsey-Firpo fight in New York on Sept. 14, 1923. Bellows was commissioned by the *New York Journal* to cover the fight and make quick sketches on the spot. From these he later did a crayon drawing, two separate lithographs, and an oil painting.

The scene shows Dempsey knocked out of the ring by the Argentinian, Firpo, and about to be pushed back in time to save his title as “the Champ”.

Discussion Suggestions

Discuss the Painting:

- *How does Bellows make our attention go to the two fighters?*
- *Where are the dark areas of the painting? The light areas?*
- *How does Bellows make the figures look as if they are moving?*
- *Where do you see diagonal lines? Why are they important in this painting?*
- *What reactions to the fight are the people in the audience having? How do you know?*
- *How do the shadows on the two boxers help to make the painting look realistic?*

Activity Idea

Preactivity: Watch the video

<http://keepingscore.blogs.time.com/2010/04/17/top-10-boxing-matches-of-all-time/slide/jack-dempsey-vs-luis-angel-firpo-sept-14-1923/>

Activity Ideas:

- Have the children use cut-out sports images (they can bring their own) to create their own action-packed pictures. Have the kids draw the background. Before beginning, have them think about – what’s happening around the action, are there spectators, are they indoors or outdoors, what story does/will the picture tell, etc.
- Xerox copies of the boxers, and have children color them with colored pencil and attach them to a piece of paper with paper springs. To create the scene they could use markers to draw the background, and could use jute twine for the ropes.
- Have the children play charades with different sports – write their sports ideas on small pieces of paper then have each child draw one from a bowl. Each child is then allowed to draw one piece, and use ONE motion, to depict their sport. The rest of the children guess which sport is being depicted.
- Have children use black pipe cleaners to create a stick person doing their favorite sport. Have them think about how a body moves with each sport, and try to represent that motion. They could also create sports equipment (balls, goals, balance beams, etc.) and attach their figures to construction paper using poster putty or tape