Love of Winter
1914
by George Bellows
George Bellows (American, 1882–1925)

Love of Winter, 1914

Oil on canvas
32 1/2 x 40 1/2 in. (81.6 x 101.6 cm)
Friends of American Art Collection, 1914.1018

When George Bellows taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1919, he told his students, “You don’t know what you are able to do until you try it. Try everything that can be done.” Bellows practiced what he preached, approaching his own life and work with great energy and enthusiasm. During his brief career, spanning less than 20 years, he created a rich collection of paintings that mirror the first quarter-century of urban American life. Bellows's style and subject matter had broad appeal because it expressed the American culture of his day—vividly and honestly.

Raised in the nation’s heartland, Bellows was as American as apple pie. He grew up in Columbus, Ohio, went to college at Ohio State University, and loved to play baseball. However, in the midst of this traditional Midwestern childhood and education, he showed a strong talent for drawing. When it was time to decide on a career, he shocked family and friends by choosing art. At Ohio State, he studied art history and made illustrations for the school yearbook but was not satisfied. To the dismay of his parents, Bellows dropped out of college at the end of his junior year and left the Midwest for New York City, already the center of American arts at the turn of the century.

The National Academy of Design, a self-perpetuating club of artists, controlled the city’s artistic endeavors. One of its members, William Merritt Chase, founded the New York School of Art where artists, controlled the city's artistic endeavors. One of its members, William Merritt Chase, founded the New York School of Art where artists, controlled the city's artistic endeavors. One of its members, William Merritt Chase, founded the New York School of Art where artists, controlled the city's artistic endeavors. One of its members, William Merritt Chase, founded the New York School of Art where artists, controlled the city's artistic endeavors. One of its members, William Merritt Chase, founded the New York School of Art where artists, controlled the city's artistic endeavors. One of its members, William Merritt Chase, founded the New York School of Art where artists, controlled the city's artistic endeavors. 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He felt that “the ideal artist is he who knows everything, feels everything, experiences everything, and retains his experience in a spirit of wonder and feeds upon it with creative lust.... The artist is the man who makes life more interesting or beautiful, more understandable or mysterious, or probably, in the best sense, more wonderful.”

Bellows followed this philosophy throughout his short career. By the time he was 24, he was exhibiting his work regularly at the National Academy of Design and winning considerable acclaim for his powerful urban scenes. In 1909 he became the youngest artist ever elected an associate member of the Academy. When Bellows was 37 years old, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago invited him to lecture for two months during an exhibition of his work at the museum. His lifetime achievements were commendable, especially as an artist who died so tragically young; in the span of about 20 years, he managed to create more paintings and receive more recognition for his work than most artists achieve in twice as much time.

Bellows painted everything he encountered in the city: ethnic neighborhoods, circus acts, young children playing in the street, boxing matches, and scenes like this 1914 genre painting, Love of Winter. In January of 1914, lamenting over the lack of snow that season, Bellows had written to a friend “There has been none of my favorite snow. I must paint the snow at least once a year.” One month later the weather granted his wish and inspired this painting.

Love of Winter depicts the excitement and speed of skating outdoors in the middle of winter. Though the background suggests a rural setting with its sloping hills and large trees, Bellows used a pond in Central Park as his setting. Note how he contrasts the background, an expanse of blue-gray hills and trees, with the boldly colored and vigorously rendered figures in the fore- and middle grounds. His use of bright dynamic colors and his strong brushstrokes convey the mood and action of the scene. Bellows captured a moment of time on his canvas, “freezing” the skaters and spectators as they enjoy a crisp winter day. All the skaters bend forward and move to the left. The rest of the figures, standing in the foreground, remain vertical with only a slight suggestion of movement of the arms or head.

A devoted husband and father, Bellows often painted portraits of his wife Emma and two daughters, Anne and Jean. When he painted Love of Winter, his eldest daughter was a three-and-a-half-year-old toddler. Which figures in the painting might be Emma and Anne?

Note the contrast between the deep blue tones of the hills and trees in the background and the vibrant array of colors used for the skaters in the foreground. Which figures stand out the most? Why?

George Bellows’s career was tragically cut short when he died suddenly of appendicitis at age 42. Fortunately, he left behind a legacy of beautiful, energetic, and colorful representations of early 20th-century American life. Love of Winter is a timeless painting. It brings to mind nostalgic memories and reminds us that Bellows’s “spirit of wonder” is in us all.
Glossary

**Ashcan School**: another name for the Eight that stemmed from this group’s depictions of the back-alley life of working-class people.

**Central Park**: an expansive New York City public park designed by Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux between 1852 and the late 1880s. Central Park was constructed as a result of a city competition, which they won. It includes walkways, fields, woods, lakes, and ponds, such as the one in Bellows’s painting. Today, ice skating takes place on a rink in the park, instead of a frozen pond.

**The Eight**: A group of artists who advocated depicting the everyday lives of ordinary people in urban settings in an honest and straightforward way. The group was lead by Robert Henri and included George Luks, William Glackens, Everett Shinn, Maurice Prendergast, Ernest Lawson, Arthur B. Davies, and John Sloan.

**genre scene**: a scene from everyday life

**Robert Henri** (1865–1929): artist who received his training from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. He believed art should embody the spirit of its own time. Henri tried to portray human dignity in his paintings whether the subjects were the wealthy elite or peasant immigrants.

Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions

- **Discuss the people in the painting.**
  Who is in the foreground; who is in the background? Where are the children in the painting? Which people in the painting are the most active? Which are the most inactive? Have students look closely at Emma and Anne, the two figures in the center foreground of the picture. Anne was three-and-a-half years old when this was painted, yet she seems much older. Discuss Anne’s figure in terms of proportion. Using Emma’s figure as a scale, how tall should Anne really be?

- **Create a favorite season painting.**
  After studying and discussing Bellows’s painting Love of Winter, have students choose their favorite season and paint a picture showing the kinds of activities they like to do during that season. Ask them to think about movement in their painting. How would they convey movement?

- **Create a lesson about color.**
  Have students study and briefly discuss a color chart and color families. Ask students to name all of the cool colors in Love of Winter and then all of the warm colors. Discuss how the colors are used and which colors are used the most. How do the colors make you feel? Cool colors recede on the plane of a painting, and warm colors come forward. Bellows uses warm colors to grab the viewer’s attention to the two central figures of Emma and Anne. Have students trace with their eyes the use of yellow paint in Love of Winter—from the two figures in the middle foreground through the lake and trees all the way to the sky. Try this with another color in the painting like red or white. Have students make two drawings: one with cool colors and one with warm colors. Make a list of themes or subjects associated with each color. From the list, have students choose one theme or subject for each painting of warm and cool colors. After they have made their two drawings, hang them in the room and have the students group them according to color families. Are the themes for each color group similar? If different, how so and why?
• Bellows used many different types of brush strokes when he applied the paint on the canvas for Love of Winter. Have the students examine the painting and discuss the different kinds of brushstrokes they find (wide, narrow, long, short, curved, straight, etc.) and how the brush strokes are used to create different objects and textures in the painting. Ask students to consider why Bellows chose loose rather than more precise brushstrokes. Provide a variety of paintbrushes in various sizes and have the students practice Bellows's brushstroke techniques.

• People dressed very differently in 1914 from how they dress today. Have students look at and discuss the clothing people are wearing in Love of Winter. What do the figures' fashionable dress tell us about their lifestyles? Ask students to research athletic or leisure clothing for men and women during the first quarter of the 20th century, the 1950s, and the 1990s. How did these outfits function? How were these outfits a sign of their time? What does clothing say about a person? Have students research the history of leisure sports or exercise and how they have changed over time, relating their findings to the leisure clothing of each era.

• Ashcan artists like Bellows liked to depict the middle class at leisure. They looked at how social relationships were changing during the rapid growth of industry in early 20th-century America. Have students look at paintings by other Ashcan artists like Robert Henri, George Luks, or John Sloan. Discuss how these artists presented themes and subject matter in their work. How are their paintings an illustrated social history of early 20th-century America? For older students, compare the goals and painting styles of French Impressionists to the Ashcan School (see Art Institute’s teaching packet on Impressionism).

Related Resources for Teachers


Related Resources for Students


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