

You are looking at a high resolution digital reproduction of a painting made by the American artist George Bellows in 1911, titled *New York*.

How did George Bellows become an artist?

Given the choice of becoming an artist or a professional baseball player, which would you choose? Growing up in Ohio in the 1890s, George Bellows loved both sports and art. In college, he drew illustrations for the school yearbook, sang in the glee club, and played basketball and baseball. In his early twenties, he was offered the chance to play professional baseball, but turned it down to become an artist.

In 1904, Bellows moved to New York to pursue his career in art. He enrolled in the New York School of Art, studying under the well-known teacher and artist Robert Henri. Henri encouraged students to be inspired by real life. He wrote: "Draw your material from the life around you, from all of it. There is beauty in everything if it looks beautiful to your eyes." Bellows, together with a group of New York artists, followed Henri's advice, and focused on painting the gritty side of city life. Bellows' early paintings depicted New York's busy streets, boxing matches, construction sites, commercial docks, and poor neighborhoods.

Many artists in the early twentieth century worked as reporters and illustrators. Before the widespread use of photography in newspapers and magazines, their drawings served to document current events. As a painter of modern life Bellows focused on contemporary social, economic, and political issues, including poverty and the impact of large construction projects on neighborhoods. He said, "Every artist is looking for news. He is a great reporter of life, keeping his eyes open for some ...untold piece of reality to put on his canvas. His picture chooses him."