

How did Bellows choose to show the city of New York?

When George Bellows painted *New York* in 1911, the city was quickly becoming the nation's preeminent modern city. Imagine yourself standing in the middle of this scene. What might you hear, smell, or feel?

Bellows captured the whirlwind of activity on a winter day. The picture is a congestion of buildings, signage, and people and goods on the move. Motorcars mingle with horse-drawn carts and trolleys while pedestrians hurry along packed sidewalks. When Bellows created this work of art, the traffic light had not yet been invented. In the painting you can see a policeman trying to direct traffic, a street cleaner busy sweeping, and a woman stopping at a vegetable cart. Bellows use of loose, expressive brushstrokes conveys the energy of the scene.

Although the painting's general location is Madison Square, at the intersection of Broadway and 23rd Street, Bellows imaginatively combined elements that could not be seen from a single viewpoint. Many of Manhattan's most famous features are here: skyscrapers, apartment buildings, elevated train tracks, a subway entrance, electric signs, advertising billboards, a tree-lined park, and dense crowds. While these features are familiar today, they represented an awe-inspiring, modern experience for most people at the beginning of the twentieth century. During Bellows' life, New York was becoming a metropolis with vast building projects that included new bridges, railroad stations, and skyscrapers. The energy, drama, and scope of these engineering feats fascinated Bellows, and he made many paintings—such as this one—documenting the rapidly changing urban landscape.

Bellows noted, "I paint New York because I live in it and because the most essential thing for me to paint is the life about me, the things I feel today and that are part of the life of today."