

Open Windows 6

December 2014

**The Macabre in
the Work of Hans
Baldung Grien**
Mariela Bargeño

p 3



**Rousseau and
Fontainebleau,
beyond Brushes**
Águeda B.
Esteban Gallego

p 7



**Camille Pissarro:
*Rue Saint-Honoré
in the Afternoon,
Effect of Rain,*
1897**

Paula Luengo

p 11



**New Sources for the Study
of *A Grandmother***

Clara Marcellán

p 15

Open Windows 6

The articles in this new issue of *Open Windows* take us into the darker side of Hans Baldung Grien's work and his treatment of death; reveal Rousseau's defense of the forest of Fontainebleau and its controversial exploitation as a source of tourism and artistic subjects; draw attention to the significance of *Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon*, *Effect of Rain* in Pissarro's trajectory; and, last but not least, present new information about *A Grandmother*, by George Bellows.

The Macabre in the Work of Hans Baldung Grien

Mariela Bargaño



Fig. 1
Detail of Grien's
monogram at lower left
in *The Fall of Man*, 1511
Engraving, 311 × 251 mm
Rijksprentenkabinet,
Amsterdam

Hans Baldung Grien was born in the town of Schwäbisch Gmünd, southwest Germany, in late 1484 or early 1485. Although little is known about his origins, it is certain that he did not come from a family of craftsmen. Regarding the surname Baldung, records from the time mention two: one a lawyer at the Episcopal Court in Strasbourg and the other – Hieronymus Baldung¹ – a doctor of medicine and honorary physician to the Emperor Maximilian I. Hans's brother Caspar is also known to have taught at the University of Freiburg and to have later become a judge at the Imperial courts.

Baldung embarked on his career around 1500, probably in Strasbourg and apprenticed to a follower of the great painter and engraver from Colmar (Alsace) Martin Schongauer (c. 1430-91). He thus received his initial training in the Upper Rhine region. Three years later, he was apprenticed to Albrecht Dürer at the artist's Nuremberg workshop.

Various theories exist as to when and why he adopted the nickname "Grien". Some state that he received it in the early years at the Strasbourg workshop or when he was with Dürer, but other explanations may be that in his youth his favourite colour was green, or that he preferred clothes of that colour, or that the leaf which usually appears in his monograms² [fig. 1] is green, or even that he used it to distinguish himself from other apprentices of Dürer's called Hans. Whatever the case, in 1510 his monogram became "H.B.G."³

The fact that Dürer left Baldung in charge of the workshop when he embarked on his second journey to Italy in 1505 is proof of the close friendship between master and apprentice. Indeed, the relationship was to last a further two decades.

In 1507 Baldung was summoned to the town of Halle, where he painted the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* altarpiece (now in the Germanisches Museum, Nuremberg). Two years later he returned to Strasbourg, where he obtained citizenship. In 1510 he married Margarethe Herlin, the daughter of a middle-class merchant, and established his own workshop.

Between 1509 and 1512 Baldung was obsessed with sorcery, witchcraft and death. Dating from around this period are the drawing *Three Witches* (1514, Musée du Louvre, Paris) and *The Three Ages of Woman and Death* (c. 1510-11, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). These themes were recurrent throughout his career.

Between 1512 and 1517 he painted the extremely ambitious altarpiece for the high altar of Freiburg cathedral. One of the eleven paintings, *The Coronation of the Virgin* [fig. 2], has been described as expressive mannerism and somewhat eccentric. "The Virgin is too self-conscious, God the Father lacks the proper degree of godliness, Christ is weak and effeminate..." Furthermore, the painting lacks the monumentality typical of Dürer.⁴



Fig. 2
Hans Baldung Grien
The Coronation of the Virgin, 1512-16
Oil on panel, 280 × 239 cm
Freiburg cathedral



Fig. 3
Lucas Cranach the Elder
Venus and Cupid, 1509
Oil on canvas, 213 × 102 cm
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg



Fig. 4
Hans Baldung Grien
Eve, 1525
Oil on panel, 208 × 83.5 cm
Szépművészeti Múzeum,
Budapest

When Albrecht Dürer died in 1528, Baldung was sent a lock of his hair, again proving just how close their friendship was. There is no doubt that Dürer's most gifted pupil inherited his skill and knowledge from his master, although it is also true that he developed a unique style of his own characterised as impetuous and energetic and on occasion informal and light-hearted.⁵ He was also strongly influenced by the styles of Matthias Grünewald (1475/80-1528), Jan Mabuse (1478-1532) and Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553).⁶ He died in 1545.

Brief notes on the theme of death and its representation

Hans Baldung Grien's art reflects a lifelong obsession with the concepts of sin, witchcraft and death. This is why so many of his works were inspired by the Dances of Death.

The Dance of Death was a form of Christian reflection on death that originated and developed between the 14th and 16th centuries in response to the Black Death and other pandemics, famines, wars and droughts of the age. The first references are found in a number of poems written in Latin in the 13th century, known as *Vado Mori*, and in the theme known as *the three living men and the three dead men* (possibly of Eastern origin and widely found in late 13th-century Europe), in which three men returning from a hunt meet three corpses or skeletons who remind them of the fleetingness of existence.⁷

Other references also exist in Latin texts from the early to mid-15th century containing advice on procedures for a "good death" or how to "die well", according to Christian precepts. These are known as the *Ars Moriendi*.

In the 15th century, Dances of Death were performed all over Europe. The participants probably numbered twenty-four and represented different social stations (kings, bishops, peasants, etc.), and each was invited to dance by another figure representing death. Although little is known about the development of the dances, their purpose is known to have been to exalt life while serving as a reminder of its fleetingness, as all too soon Death will come to claim it. In this respect, death was seen as a levelling force between all social classes.

Outstanding examples of depictions of this kind can be found in books illustrated with wood prints and among the engravings by the Nuremberg painter and engraver Michael Wolgemut (1434-1519)⁸ [fig. 5], as well as in Hans Holbein the Younger's (1497-1543)⁹ [fig. 6] Dance of Death (*Totentanz*) series. Specific dating is not possible but experts generally agree that the theme first appeared in Baldung Grien's production in the period between 1509 and 1520.



Fig. 5
Michael Wolgemut
The Dance of Death, from
Liber chronicarum, 1493
Woodcut, 470 × 324 mm
National Gallery of Art,
Washington



Fig. 6
Hans Holbein the Younger
The Noble Lady, from
*Les simulacres et historiées
faces de la mort*, La
Dance Macabre, 1538
Woodcut
British Museum, London



Fig. 7
Hans Baldung Grien
The Fall of Man, 1511
Woodcut, 371 × 251 mm
Rijksprentenkabinet,
Amsterdam



Fig. 8
Hans Baldung Grien
Death and the Maiden, 1515
Drawing
Kupferstichkabinett,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
SPK, Berlin

The macabre in Hans Baldung Grien's work

Executed in the expressionist style prevalent in early 16th-century Germany, Baldung's works have a strong psychological impact and are forceful in style and on some occasions intentionally informal and unabashed.

Despite the importance of diabolical fantasies in Baldung's work, the existence of evil and sin combined with a distinct sensuality are often the *leitmotif*. In *The Fall of Man* of 1511 [fig. 7], a seductive Eve gazes out at the spectator while Adam stands behind her fondling her breast as he glances at the apple in her left hand. Here it could be said that the artist drew an analogy between the forbidden fruit and Eve's breast.¹⁰ The scene is strongly influenced by a work of Albrecht Dürer's which, although similar, does not possess the same degree of sensuality.

The figure of Eve is again found in the oil on panel painting *Eve, the Serpent and Death* [fig. 9] of around 1515. Here the artist left Adam out of the scene, substituting him – even replacing him¹¹ – with Death in a clear allusion to the driving forces of life and death as represented through Eros and Thanatos. It is interesting how Death grasps Eve's arm while the serpent bites his wrist.¹²

This painting is highly charged with symbolism: Death is the representation of Adam as a corpse¹³ reproaching Eve for the act she has just committed. It could thus be seen as an interpretation of the Christian myth regarding the origin of death. The extremely interesting relationship between Adam and Death established by Baldung is not an isolated case in his oeuvre. He painted Adam and Eve again in 1531 in a canvas now belonging to the Museo Thyssen [fig. 10].¹⁴

Here Adam stands behind Eve in a distinctly provocative pose with his left hand resting gently on her hips as he fondles her breast with his right hand. Both gaze out at the spectator, interacting with him and making him Adam's accomplice¹⁵ – even causing a certain rivalry between Adam and the spectator – while Adam flaunts Eve's beauty. Eve is dressed in a very thin garment which, rather than concealing her body, accentuates her genital area. Flimsy garments of this kind are common in pictures of female nudes of the time and were featured as erotic elements (as for example in Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Venus* of 1532).

In conclusion, Hans Baldung Grien the artist was deeply preoccupied with sin, death and sensuality, which he depicted with skill similar to that of his master, Albrecht Dürer, and approached the majority of his works with a markedly moralistic and spiritual viewpoint.



Fig. 9
Hans Baldung Grien
Eve, the Serpent and Death,
c. 1515
Oil on panel, 64 × 32.5 cm
National Gallery of Canada,
Ottawa



Fig. 10
Hans Baldung Grien
Adam and Eve, 1531
Oil on panel, 147.5 × 6.3 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid
[\[+ info\]](#)

Notes



Fig. 11
Hans Baldung Grien
Adam (detail), c. 1524
Oil on panel, 208 × 83.5 cm
Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest

- 1 On page 4 of the exhibition catalogue *Hans Baldung Grien, Prints and Drawings* (James H. Marrow and Alan Shestack, *Hans Baldung Grien: Prints and Drawings*. [Exh. cat. Washington, National Gallery of Art, 25 January-5 April 1981; New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 23 April-14 June 1981]. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981), his father is identified as Johann Baldung and Hieronymus Baldung is listed as his uncle. However, on page 19 of the catalogue *Witches' Lust and the Fall of Man* (Bodo Brinkmann, *Witches' Lust and the Fall of Man. The Strange Phantasies of Hans Baldung Grien*. [Exh. cat. Frankfurt, Städel Museum, 24 February-13 May 2007]. Petersberg, Imhof, 2007), Hans Baldung Grien's father is listed as anonymous.
- 2 See Brinkmann 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
- 3 As regards his beginnings as an artist, the workshop where he was apprenticed and the origin of the nickname "Grien", there are many opinions and much controversy when it comes to dating his works. In addition to the catalogues mentioned above see Robert A. Koch, *Eve, the Serpent and Death*, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1974, p. 10.
- 4 Marrow and Shestack 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- 5 If we compare Baldung's *chiaroscuro* print *The Fall of Man* (1511) and a work by Dürer of the same name of 1504, the master's stylistic legacy is evident in Baldung's treatment of the female form, a subject which Baldung was later to develop further.
- 6 To the untrained eye, Hans Baldung Grien's female nudes can be mistaken for Cranach's due to the similarity of styles: see figs. 3 and 4.
- 7 See Juan Barja, *La Danza de la Muerte. Seguido de un texto de John Ruskin y del Códice Del Escorial. Hans Holbein*, Madrid, Abada, 2008, p. 8; and *Del Amor y la Muerte. Dibujos y grabados de la Biblioteca Nacional*, [Exh. cat. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, July-October 2001], Barcelona, Fundació Caixa Catalunya, p. 188.
- 8 It is interesting to note that Michael Wolgemut was also Albrecht Dürer's master.
- 9 Of great interest regarding depictions of the Dance of Death are: the work of the Paris engraver Guy Marchant, who in 1485 copied the now lost murals of the Dance of Death in the Saints Innocents cemetery in Paris; the frescoes painted by the monk John Lydgate in the Gothic Basilica of St Paul's, London, which were destroyed in the great fire of 1666; and the mid-15th-century frescoes in the Marienkirche, Lübeck (also destroyed). In modern times, the Dance of Death is performed in Verges (Gerona) every year on Maundy Thursday. The event is unique for having survived across the centuries.
- 10 See Brinkmann 2007, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-63.
- 11 *ibid.*, p. 176; see also Marrow and Shestack, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
- 12 Death emerges from behind the Tree of Knowledge in a reference to the Christian principle that knowledge is sin and human desire for knowledge can only bring death (Koch 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 24).
- 13 Marrow and Shestack, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- 14 On p. 178 of *El diablo: una máscara sin rostro*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2002, L. Luther compares the figure of Adam in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza picture to the Devil, a theory supported by the curls in Adam's hair, which resemble horns. The same can be said of the 1524 oil painting *Adam* [fig. 11].
- 15 Brinkmann 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

Rousseau and Fontainebleau, beyond Brushes

Águeda B. Esteban Gallego



Fig. 1
Théodore Rousseau
The Colliers' Hut in the Forest of Fontainebleau, ca. 1855
Oil on canvas, 34.2 × 42.1 cm
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, on deposit at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)



Fig. 2
Étienne Carjat
Photograph of Théodore Rousseau, ca. 1865
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The Colliers' Hut in the Forest of Fontainebleau, painted by Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867) around 1855, was acquired by Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza in 1999. Today it is part of the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, on deposit at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

In this work, Rousseau presents a small hut surrounded by trees near a little copse. It depicts the calm after a storm, which has left behind a puddle, in the foreground.¹

Sensier, the artist's friend and biographer, describes Rousseau's works and explains how the artist begins with a grey preparation upon which he lays out a large mass of trees, spreading the medium with a painting knife and adding tiny, almost imperceptible touches.²

The painting is but one example of the numerous works Rousseau would devote to Fontainebleau, a place that would leave its mark on his life and his painting. Rousseau would become one of the nineteenth century's great defenders of the natural environment.

Frédéric Henriot claimed in 1876 that "the forest of Fontainebleau is the true school of contemporary landscape painting", but Fontainebleau, located about fifty-five kilometres outside Paris, was not simply a subject to be painted.³ In the middle of the nineteenth century, when our current concerns about climate change and the ozone layer remained far in the future, artists like Rousseau defended real nature—nature devoid of artifice—the beauty of desolate wilderness or a wood full of different kinds of trees, plants, flowers and animals.

The artist settled in Barbizon in 1847, from whence he wrote, enthusiastically describing the views from his studio. He praises the elegance of the poplars, the majesty of the oaks; he marvels at every detail that he observes in nature and bemoans the fact that few any longer can enjoy it. Sensier quotes Rousseau to explain for us at first hand the profound sentiments that the artist held for nature: "I could also hear the voices of the trees; the unexpected surprises of their movements, the variety of their forms, and even the singularity with which they are attracted to the light suddenly revealed to me the language of the forests: that entire world of flora [...] whose passions I was discovering".⁴

Rousseau and the other members of the Barbizon school became particularly committed to the cause in support of the forest of Fontainebleau. The first time that the alarm was raised was when, between 1830 and 1847, one of the areas of open ground was replanted with fifteen million pine trees on the order of Louis Philippe and M. de Bois d'Hyver, who was then the inspector of woodlands. It was the largest reforestation effort ever before carried out: some six thousand hectares—which came to more than twenty times the number of trees replanted in the three previous decades combined—and over a quarter of the total area of the forest of Fontainebleau.⁵ At first blush, this might strike one as an ecologically sound strategy, but the sole purpose of



Fig. 3
Nicolas de Fer
Plate 78, *Plan général de la forêt de Fontainebleau en 1705* (General map of the forest of Fontainebleau, 1705). Château de Versailles



Fig. 4
Alfred Sisley
The Painter Claude Monet in the Forest of Fontainebleau, ca. 1865. Oil on canvas, 36 × 55 cm
Saarland Museum, Saarbrücken



Fig. 5
Augustin Entfaint
An Artist Painting in the Forest of Fontainebleau, ca. 1825
Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 26.7 × 34.3 cm
Private collection



Fig. 6
Théodore Rousseau
Massacre of the Innocents, 1847
Oil on canvas, 94 × 147 cm
The Mesdag Collection, The Hague



Fig. 7
Claude Monet
Luncheon on the Grass, 1865
Oil on canvas, 130 × 181 cm
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow



Fig. 8
Poster,
Fontainebleau,
Its Palace
and Its Forest
Château de
Fontainebleau



Fig. 9
Anonymous
View from "la Roche qui Pleure", from
the album *Souvenirs de Fontainebleau*
Lithograph, 34.6 × 55 cm

this reforestation was for the trees to be later cleared by local wood merchants. Fontainebleau had ceased to be a “wild” forest and had become a “cultivated” wood.⁶ Rousseau and his colleagues could not abide that manipulation of nature, which turned it into some sort of artificial tree factory. To that effect, the painter complained that “Mankind bustles about in his ignorance, inverts the order of nature and disturbs the balance in disrupting the compensations”.⁷ In the same sense, Georges Gassies reveals all the artists’ vexation with the decision to plant fast-growing pine trees rather than the majestic, native oaks: “At that time, the entire area near Barbizon was free of all these horrid plantations of pines, which are, it is true, productive for the administration”.⁸

As early as 1785 there had been an attempt to introduce plantations of coastal pine trees into France, but their success was very limited. Later, however, plantings of Scots pines imported from Sweden proved successful.⁹ Since the trees grow quickly and also do not require very specific climatological conditions, it was a boon to the market in wood.

For Rousseau, the felling of trees was nothing less than a “massacre”, which he made manifest in a work from 1847 titled *Massacre of the Innocents*, now in the Mesdag Collection in The Hague, and which portrays one of those habitual acts of disproportionate destruction. The artist never completed this painting, though he worked on it throughout his life and kept it in his studio as a reminder of that drama.

Rousseau would persevere throughout his life in the struggle to maintain Fontainebleau’s original nature. Initially he addressed the authorities, alleging that “[The administration] indiscriminately cuts down trees whose great age, fame and artistic beauty should make them respected”.¹⁰ The administration ignored his protestations, but this did not stop the artist. He decided then to make an appeal to Claude François Denecourt, Fontainebleau’s superintendent, who since 1832 had been focused, almost obsessively, on making Fontainebleau a major tourist attraction. Denecourt replied to Rousseau—without referring to him by name—in a pamphlet titled “La guerre déclarée à mes sentiers!” (War declared on my trails!), in which he claims that “Certain artists say, ‘We don’t like your trails precisely because they have civilised the forest too much and they lead to too many unwanted visitors so that we can no longer paint either a site or even the most minor study without distraction...’ In truth, these artists would be more comfortable if our sites were forbidden to the 80 or 100,000 tourists and walkers who visit this lovely area of Fontainebleau annually; but in general, they are too just to want to keep the enjoyment of our picturesque deserts to themselves and equally too intelligent to reprove someone who, I repeat, has furnished so many subjects, so many treasures for their brushes to explore.”¹¹



Fig. 10
G. La Fosse
The Belle-Croix Pond, illustration to “Train de plaisir à Fontainebleau”, in *Le Journal Amusant*, no. 994, 18 September 1875

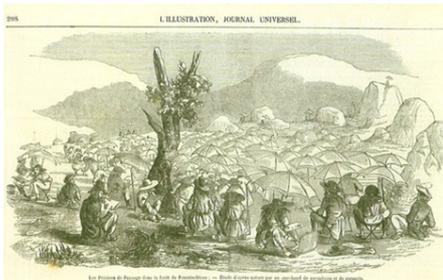


Fig. 11
Anonymous
Landscape of Painters in the Forest of Fontainebleau: Study of Nature by a Merchant of Umbrellas and Parasols. Cartoon in *L'illustration* 14, no. 352, 24 November 1849



Fig. 12
Cham
Excursions to Fontainebleau. Cartoon in *Le Journal Amusant*, no. 461, 29 October 1864

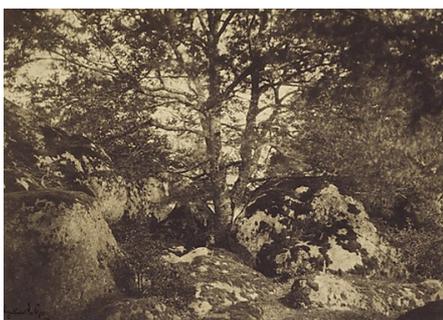


Fig. 13
Gustave Le Gray
Oak Tree and Rocks, Forest of Fontainebleau, 1849–52
Photograph, 25.2 × 35.7 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

But Rousseau would not give up. In 1852, together with Sensier and in the name of the other artists of the Barbizon school, he defended their cause before the emperor Napoleon III himself, through the intercession of the Duke of Morny.¹² They sought the conservation of certain areas, to be kept free of tourists and reforestation and left exclusively to undefiled nature and to artists at work: “I ask you for protection, Monseigneur, for these old trees which for artists are the source from which they derive their inspiration and their future, and which are for all visitors, venerable souvenirs of ages past”.¹³ In the end, Rousseau triumphed. On 14 April 1861, the emperor signed a decree protecting over 1600 hectares from cultivation, reserving 1000 exclusively for the purposes of the work of artists. Indeed, the decree provided for an area larger than that which the painter had sought, making him a guiding light for his colleagues in the Barbizon school.

This victory made Fontainebleau the world’s first nature reserve.¹⁴ In 1872, the Committee for the Artistic Conservation of the Forest of Fontainebleau was created. From that point, other artists and humanists from the period, like Millet, Daubigny, Corot and Victor Hugo, joined forces to protect the forest. In 1874 they presented a new petition to preserve another 1000 hectares and to name the forest of Fontainebleau a national monument. As Victor Hugo declared, “A tree is an edifice, a forest is a city, and amongst all the forests, the forest of Fontainebleau is a monument”.¹⁵ In the event, they obtained an expansion of the nature reserve, though not the official title of National Historical Monument.

Fontainebleau thereafter became the obligatory destination of any respectable landscape artist from the period.

Unlike the Impressionists, who represented sensations derived from their direct experience of nature, their predecessors like Rousseau painted their feelings towards nature. A work is not just a painting; it is a story, a fragment of the artist’s biography, a part of him. To conclude, we shall redirect our gaze towards the work that brought us here in the first place: *The Colliers’ Hut in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, the hut from which we have contemplated the origin, the first green shoots, of the emerging science of ecology. It is a hut surrounded by rainwater, a characteristic element in Rousseau’s work that, as Greg Thomas has aptly explained, flows through his canvases giving life to the landscape, in the same way that blood flows through our veins in order to give life to our bodies.¹⁶

Notes

- 1 Michel Schulman, *Théodore Rousseau, 1812–1867: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint* (Paris: Éditions de l'Amateur, 1999).
- 2 Alfred Sensier, *Souvenirs sur Théodore Rousseau* (Paris: Léon Techner, 1872), p. 199.
- 3 “La forêt de Fontainebleau, c'est la véritable école du paysage contemporain”. Frédéric Henriet, *Le Paysagiste aux champs* (Paris, 1876), p. 9; quoted in Vincent Pomarède, “Songe à Barbizon, cette histoire est sublime”, in *L'École de Barbizon: Peintre en plein air avant l'impressionnisme*, ed. Vincent Pomarède and Gérard Wallens, exh. cat., Musée des Beaux Arts de Lyon (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2002), p. 30.
- 4 “J'entendais la voix des arbres, les surprises de leurs mouvements, leurs variétés de formes et jusqu'à leur singularité d'attraction vers la lumière m'avaient tout d'un coup révélé le langage des forêts, tout ce monde de flore [...] dont je découvrais les passions”. Sensier, *Souvenirs*, p. 52n2.
- 5 Kimberly Jones, “Landscapes, Legends, Souvenirs, Fantasies: The Forest of Fontainebleau in the Nineteenth Century”, in *In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 20–21.
- 6 G. Tendron, *La Forêt de Fontainebleau: De l'écologie à la sylviculture* (Fontainebleau: Office nationale des forêts, 1983), p. 9.
- 7 “L'homme s'agit dans son ignorance, intervertit l'ordre dans la nature et rompt les équilibres en troublant les compensations». Ibid., pp. 14–15.
- 8 “Dans ce temps-là, tout ce qui a voisine immédiatement Barbizon était vierge de ces atroces plantations de pins qui sont, il est vrai, productives pour l'administration”. Georges Gassies, *Le Vieux Barbizon: Souvenirs de jeunesse d'un paysagiste, 1852–1875* (Paris, 1907); quoted in Pomarède, “Songe”, p. 27n3.
- 9 Jones, “Landscapes”, p. 21n5.
- 10 Ibid., p. 20.
- 11 Claude-François Denecourt: “La guerre déclarée à mes sentiers”, in *L'Indicateur de Fontainebleau: Itinéraire descriptif du palais, de la forêt et des environs* (Fontainebleau, 1855); quoted in Jones, “Landscapes”, p. 22n5.
- 12 The letter may be found in Greg M. Thomas, *Art and Ecology in Nineteenth-Century France: The Landscapes of Théodore Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 214–17.
- 13 Jones, “Landscapes”, p. 22n5.
- 14 Chantal Georgel, “Un héritage pour la forêt d'aujourd'hui, et de demain”, in *La Forêt de Fontainebleau: Un atelier grandeur nature*, exh. cat. (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 2007), p. 175.
- 15 Jones, “Landscapes”, p. 23n5.
- 16 Thomas, *Art*, p. 27n13.

Camille Pissarro: *Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon, Effect of Rain, 1897*

Paula Luengo



Fig. 1
The Place du Havre, Paris, 1893
 Oil on canvas, 60.1 × 73.5 cm
 The Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer
 Collection [PDR 986]

Pissarro was the only Impressionist artist who systematically represented the rural landscape of France. Throughout his long career, he painted the towns where he lived (including Louveciennes, Pontoise, and Éragny) and their fields and small orchards—to the extent that his detractors called him “the cabbage painter” (*le peintre de choux*). Nevertheless, in the last decade of his life, between 1893 and 1903, his activity as a painter focussed on urban landscapes. He created over three hundred canvases depicting Paris, Rouen, Dieppe, and Le Havre.¹ Other Impressionists before him, like Renoir, Monet, and Caillebotte, executed views of Paris, but none of them created works of this type with such consistency and in such large numbers. The painting in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza collection titled *Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon, Effect of Rain* [fig. 10], from 1897, is a magnificent example, and for this reason we are devoting an article to the work in this issue of our online publication, *Open Windows*.

The series

In early 1891, Camille Pissarro criticized Monet for his repetitive series of haystacks, and yet, by the year’s end, he himself came to recognize the enormous possibilities afforded by working in series.² His initial misgivings about Monet’s commercial success—feelings perhaps tinged by a degree of envy—gradually gave way to a growing interest in exploring a single subject under the changing effects of the seasons, the weather, and light, viewed from different angles and perspectives and in various formats. In late May of 1895, Pissarro visited the exhibition of Monet’s *Cathedrals* at the Durand-Ruel gallery, and he came away fascinated by the experience. He wrote to his eldest child, Lucien, urging him to come from London to Paris so as not to miss seeing the complete series, for this would be the only opportunity to do so before it was sold off as individual paintings: “I’m bowled over by the extraordinary mastery. Cézanne, whom I met yesterday at Durand’s, agrees that it’s the work of a strong-willed man, well-thought-out, pursuing the imperceptible nuance of effects that no other artist I can think of has achieved”.³

Two years before this letter, in 1893, Pissarro began his first urban series depicting Paris, in the neighbourhood of Saint-Lazare. That spring he was obliged to remain in the capital in order to receive daily treatment for an abscess in one eye. Following the advice of his physician, Doctor Parenteau, who recommended he not expose it to the wind and dust of the streets, the painter rented a room in the Hôtel-Restaurant de Rome. From the window of his strategically situated studio, he painted four views of rue Saint-Lazare, the place du Havre [Fig. 1], rue d’Amsterdam, and the Saint-Lazare train station (where he would arrive when he travelled to Paris from Éragny).

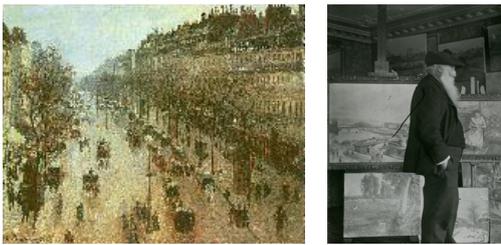


Fig. 2
The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning, 1897
Oil on canvas, 64.8 × 81.3 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Katrin S. Vietor,
in loving memory of Ernest G. Vietor, 1960 (60.174) [PDR 1160]

Fig. 3
The painter in his apartment on Rue de Rivoli, ca. 1900
Musée Pissarro Archives, Pontoise



Fig. 4
*The Louvre, Afternoon,
Rainy Weather, 1900*
Oil on canvas, 66.5 × 81.5 cm
Corcoran Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C., Edward C.
and Mary Walker Collection
[PDR 1346]



Fig. 5
Tuileries Gardens, 1900
Oil on canvas, 73.6 × 92.3 cm
Glasgow Life (Glasgow
Museums) on behalf
of Glasgow City Council.
Presented by Sir John
Richmond, 1948 [PDR 1310]



Fig. 6
The Pont-Neuf, 1902
Oil on canvas, 55 × 46.5 cm
Szépművészeti Múzeum,
Budapest [PDR 1415]



Fig. 7
Self-Portrait, 1903
Oil on canvas, 41 × 33 cm
Tate: Presented by Lucien
Pissarro, the artist's son, 1931
[PDR 1528]

He thus initiated a model of series paintings that he would undertake on eleven occasions: in Rouen (1896, 1898), Dieppe (1901, 1902), Le Havre (1903), and above all Paris (1892–93, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900–3). Pissarro was encouraged by his dealer, Durand-Ruel, who for the first time bought his views en bloc, as well as by Lucien: “What a good idea you had to install yourself in Paris. This will make you more successful in the eyes of the Parisians who love their city, when all’s said and done, not to mention the enjoyment you’ll get from this thoroughly new series”.⁴

In January 1897, Pissarro returned to the same hotel in Saint-Lazare. Afterwards, from 8 February to 25 April, he lived on boulevard Montmartre, in the Grand Hôtel de Russie, which also looked onto boulevard des Italiens and where he painted sixteen canvases [fig. 2]. In late 1897 and early 1898, he executed his series of the place du Théâtre-Français, which I shall discuss in further detail below.

From early 1899 to the summer of 1900, he focussed on the Tuileries Gardens and the Louvre, painting a total of twenty-one works [figs. 4 and 5], from his apartment on rue de Rivoli [fig. 3], where he was living with his wife, Julie, and his young children, Cocotte and Paul-Émile, during the autumn and winter months. During the summer they moved to Éragny.

For his long painting campaign at the place Dauphine from 1900 to 1903, he rented an apartment near the Pont-Neuf with views of both banks of the Seine. He painted a total of sixty works [fig. 6], divided into three series, along with a fourth and final series that he painted from a hotel on the quai Voltaire in May 1903.

Unfortunately, in September 1903, when Pissarro and his family were preparing to move to a new apartment on boulevard Morland, where the artist was to begin a new series, he fell ill and died shortly thereafter. It was precisely at the place Dauphine that he created his last self-portrait, at the age of seventy-three, with the Samaritaine building in the background.

Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon, Effect of Rain, 1897

But let us return to 1897, an extremely difficult year for the artist. His son, Lucien, suffered a stroke, and Pissarro moved to London from May to July to be by his side while he recovered. In the autumn, the family experienced another misfortune when his fifth child, Félix (“Titi”) [fig. 8], died on 15 November from tuberculosis when he was only twenty-three. The painter could not travel again to London, to the Blenheim House sanatorium in Kew where Félix was a patient, so Julie travelled there in his stead.

In December of that year, Pissarro painted *Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon, Effect of Rain* [fig. 10], barely a month after Félix’s death.



Fig. 8
From left to right:
Camille and his
sons Ludovic-
Rodolphe, Lucien,
and Félix in
Knokke, 1894.
Musée Pissarro
Archives, Pontoise



Fig. 9
Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris



Fig. 10
Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon, Effect of Rain, 1897
Oil on canvas, 81 × 65 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid [PDR 1196]
[\[+ info\]](#)

From 4 to 22 December, he travelled to Paris, where he stayed at the Hôtel Garnier. He sought out new locations for his paintings and found a room in the Grand Hôtel du Louvre [fig. 9]: “I neglected to mention that I found a room at the Grand Hôtel du Louvre with a superb view of the avenue de l’Opéra and the corner of the place du Palais Royal! —It will be very beautiful to paint! It may not be very aesthetic, but I’m delighted to be able to have a go at Paris streets, which are said to be ugly, but are so silvery, so bright, so vibrant with life, they’re altogether different from the boulevards—they’re totally modern!!!”⁵

He began to work conscientiously, perhaps so as to escape the pain caused by Titi’s death, as his letter to his son dated Wednesday, 15 December 1897 would suggest: “My dear Lucien: I received your letter and Esther’s. I cannot tell you how relieved I am that you have been able to face the terrible news of the death of our poor Titi, whom we loved so. [...] So, my dear Lucien, let us work in order to heal our wounds. I hope you remain strong and that you can shield yourself, so to speak, with art”.⁶

Immediately before returning to Éragny to spend a gloomy Christmas with his family, Pissarro painted two canvases from his new studio in 1897: *Place du Théâtre-Français, Fog Effect*, now in the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza’s *Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon, Effect of Rain*, which represents the intersection of rue Saint-Honoré with the place du Théâtre-Français. In the foreground on the left, we see rue de Rohan, which leads into rue de Rivoli and ends at the Musée du Louvre. The country roads that were such a common feature of his rural compositions have become the modern streets, boulevards, and avenues of the metropolis.

On 5 January 1898, he settled in the Grand Hôtel du Louvre, and he would remain at 172 rue de Rivoli for four months, working on a total of fifteen views. In May, Durand-Ruel bought twelve canvases from the series, which he described as “very successful”.⁷ These are open, spacious compositions that present variations of snow, rain, fog, and vegetation, in the winter and springtime. A month later, his dealer exhibited these works in his gallery and encouraged Pissarro to continue painting birds-eye views of urban landscapes, for they sold well. The artist finally attained the commercial success that he had yearned for and could continue to support his family, settle his debts, and live in greater ease.

During this last period of his artistic career after he turned sixty-eight, and despite the problems with his sight that obliged him to make frequent appointments with his doctor in Paris, Pissarro seemed to rejuvenate. He found the energy necessary to work with great intensity, painting works like *Place du Théâtre-Français, Fog Effect* in a single day. Signac describes a visit to Pissarro’s studio on 11 February 1898: “I expected to see him more grief-stricken at the death of Félix and



Fig. 11
Camille Pissarro in Rouen, standing before
the Hôtel d'Angleterre and wearing a black
armband possibly in mourning for Félix, 1898
Musée Pissarro Archives, Pontoise

the illness of Lucien. He has an admirable philosophy and a serene resignation. He is more vigorous than ever, works with enthusiasm and talks ardently about the Zola affair. When one compares the old age of this artist, who is all activity and work, with the gloomy, senile extinction of the old men of independent means and the pensioners, what a reward art has in store for us!"⁸

After having worked in the French countryside and lived in its tranquil, traditional towns for most of his life, Pissarro—*humble and colossal*, as Cézanne described him—found a growing fascination with cities and incipient industrialization: smoke, movement, activity. This adaptation to modernity is reflected in his choice of subjects as well as in the serial method with which he now painted, a method that perfectly suited his needs, for the variations in atmosphere and effects that he could discover in a single motif or locale were practically endless: "You know that the motifs are of entirely secondary interest to me: What I consider is the atmosphere and the effects".⁹

Notes

- 1 Richard R. Brettell: "Camille Pissarro and Urban View Painting: An Introduction", in Richard R. Brettell and Joachim Pissarro: *The Impressionist and the City: Pissarro's Series Paintings*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. XV.
- 2 As Joachim Pissarro points out in "Monet / Pissarro in the 1890s: Serial Racing," in *Pissarro*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2013), p. 45.
- 3 "Je suis très emballé par cette maîtrise extraordinaire. Cézanne, que j'ai rencontré hier chez Durand, est bien de mon avis que c'est l'œuvre d'un volontaire, bien pondéré, poursuivant l'insaisissable nuance des effets que ne vois réalisée par aucun artiste." Letter to Lucien Pissarro, 26 May 1895, in *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, ed. Janine Bailly-Herzberg, 5 vols. (Saint-Ouen l'Aumône: Valhermeil, 1991), vol. 4, p. 75, no. 1138.
- 4 "Quelle bonne idée tu as eu de t'installer à Paris, cela va relever ton succès aux yeux des parisiens, qui n'aime que leur ville, au fond, sans compter le plaisir que te donnera cette série si nouvelle". *The Letters of Lucien to Camille Pissarro (1883–1903)*, ed. Anne Thorold (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 529.
- 5 "J'oublie de t'annoncer que j'ai trouvé une chambre au Grand Hôtel du Louvre avec une vue superbe sur l'avenue de l'Opéra et du coin de la place du Palais Royal! —C'est très beau à faire! C'est peut-être pas très esthétique, mais je suis enchanté de pouvoir essayer de faire ces rues de Paris que l'on a l'habitude [de] dire laides, mais qui sont si argentées, si lumineuses et si vivantes, c'est tout différent des boulevards—c'est le moderne en plein!!!" *Correspondance*, vol. 4, no. 1489, n3.
- 6 Camille Pissarro and Lucien Pissarro, *Camille y Lucien Pissarro: Cartas 1883–1903* (Madrid: Lamicro, 2013), p. 100.
- 7 "Très réussie". *Correspondance*, note 3, vol. 4, n. 1528.
- 8 John Rewald, "Extraits du journal inédit de Paul Signac, II (1897–98)", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (April 1952), pp. 275–76.
- 9 "Tu sais que les motifs sont tout à fait secondaires pour moi: ce que je considère c'est l'atmosphère et les effets". Letter to his son, Rodolphe, Le Havre, 6 July 1903, in *Correspondance*, vol. 5, p. 352n3.

New Sources for the Study of *A Grandmother*

Clara Marcellán



Fig. 1
George Bellows
A Grandmother, 1914
Oil on panel, 94 × 74.5 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)



Fig. 2
Views of the first room of the exhibition *Hopper*, held
at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in the summer of 2012

A Grandmother, by George Wesley Bellows [fig. 1], is one of those American paintings that are a rarity in Europe and that have made it to these shores thanks to Baron Thyssen's interest in North American art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This interest distinguishes him from other collectors who were his contemporaries, making the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza an exceptional bastion of such art on this side of the Atlantic. But what brings us to consider George Bellows in particular at this juncture?

The constant updating of the collection's documentation still affords us occasional surprises. This is precisely what has occurred in the case of *A Grandmother*, whose latest re-examination has led to the inclusion of the recent catalogue raisonné and the artist's own ledger book in the bibliography on the work, providing information that sheds new light on it and significantly expanding our knowledge of the painting. In the process of reassessing the work, we inevitably immersed ourselves in the question of Bellows' critical reception and in his current reputation. What follows is a summary of our findings.

Bellows and Hopper

When he died at the young age of forty-two, Bellows enjoyed greater popularity and recognition than his colleague Edward Hopper, yet he was soon relegated to a secondary status; in Europe he has remained practically unknown.¹ One of the few occasions on which *A Grandmother* has been exhibited since the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza opened its doors to the public was in fact as part of the successful exhibition *Edward Hopper* in the summer of 2012. Visitors to the museum encountered her in the first room [fig. 2], devoted to Hopper's formative years, when, together with Bellows, he studied under Robert Henri.²

Bellows' re-emergence

At nearly the same time that *A Grandmother* was being shown in the Edward Hopper exhibition in Madrid, the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., presented an ambitious retrospective of Bellows' work, which travelled to the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Royal Academy in London³. This exhibition, curated by Charles Brock, argued for Bellows' fundamental place in American Modernism at the same time that it established his connection to the European artistic tradition.

A year later, in February 2014, the National Gallery in London announced the acquisition of an American masterwork for the sum of 25.5 million dollars—George Bellows' *Men of the Docks* [fig. 3], painted in 1912—the first major American painting in the museum's collections.⁴ The director of the museum, Nicholas Penny, explained the effect of situating Bellows' work in this new European setting: "Bellows has



Fig. 3
George Bellows
Men of the Docks, 1912
Oil on canvas, 114.3 × 161.3 cm
The National Gallery, London

almost always been seen in the context of American painting, but the way he painted owed much to Manet, and his depiction of the violence and victims of New York derived from Goya and earlier Spanish art”.⁵

New sources

The exhibitions of Bellows’ work and his re-evaluation in the art market have been accompanied by symposia and publications that have brought to light new sources for the study of his oeuvre. H. V. Allison and Co., which has managed the artist’s estate since 1941, published an online catalogue raisonné of his work in 2011.⁶ That same year, The Ohio State University (which Bellows attended from 1901 to 1904) and The Columbus Museum of Art acquired the notebooks in which the artist recorded information pertaining to his artistic output. These institutions have begun a project to digitize these sources in order to make them available to anyone interested in their study.⁷ We have been able to include this new documentation in our own files on the work, further clarifying what we already knew about it and considerably expanding our information on the work’s exhibition history, for which previously we had details only as far back as 1978.

A Grandmother’s earliest years—Bellows indicates that he painted it in August 1914—were especially intense. His notes [fig. 4] record thirteen exhibitions between 1914 and 1916, in cities like Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York [fig. 5]. To this list, the catalogue raisonné adds exhibitions in the Milwaukee Art Institute and the Carnegie Institute in 1923. After that, it is not until 1965 that we find another exhibition in which the work appeared.

Bellows’ notes in his ledger books, which his family and the Bellows Trust continued to expand after his death in 1925, also provide information about the work’s ownership, including sales prices. We know that *A Grandmother* was valued at 1,500 dollars according to Bellows’ own indications and that on 24 October 1977 it was sold to Kennedy Galleries for 20,000 dollars. Some of the text has been crossed out, such as the allusion to an exhibition in 1917 and, curiously, a word from the title, “Wells”. It would seem that a possible original title identifying the sitter, “Grandmother Wells”, was thus modified, along with the addition of an indefinite article in the margin of the page, returning her to anonymity. Nevertheless, we have not been able to determine who she might have been. Those who have studied the work suggest that she was probably an inhabitant of Monhegan, on the coast of Maine, where the artist spent the summer of 1914.

Thanks to the catalogue raisonné, we have access to the collection of works presented at each exhibition and can imagine what members of the public experienced and how they may have

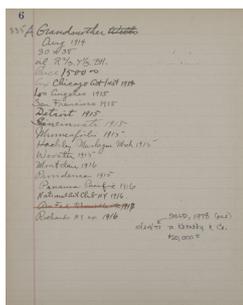


Fig. 4
A Grandmother, 1914,
George Bellows Record
Books. The Ohio State
University Libraries and
The Columbus Museum of
Art, Columbus, Ohio,
vol. B, p. 6

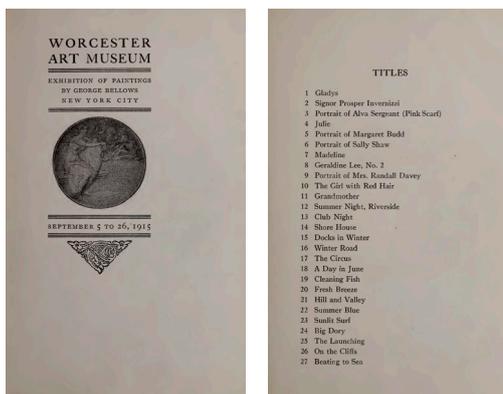


Fig. 5
Exhibition of Paintings by George Bellows, Worcester Art
Museum, 1915. *A Grandmother* is number 11 in the list of works



Fig. 6
George Bellows
Spanish Shawl, 1914
Oil on canvas,
96.5 × 76.2 cm
Private collection



Fig. 7
George Bellows
The Pink Scarf, 1914
Oil on panel, 96.5 × 76.2 cm
Mr. and Mrs. J. Kermit
Birchfield, Gloucester,
Massachusetts

perceived Bellows' work. In Chicago and the other cities where he exhibited in 1914 and 1915, almost half of the works on display were portraits. The rest were landscapes from the New York coastline and his famous boxing scene, *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909)⁸.

The gallery of portraits reveals a repeating compositional arrangement. The majority, painted in July and August of 1914, are three-quarter length portraits of women seated before neutral or two-toned backgrounds with curtains, a scheme that repeats the austere composition of our painting here. In many of these portraits, Bellows includes an accessory that ultimately provides the title for the works, like *Spanish Shawl* [fig. 6] or *The Pink Scarf* [fig. 7], both from 1914. In late 1915, a review in *The New York Times* on the exhibition at the Whitney-Richards Gallery described the painting now in the Museo Thyssen, among "a number [of paintings and drawings] not before exhibited, and one at least, *The Grandmother*, in which he is at his highest level. A subject which opens out to every artist attempting it the opportunity for sentimentality is treated by him with the reserve and dignity due to its character [...] A quiet brush and a simple palette, a serene arrangement of the figure on the canvas, and the atmosphere evoked is that for which the subject calls".⁹

Bellows at the Thyssen

After these intense first months of its existence, *A Grandmother* remained in Bellows' and his heirs' collection until 1977. Baron Thyssen acquired the painting in 1980, and it has resided in Madrid since 1992. The incorporation of *Men of the Docks* into the collections of the National Gallery in London may well attract more attention to this painter now on this side of the ocean. And it may also encourage us—as the National Gallery's director Nicholas Penny proposes—to view our painting by Bellows in a new light, in dialogue with the European paintings in our own collections. In that spirit, I shall leave you with two suggestions:

Fig. 8
Anton van Dyck
Portrait of Jacques Le Roy, 1631
Oil on canvas, 117.8 × 100.6 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)

Fig. 9
Édouard Manet
Horsewoman, Fullface, ca. 1882
Oil on canvas, 73 × 52 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)

Fig. 10
George Bellows
A Grandmother, 1914
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)



Notes

- 1 See <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/mar/12/royal-academy-retrospective-george-bellows>.
- 2 At this point in their careers, Bellows and Hopper steeped themselves in the social realism eventually championed by the Ashcan School, with which Bellows is customarily associated.
- 3 *George Bellows*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 10 June-8 October 2012; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 15 November 2012-18 February 2013; Royal Academy of Arts, London, 16 March-9 June 2013.
- 4 This is the second-highest price to date for a work by Bellows. The record is held by the 27.7 million dollars spent on *Polo Crowd* in 1999, which surpasses the maximum price ever fetched by a work by Hopper, whose *Hotel Window* sold for 26.8 million dollars at auction in 2006. See <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303807404577434393637443940>.
- 5 See <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/content/conWebDoc/3262>.
- 6 See <http://www.hvallison.com/Default.aspx>.
- 7 We should like to express our gratitude to Lisa Daugherty Iacobellis, Assistant Curator in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at The Ohio State University, for providing us with a copy of the page from Bellows' notebook on which he recorded information regarding *A Grandmother*.
- 8 The title of this work refers to Sharkey's, a private athletic club whose members participated in boxing matches and other activities. "Stags" were non-members who were occasionally allowed to compete.
- 9 "Art Notes: George Bellows' Paintings in the Whitney-Richards Gallery", *The New York Times*, 25 December 1915.