



## Country Life, 23 July 2014

### My favourite painting Abraham Thomas *Blue Morning* by George Bellows

John McEwen comments  
on *Blue Morning*

**B**ELLOWS'S most famous painting is of a boxing match, but it's not just what he paints, but the way he paints that provides the punch.

He was born in Ohio, the son of a successful architect and builder and the grandson, through his mother, of a New England whaling captain. That he is a pugnacious painter (known in youth as American art's *enfant terrible*) is appropriate, because he first made his name as an athlete good enough to play baseball for Ohio State University, but art proved an even greater passion. At the New York School of Art, he soon became a favourite pupil of Robert Henri, 'a born preacher... [with] the pioneer's contempt for cant and aestheticism'. Henri urged his pupils to make art that expressed 'the spirit

of people' in their American place and time. Bellows reaped the reward.

The year Bellows painted *Blue Morning*, Henri opened his own art school in New York. Bellows lived in the same building. It was the year he had a picture bought by a museum for the first time and, exceptionally at his young age, was elected an associate member of the National Academy of Design. Recently, *Blue Morning* was hung between two Monets to demonstrate how 'innovative' he was 'in terms of colour and concepts of the city', and the London National Gallery has just bought his *Men of the Docks*, its first major purchase of an American painting and only the second by an American artist to enter the collection.

Bellows died at 42 of peritonitis following surgery on a burst appendix. 🐸



Abraham Thomas  
is Director of Sir John Soane's Museum

‘I spend a lot of time in Washington DC, and this painting depicting New York's Penn Station under construction is one of my highlights at the National Gallery of Art. It provides an insightful comment on optimistic urban development, later tempered by its tragic demolition in the 1960s, which reminds one of the fate of Soane's Bank of England in the 1920s’



*Blue Morning*, 1909, by George Bellows (1862-1925), 34in by 44in, National Gallery of Art, Washington



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