



George Bellows
American, 1882 - 1925

Chester Dale

1922

oil on canvas

overall: 113.7 x 88.3 cm (44 3/4 x 34 3/4 in.)

framed: 136.5 x 109.8 cm (53 3/4 x 43 1/4 in.)

Inscription: lower right in red: GEO BELLOWS; upper center reverse: PORTRAIT OF CHESTER DALE. / BY GEO BELLOWS, 1922

Chester Dale Collection 1944.16.1

ENTRY

Chester Dale (1883–1962) was born in New York City, the son of a department store salesman. He left the Peekskill Military Academy in 1899 and was employed on Wall Street. Hardworking and ambitious, he achieved success as a prominent and wealthy investment banker by specializing in the sale of railroad mortgages and public utility securities. In 1909 he went into business with a friend and formed William C. Langley & Company and by 1918 was a member of the New York Stock Exchange. In 1911 Dale married the artist Maud Murray Thompson (1875–1953) in Greenwich, Connecticut. The couple became avid art collectors and gradually assembled an important collection of modern American and French paintings as well as a number of works by the Old Masters.

After retiring from William C. Langley & Company in 1935, Dale served as a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Dale was a trustee of the National Gallery of Art from 1943 until 1955, when he became its president. Beginning in 1943 and through his bequest at the time of his death in 1962, Dale gave the majority of his remarkable collection to the Gallery, including a number of major paintings by George Bellows.

Bellows and Dale were contemporaries and lived near each other in New York from 1911 to 1918. Bellows painted this portrait in his Manhattan studio in January 1922 for a fee of \$1,500. [1] Represented in half-length, the stiffly posed banker holds a golf club horizontally across the bottom margin of the composition and looks directly at the viewer. Dale's pose—standing and turned to his left—suggests

that he commissioned the painting to serve in effect as a pendant to a 1919 portrait by Bellows of his wife Maud (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), where she is shown seated, facing right. Despite the intention to represent Dale as a sportsman at leisure, a quality emphasized by the carelessly knotted bow tie, the portrait possesses an incongruously formal, awkward quality. Dale's somewhat tentative expression seems at odds with his reputation as a self-made millionaire, cosmopolite, and unusually acquisitive art collector, especially when compared to the elegance and stylish ease with which Guy Pène du Bois (American, 1884 - 1958) invested Dale in his flattering later double portrait, *Mr. and Mrs. Chester Dale Dine Out* [fig. 1]. [2]

In 1965 Charles Morgan noted that work progressed rapidly on the portrait because Bellows experienced none of the difficulties that had plagued him while painting his three portraits of Maud Dale. [3] He further stated that Dale was pleased with the result. [4] According to Donald Braider, however, “there was little *rapport* between artist and subject, a condition the portrait immediately discloses; it is wooden and without much feeling,” implying that the sitter was dissatisfied with it. [5]

From a conventional critical perspective, Bellows's *Chester Dale* exemplifies the artist's difficulty with formal commissioned portraiture in his failure to convey an accurate and convincing sense of the subject's personality. Perhaps, however, Bellows discerned the same quality in Dale that Pène du Bois cynically noted in private, that his “glories have to be in things money can buy him for they are absolutely not in him. He is one of those forced to stand by his pile of gold in order to have any beauty at all.” [6] At the same time, the inexplicably diffident, almost tentative quality of Bellows's portrait of Dale brings to mind the court portraits of King Philip IV of Spain by Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599 - 1660), especially the famous example in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna [fig. 2], painted around 1632. It is likely that Bellows deliberately quoted this famous Old Master source as an allusion to the fact that both Dale and Philip IV were powerful men who collected art on a princely scale. Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's more imposing seated portrait of Maud dressed in red recalls Velázquez's *Portrait of Innocent X* in the Galleria Doria Pamphilj in Rome.

Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Guy Pène du Bois, *Mr. and Mrs. Chester Dale Dine Out*, 1924, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Chester Dale, 1963. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY



fig. 2 Diego Velázquez, *King Philip IV of Spain*, c. 1632, oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Image: KHM-Museumsverband

NOTES

- [1] Bellows listed it in his “Book B. of Paintings,” 266, and recorded the fee in his “Ledger Book,” 14. The Bellows record books and ledger are jointly owned by the Ohio State University Libraries and the Columbus Museum of Art.
- [2] A 1926 version of this portrait, *Café Madrid (Mr. and Mrs. Chester Dale)*, is owned by the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, FL.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

American Paintings, 1900–1945

- [3] Charles H. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 251–252. The three paintings Morgan cited are *Maud Murray Dale (Mrs. Chester Dale)* (1919, National Gallery of Art, Washington), *Mrs. Chester Dale* (1919, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), and *Mrs. Chester Dale with Dog* (1919, destroyed).
- [4] Charles H. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York, 1965), 251–252.
- [5] Donald Braider, *George Bellows and the Ashcan School of Painting* (New York, 1971), 131.
- [6] Guy Pène du Bois, August 4, 1936, diary entry, quoted in Betsy Fahlman, *Guy Pène du Bois: Artist about Town* (Washington, DC, 1980), 75.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a plain-weave, medium-weight fabric. It is lined onto a fabric of similar weave and weight with a paste or glue adhesive. The tacking margins have all been cut off, but cusping at the top and bottom of the painting suggest that the height is close to the original dimension. The original width is unclear as there is no cusping at the left or right edges. The mortise-and-tenon, key-type stretcher has one vertical and two horizontal crossbars. The stretcher is not original. The ground is only visible in a very thinly painted area in the sitter's left eye, where it appears to be a grayish off-white. Elsewhere the paint was heavily applied with wide brushes and lively brushstrokes, resulting in generally low impasto. The paint was blended by the artist during the painting process to accomplish the shading. The x-radiograph shows only one change, which is in the position of the golf club. This change is also evident in the paint texture in this area. Infrared examination shows no underdrawing. [1] The paint layer is coated with a thick, somewhat discolored, semigloss varnish.

For the most part, the painting is in relatively good condition. However, there are lines of small circular losses spaced about 1 ½ inches along the top, left, and right sides, approximately 6 inches in from each edge. They could be filled and retouched tack holes, but it is hard to explain their presence because the canvas was not reused. Approximately 7 ½ inches from the bottom edge a line of filled and retouched losses suggests that at one time this part of the canvas was folded over, but there is no corresponding surface deformation that confirms this hypothesis.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The infrared examination was conducted using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

Commissioned 1922 by Chester Dale [1883-1962], New York; gift 1944 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1924 Paintings and Sculpture by British, American and Canadian Artists; Graphic Art and Photography, Canadian National Exhibiton, Toronto, August-September 1924, no. 205.

1924 Twenty-Third Annual International Exhibition of Paintings, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, April-June 1924, no. 65.

1948 New Yorkers 1848-1968, Portraits, Inc., New York, 1948, no. 6.

1957 George Bellows: A Retrospective Exhibition, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., January-February 1957, no. 54, repro.

1957 Paintings by George Bellows, Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Ohio, March-April 1957, no. 56.

1965 The Chester Dale Bequest, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1965, unnumbered checklist.

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