

KINDRED SPIRITS:

George Bellows and Friends in Woodstock



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SAMUEL DORSKY MUSEUM OF ART

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The quest for an idyllic setting where one might pursue one's creative passions, surrounded by natural beauty and unfettered by the day-to-day distractions of conventional life, emerged as a phenomenon in the United States during the latter part of 19th century and early part of the 20th century. By the mid-1920s it had reached its apex, and significant art colonies existed in Rockport and Provincetown, Massachusetts; Taos, New Mexico; Old Lyme, Connecticut; New Hope, Pennsylvania; and locally in Cragmoor and Woodstock, New York.

The art colony in Woodstock evolved from an experiment championed and funded by the utopian Englishman, Ralph Whitehead. He and "kindred spirits" Hervey White of Chicago and Bolton Brown, a native New Yorker, then teaching art at Stanford University, founded the Byrdcliffe Art Colony on Overlook Mountain in 1902. Byrdcliffe was an arts-and-crafts-based colony designed to foster individual creativity through self-sufficiency. During its brief existence, it was a center for fine furniture-making, ceramics, metalwork, and painting. The community attracted creative people who traveled to Woodstock from locations near and far, and it was indeed Byrdcliffe that served as the magnet. Here the seeds were planted that spawned the enduring Woodstock art colony that survives to this day.

Kindred Spirits: George Bellows and his Friends in Woodstock, takes us back to Woodstock in the early 1920s and examines the work of a small circle of friends (in essence a microcosm of the creative life found in the colony). The exhibition evolves around the influence of one of its most accomplished and distinguished inhabitants, George Wesley Bellows. George Bellows arrived in Woodstock in 1920 at the urging of his friend Eugene Speicher, the renowned portrait painter. By this time in his career Bellows enjoyed considerable success and recognition as an illustrator, printmaker, and most of all, a painter. He was closely aligned with a group of innovators led by Robert Henri, derisively called the "Ash Can School," who rejected the conservative influence of the academy. Until his Woodstock days, Bellows' preference for subject matter was the streets of New York, the sporting life, and always his friends. His progressive social philosophy, and his passion for the common man, was loosely rooted in democratic socialism, from which he drew inspiration.

Bellows lived in Woodstock for the five years prior to his death, during which he reveled in and thrived from the inspiring landscape, the creative focus of community life, and most of all the enduring friendships that he established. Bellows was the locus around which deep friendships thrived. He encouraged his colleagues and friends to vigorously pursue and push the parameters of artistic expression. The circle of "kindred spirits" that developed around Bellows included his close friends and neighbors Eugene Speicher, Charles Rosen and their mentor from Art Student League days in NYC, Robert Henri. The group also included Norbert Heermann, John Carroll, Leon Kroll, and Neil Ives, as well as three artists that Bellows greatly admired: Andrew Dasburg, Konrad Cramer, and Henry Lee McFee—free-thinkers whose work was heavily influenced by European modernism—leading them to be dubbed the "Rock City Rebels."

At the hub of Woodstock’s creative and social life it was often Bellows who moderated many of the philosophical battles that permeated the halls of the newly established Woodstock Artists Association gallery. He organized excursions into the countryside to paint, and was almost always the center of fundraising and charitable events, where he drew caricatures of his friends and neighbors for a quarter, always donating the proceeds to charity. George Bellows was very much still in his creative prime when he died unexpectedly in 1925. He left behind a prodigious body of work and a legacy of optimism, and goodwill that elevated the spirits of his colleagues, friends, and neighbors, and arguably inspired their creativity.

This exhibition looks at the relationships developed around George Bellows and in particular the work of a few lesser-known “kindred spirits” with whom he worked and lived. Bellows’ drawings, caricatures, and prints convey the admiration and respect that he maintained for his friends, each of whom is represented in the exhibition by examples of their work. The exhibition seeks to evoke the spirit of the independent and creative impulses that permeated through Woodstock, and that to this day define its spirit, as well as the richness and diversity of American art. It also celebrates the vision of the man who assembled the collection, Arthur A. Anderson—a passionate and informed collector, whose belief in the importance of this legacy has become the nexus of a new circle of “kindred spirits” centered around the creative life fostered by the work of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art.

Neil C. Trager
Exhibition Curator



George Bellows
Speicher, Kroll and Bellows, 1921
Lithograph

EVOLUTION OF A COLLECTOR

A collector is a strange creature. Running especially strong in the DNA of my English ancestry, collecting is in my blood, although it was many years before I knew this.

Collecting with depth or breadth is about personal exploration. Since there are few physical worlds to explore for the first time, collecting becomes about the breadth and depth of a subject, making it a unique adventure. It involves passion, and for many is an obsession to varying degrees. It matters little what the details are, it's a part of one's being.

My collecting began as a boy, and like many boys I collected rocks, minerals, and frogs. The seeds of my mature approach to collecting began when I was twelve, with a gift of stamps owned by the grandfather I never knew. He was a wanderer, but never traveled outside this country. Stamps were his passport to exotic places. There were stamps of faraway places with strange

names: Tasmania, Cochin, Nyasaland, Goa. There was even a packet of folded letters from the South, predating stamps and chronicling the slave trade. The collection went deep—he had thousands of common Two Cent U.S. stamps of the 1880s. Like frogs, each was different from the other—whether a different shade, an error mark, or strange perforations, each stamp was individual in its own right. Most were worth no more than a penny, but some could be worth a thousand times that or more. I traveled the world through my stamps. In college I turned to chemistry and American history. These also took me to new places, one of them being the John Carter Brown Library where I learned hand bookbinding which allowed me to go deep into the world of books. I enjoyed finding orphan antiquarian volumes in the flea market that I could bring back to life.



George Bellows
Gene Speicher
Drawing on a Stone,
1921
Lithograph

One day, during law school I discovered an old, small painting in a damp basement. It was dirty, and the paint flaking; I could barely make out a tortured tree in the foreground. I vowed that with my first job I would bring this painting back to life and hang it in my first home. After my first year of work I sent it to a conservator—this cost the equivalent of a month's rent. The conservator said it was "Hudson River School," but she missed a faint signature, "S. Rosa." Without the need to research the signature I might have stopped there, but I wanted to learn about the artist and the Hudson River School. "S. Rosa" was Salvatore Rosa, the Italian artist whose work is said to have inspired Thomas Cole.

When I later bought a cabin in Ulster County, I committed to learn more about the Hudson River School—Olana the home of Frederick Church was nearby, as was Cedar Grove, Thomas Cole's home. In time I learned of Woodstock's Byrdcliffe Colony, the Woodstock Artists

Association, Bolton Brown, George Bellows, Eugene Speicher, Andrew Dasburg, and other artists. It mattered not to me whether they were well known or little known, what interested me was that they were part of a community of kindred spirits. Then one day I saw a painting of a beautiful woman with lush red lips; I bought it for the princely sum of four months' rent. The artist was Norbert Heermann, a friend of George Bellows'. Little known now, Heermann had exhibited at the famous Anderson Gallery in New York, more than a coincidence for me. Not realizing what had occurred, I fell into collecting artists of the Historic Woodstock Art Colony.



Eugene Speicher
Head of Leon Kröll
by Eugene,
ca. 1920-25
Crayon on paper

A complication to building my collection, to my surprise, was the fact that many of the works of art that I discovered were fragile and had deteriorated. They needed conservation. It often cost more to conserve a painting than to buy it, but this concept appealed to me from my antiquarian bookbinding days. I was more interested in finding "orphans" that needed care than I was in finding a singular museum piece to display. I was not so much interested in the chase as the opportunity to bring something out of oblivion and show it in the way the artist had intended.

My passion for the Historic Woodstock Art Colony grew from learning about the friendships these artists had with one another and their arguments over tradition and modernism. Collecting their work became as much social history as art history for me. These artists had personal as well as professional relationships, and if you looked very carefully at a body of work, there were always secrets revealed.

As fascinating as was the viewing of a thin slice of a crystal in chemistry, likewise in art collecting. This exhibition begins with George Bellows' drawings and prints of his friends and family, evoking the intimacy of these kindred spirits. These works are juxtaposed with paintings by his friends. I hope you enjoy this slice of life.

Arthur A. Anderson

All works unless otherwise indicated are courtesy of Arthur A. Anderson.

George Wesley Bellows

1882 – 1925

Speicher, Kroll and Bellows

[*Caricature of Speicher, Kroll and Bellows*], 1921

Lithograph

7 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

TR2004.015.005

Portrait of Norbert Heermann, ca. 1921-25

Crayon on paper

12 x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

TR2004.015.006

Caricature of Robert Henri, ca. 1921

Graphite on paper

7 $\frac{15}{16}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{16}$ "

TR2004.015.021 a

Caricature of Charles Rosen, ca. 1922

Crayon on paper

11 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 8 $\frac{15}{16}$ "

TR2004.015.008

Elsie, Emma and Marjorie, 1921

Lithograph

11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

TR 2004.015.020

Portrait of John Carroll, 1923

Lithograph

11 x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

TR2004.015.019

My Family, No. 1, 1921

Lithograph

10 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

TR2004.015.009

Gene Speicher Drawing on a Stone, 1921

Lithograph

11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

TR2004.015.018

Four Friends, 1921

Lithograph

12 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 11"

TR2004.015.010

Self Portrait, ca. 1921

Crayon on paper

16 x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

TR2004.015.029

Portrait of Eugene Speicher, ca. 1921

Crayon on paper

15 x 12"

TR2004.015.028

Artists Judging Art Work, 1916

Lithograph

14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19"

TR2004.015.031

Speicher Seated in a Chair

[*Portrait of Eugene Speicher*], 1923-24

Lithograph

14 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

TR2004.015.012

Konrad Cramer

1888 – 1979

Self Portrait, n.d.

Oil on canvas

24 x 20"

TR2004.015.035

Andrew Dasburg

1887 – 1979

Woodstock, ca. 1915-1920

Watercolor

19 x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

TR2004.015.022

Robert Henri

1865 – 1929

Elsie and Eugene Speicher at George Bellows' Drawing Party, 1923

Charcoal on paper

10 x 13"

Courtesy of the Owen Gallery, New York City

TR2004.019

And Who Then Is This?, n.d.

(Robert Henri self-portrait)

Ink on paper

20 x 18"

TR 2004.015.030

Norbert Heermann

1891 – 1966

Untitled portrait, n.d.

Oil on canvas

16 x 13"

TR2004.015.039

Untitled, n.d.

Oil on canvas

24 x 20"

TR2004.015.038

Neil McDowell Ives

1892 – 1946

Woodstock Landscape, n.d.

Oil on canvas

19 x 22"

TR2004.015.026

Leon Kroll

1884 – 1974

Reclining Nude, n.d.

Oil on canvas

22 x 30"

TR2004.015.023

Charles Rosen

1878 – 1950

The Ives House, n.d.

Oil on canvas

25 x 30"

TR2004.015.036

Village Stream, 1929

Oil on canvas

29 x 40"

TR2004.015.040

Riverboat, ca. 1935

Oil on canvas

32 x 40"

TR2004.015.041

Brickyard, Kingston, NY, 1931

Oil on canvas

29 ½ x 24 ½"

TR2004.015.043

Eugene Speicher

1883 – 1962

Head of Leon Kroll by Eugene, ca. 1920-25

Crayon on paper

11 ⅝ x 9"

TR2004.015.007

The Red Vest, n.d.

Oil on canvas

30 x 25"

TR2004.015.033

Untitled n.d.

Oil on canvas

19 x 22"

TR2004.015.034

Untitled, n.d.

Oil on canvas

17 x 22"

TR2004.015.025

Jean Bellows, ca. 1924

Oil on canvas

20 x 16"

TR2004.015.027

Untitled, n.d.

Oil on canvas

18 x 22"

TR2004.015.024

John Carroll

1892 - 1959

Lydia, ca. 1925

Oil on canvas

36 ¼ x 34"

TR2004.015.032

M & R Wetterau Engravers

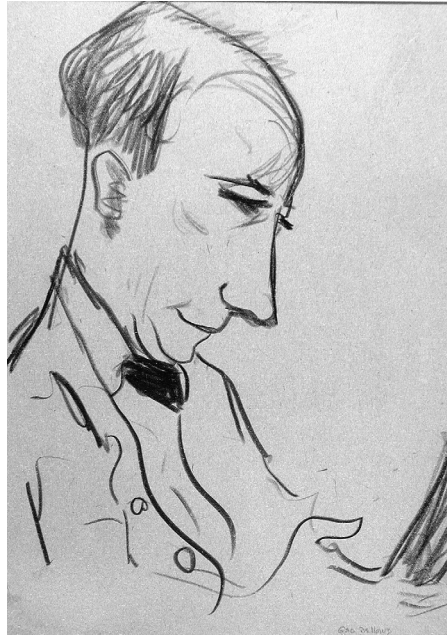
Map of Woodstock, County of Ulster, New York, United States of America

Showing the Location of Some of the Artists Homes, 1926

Hand colored engraving on cardboard

19 ½ x 28 ¼"

TR2004.015.037



George Bellows
Self Portrait, ca. 1921
Crayon on paper



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