



## George Wesley Bellows

### FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

#### ACTIVITIES

- Write a headline for this artwork. The headline must summarize the main points you think the artist is trying to convey in the work.
- Read news articles on current events and create an artwork to accompany an article. The work should convey what is happening, but also carry the tone and meaning of the event that was covered.



#### Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

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George Wesley Bellows, *Excavation at Night*, 1908, oil on canvas.

George Wesley Bellows (1882–1925) was born in Columbus, Ohio. He played college sports, and after graduating in 1904, he rejected an offer to play professional baseball for the Cincinnati Reds to pursue a career as an artist. In New York City, Bellows began by enrolling in the New York School of Art. It was there that he met and fell under the influence of Robert Henri (HEN-rye), one of the most dynamic and persuasive personalities at the school.

Henri encouraged students to rebel against the artistic norm at the time, and leave places like Central Park to paint in the tenement district where it was more real. Henri wanted his students to paint the real life they saw around them every day. Henri's group of realist artists became known as the Ashcan School. The name came from a drawing by George Wesley Bellows titled *Disappointments of the Ash Can*, in which homeless were depicted taking food from the garbage can. These artists wanted to capture the real and often seamy and gritty side to the city.

In *Excavation at Night* Bellows shows the construction of Pennsylvania Station in New York City. Bellows painted this site four times between 1907 and 1909, and the station opened in 1910. In this version he pictured the building site at night with shadowy figures huddled by the fire. To capture the details of the scene, Bellows repeatedly walked around the entire construction site and then painted primarily from memory. The excavation itself was a monumental undertaking for the time and was covered in the newspapers. The new station was important because it allowed trains carrying people and goods to come directly into the city, rather than being ferried in from New Jersey. The fact that the subject matter was current and familiar contributed to the painting's prolonged relevance.