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**SMITH CELEBRATES THE ACQUISITION OF CELEBRATED
ASHCAN SCHOOL MASTERWORK**

**Alumna’s Remarkable Gift Brings George Bellows’
“Pennsylvania Excavation” to the Permanent Collection of
Smith College Museum of Art**

Editor’s note: A high-res digital image of “Pennsylvania Excavation” is available; contact Margi Caplan, mcaplan@smith.edu; 413 244 3150.

NORTHAMPTON, Mass. – Smith College Museum of Art (SCMA) is the recipient of one of the most celebrated works by a preeminent leader of the Ashcan School of American realist painting.

“Pennsylvania Excavation” (1907), a painting that launched the career of New York realist painter George Wesley Bellows (1882-1925), has been given to the museum by 1960 Smith graduate Mary Gordon Roberts in honor of the 50th reunion of her graduating class. The acclaimed landscape depicts the site preparation for the construction of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company’s landmark station in midtown Manhattan, a turning point in New York’s urban and civic development. The painting will be on view at SCMA beginning April 13.

Bellows, who is perhaps best known for his boxing pictures, including “Stag at Sharkey’s” (1909), is celebrated for his gritty, muscular depictions of urban environments, specifically of working-class New Yorkers, their neighborhoods and activities.

Last exhibited publicly in the late 1990s, “Pennsylvania Excavation” is one of four New York paintings Bellows produced early in his career that document the construction of Penn Station, the hub of a monumentally ambitious project that would transform national transportation and commerce. Bellows’ depiction of the construction site—described by a critic in the *New York Sun* as a “great gaping wound in the dirty earth”—earned the artist early critical acclaim for capturing the raw vitality of the city’s growth. Related works are in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum (“Pennsylvania Station Excavation,” 1907-09); the National Gallery of Art (“Blue Morning,” 1909); and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (“Excavation at Night,” 1908).

“We are deeply honored by this gift and by the sustained commitment that Mary and her family have shown to Smith’s educational mission,” said Smith President Carol T. Christ. “Direct encounters with original masterworks are integral to the study and practice of art, and Smith is proud to be the place where this remarkable painting will have a lasting legacy through its availability to students, scholars and the public.”

Jessica Nicoll, director and chief curator of the college’s art museum, noted that the gift addresses an ambitious collecting priority for the museum that “we could only have realized through a gift.” Acquiring the Bellows, she said, “has realized a dream for us in the context of our commitment to an outstanding American collection.”

Established in 1879 as a contemporary American collection, Smith College Museum of Art is widely acknowledged as having one of the most important art collections at an American liberal arts college. Its 21,000 works include significant paintings by American masters such as John Singleton Copley, John Peto, Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, Childe Hassam, Charles Sheeler, Rockwell Kent and Edward Hopper, as well as works by Robert Henri, Bellows’ teacher and mentor at the New York School of Art. More than 40,000 people visit the Museum every year.

Mary Gordon Roberts majored in history at Smith and earned a master’s degree in international affairs from Stanford and an MBA from New York University. She had a long career as a financial analyst and investment banker and was a competitive long-distance runner. In 1985, the college awarded her a Smith Medal, its highest alumnae honor, in recognition of her accomplishments.

The Gordon family has supported Smith for many years, across a number of areas, notably in athletics. Albert H. Gordon, Mrs. Roberts’ father, served for a decade on the college’s board of trustees. Mary Gordon Roberts has been an active leader in the alumnae association and chaired the college’s investment committee.

For comment on the significance of the Bellows acquisition:

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