

**Lauris Mason, *The Lithographs of George Bellows: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Milwood, New York, KTO Press, 1977. 262 pp., 223 illus., \$35.00**

**David Tatham**

Volume 5, Number 2, 1978–1979

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077023ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077023ar>

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**Publisher(s)**

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

**ISSN**

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

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**Cite this review**

Tatham, D. (1978). Review of [Lauris Mason, *The Lithographs of George Bellows: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Milwood, New York, KTO Press, 1977. 262 pp., 223 illus., \$35.00]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 5(2), 138–139. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077023ar>

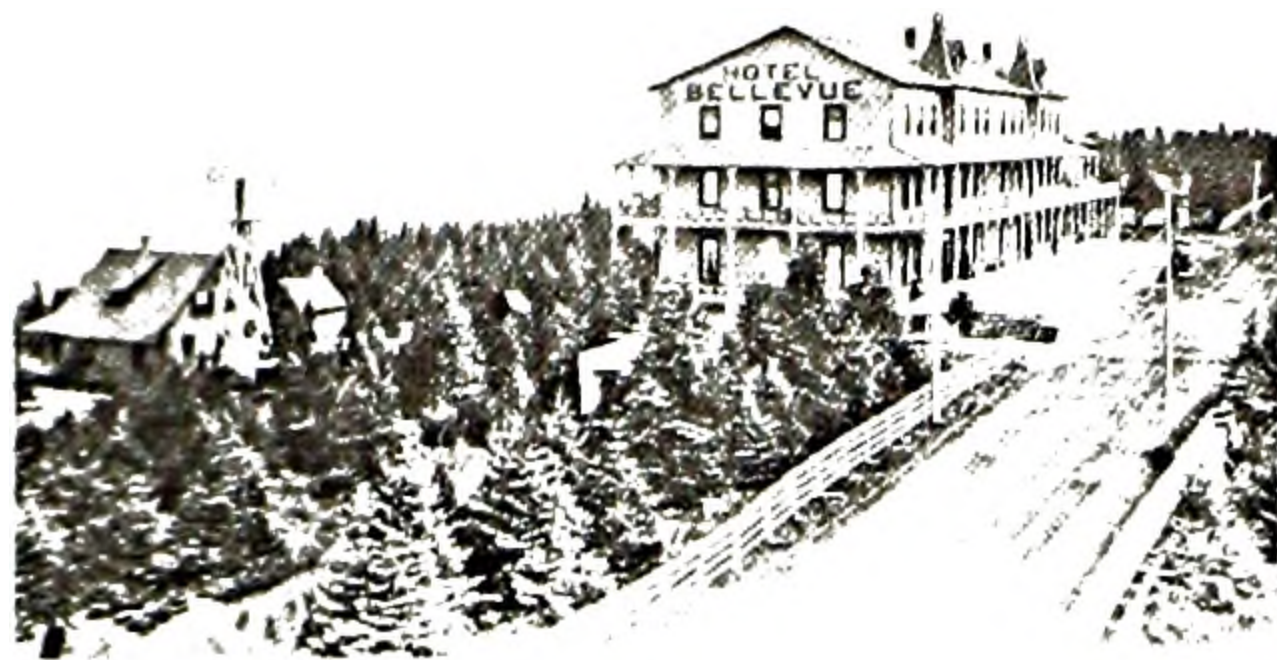


FIGURE 1. Hôtel Bellevue, Rivière-du-Loup. Caron, p. 69.

renseignements techniques et un titre anglais identifiant les négatifs apparaissent même sur chacune des enveloppes.

Contrairement à bon nombre de nos documents iconographiques où la dimension humaine tend à faire ressortir la vie populaire ou bourgeoise, les clichés de Würtele dépeignent, à travers le bâtiment, l'histoire architecturale bien sûr, tant civile, conventuelle, militaire et navale, mais aussi l'histoire événementielle, socio-culturelle et économique. Chez lui, on le sent, l'histoire est affaire de réussite. La prédominance d'ensembles architecturaux prestigieux (35 % des clichés) comme le peu de scènes illustrant la vie active de la ville de Québec, accentuent la corrélation entre ses activités professionnelles et sa recherche photographique. On peut y lire, en filigrane, les préoccupations et genres de vie du photographe, comptable de profession en milieu commercial et éducatif, militaire de carrière – ses états de services s'échelonnent sur près de vingt ans – et philanthrope passionné d'histoire. Dans ce domaine, on le retrouve successivement, et à titre bénévole, conservateur des objets puis bibliothécaire à la Québec Literary and Historical Society et enfin, secrétaire de l'Archaeological Institute of America, Department of Canada, Québec Society. Il publie sporadiquement, de 1887 à 1899 les résultats de ses recherches historiques et devient même éditeur en 1905 et 1906. Le photographe qui évolue à travers ces multiples préoccupations cherche à saisir un monde qu'il étudie, un monde qui meuble sa vie quoti-

dienne et un monde qu'il voit s'éteindre. Ces impressions inhérentes à la personnalité de Würtele se retrouvent immortalisées dans l'ensemble de son œuvre.

L'on a fort peu étudié dans ce numéro des Cahiers du patrimoine l'information transmise par ces clichés : histoire et configuration de la ville, architecture civile et fonctionnelle (Fig. 1), événements particuliers du début du siècle. Quant à l'histoire de la photographie, par trop discrète, on s'explique difficilement l'omission volontaire de détails techniques inscrits, de la main de Würtele, sur les enveloppes des négatifs. Quelques reproductions de ces sources auraient suffi à donner une idée exacte du type de renseignements notés par l'auteur, renseignements intimement liés, faut-il le dire, à un fait technique dont est fort peu alimentée l'histoire de la photographie au Québec.

Cette étude « qui se veut à la fois un album de photos et un instrument de travail » (p. 164) n'atteint qu'à moitié son objectif. La présentation par thème complétée de la collection complète en reproductions petit format est certes une idée heureuse qui justifie amplement le titre d'album de photos. Le morcellement des renseignements et la carence d'informations en font toutefois un instrument de travail qui ne répond que très partiellement à ce que l'on peut se permettre d'attendre d'une iconographie aussi significative et si riche à la fois de sources manuscrites.

Sans attaquer et encore moins douter du bien-fondé d'une telle publication, on regrette que la méthode d'analyse n'ait pas été plus précisément orientée sur une réelle mise en valeur de ce bien culturel.

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LAURIS MASON *The Lithographs of George Bellows: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Milwood, New York, KTO Press, 1977. 262 pp., 223 illus., \$35.00.

During the last dozen years of his life, George Bellows was a towering figure in American art. He was widely acknowledged not only as a major painter, printmaker, and teacher, but also as a kind of cultural hero, an artist who as a person embodied many things quintessentially American, from baseball to democratic humility. Following his death of a burst appendix at the age of forty-two, his reputation declined gradually as the long-established taste for realism waned and the memory of his personal magnetism faded. He remains, nevertheless, an important American artist of his era, if scarcely the great master his plentiful boosters made him out to be.

Bellows had many strengths as a painter, and in his best work he touched a number of familiar subjects in American life freshly and movingly. To some of his most fervent admirers, he represented a stay against the encroachment of modernist styles from Europe; but Bellows himself, though provincial in the sense that he never travelled outside North America, was by no means a reactionary in matters of art. His championing of Jay Hambidge's theory of dynamic symmetry and of Hardesty Maratta's colours may be seen as being less significant for the effect it had on his work than as evidence of his belief that in his own, cautious, way he was part of a vanguard. His death in mid-career was tragic, for of all the American realists of his day, he seemed perhaps the most likely to absorb some of the ideas of the modernists and to be able to do so without surrendering the intuitive genuineness which provided his work with much of its strength. The geometricized simplifications of his later works may be seen as evidence that he was even then attempting to make an original accommodation with the innovations of the modernists.



FIGURE 1. Bellows, *Benediction in Georgia*. Mason, p. 53.

Bellows was an accomplished lithographic artist. Between 1916 and 1924 he drew 193 lithographs, all monochromatic and nearly all drawn directly on the stone. He claimed that he was rehabilitating the medium of lithography from the stigma of commercialism which had overwhelmed it in the second half of the nineteenth century, and there is a large kernel of truth in his claim. He was indeed the first major American artist in the twentieth century to make a reputation as a printmaker by working in the medium. Nevertheless it is an exaggeration to leave the impression, as does the book at hand, that the medium had fallen into total disuse as a fine art medium and that Bellows single-handedly revived it. (He was not alone – John Sloan, for example, who made some admirable lithographs even earlier than Bellows, merits some credit.) Still, Bellows was undeniably foremost among a number of American artists participating in what proved to be a world-wide revival of the medium, and his prints, more than any others, restored lustre to lithography's reputation as a fine art process in America.

His subjects were varied, almost bewilderingly so. His drawing style was also varied, as might be expected of an artist exploring a new medium. A few of his prints rank very high in any assessment of North American printmaking. His very first print, *Hungry Dogs*, is one of his best. His satires, of which *Benediction in Georgia* (Fig. 1) is one of the strongest, are sharply observed. His war series is quite pow-

erful, even though it reflects the rage of an artist who knew the war through newspaper reports rather than from experience. Comparisons have often been made with Goya's *Los Caprichos* and *Los Desastres de la Guerra* and with Daumier, and while the spirit of these masters can be seen from time to time in Bellows's best prints, what is important about his work comes from the clarity and originality of his observations of particularly American subjects.

Following Bellows's death in 1925, his wife Emma prepared a catalogue of his lithographs using, among other sources, the artist's own notes and records. Published in 1927 and reprinted with revisions in 1928, it served for half a century as the authoritative source of reference for this body of the artist's work. Lauris Mason's well-produced catalogue raisonné now supplants it, being more complete (including two lithographs not recorded by Emma Bellows), more accurate in a few matters, and more useful. Mason's general model seems to have been Peter Morse's wholly admirable catalogues raisonnés of the prints of John Sloan and Jean Charlot, and while the result is not so sophisticated or intellectually alert as Morse's studies, it is quite a satisfactory job.

Each print is illustrated. The year of execution, dimensions, edition size, and Emma Bellows's catalogue number are given for each entry, and brief extracts from pertinent writings by the artist, his wife, or others are also included. Unique material from the Wiggin Collection of the Boston Public Library Print Room is cited. Appendices include a concordance of Mason's numbers with those of Emma Bellows and a list of holdings of Bellows lithographs in selected museums, a list which would be more valuable if it were not limited to seventeen institutions in eight states and the District of Columbia. There is no significant discussion of misattributions or forgeries. A foreword by Charles H. Morgan, author of the standard life of Bel-

lows, illuminates a few aspects of Bellows's career as a printmaker, but it does not establish a context for the artist either in the history of lithography or in the graphic arts milieu of early-twentieth-century America. Nor is the foreword entirely free from the sort of wide-eyed admiration that has long been a burden to Bellows's reputation.

The author and her assistant, Joan Ludman, have compiled a reference work which will be of obvious value to print curators and dealers. It will also be useful to scholarly studies not only of this important American artist, but also to the larger subject of fine art printmaking in North America during the first third of this century.

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*Graphic Works of the American Thirties: A Book of 100 Prints*. New York, Da Capo Press, 1977. 216 pp., illus., \$7.95 (paper).

The original edition of this volume appeared in conjunction with the first art exhibit sponsored by the American Artists' Congress in New York City in December 1936, with simultaneous duplicate exhibitions in thirty other U.S. cities. Founded late in 1935, the Congress's objective, as stated by its secretary, Stuart Davis, was 'to take a firm stand against war and fascism, and for the defense of art and artists of all esthetic persuasions.' To that end, the Congress's thirteen-member jury assembled an exhibit of one hundred 'socially conscious' prints by U.S. artists working in a variety of media and styles. The reproduction of these prints forms the basis for this volume.

The inadequate introductory text includes discussions of the three major printmaking techniques represented in this exhibition – woodcut, etching, and lithography – plus an explanation of the rationale for the show. Conceived as a state-