



OCTOBER 2014

## A Tugboat with Eyes

Arthur G. Dove | *The Bessie of New York*



**VISIT THE BMA**  
and see *The Bessie of New York* in the  
American Wing after  
its reopening on  
November 23, 2014.

Arthur G. Dove (American, 1880-1946). Detail, *The Bessie of New York*. 1932. Oil on canvas. 28 x 40 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial Collection, BMA 1953.5. ©The Estate of Arthur G. Dove, courtesy Terry Dintenfass, Inc.

Many boats have names, just like people, but there's something unusual about this little tugboat named Bessie. As we peek into her brightly lit windows, she seems to be peering back at us. Her cabin door is exactly where a mouth might be. Her bright green pipe looks a bit like a bent nose, and her bow juts out over the water like an enormous chin. In 1932 when Arthur Dove painted *The Bessie of New York*, Walt Disney had just begun producing animated films. Perhaps the artist was having fun making Bessie look as alive as a boat in a cartoon.

Arthur Dove knew boats well. For seven years, he had lived on the water, first on a houseboat on New York's Harlem River and then on a yacht off of Long Island Sound. Surely he had seen tugboats pushing and pulling much larger ships down the rivers and gently guiding them into harbor. Some would have been much grander than Bessie, with ladders and rails, flags, masts, and tall smokestacks. But there would also have been smaller tugs, short enough to pass easily under a low drawbridge. Bessie may have been one of those.

Most of the time, Dove used his paints and brushes to record his sense of wonder at the expanse of the sea, the brilliance of the sun, the radiance of the moon, the splendor of trees, the mystery of wind and fog. But here in this painting, it seems that he enjoyed giving a spark of life to a little tugboat bobbing along on gentle waves near a sandy cliff and rolling hills.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Compare and contrast Dove's *The Bessie of New York* with photographs of actual tugboats. See <http://bit.ly/1rZWP9f>

How do the faces of the tugboats in the animated cartoon *Theodore and the Queen* (<http://bit.ly/1pVwAgV>) compare to appearance of Dove's Bessie? Which facial features are drawn on the boat's exterior? Which are derived from the boat's own windows, doors, pipe, and bow? Which do you find most effective?

"Animate" a picture of a building, vehicle, or household object, using parts of its actual structure (such as a building's windows, a car's headlights, or a teapot's spout) to form its facial features.

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**



To comment or register  
for Art-To-Go, email  
[ebenskin@artbma.org](mailto:ebenskin@artbma.org)

For visitor information:  
[artbma.org](http://artbma.org)

Sponsored in memory of dedicated BMA  
docent Ruth H. Singer by her family.



Arthur G. Dove. *The Bessie of New York*.

1932. Oil on canvas. 28 x 40 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial Collection, BMA 1953.5. ©The Estate of Arthur G. Dove, courtesy Terry Dintenfass, Inc.