

## 5105

### George Benjamin Luks, *Street Scene (Hester Street)*

**Dominic Carter:** Hester Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, about a hundred years ago. George Luks captures the street life of recent Jewish immigrants in what was then one of the most crowded places on the planet. Rather than simply showing an anonymous mass of humanity, Luks places a group of individual figures up front and center. As curator Barbara Gallati notes, he introduces them to us with a skillful flourish:

**Barbara Gallati:** In the lower right-hand corner we have what looks to be a cart filled with cabbages, in this lovely blue tone that takes us from this lower right-hand corner and diagonally moves us into the center of the composition, and lets us stop where these children are.

**Dominic Carter:** The man to the left of the children appears to be out for a stroll, casually enjoying the spectacle of urban life. He might be a stand-in for Luks himself, who, as an artist, wanted to paint what was going on outside in the city, not in the studio.

**Barbara Gallati:** I think what was radical about the painting was that it was realism rather than something very aesthetically high-minded.

**Dominic Carter:** The Lower East Side is not as crowded as it used to be, but it's still a destination for immigrants. Paul Mak, president and CEO of the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association, recognizes something of contemporary New York in this painting:

**Paul Mak:** For example, Manhattan Chinatown is really a centralized location for a lot of people, so basically on any holiday or weekend you will see people crowding the streets and meeting with people and talking to people.