



## Ralph Fasanella: Images of Optimism

**Leslie Umberger**

**Mark Fasanella**

**Ralph Fasanella, Illustrator**

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Facing a blank canvas, most artists strive to paint a pretty picture under the guidelines (however loose) of Impressionism, Expressionism, or some other style or technique, while a rarer few seek to use their paintings to address political or social injustices, either symbolically or overtly. With the primitive, self-taught style of Grandma Moses in mind, take note of Ralph Fasanella's early- mid-twentieth century work depicting gritty, urban New York City. A fierce advocate for strong unions and labor rights among the immigrant population, Fasanella started painting shortly after World War Two and quickly earned critical acclaim as a "modern primitive," an artist adept at capturing a "unique and quintessentially American spirit while simultaneously offering an antidote to the elite art world embodied in the work of the abstract expressionists," according to art historian Leslie Umberger in *Ralph Fasanella: Images of Optimism*. Interestingly, Fasanella's lack of formal art training did not keep him from intensely studying the greats via books, galleries, and museums. Throughout his life, he was comfortable in art circles. Blacklisted for his leftist activism during the early Cold War years, his work never backed away from the political issues of the day.

MATT SUTHERLAND (July/August 2017)

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