

Ralph Fasanella: A More Perfect Union

May 11-June 22, 2013

Opening reception: Saturday, May 11, 5 - 7 pm

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present *Ralph Fasanella: A More Perfect Union*, its first solo exhibition for the legendary self-taught New York painter. A 64 page catalog published for the exhibition features an essay by Erika Doss, an art historian and professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

In March 2008, Senator Barack Obama delivered an empathetic and energizing speech that, as the *New Yorker* later declared, indisputably convinced Americans “of all colors” to vote him into the White House that November as the nation’s first African American president. Named after a phrase in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech called on Americans to move past their “profoundly distorted” and “divisive” views, especially those pertaining to race, and re-engage in a collective “march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America.”

Ralph Fasanella (1914-1997) would have loved that speech. Many of the boldly colored and intricately detailed paintings that this working class New Yorker produced for over fifty years resonate with the same yearnings, the same expectations, for a more perfect America. Like Obama, Fasanella believed that a nation founded on aspirations of liberty, freedom, and collective social progress should, in fact, live up to those ambitions; similarly, he didn’t sugarcoat how the nation had failed, or fallen behind. Frequently combining scenes of what was with what could be, often referencing the reformist initiatives of twentieth-century labor unions and other progressive political movements, Fasanella pictured an imagined America, a more perfect union.

Spanning his entire career, the works collected in this exhibition reveal many of the subjects and scenes that most captivated Fasanella: urban neighborhoods, labor activism (the Great Strike of 1912, Lawrence, MA), and national tragedies (the assassination of JFK), and traumas (the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg). Today, as demonstrated by the surge of protest by groups like Occupy, and growing recognition of the abiding facts of American economic disparity, Ralph Fasanella’s paintings are more revelatory, and relevant, than ever.