



BLIND NEWSDEALER

Ralph Fasanella (1914–1997)

New York; 1947

Oil on canvas; 39 × 39"

Gift of Eva Fasanella and her children, Gina Mostrando and Marc Fasanella, 2004.27.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ralph Fasanella was born in New York City, the son of Italian immigrants. Early in life, Fasanella developed an intense feeling for the struggles of working people and, at the age of 24, in 1938, he took a job as a union organizer. As early as the 1940s, however, Fasanella experienced an urge to draw. By the 1950s, he was painting every evening. His subjects reflect his strong ideological commitment to organized labor and those who he believed were economically exploited. Just as important, besides providing the artist with a forum for his social and political views, painting opened up an outlet for his creativity.

Blind Newsdealer is a subject that Fasanella painted several times, and the scene is typical in the Manhattan cityscape. The newsdealer is depicted in the center of the painting wearing dark glasses, and he is surrounded by newspapers organized in neat, sorted stacks—the *Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, the *Sun*, and the *News*.

RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

www.folkartmuseum.org

Community Learning Network, Advertising in the Media Theme Page: www.cln.org/themes/media_advert.html

D'Ambrosio, Paul S. *Ralph Fasanella's America*.

Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 2001.

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson. *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Watson, Patrick. *Fasanella's City: The Paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the Story of His Life and Art*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS

QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in this picture?
- What can we say about this place?
- How does the composition lead our eye through the work?
- What more can we find?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Look closely at the words on the newspapers in the painting. How do these headlines compare with ones we see today on newsstands?
- Ralph Fasanella tells us in the title that the newsdealer in the painting is blind. To what is he blind? What do we see that he does not? How does the artist use the metaphor of blindness?
- The newsstand in Fasanella's painting is plastered with images of women. How are the women depicted? What messages about gender does the artist communicate?
- The words *beauty* and *love* are featured prominently in the newsstand. What are the roles of these two concepts in the painting?
- Do you think the newsstand acts as a confining element for the newsdealer, or is it a sanctuary? What visual clues lead you to this conclusion?
- Fasanella is known for his sympathetic treatment of labor issues and as a champion of working people. How does this painting relate to these themes? What, if any, commentary does the artist inject into the image?
- Do you think this painting is still relevant today?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What were some of the major stories one might have been able to read about at this newsstand in 1947, when the painting was made?
- How has the recent emergence of online news sources affected the print media we might find at a newsstand today?
- Do you think there is there a kind of "blindness" in today's news media? If so, where do you perceive it?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students collect headlines from various news publications in their area and develop a written response to what they discover in this process. What are some critical modern-day social issues, and how are headlines indications of these?
- Have an in-class journalism competition. Ask students to research underreported issues relevant to their community. What important stories are not being told? Have students submit their activist articles to their school or local community newspaper.

- Have students investigate the depiction of both men and women in the media. How do these portrayals compare with each other?
- Ask students to visit a local newsstand and survey the publications available at each. Interview the vendor to learn about how publications are selected for sale, and which are most popular with buyers.

