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Ralph Fasanella (1914–1997), a well-known contemporary folk painter, described himself as "a working man with social ideas." The son of Italian immigrants, Fasanella went to work at the age of seven, assisting his father in making ice deliveries. As a young man he went to Spain to fight with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He later worked as a union organizer, a trucker, and a garment factory worker. When he was blacklisted for many years, he found employment in his brothers' gas station. Then, in the early 1970s, when his vibrant paintings of the urban landscape became widely recognized for their brilliant evocation of working class life and culture, he was finally able to make a living from his art. In this painting, "Dress Shop," which shows the cut-away interior of a garment factory, Fasanella depicts his mother and sister, who were both seamstresses. The artist said that he was joyful as he worked on this painting: "I felt wonderful. It's a beautiful painting, very rich. That came because, knowing the people in the shop and including my sister—I loved these people. They were a part of me." (From Paul S. D'Ambrosio, Ralph Fasanella's America. Cooperstown, NY: New York State Historical Association; 2001.)

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