

Robert Fishko, *Director*

WILLIAM GROPPER
(1887-1977)

Little Steel, c.1937
oil on canvas
33 3/4 x 44 1/2 inches

Provenance

The Artist
Private Collection, New York, NY
Forum Gallery, New York, NY



Note

The Artist William Gropper wrote an article for *The Nation* in the summer of 1937, at the height of the Dust Bowl and second wave of the Great Depression. Using Works Progress Administration funds, Gropper went on a tour around the country to document the resilience of ordinary people living in extraordinary times, facing twin man-made disasters.

In the article, Gropper describes a particularly violent encounter between the Youngstown police and the women workers taking their turn in the truck drivers' union picket line, some holding children in their arms, "At about nine o'clock in the evening, in front of Gate 5 of the Republic plant, the police got into an argument with the women and ordered them to leave. The women refused, and three shots of tear gas were fired into the crowd...Screams were drowned out by shell fire. Strikers ran in every direction; many of them hurled rocks at the police, others ran to find weapons. More blasts from the police rifles – and then cars full of special police drove by, firing low at the mass of people. Tear bombs were thrown into nearby houses, and women and children came running out with tears in their eyes, choking and looking for a place to hide. The shooting continued until after midnight. According to the next morning's paper, two were killed and twenty-eight hurt. This was my introduction to Youngstown, the first stop on my trip West." ¹

Following this tense introduction to the Ohio city, Gropper completed his seminal masterwork, *Youngstown Strike*, 1937 (Collection, The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio. Museum Purchase, 1985.) It was around this time period that William Gropper also completed the tondo, *Little Steel*, which depicts a violent clash of uniformed police with union strikers. The swirling composition of figures with upraised fists and billy clubs, is an undulating melee resembling a dance of protest and aggression.

¹ Gropper, William. "Gropper Visits Youngstown," *The Nation*, New York, NY, July 3, 1937, p. 15