

Date: 1917

Size: 18¾ x 23¾ (477 x 603 mm)

Edition: 99

Reference: B. 71

First appeared as a painting in 1907, with two variations on the theme following later. This lithograph was made... using the paintings as studies and adding new features and alterations. All proofs from the stone run very much alike.—GB

At Sharkey's, in 1907, the crowd was so small and so compact that it bred an instant intimacy and partisanship over the beer mugs and the smell of resin and cigars. Each clout and grunt from the ring rallied boos and cheers demanding a dramatic finish.... No one wanted a decision, only a comatose body on the canvas and a blood-stained, hysterical victor standing above him in the ring, held back by the referee to prevent sheer murder.—CHM, p. 76

This powerful large-scale lithograph is one of the most important American prints of the first half of the twentieth century. The combination of the brute strength of the fighters and the lust of the spectators made it one of the first Bellows prints to attract general attention.

The setting is Tom Sharkey's club, not far from the artist's first studio in New York City's Lincoln Arcade Building. Sharkey, a retired fighter, operated a saloon where he staged frequent bouts in the back room. Since prize-fights were illegal as a public sporting event in New York, Sharkey's operated as a private club calling tickets to the fights "dues"—and thus legitimizing the bouts.

A painting, *Club Night*, August and September 1907, (originally titled *A Stag At Sharkey's*) is in the National Gallery of Art. The painting on which the lithograph was based, *Stag at Sharkey's, August 1909* (originally titled *Club Night*) is in the collection of

the Cleveland Museum of Art.

In the oil painting of the same name, the ropes enclosed the tumultuous fighters. In the lithograph the ropes almost disappear and the viewer identifies with the anonymous fighters as well as with the crowd.

According to Mahonri Sharp Young, Bellows' comment about his painting *Both Members of This Club*, 1909 (originally titled *A Nigger and a White Man*) was, "I don't know anything about boxing, I'm just painting two men trying to kill each other." (MSY, p. 42)

An impression of this lithograph sold at Christie's, New York, in September 1984, was annotated, "No 99 last proof." The impression in the collection of The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Bequest of W.G. Russell Allen) is inscribed, "This proof for Edward Krause." (See page 21.)

