

# MODERN ART COLLECTION

**Theodore Robinson**  
***Afternoon Shadows***  
**1891**  
**Oil on canvas**  
**19 × 22½ in. (48.3 × 57.2 cm)**  
**Museum purchase, funds provided by Michael A. and Donna Singer**  
**2007.7**

Theodore Robinson was one of the first American artists to embrace the innovations of the French impressionist movement and was among the few American artists to enjoy a close personal friendship with Claude Monet, the father of French impressionism. Between 1887 and 1892, Robinson spent half of each year in Giverny, where his mature artistic style—characterized by a powerful sense of design, atmospheric effects, and lively surface texture—evolved under the direct influence of Monet.

Painted at Giverny in the summer of 1891, *Afternoon Shadows* depicts a single stack of grain in a meadow of vivid greens and yellows bordered by a line of trees along the horizon. The deep shadows in the foreground recede toward the sunlit boundary of the field, suggesting late afternoon. The title of the work was given by Robinson himself in his diary in an entry dated December 8, 1893.

Robinson was an academically trained figure painter who studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and at the National Academy of Design in New York City. Following this early period of study from 1870 to 1874, Robinson sought an art education in Europe and continued his studies in Paris between 1876 and 1879 at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian. He was an active member of the American artistic community in France and exhibited his work at the Paris Salons in 1877, 1880, and 1887 through 1890.

Between 1887 and 1892, Robinson made six extended visits to Giverny, where he came to know Claude Monet personally. Robinson's diary includes numerous accounts of lively exchanges between the two about art and artists. Robinson also corresponded frequently with Monet following his final extended visit to Giverny in 1892. In his letters to the American artist, Monet praised Robinson's work and offered advice. This personal friendship enhanced Robinson's knowledge of



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impressionist techniques and was the genesis of Robinson's essay on Monet published in the illustrated monthly magazine *The Century* in 1892.

The summer of 1891 marked the high point of Robinson's incorporation of impressionist techniques. *Afternoon Shadows* forms a pair with another work of identical composition currently in the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. Painted at different times of day, both versions explore changing color and light in the landscape and owe their inspiration to Monet's grainstack series of the mid-1880s and 1890-1891. The varied and expressive brush technique of *Afternoon Shadows* provides a lively surface texture, while the abrupt cropping of the vista along the high horizon line enhances the spontaneity of the composition. The high-keyed palette of greens and yellows with touches of blue and red conveys the effects of afternoon sunlight and shadow on this pastoral vista.

Robinson was unable to return to Giverny after the winter of 1892 because of poor health. He settled in New York, where he became an important teacher of impressionist plein-air painting at the Brooklyn Art School, Princeton College, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Chronic and debilitating asthma limited his ability to travel abroad. Robinson died in 1896 from a severe asthma attack.

