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The Frigon Collection

American Images from the Turn of the Century



Theodore Robinson, *Vermont Valley*

Paintings associated with the Impressionist movement are currently the most popularly-known, best loved and most widely-assimilated pictures in the history of art, and Impressionism was arguably just as popular a century ago. *American Images from the Turn of the Century: The Frigon Collection* is a celebration of the American interest in the Impressionist aesthetic both one hundred years ago and today.

The movement of Impressionism emerged in France in 1874, when artists like Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir were rejected by the academic Salon. The scorned artists staged their own exhibition in the former studio of the photographer Nadar. Profoundly influenced by photography,

the Impressionists' goal, as art historian Frederick Hartt writes, "was to beat photography at its own game, and supply the essentials that the camera missed" -- the elusive appearance of nature and the psychology of color, light and motion. The term Impressionism was derived from the title of Monet's 1872 port scene *Impression--Sunrise*.

The Frigon Collection reveals the extent of artistic expression inspired in American artists by the French Impressionist movement. More than twenty significant paintings celebrate the impressionist theories which American artists including Theodore Earl Butler, Childe Hassam, Louis Ritman and Theodore Robinson encountered during trips to Europe and through their exposure to the work of Impressionist masters.

American Impressionists shared outlooks and techniques, gathered together and exchanged ideas, painted and exhibited. They depicted contemporary life and landscapes by rendering an "impression" of what they saw rather than what their minds knew were there. Impressionism's major break with tradition lay in its high-keyed color and assumed lack of finish. Working start to finish out-of-doors, they became fascinated by the transformations wrought by light on natural objects, surfaces and atmospheric spaces. Americans in France absorbed the ideals and aesthetics of Monet, Manet, and Renoir, then added characteristics common to all American eras--individualism and realism.

Among the Americans who painted in France toward the close of the nineteenth century was Theodore Earl Butler. Butler's work *The Mill in the Flood, Giverny* implies references to Monet. Like Monet's interest in changing atmosphere and light at specific sites, Butler dramatized the 1910 spring flood of the Epte at Giverny in, as Richard Love writes, "a way that only someone with a 'spirit of place' could render." Butler became an intimate of Monet's household and married Monet's stepdaughter, Suzanne Hochede. By 1908, a second generation of Americans residing at Monet's Giverny, including Lawton Parker and Karl Buehr, focused on the female figure. Their interest in decorative settings, bright light and vibrant colors is prominent in Parker's *The Orange Parasol* and Buehr's *Under the Parasol*.

In the United States, scenes of the American countryside and the modern city were popular. Impressionism dominated in early 20th century Connecticut art colonies like Cos Cob and Old Lyme; Childe Hassam's *Nocturne, Provincetown*, and Robert Vonnoh's *Pleasant Valley, Lyme, CT* are two examples. Guy Wiggins's *New York City, Winter* and Ernest Lawson's *Across the Hudson* prove that American Impressionists were as interested in depicting the modern world as their French forebearers.

Americans developed their own Impressionism by bringing back the concepts, techniques and ideals of the movement from France and transforming the aesthetic with their own styles. Through the generosity of Anne Marie and Henry Frigon, the Paine is delighted to share these images from a century ago.



Karl Buehr, *Under the Parasol*

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