

## **JAMES MCDOUGAL HART (1828–1901)**

Dawn of Morning, c. 1855

Oil on canvas

26 3/16 x 36 1/4 inches

Signed lower center

Prominent amongst the second generation of Hudson River School painters, James McDougal Hart is known for his refined and intricately crafted pastoral scenes, often featuring grazing cattle. Born in Kilmarnock, Scotland in 1828, Hart immigrated with his family to Albany, New York when he was just two years old. His older brother, William Hart (1823–1894), and younger sister, Julie Hart Beers (1835–1913), also went on to become accomplished landscape painters. James' future wife, Marie Theresa Gorsuch, was a still life painter, and their three children, Robert Gorsuch Hart, Letitia Bonnet Hart, and Mary Theresa Hart, all grew up to be painters as well.

James Hart began his career, as had William, in a sign and carriage painter's shop. Unlike his brother, James returned to Europe at the age of twenty-two to receive academic training. He studied briefly in Munich, and for three years with Johann Willhelm Schirmer (1807–1863) at the Düsseldorf Academy, a center of realist pedagogy that was equally influential for fellow Hudson River School painters, Worthington Whittredge (1820–1910), Eastman Johnson (1824–1905), Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), and William Stanley Haseltine (1835–1900).

Returning to the United States in 1853, Hart established his first studio in Albany. A few years later, he settled permanently in New York City, later moving to Brooklyn. In the 1870s, he and his brother opened studios in Keene Valley, New York, in the heart of the Adirondacks. Hart was elected an Associate of the National Academy of Design in 1857 and a full member in 1859, exhibiting his work there consistently over the next forty years, and serving as its Vice President from 1895 to 1899. He also exhibited at the Brooklyn Art Association, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Boston Art Club, the Mechanics Institute in Boston, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Centennial International Exposition of 1876 (the first official World's Fair in the United States, held in Philadelphia), and the Paris Exposition of 1889.

In 1867, prominent art critic Henry Tuckerman observed that “an exquisite truth and grace [are] characteristic of his [Hart's] pencil,” and praised his *Woods in Autumn* as “one of the finest contributions lately made to the list of American successes in this field of art.” Today, Hart's paintings are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Brooklyn Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum; the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.; the Corcoran Gallery of Art; the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland; and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, among others.

One could only hope to find themselves overlooking the majestic landscape that Hart has rendered in the exceptional, early large-scale, *Dawn of Morning*. The sky is a spectrum of color, suggestive of the rising sun, and fragments of light are reflected on the water below. The entire scene, with its lush trees and tranquil lake, appears to be untouched and unaffected by man with the exception of the peaceable sheep resting and grazing in the left foreground.