

Basic Detail Report



Sheepshearing

Date

c. 1901

Primary Maker

Dermod O'Brien

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

76 x 106 cm

Description

Like Nathaniel Hone, Dermod O'Brien lived on a farm and recorded its day-to-day activities in a somewhat reserved, yet matter-of-fact, way. In 'Sheep Shearing' the work of the shearers is understated, relegated to the middle distance and framed by a remarkably detached herd of sheep. The usual attendant panic in the flock is noticeably absent and the tranquillity of the event is underscored by the way the woman on the left continues to peg up her washing with her back to the action as if unaware of it. The monumentality of the haystack with its rich golden warmth stabilises the composition and radiates comfort, prosperity and order and compensates for the artist's difficulties with scale. The combination of trees, haystack and shadows forming a line from left to right close to the background of the composition give it something of the formality and shallowness of space of a classical frieze. O'Brien was a great admirer of the Dutch Old Masters but this picture owes more to the intimacy of 19th century Dutch realists like Josef Israels and Anton Mauve. 'Sheep Shearing' was painted in around 1901 when the artist lived at Cahermoyle, Co. Limerick. An oil sketch made in preparation for this was still in his possession at the time of his death. (Extract from 'Images and Insights', Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1993, p. 78)