

Give examples of landscape or cityscape paintings from Vermeer to the present that show the foreground lit by sunlight, the middle ground in the shadow of a cloud, and the background again lit by sunlight. A good example can be found in Martin Johnson Heade's painting of a salt marsh.

[looking for what is known as "cloud shadows sweeping across the landscape,"]

You're looking for a specific atmospheric effect in landscape and cityscape paintings: a foreground lit by sunlight, a middle ground in the shadow of a cloud, and a background again lit by sunlight. This creates a striking sense of depth and the transient nature of light.

Here are some examples, including the one you mentioned:

**1. Martin Johnson Heade: "Sunlight and Shadow: The Newbury Marshes" (c. 1871-1875)**

This is an excellent example of the effect you describe. Heade was a master at capturing the atmospheric conditions of the salt marshes. In "Sunlight and Shadow," the foreground marshland and an apple tree are bathed in sunlight, while a large cloud casts a distinct shadow over the middle ground, often encompassing a haystack or a bend in the creek. Beyond this shadowed area, the distant horizon and the tops of the clouds are once again illuminated by the sun, creating that distinct layered effect of light and shadow. The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. has a fine example of this.

**2. Johannes Vermeer: "View of Delft" (c. 1660-1661)** While Vermeer is best known for his interior scenes, "View of Delft" is a masterful cityscape that beautifully demonstrates the play of light and shadow. The foreground, with its figures and the water of the canal, is often depicted in shadow, cast by large, dark clouds overhead. The middle ground, particularly the city walls and the rooftops of some buildings, falls into this shadow. However, the background, most notably the spire of the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church), is bathed in brilliant sunlight, creating a dramatic contrast and emphasizing the depth of the scene. Vermeer deliberately manipulated reality to achieve this striking effect.

**Beyond Vermeer and Heade (looking towards the present):**

While finding perfect "foreground in sun, middle ground in cloud shadow, background in sun" examples is quite specific, this atmospheric effect, known as "cloud shadows sweeping across the landscape," has been a recurring theme for artists interested in capturing the changing moods of nature. Artists often focus on the dramatic interplay of light and shadow, even if the exact three-layer sun-shadow-sun effect isn't always present in such a distinct manner.

- **Hudson River School (American, mid-19th century):** Many artists from this movement, like **Frederic Edwin Church** or **Albert Bierstadt**, were fascinated by

dramatic skies and the way light affected vast landscapes. While their focus was often on grand, epic scenes, you can sometimes find passages in their works where cloud shadows create distinct bands across the landscape, though perhaps not always with the foreground specifically sunlit and the background also sunlit in the precise way you're looking for. Their emphasis was on the sublime and the powerful forces of nature.

- **Impressionists (French, late 19th century):** Artists like **Claude Monet** were deeply concerned with capturing the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere. While they often focused on direct sunlight or overall atmospheric conditions, their rapid brushstrokes and studies of light could sometimes hint at these shifting patterns. Look for series of paintings where the same subject is depicted under different light conditions, as you might find some instances of cloud shadows moving across the scene.
- **Tonalism (American, late 19th - early 20th century):** This movement, with artists like **George Inness**, emphasized mood and soft, atmospheric effects. Their landscapes often feature muted colors and a sense of diffused light, but the subtle interplay of light and shadow, often due to clouds, is central to their work. While less dramatic than Heade, you might find more nuanced examples of this phenomenon.

It's a challenging effect to capture perfectly in a single painting, as it relies on a very specific and transient moment in nature. However, it's a testament to the skill of artists like Heade and Vermeer that they were able to immortalize such fleeting beauty.

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/entertainment/arts/art-city/2016/11/17/martin-johnson-heade-forged-his-own-stubborn-path-nature-painter/93897718/>

<https://bigthink.com/hard-science/vermeer-delft-astronomy/>



This painting is "View of Haarlem from the Northwest, with the Bleaching Fields in the Foreground" by Jacob van Ruisdael. (Rijksmuseum)



This painting is **"The Stone Bridge"** by **Rembrandt van Rijn**.

Rembrandt finds that same quality of distant bathed in sunlight, surrounded by shadow, focus in his work. (Rijksmuseum)



This painting is **"View of the Golden Bend in the Herengracht"** by **Gerrit Adriaensz.**

Though not a shadow in the middle distance example, it's cityscape shadows and light are interesting. (Rijksmuseum)