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# “On the Subject of Nativeness”

## Marsden Hartley and New England Regionalism

Donna M. Cassidy

**B**ORN IN LEWISTON, Maine, Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) spent the first decade of the twentieth century painting in his native state. He traveled to France and Germany in the early 1910s and worked so frequently outside the United States in the following decade that he was labeled an expatriate. By the early 1930s Hartley’s excursions abroad diminished. He began making trips back to New England yet at the same time renounced the region in his letters: “It is theatric and all over the place—and as I have already said—ruined by the commercialism of the nouveau riche and the parvenu. . . . I shall be happy enough to get out of New England never to enter it again.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite such disparaging remarks, Hartley returned again and again to his native region in the

early 1930s and settled permanently in Maine in 1937. The key to his changing affections lies in the relationship of his late art to midwestern regionalism. In opposition to European modernism, regionalist artists and their apologists advocated a realistic, indigenous art grounded in place and accessible to a wide audience. They situated American cultural identity in traditional rural communities and outside the modern and the urban. Hartley’s association with Alfred Stieglitz and the avant-garde has prevented historians from seeing his affinity for regionalism and his own role in the formation of a New England brand of this art.<sup>2</sup> More than simply an art movement, regionalism was a set of values manifest in varied forms of cultural production in the 1920s and 1930s, and artists of all persuasions—political and aesthetic—

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<sup>1</sup> Marsden Hartley to Rebecca Strand, October 18, 1930, reel X3, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, Boston Regional Office) (hereafter cited as AAA). Marsden Hartley to Helen Stein, January 26, 1940, Helen Stein Papers, AAA (letters, Boston Regional Office). Hartley to Isabel Lachaise, July 22, 1928, reel X3, AAA. See also Hartley to Strand, October 11, 1930, reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Norma Berger, July 1931, as quoted in Vivian Endicott Barnett, “Marsden Hartley’s Return to Maine,” *Arts* 54 (October 1979): 176.

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<sup>2</sup> The major publications on Hartley focus on his stylistic evolution: Barbara Haskell, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: New York University Press, 1980); William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977); Gail R. Scott, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988). Although some books, articles, and exhibitions have analyzed particular aspects of his career (Gerald Ferguson, ed., *Marsden Hartley and Nova Scotia* [Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 1987]; Jeanne Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids: The Art of Marsden Hartley* [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993]; Gail Levin, *Marsden Hartley in Bavaria* [Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989]; *Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown* [Gloucester, Mass.: Cape Ann Historical Society, 1985]), the scholarship rarely discusses the relation of the painter’s art to changing social, economic, or aesthetic contexts. An exception is Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Only two articles examine Hartley in Maine: Barnett, “Hartley’s Return to Maine”; Dickran Tashjian, “Marsden Hartley and the Southwest: A Ceremony for Our Vision, A Fiction for the Eye,” *Arts* 54 (April 1980): 127–31.

shared this need for a sense of place. Like his midwestern counterparts, Hartley constructed a national identity rooted to his native region, redefined the image of this place, and created an art informed by New England's past and its popular, consumer culture. From 1937 to 1943 he reinvented his art and his own artistic identity in response to both personal and cultural crises.

As historians have demonstrated, the turn to region was a widespread phenomenon in 1920s and 1930s American culture. Several recurrent themes marked this movement: a search for an indigenous or essential America, believed to be located in the natural landscape or in folk cultures; a longing for the imagined intimacy and stability of rural communities; and a reverence for the past as an antidote to the chaotic present. This appreciation of place and past emerged as a way of dealing with social and cultural upheavals. Regionalism initially arose in the 1920s as a movement criticizing modernization—urbanization, industrialization, standardization of mass culture. The discovery of region formed the basis for personal and cultural regeneration as writers and intellectuals considered regional culture a model for a new integrated American society. The Great Depression deepened this movement. The unstable economy and attendant social dislocations caused an identity crisis, and a sense of place became key to reconstructing both the individual and national self. Historian Michael C. Steiner has argued that although clearly not a unified movement, regionalism was “part of a desire for security of place amid the disorder and stress of the great depression [that] permeated all levels of American society.”<sup>3</sup> Folklorists, social scientists, reformers, and architects as well as visual artists of diverse affiliations articulated this need for place.

Like many Americans of the period, Hartley turned to his native region during this economic crisis—a crisis that greatly affected the painter. His *Prayer on Park Avenue* addresses the suffering and desperation of the depression decade (fig. 1). Yet this sketch of a down-and-out worker is also an image with deep personal meaning. The figure's pose recalls the crucified Christ—a theme common in Hartley's late art and one with which the painter identified. Never able to attract a consistent buying



Fig. 1. Marsden Hartley, *Prayer on Park Avenue*, ca. 1939. Graphite on paper; H. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ "", W. 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". (Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, Bates College, Museum of Art, Lewiston, Maine.)

audience, Hartley was especially vulnerable to the art market's collapse. During the 1930s his Stieglitz circle associates John Marin and Georgia O'Keeffe succeeded in selling their art, but Hartley lamented that he could not sell a thing. Experiencing serious financial problems, he painted on the Works Progress Administration easel project when he returned to New York from Europe in 1934 and again in winter 1936. In January 1935 Stieglitz did not pay Hartley's storage bills—a favor he had been doing for years—and Hartley, unable to afford the fee, had to destroy more than one hundred paintings and drawings. That winter, he lived on 60¢ a day and had one decent meal a week, which Stieglitz bought him.<sup>4</sup>

The depression was not the only reason for Hartley's monetary woes. In the eyes of many buy-

<sup>3</sup> Michael C. Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," *Geographical Review* 73 (October 1983): 443. Robert L. Dorman, *The Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," pp. 430–46.

<sup>4</sup> Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, pp. 29–32; Hartley to Donald C. Gleason, April 15, 1935, reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Strand, July 29, 1935, reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, July 5, 1932, reel X4, AAA; Gail R. Scott, "Cleophas and His Own: The Making of a Narrative," in Ferguson, *Hartley and Nova Scotia*, p. 55.

ers and critics, his art lacked a quality that was highly valued and marketable in the 1930s: American-ness. The period's economic problems heightened an isolationist, xenophobic turn inward—a turn that had begun after World War I. As in other aspects of American life, things foreign and things native shaped the visual arts and art-critical discourse. Debates about the “Americanism” of art took center stage. In 1933 art dealer Maynard Walker related this new Americanism to the country's financial problems: “The depression has actually been instrumental in opening the eyes of many American art patrons to the worthwhile art that is being produced in this country. The complexity and ultra-sophistication of the era just preceding the crash led many to seek only the bizarre and the sensational in art. . . . But with the crash in 1929 everyone began to look around to see if there were any realities left in the world. The shiploads of rubbish that had been imported from the School of Paris were found to be just rubbish.”<sup>5</sup>

Critics associated Hartley's art with this Parisian trash. He was criticized as un-American because he often worked in Europe, and in 1930 he commented, “I felt the force of certain (perhaps imagining) repulsion towards me in some directions—for no other reason I can think of except that I have lived abroad.” While in France in 1929, he responded hotly, albeit privately, to critic Henry McBride's claims that only painters working in the United States could be “American”: “When I get home to stay I shall see what can be evolved toward starting a campaign about myself. . . . I doubt very much if I shall exhibit any more French landscape subject material even if I do it—I am not going to permit any such situation as McB. saw fit so cheaply to stage—‘contre les américaines’ because of their French sympathies.”<sup>6</sup>

At first Hartley's repatriation proved difficult, as a less-than-supportive audience awaited him in New York. In his estimation, his last two exhibitions (1936, 1937) at Stieglitz's American Place were unsuccessful both critically and financially. Stieglitz expressed concern over Hartley's 1936 exhibition: “His Show is good. Very, in a way.

<sup>5</sup> Maynard Walker, “Midwest Is Producing an Indigenous Art,” *Art Digest* 7 (September 1933): 10.

<sup>6</sup> Hartley to Strand, (ca. 1930), reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Strand, April 3, 1929, reel X3, AAA. See also Hartley to Strand, March 6, March 27, and April 3, 1929, reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Kuntz, (ca. 1929), reel X4, AAA; Henry McBride, “Attractions in the Galleries,” *New York Sun*, January 5, 1929, p. 12; Henry McBride, “The Palette Knife,” *Creative Art* 6 (February 1930): supp. 34–35.

Will anyone give him a pittance for anything? Ye gods, I certainly don't know.” Hartley did sell six works from the show but complained that prices were “ridiculously low.” The critical response was mixed. E. M. Benson reported: “[Hartley's] landscapes, therefore, richly conceived as several of them are, particularly the New England ones, leave one slightly chilled by their gray objectified solemnity. . . . When one calls to mind the flavorful quality of Hartley's earlier landscape paintings, it becomes even more difficult to explain the existence of his banal and uninspired Alpine vistas.” McBride opined: “Marsden Hartley did considerable traveling around the world in search of the essential truths only to discover them shining out most brilliantly in the bleak region where he was born. The half dozen paintings in ‘the New England series’ quite overtop all the other things in the collection.” Perhaps the artist recognized the praise for the New England paintings and derision of the Alpine scenes as symptomatic of the antiforeign or anti-European tenor of the times. Less than two weeks after the close of the exhibition, he remarked to a friend, “I propose a 100% Yankee show next year—to cram that idea down their throats till it chokes them even.”<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Hartley's 1937 exhibition of paintings and drawings of Gloucester, Nova Scotia, and marine still lifes at An American Place left some viewers confounded. Although pleased with the show, Hartley was unhappy again with the critical response. His friend William Carlos Williams considered this exhibition “strange”: “It taxed the good will of the spectator pretty hard because of the monotonous tone of the pictures and the similarity if not identity of the sizes. . . . Some seemed not to have come off at all, they looked flat and lifeless. Others were so full of mannerisms that the good of them seemed buried.” Stieglitz himself downplayed Hartley's work and his importance as an artist to critics visiting the gallery.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Arthur Dove, March 25, 1936, in Ann Lee Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), p. 346; Hartley to Stein, April 17, 1936, Helen Stein Papers, AAA; E. M. Benson, “Marsden Hartley Returns to An American Place,” *American Magazine of Art* 29 (May 1936): 331–32; Henry McBride, “Marsden Hartley Reappears: New England Artist Again at the American Place,” *New York Sun*, March 28, 1936, p. 32; Hartley to Kuntz, April 28, 1936, reel X4, AAA. For a list of the works in the exhibition, see *Marsden Hartley* (New York: An American Place, 1936); copy in Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, Olin Arts Center, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

<sup>8</sup> *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirlwall (1957; reprint, New York: New Directions Publishing

Conflicts between Stieglitz and Hartley marked the period. As early as 1929 Hartley perceived his place in the Stieglitz circle as the “eternal drudge in an otherwise [?] pleased household” and himself as a millstone around Stieglitz’s neck. By the late 1930s tensions between painter and patron prompted Hartley’s move to a new dealer and gallery. Their problems had often centered on the painter’s resistance to staying in the United States and participating in his patron’s cultural nationalist program. Hartley’s colleagues Marin and O’Keeffe both successfully identified their art as American. Although their modernist styles were suspected to be unpatriotic in the 1930s, their subjects—New York, the Southwest, and Maine—endowed their work with a nativeness in the eyes of many critics. Marin, in particular, won praise as a true Yankee and an heir to Winslow Homer.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Hartley executed French, German, and Mexican landscapes in a European-inspired style, and his art was decidedly not perceived as an indigenously product.

These circumstances—economic problems, critical disfavor, patronage strifes, and the public’s demand for Americanism—set the stage for Hartley’s nativist rebirth. They forced him to reevaluate his work and its relation to the New York art scene. He recognized, however reluctantly, that he had to sell himself as an American artist to succeed. For Hartley, as for many artists of the period, region became the locus of national identity. From 1937 to 1943 he publicized and packaged himself as a regional painter: “I’m going local for a time now, and want to book myself as the Maine painter, which I really am you know, and there is no one to deny me it.” His concern with self-promotion extended to calling cards for the State of Maine Publicity Bureau and the New England Calendar Company. He looked to state and regional art institutions for support in constructing this new iden-

tity, averring: “I can have a show at Bowdoin College which has a lovely gallery and collection—I can have one in Portland—and one in Boston—and because I was born in Lewiston Maine I will ‘go in the air’ as a local ‘genius.’” He considered a lecture at Bates College and a write-up in the local paper to “project the ‘Maine’ idea very well.”<sup>10</sup>

In his promotional strategy Hartley perhaps took a cue from the midwestern regionalists. Writing in *Art Digest* about the 1933 Kansas City Art Institute exhibition “American Painting Since Whistler,” art dealer Walker singled out Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry from the thirty artists in the show and presented them as “the real American artists” creating the “most vital modern art in America” from the Midwest. Picking up Walker’s story, *Time* packaged Benton, Wood, and Curry as the leading painters of the American scene. Until this time, these artists’ works had been seen as satires, not realism, and had not been grouped together. Walker and *Time*, in effect, created regionalism as an art movement.<sup>11</sup>

Recognizing the growing power of the media, Hartley also enlisted the popular press—*Yankee* magazine and the *Lewiston Journal*, for example—and sought local patrons and art institutions to advance his cause, as had the midwestern trio. He used his own writings to construct his regional identity as well. “Return of the Native” (1932) announced his intention to return to New England, and “On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine,” which appeared in the catalogue for his 1937 exhibition, declared his homecoming and served as a regionalist manifesto of sorts. In the latter, Hartley claimed, “This quality of nativeness is coloured by heritage, birth, and environment, and it is therefore for this reason that I wish to declare myself the painter from Maine. . . . And so I say to my native continent of Maine, be patient and forgiving, I will soon put my cheek to your cheek, expecting the welcome of the prodigal, and be glad of it.” He described the mythic qualities of

Corp., 1984), pp. 167–68. Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA. Martha Davidson, “Marsden Hartley: Paintings of the North,” *Art News* 35 (May 8, 1937): 17. Hartley did sell works from the 1937 exhibition: one of the Dogtown series was sold to the Whitney Museum of American Art for \$800, and another to a private collector; see “Marsden Hartley (transcript from a taped interview with Hudson Walker, conducted by Elizabeth McCausland and Mary Bartley Cowdrey),” *Archives of American Art Journal* 8 (January 1968): 10; Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA.

<sup>9</sup> Hartley to Strand, March 27, April 3, 1929, reel X3, AAA. Carol Troyen, “After Stieglitz: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Taste for Modern Art in America,” in *The Lane Collection: Twentieth-Century Paintings in the American Tradition* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1983), pp. 43–44; “John Marin, American Artist,” *Design* 38 (December 1936): 31.

<sup>10</sup> Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Kuntz (ca. 1937), reel X4, AAA; Hartley to Kuntz, June 13, 1937, reel X4, AAA. See also Hartley to Stein, September 10, 1939, Helen Stein Papers, AAA. Hartley Memorial Collection. Lydia Allison (Adelaide Kuntz’s friend) volunteered to help Hartley with publicity; see Townsend Ludington, *Marsden Hartley: Biography of an America Artist* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), p. 240.

<sup>11</sup> Walker, “Midwest Is Producing an Indigenous Art,” p. 10; “U.S. Scene,” *Time* 24, no. 26 (December 24, 1934): 24–27. Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton, An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 216–21.

Maine and northern New England, equating the region's geography and inhabitants with those of Nova Scotia and Gloucester (to explain the absence of any Maine canvases in the exhibition). Similar to Native Americans of the Southwest, the hard-boned, sturdy, silent North Atlantic folk were shaped by their environment—the deep snow-filled woods, hostile and threatening sea, and desolate land. He added, “Maine is likewise a strong, simple, stately and perhaps brutal country, you get directness of demeanor, and you know where you stand, for lying is a detestation, as it is not in the cities.”<sup>12</sup>

This rejection of the city and interest in the role of the environment in forming regional character also ties Hartley to the midwestern regionalists. Yet he simultaneously dissociated himself from these artists. He did not espouse what he considered their “prescribed story” or “reportorial painting,” and wrote to a friend: “Some fearful new things in the new collection at the Met. Mus. exponents of the American Scene. Pigs—cows—windmills—silos etc. of the Kansas-Oklahoma esthetes, and that’s one place I thank God I am not embalmed in.” Of Thomas Craven’s *Modern Art: The Men, The Movements, The Meaning*, in which the author promoted a realistic native painting typified by Benton’s work and denounced Stieglitz’s efforts, Hartley wrote: “Mr. Thomas Craven, in his latest book, would have the world now believe that Mr. Stieglitz has done more evil than good. . . . Despite whatever derogatory criticism . . . the thing that happened [at Stieglitz’s Gallery 291] was found to be a high and strictly pure American value, and an American contribution to American cultivation.”<sup>13</sup>

Hartley defended Stieglitz’s Americanism and

<sup>12</sup> Marsden Hartley, “On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine,” in *Marsden Hartley: Exhibitions of Recent Paintings, 1937* (New York: An American Place, 1937), pp. 5, 2. This essay is reprinted in Gail R. Scott, ed., *On Art* (New York: Horizon Press, 1982), pp. 112–15. *The Collected Poems of Marsden Hartley*, ed. Gail R. Scott (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1987), p. 251. “Return of the Native” was first published in *Contact* 2 (May 1932): 28, and subsequently in *Pictures of New England by a New Englander* (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1932), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Hartley to Kuntz, November 17, 1938, reel X4, AAA; Hartley to Stein, postmarked December 31, 1934, Helen Stein Papers, AAA. Marsden Hartley, “291—and the Brass Bowl,” in Scott, *On Art*, pp. 86–87. See also Hartley to Stein, May 14, 1935, Helen Stein Papers, AAA; Marsden Hartley, “Is There an American Art?,” in Scott, *On Art*, pp. 196–200. Thomas Craven, *Modern Art: The Men, The Movements, The Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934), pp. 311–14. Hartley’s essay, “291—and the Brass Bowl,” appeared in Waldo Frank et al., eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait* (New York: Literary Guild, 1934), a volume that attempted to rebuild Stieglitz’s position as patron in the 1930s.

aligned himself with his patron’s aesthetic position and against the Craven camp. But was he so unequivocally against the critic and the artists he supported? Like Craven, Hartley was disillusioned with European modernism, and in subsequent years he did turn to American life for subjects and to local institutions to exhibit his work. Hartley’s late art and career, moreover, had much in common with those of the artists Craven championed. Benton, Curry, and Hartley were involved in the New York art world in the early 1930s, and each returned home in the second part of the decade—Benton to Missouri in 1935, Curry to Kansas in 1936, and Hartley to Maine in 1937. They looked to their regional roots for subject matter and were concerned with defining American traditions and the past. Hartley created images of folk heroes in his Abraham Lincoln portraits just as Wood had in *Parson Weem’s Fable* (1939), and he wrote nostalgically: “If you are a bonafide New Englander seeking rehabilitation with old things, things familiar and loved in the past, you are palled with the pressures of all this superficial show business. . . . What strange visions are these for one who seeks to restore simple contacts with inherited old-fashioned things, things that were once a real part of one’s earlier life.”<sup>14</sup>

Regionalism and Hartley’s art intersected in other ways. Regionalist advocates and artists prescribed a nativist art that celebrated an American heritage, emphasized rural subject matter, and avoided disagreeable themes; they opposed modernism and embraced realism as the American style. Regionalism was isolationist, conservative, and reactionary, both aesthetically and politically. These often-cited generalizations, however, mask the complexity of this art and its relation to depression-era America. Describing regionalism as the idealization of rural life does not account for Wood’s satires, Curry’s images of tornado-swept Kansas, or Benton’s urban scenes. Seeing regionalism as antimodernist is also inaccurate. As art historian Erika Doss has recently shown, Benton wanted to depict the American scene in a modern style and adapted both Cézanne’s art and synchro-

<sup>14</sup> Marsden Hartley, “New England on the Trapeze,” *Creative Art* 9 (February 1931): 58. The Lincoln portraits include *Young Worshipper of the Truth* (1939–40), *Weary of the Truth* (1940), and *The Great Good Man* (1942). Hartley’s sketches for a proposed house called “High Spot” describe a living room with wall decorations of a Lincoln portrait flanked by maps of Maine (Hartley Memorial Collection), and he wrote at least two poems about Lincoln, “American Icon—Lincoln” and “A. Lincoln—Odd, or Even”; see *Collected Poems*, pp. 197, 274.

nism to create the rhythmic forms and fragmented views in his works.<sup>15</sup>

In general, art critics and historians have identified 1930s regionalist art with the Midwest, but presenting this aesthetic as solely a concern of midwestern artists is misleading. Recent studies have not only argued regionalism as a cultural phenomenon but have also drawn attention to Texas regionalism, the Santa Fe and Taos artists as regionalists, and the pervasiveness of this aesthetic in New Deal post office murals across the United States. A New England regionalism is identifiable as well. In the 1930s midwestern artists and their supporters helped to separate New England from regionalism and even American cultural identity—an assessment that has shaped art historical discussions of the movement. Craven, for example, wrote about the “inflexible, second hand British culture of Boston,” while Grant Wood denounced the urban, colonial, and European influences on New England and encouraged New England artists to use their region as he used his own, although he added a caveat: “I feel that the drama and color of the old [New England] fishing villages have become hackneyed and relatively unprofitable, while little has been done, in painting at least, with the fine materials that are inherent in farming in the great region of the Mid-American States.”<sup>16</sup>

While these artists, writers, and intellectuals criticized this region, others fashioned a new New England—one in opposition to the effete, Europeanized, colonial image and similar to other regional representations. The 1930s witnessed a revival of regional consciousness in New England that, in contrast to the colonial revival, centered on rural northern New England. Writer Robert Frost, among others, described the isolation and nature’s indifference in northern New England, and playwright Thornton Wilder resurrected a nostalgia

for small-town community life in *Our Town* (1938), an intimate history of Grover’s Corners, New Hampshire. Painters Waldo Peirce, Paul Sample, and Carl Sprinchorn left urban centers to sketch the northern New England people and landscape. The federal government encouraged a rediscovery of traditional rural culture across the region: Maine artists documented ship figureheads and weather vanes for the Index of American Design and celebrated New Englanders and their history in school and post office murals; the Farm Security Administration sponsored photographs of small-town New England, including Marion Post Wolcott’s images of Vermont. Popular manifestations of this fascination with rural New England included the founding of *Yankee* magazine in 1935 and the radio program *Town Meeting of the Air*.<sup>17</sup>

Hartley’s work of the 1930s and early 1940s was part of this New England regionalism. He wrote about Sprinchorn’s art, knew about the Maine WPA projects, and avidly read New England literature, especially the poetry of Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson. For Hartley, as for these artists and writers, the heart of the region was “north of Boston” and, in his case, that meant Maine. Written after a New Hampshire trip, his “New England on the Trapeze” (1931) mapped out the “real” New England: “I was born in Maine, and, loyal as I was down the years, I never felt that I was really in New England until I had crossed the line at South Berwick, where New Hampshire ends and Maine begins.”<sup>18</sup>

In constructing a New England brand of regionalism, Hartley consciously took the offensive: “It is the habit of middle westerner regional rooters to speak of New England as the fag end of Europe, but that is because, knowing little or nothing about it, they dispatch it at once with a deroga-

<sup>15</sup> Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 10–12, 98. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, pp. 19–22.

<sup>16</sup> Craven, *Modern Art*, p. 261. Grant Wood, “Revolt against the City” (1935), in James M. Dennis, *Grant Wood: A Study in American Art and Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 134. Sue Bridwell Beckham, *Depression Post Office Murals and Southern Culture: A Gentle Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, pp. 62–69; Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Rick Stewart, *Lone Star Regionalism: The Dallas Nine and Their Circle, 1925–45* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1985). See also Waldo Frank, *Our America* (1919; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1972), pp. 100–101; George Santayana, *The Last Puritan* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936).

<sup>17</sup> Some regionalists were attracted to New England’s past as a model for an integrated society and culture; see Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, pp. 6–9. Robert L. McGrath, *Paul Sample: Painter of the American Scene* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988); footage of lecture by Dorothy Jenkins, Art Department Library, University of Southern Maine, Gorham, Maine (videotape); Park and Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas*, pp. 69–73.

<sup>18</sup> Hartley, “New England on the Trapeze,” p. 57. Marsden Hartley, “The New Paintings of Carl Sprinchorn of the Maine Woods,” in *Eight Poems and One Essay* (Lewiston, Maine: Treat Gallery, Bates College, 1976), pp. 29–35; Jenkins (videotape); Hartley to Strand, October 1928, reel X3, AAA. Hartley was acquainted with other Maine poets; see Robert Burlingame, “Marsden Hartley: A Study of His Life and Creative Achievement” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1954), p. 91; Ludington, *Marsden Hartley*, pp. 206–8. “North of Boston” is the title of a 1914 collection of Robert Frost’s poems published by H. Holt and Company in New York.



tion of Harvard, which of course is not a place but a school." Midwestern regionalists had identified realism as the American style, evident in the work of past artists like John Singleton Copley and Thomas Eakins, but not all supporters of regionalism in the 1930s embraced this definition. The Texas regionalists, or the Dallas Nine, sanctioned a stylistic pluralism. For them, the midwestern artists' attention to local subject matter was inadequate for forming a regional art, and their style was too illustrative and had no regional foundation. In contrast, the Texas artists formulated a technique based on their own regional traditions—Mexican art and folk art.<sup>19</sup>

Hartley similarly countered the midwesterners' assertion and distinguished himself as a New England regionalist by painting in what he considered that region's art tradition. Style clearly carried cultural meanings, and in the 1930s, modernism signified foreign influence, and realism American identity. In his many commentaries Hartley redefined his style as both regional and American by creating a history for it. In "Copley's Americanism" (1930), he characterized the artist's realism as both Yankee and American but claimed that Copley's "sticking to facts" could not be considered a universal style in racially pluralistic America. Written in response to a Museum of Modern Art exhibition, his essay, "Eakins, Homer, Ryder" (1930), codified an American aesthetic pluralism: these three artists represented different Americanisms—realism, romantic realism, and dramatic mysticism. Hartley believed Eakins's realism lacked the poetic feeling integral to a native expression and offered, "This Modern Museum exhibition would I think have proven more thrilling if [George] Fuller, Homer [Dodge] Martin, [Ralph] Blakelock at his best and perhaps [George] Inness also [had been included]. The public would have had a still clearer idea of what it is that constitutes a possible and plausible basis for a genuine American art."<sup>20</sup>

Hartley not only defined this aesthetic approach as American, thus challenging the midwesterners' claim to realism as the exclusive native mode, but associated this style with New England. As early as 1921, he had labeled Martin, Fuller, and Albert Pinkham Ryder as originators of an

indigenous painting style and added that "all of them [were] essentially of New England, in that they were conspicuously introspective, and shut in upon their own exclusive experience." In 1937 he wrote two essays on the history of New England art: in "The Six Greatest New England Painters" he analyzed Copley, Washington Allston, William Morris Hunt, Ryder, Fuller, and Winslow Homer and in "On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine" he outlined a tradition of New England art and listed contemporary artists continuing that tradition. In both, he foregrounded the mystical temperament as central to New England art, and in the latter he asserted, "This quality of abstract yet definite reality appears in the realm of art in its strongest and most powerful degree in the paintings of Albert Ryder, who has said once and for all—all that will ever be known about that country."<sup>21</sup>

Inspired by Ryder's art at various times during his career, Hartley turned again to this painter as a source in the late 1930s. He owned photographs of Ryder's *Hunter's Rest*, *Diana's Hunt*, and *Weir's Orchard* as well as a copy of Frederic Newlin Price's 1932 monograph on Ryder.<sup>22</sup> His portrait of the artist, based on a memory of seeing Ryder in New York decades earlier, was part of Hartley's hero portrait series, in which he created an artistic and intellectual family history for himself (fig. 2). He also painted portraits of seventeenth-century metaphysical poet John Donne, fourteenth-century hermit and religious writer Richard Rolle of Hampole, and nineteenth-century American president Abraham Lincoln—all mystics who, in the artist's estimation, had suffered and endured.

Hartley's fascination with Ryder's art went beyond hero worship: he connected his work to Ryder's and, by association, to the mystical New England tradition. With its impastoed surface, dark tones, and weighty clouds, *Northern Seascape*, *Off the Banks* resembles Ryder's *Moonlight Marine* (early 1880s) and *Lord Ullin's Daughter* (figs. 3, 4). The latter depicts the tale of two lovers who drown trying to escape a disapproving father—a fitting

<sup>19</sup> Hartley, "On the Subject of Nativeness," pp. 3–4. Stewart, *Lone Star Regionalism*, pp. 29–34.

<sup>20</sup> Hartley, "Copley's Americanism," in Scott, *On Art*, pp. 175–76. Hartley, "Eakins, Homer, Ryder," in Scott, *On Art*, pp. 171–72.

<sup>21</sup> Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts* (1921; reprint, New York: Hacker Art Books, 1972), p. 55. Hartley, "On the Subject of Nativeness," p. 2. See also "Albert Pinkham Ryder," in Scott, *On Art*, pp. 256–67; "A. P. Ryder: 'The Light That Never Was,'" in William Innes Homer and Lloyd Goodrich, *Albert Pinkham Ryder: Painter of Dreams* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), pp. 227–29; Marsden Hartley, "Albert Ryder—Moonlightist," in *Collected Poems*, p. 224. Marsden Hartley, "The Six Greatest New England Painters," *Yankee* 3 (August 1937): 14–16. See also Scott, *Marsden Hartley*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Hartley Memorial Collection.

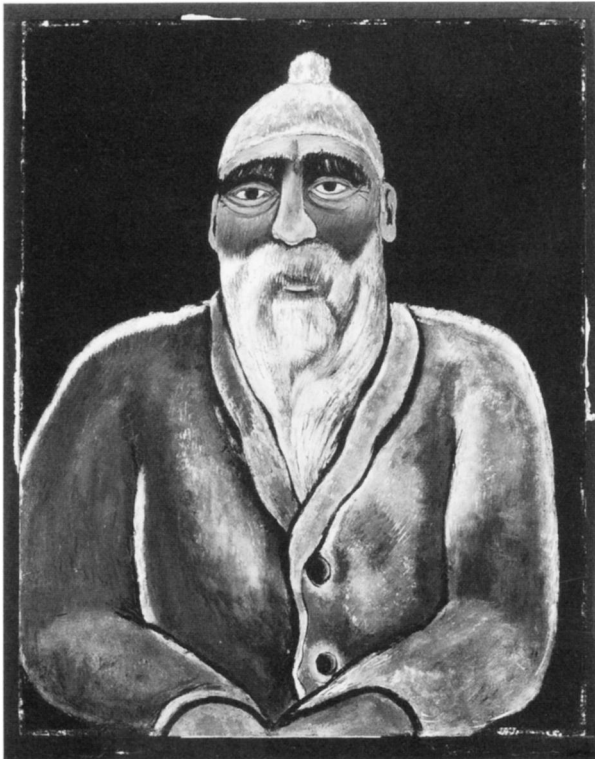


Fig. 2. Marsden Hartley, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 1938–39. Oil on pressed board; H. 28", W. 22". (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edith and Milton Lowenthal Collection, bequest of Edith Abrahamson Lowenthal, 1991.)

model for Hartley's seascape, which he dedicated to the drowned Mason brothers, with whose family he lived in 1935–36, and their cousin. The image of a storm-tossed boat against a vast, dangerous, and indifferent sea recurred in Ryder's art, and Hartley once wrote: "Ryder has typified himself in this excellent portrayal of sea disaster, this profound spectacle of the soul's despair in conflict with wind and wave. . . . Ryder is, I think, the special messenger of the sea's beauty, the confidant of its majesties, its hauteurs, its supremacies."<sup>23</sup>

While Ryderesque in its crusty surface, Hartley's *Jotham's Island, off Indian Point, Georgetown, Maine* (fig. 5) also recalls, as art historian Bruce Robertson has argued, the works of another New England painter, specifically Homer's seascapes, such as *Weatherbeaten* (fig. 6). Both painters of the

<sup>23</sup> Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, pp. 38–39. Other Ryderesque works by Hartley at this time include the seascape within *Fishermen's Last Supper* (1940–41) and *Storm Down Pine Point Way, Old Orchard Beach, Maine* (1941–43). For Ryder's influence on Hartley's late seascapes, see Sanford Schwartz, "A Northern Seascape," *Art in America* 64 (January–February 1976): 76. As early as 1937, critics commented on Ryder as a source for these works; see Davidson, "Hartley: Paintings of the North," p. 17.

sea, Ryder and Homer represented very different approaches for Hartley; the former was "the great mystic" and the latter "the great realist." Of Ryder Hartley wrote: "[He] was, I think, the greatest of them all because he went deeper into the realities of the imaginative life of New England. He was also, I believe, the only great painter of the sea in the whole range of painting at any time, supplanted by no one in this respect, for he gave not only the majestic appearance of the sea, but he gave its tragic and merciless inner power." Homer, in contrast, was a "keen observer of the facts of life" and less a dreamer than Ryder: "If Homer saw nothing but the thing, he at least invested that thing with all its personal fullness of appearance. . . . Homer gets as near to the sense of immediacy in sea life as one can get."<sup>24</sup> Hartley maintained that along with Ryder, Homer was a preeminent New England artist. Hartley's seascapes combine Ryder's thick paint and storm-tossed boats with Homer's battles between water and land. Identifying with these two painters, Hartley constructed a regional ancestry for his own contemplative, expressive seascapes.

Not only style but also carefully selected subjects constituted Hartley's works as regional and, thus, American. In the early 1930s, he located and painted sites associated with New England's antiquity. In 1931 and 1934 he visited Dogtown Common in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and claimed a type of aesthetic ownership of the landscape. He presented this glacial moraine and long-deserted colonial settlement as a monument to the region in works like *Mountains in Stone, Dogtown* (fig. 7). Autumn rusts and gold on the densely packed surface allude to a season of death and decay, while rocks and stones in disarray and overgrown vegetation describe an uninhabited locale and harsh topography. In this barren, unattended landscape sit boulders, sculpted with thickly applied gray, black, and white paint. Hartley images New England as a brutal environment and in decline yet solid and strong. Moreover, he furnishes Dogtown with mythic, even religious, meaning: rising above the horizon, one stone stands against the sky like a latter-day megalith, echoed on the other side of the composition by a cross-shape tree. In his writings, Hartley explained this imagery: "Dogtown looks like a cross between Easter Island and Stonehenge—essentially druidic in its appearance—it

<sup>24</sup> Hartley, "Six Greatest New England Painters," pp. 14–16. Bruce Robertson, *Reckoning with Winslow Homer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 153–61.



Fig. 3. Marsden Hartley, *Northern Seascape, Off the Banks*, 1936. Oil on cardboard; H. 18 $\frac{3}{16}$ "', W. 24". (Milwaukee Art Museum, bequest of Max E. Friedman.)

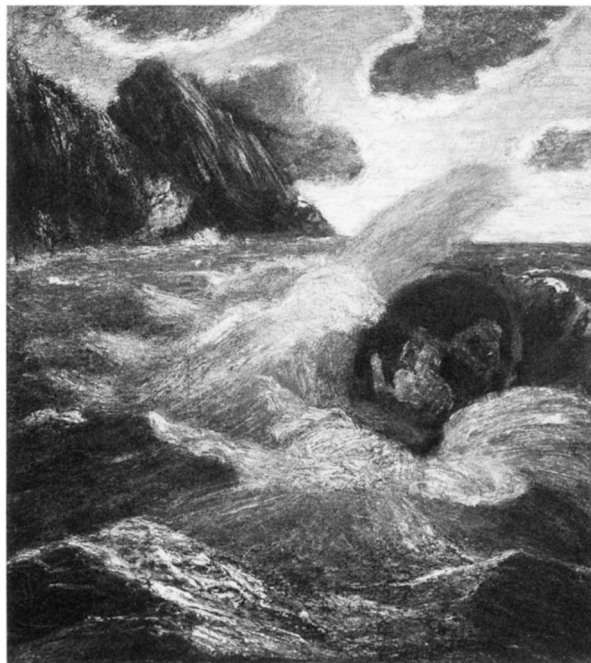


Fig. 4. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, before 1907. Oil on canvas mounted on panel; H. 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ "', W. 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ "'. (National Museum of American Art, gift of John Gellatly: Photo, Art Resource, New York.)

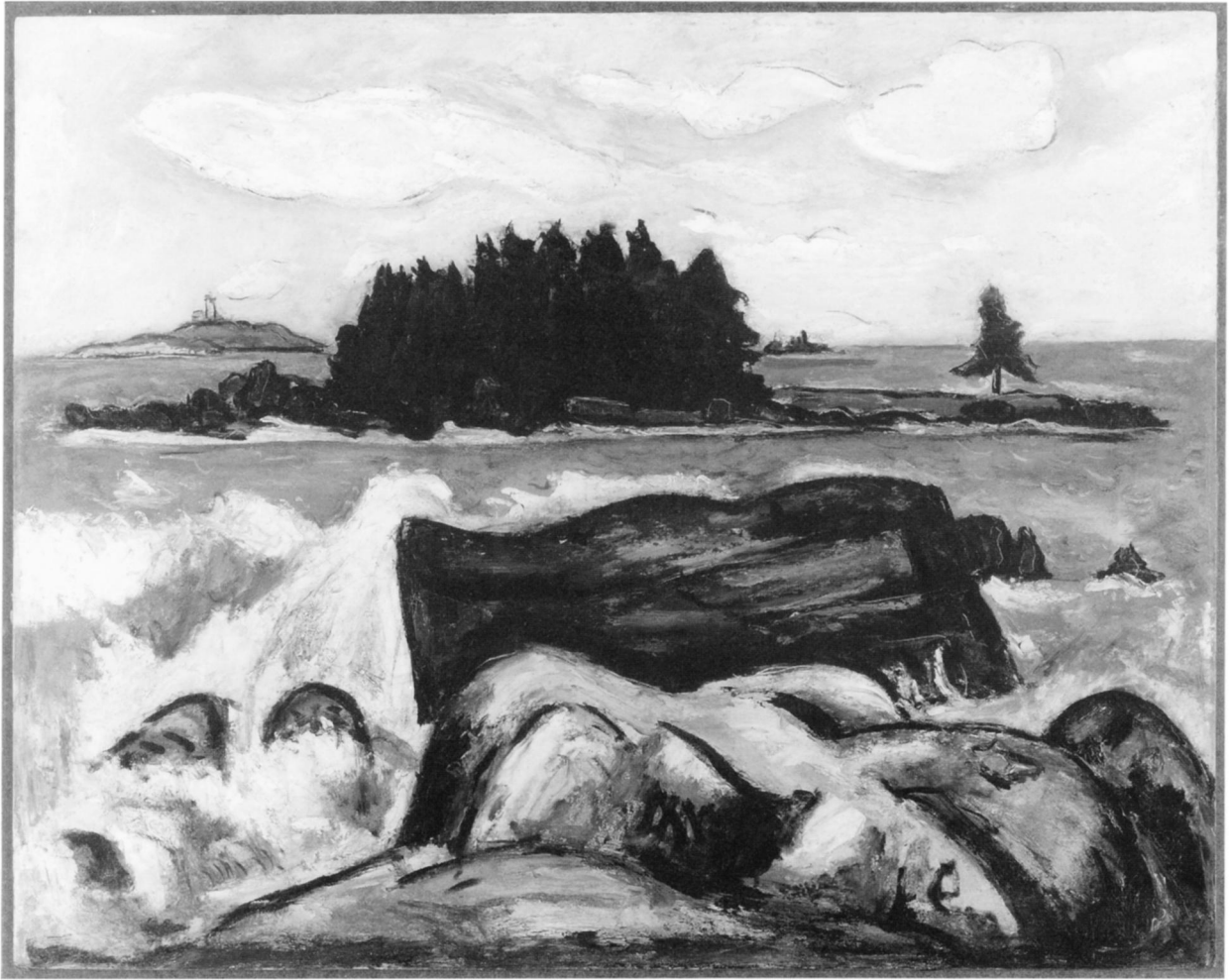


Fig. 5. Marsden Hartley, *Jotham's Island, off Indian Point, Georgetown, Maine, 1937*. Oil on board; H. 22", W. 28". (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.)

gives the feeling that an ancient race might turn up at any moment and renew an ageless rite there." The Dogtown boulders, then, mark the presence of an ancient New England. Significantly, Hartley titled this painting *Mountains in Stone*—the mountain being a geological form that he saw as mystical.<sup>25</sup>

Returning to Maine in 1937, Hartley identified venues that tied his work to the region and its past and to its tourist present. He depicted typical New England scenes in the manner of earlier artists like

<sup>25</sup> Hartley, "Somehow a Past" (1933–ca. 1939), as quoted in Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids*, p. 74. Hartley to Strand, February 23, 1931, reel X3, AAA. Hartley made religious references in his other Dogtown paintings, for example, *Altar Boulder, Dogtown* (1931). Hokin considers *Mountains in Stone* with its cross as evidence of Hartley's "attempt to locate his works within the continuum of American art and literature" (*Pinnacles and Pyramids*, p. 80).

Homer as well as views that no artists had yet recorded—or so Hartley claimed. On his arrival in Georgetown in 1937, he announced his plan to paint the birthplace of poet Edwin Arlington Robinson and the church at Head Tide. He laid aesthetic claim to the latter building: he wanted to paint the "amazing little white church which no one has done and is 'mine' really as Dogtown now is."<sup>26</sup>

Such claims to aesthetic ownership furthered Hartley's marketing of Maine. Anticommercialism was central to Stieglitz's stated ideology (although his practice tells another story), and in 1921 Hartley had written: "How can a real artist be concerned as to just how salable his product is to

<sup>26</sup> Hartley to Kuntz (1937), reel X4, AAA. Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA.



Fig. 6. Winslow Homer, *Weatherbeaten*, 1894. Oil on canvas; H. 28½", W. 48⅜". (Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, bequest of Charles Shipman Payson, 1988.)

be? Certainly not while he is working, if he be decent toward himself." But less than four years later Stieglitz complained, "Hartley wants admiration—& Cash!—Cash! Gosh! it's an awfull Spectre—ever growing." As the painter grew older and fame and recognition grew more elusive, he sought a wider audience for his work and actively followed the art market; his letters reveal a preoccupation with the marketability of his works.<sup>27</sup>

Hartley's return to Maine was a reaction to the art market. In the year before his resettlement, several artists exhibited paintings of Maine in New York with great success and critical favor. In November and December 1936, Bangor artist Peirce showed his Maine work at New York's Midtown Gallery. The Whitney Museum of American Art, Knoedler's Galleries, and Macbeth Gallery marked Homer's centennial with exhibitions, and the Museum of Modern Art hosted a Marin retrospective from October 21 to November 22, 1936. In his catalogue essay for the latter exhibition, Hartley praised Marin. His watercolors were "provocative of the great sources of nature and especially the

sea and the shores that bound it, alas my native land of Maine which I am always being told about by one good painter, this being Marin, and a lot of bad painters." The envious tone suggests that, as a "genuine" (that is, native-born) Mainer, Hartley wanted to share in the popularity of these artists and his native state.<sup>28</sup>

Images of the rocky Maine coast satisfied both New York art audiences and Maine tourists as well (fig. 8). By the early twentieth century, the state had become a favorite vacation spot, offering diverse accommodations and attractions from the exclusive Bar Harbor to the Old Orchard Beach pier. In the 1920s and 1930s, the area experienced a tourist boom due to the automobile; in 1936 the "Vacationland" slogan first appeared on Maine's

<sup>28</sup> John Marin: *Watercolors, Oil Paintings, Etchings* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), p. 17. Centennial exhibition reviews emphasized Homer's identity as a Maine artist and his Prout's Neck works as the best of his career; see "Philadelphia Shows Homer, the Individualist," *Art Digest* 10 (June 1, 1936): 37. The envious tone also marked Hartley's later comments about Waldo Peirce; see Hartley to Stein, September 29, 1939, Helen Stein Papers, AAA. Peirce was presented as an artist who could bring about a renaissance of New England art; see "New England Moses," *Art Digest* 11 (April 15, 1937): 17; "Waldo Peirce Finds Himself," *Art Digest* 11 (September 1, 1937): 9. Hartley saw himself as the only authentic Maine painter; see Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA.

<sup>27</sup> Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, p. 79; Stieglitz to Dove, July 7, 1925, in Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, p. 116; Hartley to Kuntz, August 13, 1935, reel X4, AAA.

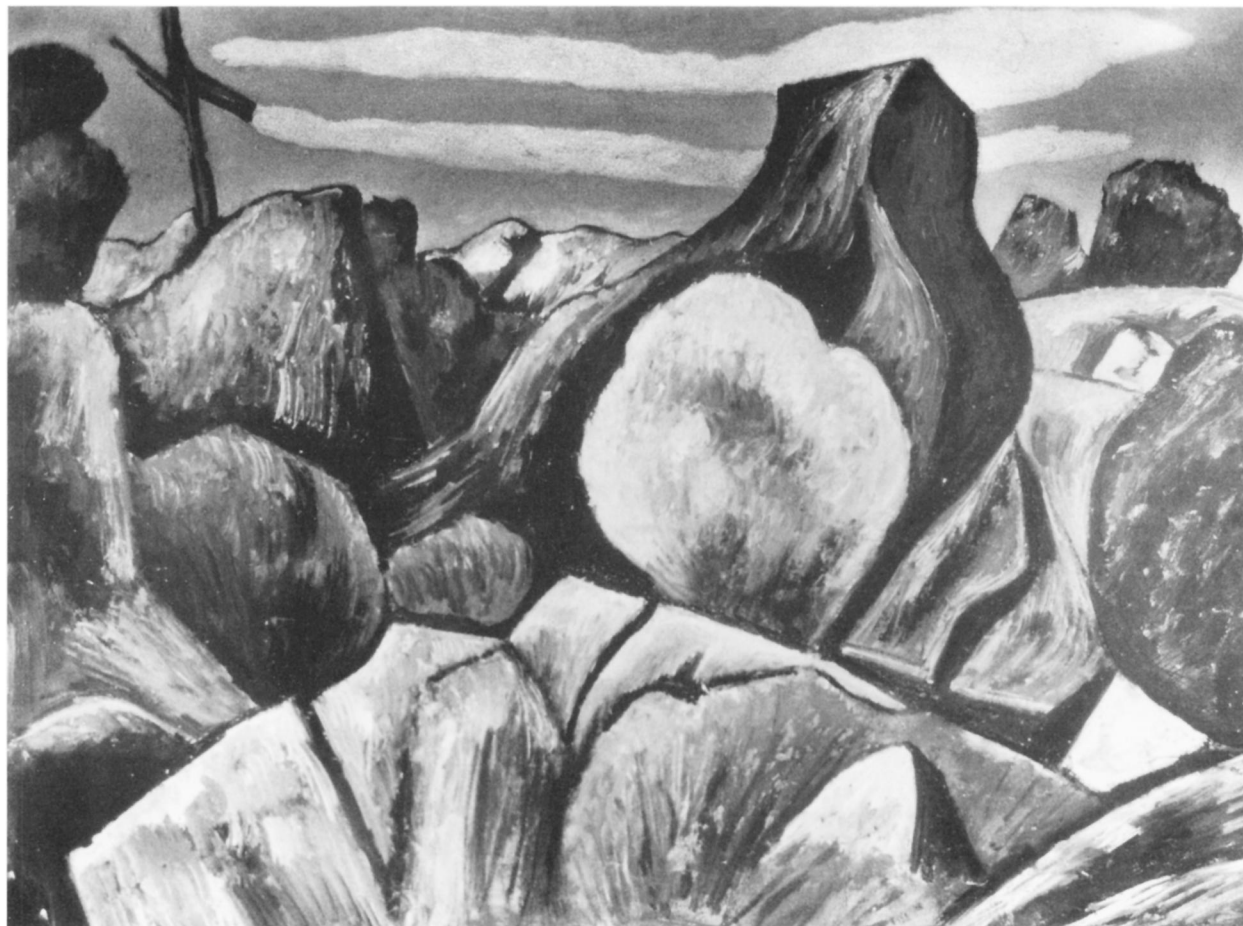


Fig. 7. Marsden Hartley, *Mountains in Stone, Dogtown*, 1931. Oil on board; H. 18", W. 24". (Collection of Harvey and Francoise Rambauch.)

car license plate, clearly linking tourism and regional identity.<sup>29</sup> Railways, the State of Maine Development Commission, and L. L. Bean packaged Maine for public consumption. Tourist literature and images envisioned the state as a kind of preserve where rural values and tight-knit family relations survived and where escape from both the modern city and depression-era turmoil was possible. Temporary participation in the occupations of the Maine people—hunting, fishing, farming—provided an antidote for urban living. Tourism was a popular manifestation of regionalism: the Maine framed in tourist brochures and advertise-

<sup>29</sup> George W. French (1882–1970) became official photographer for the Maine Development Commission in 1936, and his numerous photographs for the MDC appeared in tourist brochures in the 1930s and 1940s; see George W. French Collection, Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine. The slogan “Vacationland” was coined by the Maine Central Railroad publicists in the late 1890s; see George H. Lewis, “The Maine That Never Was: The Construction of Popular Myth in Regional Culture,” *Journal of American Culture* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 94.

ments was identical to the antimodern regionalist locale—an essential America of the natural landscape and the folk, stable agrarian-based communities, and places evocative of the past. Tourist agencies and visual artists helped to construct this mythic Maine, and tourists and art audiences alike, desiring escape from modernity and a sense of the past and place, consumed this product.

As art historian Erika Doss has demonstrated, regionalist art participated in the emerging consumer culture of the 1930s. Through the Associated American Artists, regionalist images in print form were sold at department stores like John Wanamaker’s and used in advertisements for businesses from Abbott Laboratories to the American Tobacco Company. The allure of this art in the 1930s “hinged on its energetic and dynamic form and its appeal to American values through familiar and type-cast imagery,” and Hartley’s art was no exception. Although Hartley himself complained of tourism’s effect on New England, he replicated



Fig. 8. George W. French, *Surf—Baldhead*, ca. 1930–50. Photograph. (George W. French Collection, Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.)

the familiar images found in contemporary tourist brochures—the wild coast, rugged Mount Katahdin, and the folk.<sup>30</sup> Like these tourist advertisements, Hartley envisioned a mythic Maine, an imagined locale that would prove marketable for the painter.

Hartley also participated in the consumption of place. In addition to visiting Old Orchard Beach, Hartley took an eight-day trip to Mount Katahdin, Maine's highest elevation, in October 1939, achieving what he called his "sacred pilgrimage." Although he didn't hike to the summit, Hartley did experience difficult conditions in the woods, including a drive of eighty miles from Bangor; a nearly four-mile trek in the cold rain with his guide, Caleb Scribner; and a diet of jellied venison and venison steak. Staying at a hunter's camp, Cobbs Camp, in a rough-hewn log cabin overlooking Katahdin Lake, Hartley sketched the mountain and later produced eighteen canvases of this site including *Mt. Katahdin, Maine* (fig. 9). He used a simple composition of horizontally layered

forms—lake, woods, mountain, sky and clouds—and repeated the same southern view in each work. While this vantage point undoubtedly attracted Hartley because it resembled his other mountain works, it was also a tourist view. Cobbs Camp was positioned to take advantage of this scene, and this vista and others like it appeared in contemporary tourist brochures of Katahdin (fig. 10).<sup>31</sup>

Hartley's trip can be attributed to his lifelong fascination with mountains as sacred places. But his decision to paint Katahdin at this time was due to the area's growing renown. This area was fast becoming a popular vacation spot in the 1920s and 1930s through the efforts of the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Bangor and Aroostook Railway, both of which planned expeditions, printed trail guides, and promoted Katahdin with

<sup>30</sup> Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism*, p. 162. Hartley to Strand, August 25, 1930, reel X3, AAA.

<sup>31</sup> Hartley to Norman McKinnon (ca. 1939), reel X3, AAA. See Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids*, pp. 107–17 for a discussion of Hartley's Katahdin works. See also Samuel Merrill's photograph, *Katahdin from the East (Katahdin Lake)*, in Myron H. Avery, *Mount Katahdin in Maine* (Augusta: Maine Development Commission, 1935), pp. 14–15, Department of Development Files, Box 16, Maine State Archives. According to Hartley, game warden Caleb Scribner selected this camp site; Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids*, pp. 133–34 n. 17.



Fig. 9. Marsden Hartley, *Mt. Katahdin, Maine*, 1939–40. Oil on masonite; H. 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ " W. 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edith and Milton Lowenthal Collection, bequest of Edith Abrahamson Lowenthal, 1991.)

their publications. The 1931 founding of Baxter State Park in Maine, an area that included most of Katahdin, also advertised the mountain.

Katahdin's wilds shaped perceptions of Maine; for many, it was Maine. Hartley sought to connect his public identity with this mountain. He wrote of it as "the great image of our native state" and had announced to a friend before his trip: "Next month I go up to Mt. Katahdin to paint the 'sacred mountain' as I have wanted to for years—and I must put myself on record as having done it—and as far as I know it has never appeared in art—I have elected myself official portrait painter. . . . I *must get* that Mt. for future reason of fame and success." Hartley hoped his Katahdin works would give him the recognition that he desired: "But I must invest in the idea [of painting Katahdin] for the glory that will come of it and I hope that eventually the picture will be bought by the State or by

some private individual with local pride like Ex. Gov. Baxter."<sup>32</sup>

Hartley used the Katahdin paintings to construct his regional identity in another way: this site was not only associated with contemporary tourism but with past regional artists as well. Hartley allied himself with New Englander Henry David Thoreau, who had explored the mountain and wrote about it in *The Maine Woods* (1864).<sup>33</sup> Just as Hart-

<sup>32</sup> Marsden Hartley, "From 'Be That as It May,'" 1941, Marsden Hartley Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter YCAL). Hartley to Stein, September 29, 1939, Helen Stein Papers, AAA; Hartley to Stein, September 10, 1939, Helen Stein Papers, AAA. On Hartley's publicity campaign and Katahdin, see Hartley to Kuntz, September 26, 1937, reel X4, AAA; Ludington, *Marsden Hartley*, p. 268.

<sup>33</sup> Hartley to Kuntz, October 24, 1939, reel X4, AAA. Scribner took Hartley to the lake and island on which Thoreau had camped a century earlier. Hartley's other writings on this





Fig. 10. George W. French, *View of Katahdin*, ca. 1930–50. Photograph. (George W. French Collection, Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.)

ley envisioned a regional heritage in painting his seascapes (looking back to Ryder and Homer as ancestors), he saw himself as a latter-day Thoreau in his own artistic explorations of Katahdin.

Katahdin was also the realm of the American folk: it was revered in ancient times by Native Americans and in the 1930s was used by game wardens, hunters, trappers, and lumberjacks. Survivals of the American past, Maine folk figured into Hartley's art as embodiments of the regenerated region—the new New England. In Nova Scotia in autumn 1935 and summer-autumn 1936, Hartley boarded with and befriended the Mason family, who lived in a small fishing village on Eastern Points Island; later stayed in Georgetown and Vinalhaven, Maine; and from 1941 to 1943 lived with Forest and Katie Young in the fishing and lobstering village of Corea. He viewed these Maine and Acadian fisherfolk through the lens of the primitive: he transformed them into the simple, the natural, the Other. In “On the Subject of Nativeness,” he compared these North Atlantic inhabitants to the Southwest Indians, “hard boned sturdy beings” who possess a “hardiness of gaze”

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mountain include “Ktaadn, or the Love of a Mountain,” “The Face in Ktaadn,” and “Upland Farm, Ktaadn Way,” YCAL.

and “frank earnestness of approach.” The blunt lines and chiseled forms in *Down East Young Blades* and *Young Sea Dog with Friend Billy* (figs. 11, 12) convey their character—their strength, endurance, self-reliance—while the iconic format suggests a piety and simplicity. Hartley's use of religious emblems endow the subjects with a saintly stature: the rooster in *Young Sea Dog* can be read as a disguised symbol for the fisherman-apostle Saint Peter. Hartley used religious objects and photographs from his personal collection as models; the angular features of Mexican sculpture heads and the static poses, three-figure grouping, and foregrounded forms in Piero della Francesca's *Madonna and Child* are replicated in these works.<sup>34</sup>

For Hartley, Maine folk had direct contact with the environment (the hostile sea, the stark land) and the harsh geography shaped their character. They are the region, solidly sculpted like the Dogtown boulders, the rocky Maine coast, and Katah-

<sup>34</sup> Hartley, “On the Subject of Nativeness,” p. 1. Fannie Eckstorm, *The Indian Legends of Mount Katahdin* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 1924); Hartley to Kuntz, October 6, November 4, November 5, 1935, reel X4, AAA; Hartley Memorial Collection. Hartley was perhaps referring to religious images of Maine French-Canadian Catholics in these portraits; see Hartley to Strand (ca. 1930), reel X3, AAA.

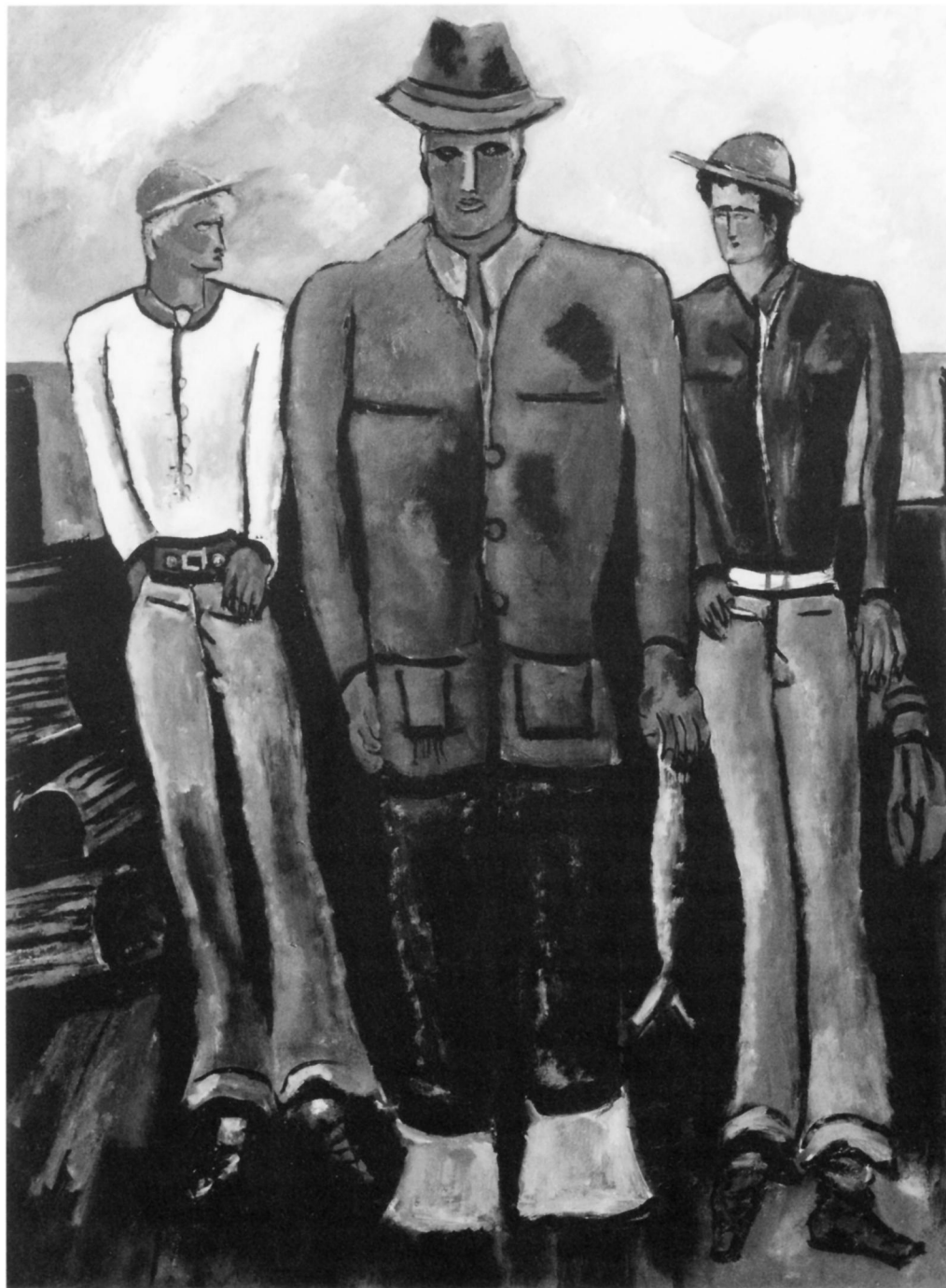


Fig. 11. Marsden Hartley, *Down East Young Blades*, 1942. Oil on panel; H. 40", W. 30". (Collection of John and Barbara Landau.)



Fig. 12. Marsden Hartley, *Young Sea Dog with Friend Billy*, 1942. Oil on canvas; H. 40", W. 30". (Regis Collection, Minneapolis, Minn.)

din's massive granite. These folk contrasted the urbane, cultivated types that Hartley had earlier associated with regional identity. Nearly two decades earlier, he had figured southern, urban New England as the region's center and the locus of death, disappointment, and spiritual decay: "Boston Portrait Projections" (1923) criticized the so-called respectable middle-class types—the debauched prodigal, viper-tongued hostess, spinster, ascetic, Brahmin scholar, and gentleman—who had lost contact with a "real" life of emotion and feeling.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, the carved, hard-edged faces and hands and the large physical forms of the figures in *Down East Young Blades* defined a new New England—potent, solid, and predominantly male. These figures share a family resemblance with the midwesterners in Wood's *American Gothic* (fig. 13),

<sup>35</sup> On Hartley's poetry, see Burlingame, "Marsden Hartley"; "Marsden Hartley's *Androscoggin*: Return to Place," *New England Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (December 1958): 447–62. These poems first appeared in *Twenty-Five Poems* and are reprinted in *Collected Poems*, pp. 68–87.

although Hartley works in a sketchy, expressionist style and Wood in a detailed, descriptive manner. In both, the regional folk are statically and frontally posed, stern and serious; these figures are transformed into icons of the hardy American.

The heroic scale and powerful physiques of Hartley's fishermen also compare with the manly workers in Benton's *Social History of Missouri* (fig. 14). With their exaggerated forms and bulging muscles, Benton's farmers dominate the landscape and literally burst out of the painting's frame with their robust gestures. Similarly, Hartley's broad-chested fisherfolk possess formidable physiques, and the canvas seems unable to contain their forms. This masculine vitality appeared not only in Hartley's art, but also in that of his contemporaries Marguerite Zorach and Sprinchorn and, importantly, in tourist advertisements of Maine fishermen, trappers, hunters, and lumberjacks. In these same years, L. L. Bean catalogue covers addressed a male audience, pitching the image of man against the elements and presenting Maine as a place for a man to test his mettle, as in William Harnden Foster's *Moose Hunter* (fig. 15). The message was clear. In the region, through such visual images or recreational activities, people could recover the elemental, pioneer past. These hunters,

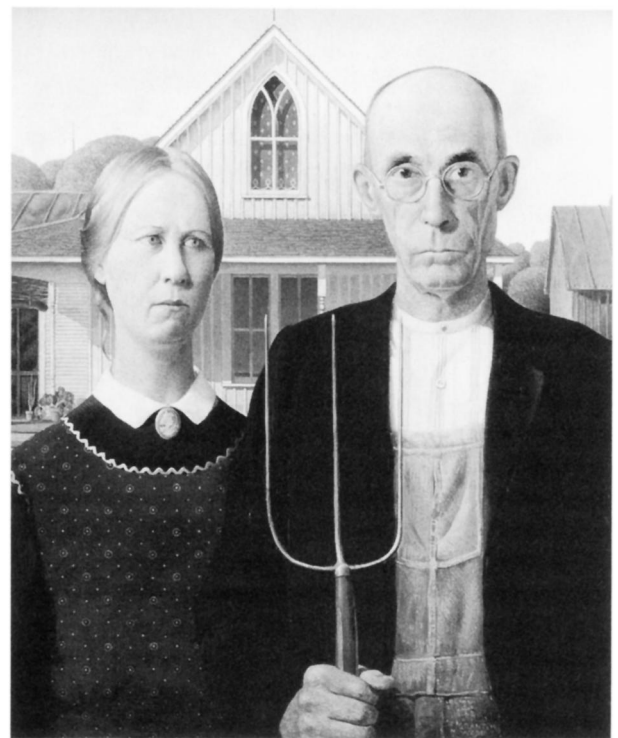


Fig. 13. Grant Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930. Oil on beaver board; H. 29<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", W. 24<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". (Art Institute of Chicago.)



Fig. 14. Thomas Hart Benton, detail of *Social History of Missouri: Politics, Farming, and the Law*, 1936. Oil on canvas; H. 55', W. 14' 2". (Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Missouri State Museum, Jefferson City, Mo.)

trappers, and fishermen simultaneously acted as the settlers of a storybook America and emerged as a new type that promised to transform and rejuvenate society. For Hartley, the Vinalhaven fishermen were “new generation stuff,” “cheery and pleasant” in stark contrast to the former “ingrown or moody” Mainers. In the poem *Sea Burial* (1941), the eighteen-year-old French-Canadian lumberjack, Blair Purves, “thick-shanked, broad-flanked” and “giant-like” shook the family tree out of its lethargy.<sup>36</sup> Hartley’s fisherfolk in *Down East Young Blades* and lumberjack in *Canuck Yankee Lumberjack*

at *Old Orchard Beach, Maine* (1940–41) portrayed the physical power and presence of this new Maine breed. These figures resonated with meaning: they were the pioneers of the past, workers of the present, and hope for the future.

Economic and cultural changes of the 1930s had forced Hartley to redefine his art and identity. He reinvented his style as regionalist and nationalist and selected subjects that intersected with the longing for a sense of place that characterized 1930s American culture. He recognized that the rocky Maine coast, the Katahdin wilderness, and the local folk had popular appeal: they were associated with region, American values and the past, and tourism. Hartley’s artistic reconstruction had benefits. It helped him succeed in “selling” his art as regionalist and American. By 1939, critic Irma Whitney was explaining to her readers: “Hartley’s

<sup>36</sup> Hartley to Kuntz, September 26, 1937, reel X4, AAA. *Collected Poems*, pp. 288–89. Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 83–109; Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism*, p. 36.

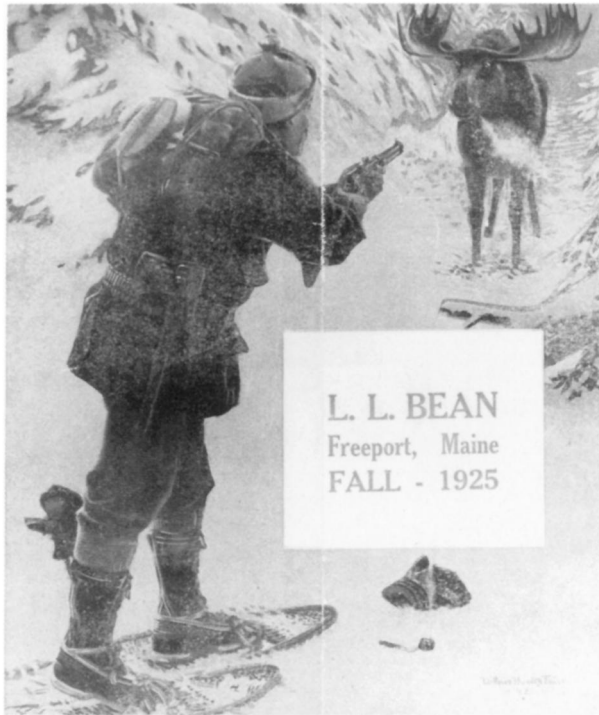


Fig. 15. William Harnden Foster, *The Moose Hunter*, 1922. Oil on canvas. From L. L. Bean catalogue cover, 1925. (L. L. Bean Inc., Freeport, Maine.)

painting reminds us of John Marin's. . . . Possibly it is today's record of Yankee transcendentalism still working like yeast in northern New England soil. . . . Hartley feels himself close to Ryder, kin to Homer. This is startlingly true in paintings of dark Maine forests opening up grudgingly to admit silent, cold water; or in others along the sea-

coast. . . . These paintings are certainly the image of Maine's pioneer hardihood and symbols of her people's undiminished self-reliance.<sup>37</sup>

Hartley's reputation grew during the next three years. By 1942, he could say: "I have a high position as a painter—as high as anyone—but I never did get hold of much money and probably never will—I am not a 'book of the month' artist—and do not paint pretty pictures." Despite these claims, Hartley did have a substantial amount of money when he died the following year. His Maine paintings had indeed proved marketable: the Addison Gallery of American Art purchased *Jotham's Island, Georgetown, Maine* in 1938, the Phillips Collection *Off to the Banks* in 1939, the Worcester Art Museum *The Wave* in 1941, the Whitney Museum *Granite by the Sea* in 1942–43, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art *Lobster Fishermen* in 1942.<sup>38</sup> While his paintings were not "pretty pictures" and never graced the cover of *Time* as did Benton's, they shared qualities with the familiar and popular works of the regionalists, past New England artists, and contemporary Maine tourist images. A thoughtful approach to Hartley and his process of picturemaking must recognize the artist's redefinition of his art according to the aesthetic and cultural demands of the time.

<sup>37</sup> Irma Whitney, "Marsden Hartley's Mystic Canvases at Symphony Hall," *Boston Herald*, December 31, 1939, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Hartley to Berger, December 1942, as quoted in Ludington, *Marsden Hartley*, p. 273. See also Hartley to Berger, February 9, 1940, YCAL. Barnett, "Hartley's Return to Maine," pp. 172, 176.