



Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism (Georgia O'Keeffe Museum)

Heather Hole

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Considered to be among the greatest early American modernists, the painter Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) traveled the United States and Europe in his search for a distinctive American aesthetic. His stay in New Mexico resulted in an extraordinary series of landscape paintings—created in New Mexico, New York, and Europe between 1918 and 1924—that show an evolution in style and thinking that is important for understanding both Hartley's oeuvre and American modernism in the postwar years.

Marsden Hartley and the West examines this pivotal stage of the painter's career, drawing upon his writings and providing illustrations of rarely seen and previously unpublished works. The author considers Hartley's involvement with the Stieglitz circle and its "soil-and-spirit" philosophy, the Taos art colony, New York Dada, and the impact of historical events such as World War I. Within this setting she analyzes the pastels and oil paintings that suggest Hartley's increasingly ambivalent response to the land. Beginning with optimistic, naturalistic views, the New Mexico works grew progressively darker and more tumultuous, increasingly reflecting a sense of loss brought on by war. The paintings become a site where the landscapes of memory, self, and nation merge, while reflecting broader modernist debates about "American-ness" and a usable past.

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