



Marsden Hartley
American, 1877 - 1943

Landscape No. 5

1922/1923

oil on canvas

overall: 58.4 x 90.2 cm (23 x 35 1/2 in.)

framed: 72 x 104.1 x 3.8 cm (28 3/8 x 41 x 1 1/2 in.)

Alfred Stieglitz Collection 1949.2.2

ENTRY

In March 1918 Marsden Hartley wrote to Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*: “I am trying to get to the Southwest this summer, for various reasons, partly for health, but chiefly to do a lot of painting and writing in peace and quiet neither of which is to be found in New York.” [1] In June 1918, with an offer to give private art lessons to an affluent client and encouraged by the art patron Mabel Dodge, Marsden Hartley traveled to New Mexico and spent the summer at the art colony that Dodge ran in Taos. Denouncing Taos as the “stupidest place I ever fell into,” he preferred Santa Fe, “which is at least something of a town.” Hartley was enthralled by local American Indian culture and the southwestern landscape. [2] He wrote that “any of these beautiful arroyos and canyons is a living example of the splendor of the ages . . . and I am bewitched with their magnificence and their austerity; as for the color, it is of course the only place in America where true color exists, excepting the short autumnal season in New England.” [3] Later that year Hartley published an essay in which he described himself as “an American discovering America,” and continued:

I like the position and I like the results. As a painter, I am impressed with the fact that America as landscape is, one might rightly say,

untouched. I am getting my cue solely from my sojourn in the
watersheds of the Rio Grande. I hear hints all around me of painted
deserts, canyons, cliffs, and cliff dwellings. [4]

In addition to working on still lifes featuring Mexican American folk altarpieces, or *santos*, Hartley made a number of literal views of the landscapes in pastel. He moved from Taos to Santa Fe in October and embarked on an extended visit to California in February 1919. He returned to Santa Fe in June and resumed work on some more naturalistic pastels and oil sketches of the local terrain before going back to New York in November. In early 1920 Hartley began working on a series of painted New Mexico landscapes based on his pastels and oil sketches and his memory of the area. Restless as ever, he became involved with the New York Dada movement and joined the Société Anonyme that had recently been founded by Katherine Sophie Dreier (American, 1877 - 1952), Man Ray (American, 1890 - 1976), and Marcel Duchamp (American, born France, 1887 - 1968), and spent the summer working in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Depressed by a lack of professional recognition and nearly destitute, Hartley longed to return to Europe. An auction of his work at the Anderson Galleries in May 1921 provided him with the funds to do so, and by November he was living in Berlin.

Hartley initially stayed with the family of his old friend, the German sculptor Arnold Rönnebeck (American, 1885 - 1947). He eventually moved into his own studio where he spent the early months of 1922 recovering from a case of syphilis. Later that year he occupied himself with still-life compositions in oil and lithographs. By April 1923 Hartley had commenced working on a new group of approximately 35 southwestern landscapes that are now known collectively as the New Mexico Recollections series. The title is derived from the artist's own reference to them in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz as "New Mexican landscape recollections." [5] The summer of 1924 found Hartley in Paris, where he painted the final Recollections pictures, including *Cemetery, New Mexico* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

Considered as a group, the Recollections are a departure from the artist's earlier, more literal New Mexico views. [6] In the first modern study of Hartley's career, Barbara Haskell describes how he "depicted the New Mexico landscape as a vast, horizontal void, wind-stripped of life. Laterally attenuated forms and broken, twisted foreground trees create a mood of blighted desolation." [7] The Gallery's *Landscape No. 5*, one of the first in the series, is very similar to *New Mexico Recollection No. 6* [fig. 1]. It represents a river running through a typical

southwestern canyon, with mountains visible along the high horizon line. The horizontal composition is simplified and stripped of anecdotal details, without any indication of human presence. The juxtaposition of the two bent trees on the left and the stand of trees on the right is a frequent motif in the *Recollections* series. Hartley has delineated the main landscape elements, especially the foreground stone squares, with thick black brushstrokes. The undulating, constantly shifting planes evoke what Hartley called “the natural wave rhythms which are so predominant in the southwestern scene.” [8] The subdued palette consists of five colors: predominantly black, white, and green, enlivened by the presence of red and yellow. The emphasis on geometric forms, two-dimensionality, and the organic, if rather subdued, colors recalls the work of Paul Cézanne (French, 1839 - 1906), an artist that Hartley greatly admired.

Hartley’s *Recollections* did not especially impress critics when they were exhibited at the *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans* show at the Anderson Galleries in March 1925. Deogh Fulton, who reviewed the show for *International Studio*, observed that when Hartley “misses, which he does sometimes, the titles might be ‘Studies in Liver.’ There is little color and a great deal of pose in many of the canvases, but there are half a dozen, still-lives and landscapes, which make up for all the rest.” Evidently Fulton included *Landscape No. 5* among that small group of successful pictures, because it was illustrated in the review. [9] The fact that Hartley painted some of the *Recollections* in Germany was also problematic during the 1920s, when many were calling for a purely American art untainted by European influences. In her discussion of the critical reception of the series, Heather Hole has noted how “American artists living abroad could be thought of as at best misguided and at worst traitorous in the group of critics associated with Stieglitz.” [10]

Many years later, in 1988, Gail R. Scott wrote: “These paintings, executed five thousand miles away from the Southwest and three or four years after he’d left it, were so audacious that they remained neglected or disparaged until a Neo-Expressionist perspective has recently yielded reevaluation of them.” [11] Scott was alluding to Patricia Broder’s 1984 essay, which was the first serious study of the *Recollections* series in the context of a reexamination of Hartley’s complete southwestern oeuvre. In that essay, Broder concluded that these “stark Expressionist compositions” constitute the artist’s most successful resolution to what she identified as the “fundamental dilemma of his art,” the question whether “painting [was] a humanistic expression or a cerebral discipline, the intellectual

solution to formal aesthetic problems.” [12] The Recollections had finally achieved a measure of recognition.

Scholars have unanimously interpreted the somber quality of the Recollections as symptomatic of Hartley’s supposed state of psychological unrest during his stay in Berlin. Broder observed how the landscape elements “are transformed as if by a raging storm and echo the desolation and emotional turmoil of the artist, isolated and misunderstood in his own land.” [13] Scott wrote that “these paintings speak for an entire generation of dislocated American expatriates who longed for contact with their native country yet found there no real nourishment or acceptance.” [14] Townsend Ludington considered them “some of Hartley’s most forceful paintings” that suggested his “nagging sense of isolation.” [15] Jeanne Hokin wrote that they “clearly reflect Hartley’s own emotional dissonance as he recalled the powerful grandeur and magnificence of the American West.” [16] According to Bruce Robertson, “they reveal the simultaneous and unendurable (for long) pull between real facts and transcendental longings.” [17] Jonathan Weinberg commented that “nature in these landscapes seems less a matter of intellectual concept than a reflection of the artist’s loneliness and anxiety.” [18] For Hole, the Recollections “are fundamentally engaged with grief and remembrance: personal, national, philosophical, and political. They express an irresolvable horror at the aftermath of World War I, and the absence not only of a secure American artistic tradition but also of the possibility of creating one.” [19]

If one can take Hartley’s own testimony at face value, he believed his Berlin works built upon the New Mexico subjects he had done in New York and that, set apart from his own personal emotions, they achieved a new degree of simplicity and resolution. In April 1923 he wrote to Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864 - 1946) and reported:

These landscapes are more vivid in the sense of nature than they were when I worked from the same thoughts in N.Y. I have calmed down generally in composition and general effects—I think you’ll like the ‘simplicity’ of the new work—and a certain coming toward repose and thank heaven at least no intervention of private states of personal existence. I think they are for the first time in my life—almost without me in them. [20]

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Even taking into account Hartley's peripatetic life and penchant for returning to past subjects, it is surprising that he commenced painting such an extensive series of southwestern landscapes in Berlin given the amount of time that had passed since he had left New Mexico. A degree of psychological angst can still be felt in the Recollections he made in Germany. But it may have been almost second nature for Hartley to employ the expressionist idiom considering his past close association with Der Blaue Reiter group and that he found himself once again working in Germany. But Hartley's physical and experiential distance from the Southwest also allowed him to more coherently order his observations of the region's remarkable natural phenomena. Working strictly from memory—as the series title *Recollections* emphasizes—without the aid of the pastel and oil sketches he had made on site, Hartley moved beyond his initial personal response to New Mexico to create powerful, transcendent works such as *Landscape No. 5* that capture the spiritual essence of the Southwest.

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Marsden Hartley, *New Mexico Recollection #6*, 1922, oil on canvas, Denver Art Museum Collection, William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.455. Image courtesy of the Denver Art Museum

NOTES

- [1] Hartley to Harriet Monroe, March 6, 1918, quoted in *Dear Editor: A History of Poetry in Letters*, ed. Joseph Parisi and Stephen Young (New York, 2002), 238.
- [2] Hartley to Harriet Monroe, November 13, 1918, quoted in *Dear Editor: A History of Poetry in Letters*, ed. Joseph Parisi and Stephen Young (New York, 2002), 240.
- [3] Hartley to Harriet Monroe, August 22, 1918, quoted in Barbara Haskell, *Marsden Hartley* (New York, 1980), 58.
- [4] Marsden Hartley, “America as Landscape,” *El Palacio* 5, no. 21 (Dec. 21, 1918): 340.
- [5] Art historians have often neglected to mention that Hartley intended the series to include the Texas landscape as well. In the same letter to Stieglitz he expressed his desire to evoke the Southwest, “especially the Texas aspects on the train from El Paso to Los Angeles,” and referred to the paintings as a “series of New Mexico & Texas landscape inventions.” Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, April 28, 1923, quoted in Townsend Ludington, *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist* (Boston, 1992), 163–164.

- [6] Other examples of the Recollections series are *Landscape and Mountains* (1922–1923, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC), *New Mexico Recollections No. 12* (1922–1923, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin), and *Landscape Fantasy* (1923, Grey Art Gallery, New York University).
- [7] Barbara Haskell, *Marsden Hartley* (New York, 1980), 72.
- [8] Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, May 28, 1923, quoted in Townsend Ludington, *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist* (Boston, 1992), 164.
- [9] Deogh Fulton, “Cabbages and Kings,” *International Studio* 81 (May 1925): 146.
- [10] Heather Hole, *Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism* (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), 126.
- [11] Gail R. Scott, *Marsden Hartley* (New York, 1988), 70.
- [12] Patricia Janis Broder, “Marsden Hartley: In Search of American Icons,” in *The American West: The Modern Vision* (Boston, 1984), 149.
- [13] Patricia Janis Broder, “Marsden Hartley: In Search of American Icons,” in *The American West: The Modern Vision* (Boston, 1984), 146.
- [14] Gail R. Scott, *Marsden Hartley* (New York, 1988), 72.
- [15] Townsend Ludington, *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist* (Boston, 1992), 161.
- [16] Jeanne Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids: The Art of Marsden Hartley* (Albuquerque, NM, 1993), 49–50.
- [17] Bruce Robertson, *Marsden Hartley* (New York, 1995), 84.
- [18] Jonathan Weinberg, “Marsden Hartley: Writing on Painting,” in *Marsden Hartley*, ed. Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser (Hartford, CT, 2002), 133.
- [19] Heather Hole, *Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism* (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), 131.
- [20] Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, April 28, 1923, quoted by Kristina Wilson in *Marsden Hartley*, ed. Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser (Hartford, CT, 2002), 288. See Heather Hole, *Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism* (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), 131, where she quotes part of this letter as an example of how Hartley seemed to be telling Stieglitz “what he thought he wanted to hear.”

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The unlined, lightweight fabric support is still on its original stretcher; the top tacking edge is a selvage. [1] The number "63" was inscribed on the reverse. The fabric support was pre-primed with a thin white ground. [2] In general the painting was executed in pastel-like paint with a dry-brush technique that leaves a good deal of ground exposed. There is some low impasto and in some places it appears that the painter came back and drew into the wet paint with the end of his brush handle. The painting is in excellent condition with no cracking or significant paint losses. There is no varnish coating, but the surface does have some dust and grime embedded in it. When it entered the Gallery's collection, the painting retained its original simple white frame, which has been replaced and put in storage. [3]

TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] The numbers 58 and 90 were stamped on the vertical and horizontal members respectively. Also inscribed are the notations "48/28, #3, 47.212" and the name "Steiglitz" on the reverse of the right vertical stretcher bar in pencil. In addition, the number 70217 was stamped on the reverse of the right vertical stretcher.
 - [2] The priming covers all of the tacking margins, indicating that the canvas was primed before painting. This usually indicates that the priming was commercially prepared rather than applied by the artist.
 - [3] Martha McLaughlin, "Survey of Original Frames in the Collection of the National Gallery of Art," typescript, 2003, in NGA curatorial files.
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PROVENANCE

Alfred Stieglitz [1864-1946], New York; by inheritance to his wife, Georgia O'Keeffe [1887-1986], Abiquiú, New Mexico; gift 1949 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1925 Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans, The Anderson Galleries, New York, 1925, one of nos. 26-50, as New Mexico.

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1997 Loan for display with permanent collection, Baum Gallery of Fine Arts, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, 1997-1998.

2008 Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 2008-2009, unnumbered catalogue, fig. 101.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1970 *American Paintings and Sculpture: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1970: 64, repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 170, repro.
- 1981 Williams, William James. *A Heritage of American Paintings from the National Gallery of Art*. New York, 1981: 216, repro. 226.
- 1988 Scott, Gail R. *Marsden Hartley*. New York, 1988: 70-72, pl. 53.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 194, repro.
- 2000 Kirsh, Andrea, and Rustin S. Levenson. *Seeing Through Paintings: Physical Examination in Art Historical Studies*. Materials and Meaning in the Fine Arts 1. New Haven, 2000: 264.
- 2007 Hole, Heather. *Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism*. Exh. cat. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe. New Haven and Santa Fe, 2007: 112, fig. 101.

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