

MARSDEN HARTLEY AND MYSTICISM

GAIL LEVIN

Marsden Hartley's interest in occult beliefs or esoteric religion was a shaping force in his development.

While many diverse American artists have pursued their own private search for spiritual truth with various forms of mysticism, Marsden Hartley's interest in occult beliefs or esoteric religion was a shaping force in his development.¹ He began by reading the usual native sources of mysticism, including Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays* (first published volume in 1841) and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (first edition, 1855). He followed these texts with William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (first published in 1901). Hartley was also naturally attracted to the work of artists like William Blake and Albert Pinkham Ryder whose mystical visions made their paintings outstanding.² Hartley saw a relationship between these two artists, noting that Ryder "was a still companion of Blake in that realm of the beyond. . . ."³

Hartley's first intense encounter with followers of mystical thinking took place in pastoral Eliot, Maine, when as an impressionable young man, at the beginning of his artistic career, he visited Green Acre in the summer and autumn of 1907. Green Acre, founded by Sarah Farmer as a rural retreat for those pursuing mystical ideas, eventually became a center for the Bahai World Faith. In his youthful involvement with Farmer, the daughter of New England Transcendentalists and social activists, Hartley followed Arthur Dow, who later became the teacher of his contemporaries, Max Weber and Georgia O'Keeffe. Dow had known Farmer at the time when Madame Blavatsky and other diverse swamis were alternately worshipped at Green Acre.⁴ Some years later, in 1918, it was also at Green Acre that the young Mark Tobey was introduced to the Bahai religion which he followed for the rest of his life. Predictably, when Tobey and Hartley eventually met, they found each other sympathetic, sharing various past experiences and mystical interests.

Hartley was already predisposed toward mysticism in 1907 when he arrived at Green Acre where he had a job setting up tents. He had previously been introduced to Emerson's *Essays* in 1898 by Nina Waldeck, his teacher at the Cleveland School of Art, who gave him a copy of the volume he treasured. He had also come to admire Whitman, whose Camden, New Jersey house he had painted about 1905, and had become close friends with the late poet's champion, Horace Traubel.⁵ In the fall of 1907, Hartley wrote from Green Acre a letter of introduction to Traubel for Harlan Ober whom he described as "tremendously spiritual but walking with his feet square on the ground," "an admirable lover of humanity," and "by faith a teacher of the Baha'i religion."⁶

Hartley's mystical interests reveal themselves quite early in his paintings and they recur with a particular intensity during the 1930s. He titled his Neo-Impressionist landscape of 1908-09 *Cosmos* (Fig. 1), no doubt reflecting the impact of the summer he had spent at Green Acre. Hartley was painting Maine, the land he knew and loved best, his orderly, harmonious universe to which he would often return. He may also have been referring to Whitman's cosmos in his "Song of Myself":

Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos, of mighty Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy and sensual, eating, drinking and breeding;⁷

Hartley, who was searching for his identity, found comfort in Whitman's poetry and other such mystical ideas. Emerson reportedly once confided to a friend that Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* reminded him at once of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *New York Herald*.⁸ The incongruous mystical effusions and prosaic banalities of both of these texts appealed to Hartley. Given his own forceful swings in mood, he could easily respond to Whitman's verse:

The pleasures of heaven are with me, and the pains of hell are with me;

The first I graft and increase upon myself—the latter I translate into a new tongue.⁹



Fig. 1. Marsden Hartley, *Cosmos*, 1908-09. Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 1/4". Columbus Museum of Art, Gift of Ferdinand Howald.



Fig. 2. Marsden Hartley, *Oriental Symphony (Musical Theme)*, 1912-13. Oil on canvas, 39 x 31 1/2". Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Gift of Samuel Lustgarten.



Fig. 3. Anonymous, Italian Primitive, from *Der Blaue Reiter*, published 1912.



Fig. 4. Marsden Hartley, *Portrait Arrangement No. 2*, 1912-13. Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 31 3/4". Private Collection.

It was not until 1912, when Hartley went to Europe for the first time, that he focused on still other mystical strains, particularly the teachings of Madame H.P. Blavatsky who founded the Theosophical Society in the United States in 1875, and attracted much attention with her book, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), which sought to establish India as the one source of all the wisdom of the past. Blavatsky combined Eastern philosophies, including Buddhist and Hindu doctrine, with Christian morality and European occult traditions.

Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy came to Hartley's attention as a result of his reading *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, Wassily Kandinsky's treatise, originally translated into English as *The Spiritual in Art* (when Alfred Stieglitz published excerpts in *Camera Work* in July 1912), then as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (in 1914). Kandinsky identified Madame Blavatsky as:

... the first person, after a life of many years in India, to see a connection between these "savages" and our "civilization." In that moment rose one of the most important spiritual movements, one which numbers a great many people today, and has even assumed a material form in the Theosophical Society. This society consists of groups who seek to approach the problem of the spirit by way of inner knowledge.¹⁰

In December of 1912, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz in New York, telling him of his new style of "subliminal or cosmic cubism." He claimed that this style resulted from his "spiritual illuminations," which, in turn, he admitted, came from "the new suggestion of Kandinsky's book the *Spiritual in Art*," about which he commented: "the mere title opened up the sensation for me and from this I proceeded."¹¹ Hartley also claimed that he was the first artist to express pure mysticism in the modern manner.

Hartley's "cosmic cubism" is perhaps most apparent in his *Oriental Symphony* of 1912-13 (Fig. 2) which combines motifs taken from Eastern and Christian religious images. In the upper right corner, beneath an exotic arch, a Buddha sits in a lotus position. Hartley owned two

Buddhas at this time, one of which was a gift from Mabel Dodge and one which he had purchased and lamented after it was stolen years later with the comment: "I have never mourned an object in my life as that one. It was from Siam—was of thin silver laid in wax—and had the most heavenly smile—I always had it on my table by the bed wherever I went."¹² He placed a second evocative Oriental arch in the top center above three hands raised toward the sun. The hands appear to give the *abhaya mudra*, or the handsign found in Indian religious art indicating "have no fear." Hartley wrote to Stieglitz about the eight-pointed stars that are found across the top section of this painting, defining it as the heavenly realm:

Of course you know that mysticism was very strong in Germany ... One instance is that everywhere in Berlin one sees the eight pointed star—all the kings wore it over their heart—the soldier on the forehead—I find also the same stars in the Italian primitives. ...¹³

Hartley's reference to the Italian primitives is a clue to consult the images in the 1912 almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*, edited by Kandinsky and Franz Marc, which Hartley so admired. There, one finds Hartley's source of inspiration in an unknown painting by an Italian primitive (Fig. 3), which not only includes the eight-pointed stars but also a scalloped archway similar to that in *Oriental Symphony*. Hartley also appears to have borrowed the interlocking circles found in the center of his painting from the circular shapes of the overlapping halos in the Italian primitive. The strong appeal for Hartley of this Italian primitive and other Christian folk images in *Der Blaue Reiter* is in keeping with his interest in the early German Christian mystics.

Hartley's *Portrait Arrangement No. 2* of 1912-13 (Fig. 4) repeats the motif of the hand raised giving the *abhaya mudra*. Its use here, just below an equestrian figure in a medallion, suggests that Hartley wished to offer divine protection to his adored Prussian officer friend. In *Portrait of Berlin* of 1913 (Fig. 5), the equestrian figure reappears as a Prussian officer floating on clouds enclosed in a medallion, set against various symbols including triangles, figure 8's, eight-pointed stars, a Buddha, a cross, and more Prussian officers. Hartley's emphasis on the number 8 exemplified his fascination with numbers as both visual and symbolic elements. This painting celebrates Hartley's enthusiasms of the moment: pre-war military pageantry, Christian and Oriental mysticism.

The significance of the number 8 for Hartley can best be seen in his *Painting No. 48* of 1913 (Fig. 6) where he painted an emblematic figure 8 contained within a large mandorla, which floats up against the top edge of the painting. The mandorla symbolizes the perpetual sacrifice that regenerates creative force, in part through life and death. The number 8 also refers directly to regeneration because it was on the eighth day after the entry of Christ into Jerusalem that the resurrection took place. Hartley had written to Stieglitz in August 1913 of his expression of "spiritual enthusiasm" in a large painting containing a "mystical presentation of the number 8," which he claimed he saw everywhere in Berlin. Several months later, he explained: "The German is most essentially a symbolist and there is every evidence that mysticism has had its home here. ... I am mystic too but what I want to express is not national but universal. ..."¹⁴ As a homosexual, Hartley

was perhaps experiencing his own spiritual regeneration in the freedom of Berlin society.

In another canvas, a previously unpublished *Pre-war Pageant* (Fig. 7), which was among the paintings referred to as "Intuitive Abstractions" that Hartley showed to Kandinsky, Marc, Gabriele Muntz, and Albert Bloch at the Galerie Goltz in May 1913 on his way to Berlin from Paris, there appears to be a symbolism around groups of three images. Three round medallions grouped in the center of the canvas are surrounded by an intensely luminous aureole in red, orange-yellow, and green. Within the medallions are triangular forms that might already represent the Indian teepees that emerge in Hartley's "Amerika" series of 1914.¹⁵ Connected by three arrow-like lines, these three medallions may symbolize a spiritual synthesis for Hartley, merging the spirit of the Native American, Oriental mysticism, and the Christian Trinity.

Kandinsky had written specifically about the triangle in his treatise: "Form alone, even though abstract and geometrical, has its internal resonance, a spiritual entity whose properties are identical with the form. A triangle ... is such an entity, with its particular spiritual perfume."¹⁶ *Paris Days, Pre-war* (Fig. 8), a previously unpublished abstract composition, painted before the declaration of war in August 1914, most closely illustrates Hartley's personal interpretation of geometric forms as spiritual entities under the influence of Kandinsky's treatise. This "Pre-war Pageant" features a large triangle at its center, the apex of which touches a smaller yellow inverted triangle above. Inside the yellow triangle is a smaller blue triangle. Several eight-pointed stars are also found in this composition.

After his first meeting in Munich with Kandinsky in January 1913, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz, listing some of the sources he credited with finding his own personal means of expression: William James' pragmatism, Henri Bergson, and, more directly, "the fragments of mysticism" that he found in Jacob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Johann Tauler, Heinrich Suso, John Ruysbroeck, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*.¹⁷

Hartley was understandably enthralled with the *Bhagavad-Gita*, known as the Song of the Lord in Hindu mysticism, an ancient (circa 100 B.C.) anonymous Sanskrit text which seeks to reconcile antithetical forms of the religious consciousness by viewing root conceptions of religion as eternal. In the section of the *Bhagavad-Gita* entitled "Worship of the Personal Lord and of the Absolute" is found the following statement that might have appealed to Hartley:

He who holds equal blame and praise, who is silent (restrained in speech), content with anything (that comes), who has no fixed abode and is firm in mind, that man who is devoted is dear to Me.

This passage refers to someone who does not exist for a family or social group, but moves along "wherever their inspiration takes them. They are not chained to one place or confined to one community."¹⁸ This sounds so much like Hartley's peripatetic existence. He was a restless soul who rarely stayed anywhere for very long. Born in Lewiston, Maine, Hartley lived in many different places from Maine to Cleveland, Ohio, New York, Berlin, Hamburg, and Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany, Provincetown and Gloucester in Massachusetts, Bermuda, Taos and Santa Fe in New Mexico, Paris, Vence and Aix-en-Provence in the south of France, Nova Scotia, and Mexico.

Hartley's interest in Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), one of the most profound of German mystics, is in keeping with his fondness for German culture and people, whom he compared to the Frenchman's tedious "nervosité."¹⁹ Hartley acquired his copy of Boehme's *The Super-sensual Life* in Paris in 1912 and saved it all his life. In this text, the Disciple asks the Master:

How shall I arrive at this Heavenly Understanding ... at this pure and naked knowledge which is abstracted from the senses ... For, alas, I am touched every Moment by the Things which are about me; and overcome by the Clouds and Fumes which rise up out of the Earth.²⁰

This interest in Boehme also places Hartley in the same intellectual sphere as his European contemporaries, such as Hans Arp who evidently read Boehme continually from his childhood. Boehme's stress on eternal life, and that everything comes from eternity and must return to it, must have appealed to the insecure Hartley. He would also have appreciated the mystic's insistence on the necessity of reconciling the existence of evil with God.

Hartley's interest in Boehme extended to texts by some of those who had influenced him, including Meister Eckhart, the founder, before

Fig. 5. Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of Berlin*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 30 1/2". Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mabel Dodge Luhan for the Marsden Hartley Collection.



Fig. 6. Marsden Hartley, *Painting No. 48*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 47-3/16 x 47 1/8". Brooklyn Museum, Dicks Ramsay Fund.





Fig. 7. Marsden Hartley, Pre-War Pageant, 1913. Oil on canvas, 39 x 31 1/2". Private Collection. Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery.



Fig. 8. Marsden Hartley, Paris Days, Pre-war, 1914. Oil on canvas, 41 1/2 x 36". Private Collection.

his death in 1327, of the Rhineland school of mysticism, who was involved in speculations about the nature of God's relation to the world. Several of Eckhart's younger contemporaries also interested Hartley, such as writings by Johann Tauler (c. 1300-1361) and Heinrich Suso (c. 1295-1365). Hartley became fascinated by another mystic indebted to Eckhart, John Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), who was a priest in Brussels before living as a recluse in a forest during his old age.

Hartley's regard for William James must have developed in Paris through discussions with his friend Gertrude Stein who had studied with James at Harvard. In his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James explained mysticism, mentioned Jacob Boehme (spelled Behmen), and cited the writings of Whitman and Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, two of Hartley's other enthusiasms.²¹ James dismissed the work of Madame Blavatsky as being "little more than musical composition," perhaps providing Hartley with a reason for diverting from Kandinsky's enthusiasm.²²

In late May of 1913, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz from Berlin that he expected to meet Dr. Rudolph Steiner and Eduard Schure whom he described as "occults," but he stressed that his own mystical outlook was personal and that he was ignorant of their ideas. Hartley certainly would have read about Steiner in Kandinsky's treatise.²³ By August 1913, Hartley revealed to Stieglitz that the Czech artist François [Frantisek] Kupka, whom he called another theorist of the Kandinsky type, and Walter Rummel, a musician well versed in "occult things," had once visited his studio in Paris, but he denied knowing anything about these matters.²⁴ Kupka has recorded in his diary that he discovered Kandinsky's *The Spiritual in Art* through Rummel in July 1913.²⁵ This suggests that Rummel might have discussed Kandinsky and the occult with both Kupka and Hartley.

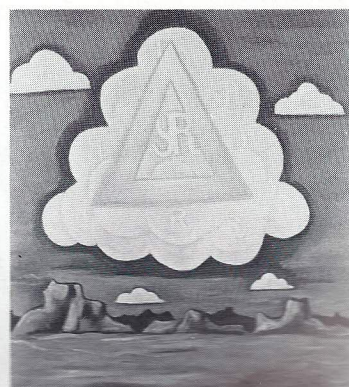
By October 1913, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz about reading [Richard] Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* and mentioned again reading William James, this time citing James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* specifically.²⁶ Bucke treated Boehme, Emerson, Whitman, and even Hartley's close friend, Horace Traubel. Bucke quotes Traubel's lengthy explanation of his spiritual awakening and how he understood

that "Whitman's notion of immortality is not one of logic but is pictorial. He does not believe in immortality. He sees it."²⁷ Traubel concluded: "Once I felt that religions were all of them religions of despair: now I saw that no religion despairs—that all religion before it becomes and as soon as it ceases to be an affair of institutions resolves itself essentially into light and immortality."²⁸

Until a depression in 1929 led him to turn inward in search of consolation, Hartley had put his interest in mysticism aside to pursue other directions in art. Once again he read Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, and John Ruysbroeck. To these, Hartley added *The Confessions of St. Augustine* as well as writings by Plotinus and George Santayana's *Plotinus and the Spiritual Life*.²⁹ By 1932, Hartley had

Fig. 10. Death of a Saint, from *Der Blaue Reiter*, published 1912.

Fig. 9. Marsden Hartley, The Transference of Richard Rolle, 1932-33. Oil on canvas, 28 x 26". Courtesy Babcock Galleries.



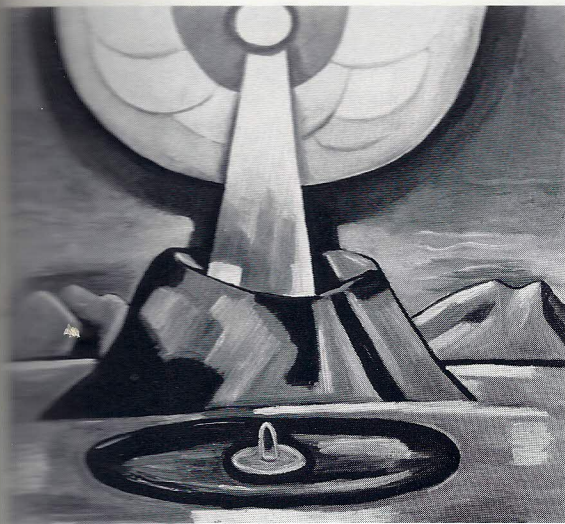


Fig. 11. Marsden Hartley, *Yliaster (Paracelsus)*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 25 x 28 1/2". Courtesy Babcock Galleries.



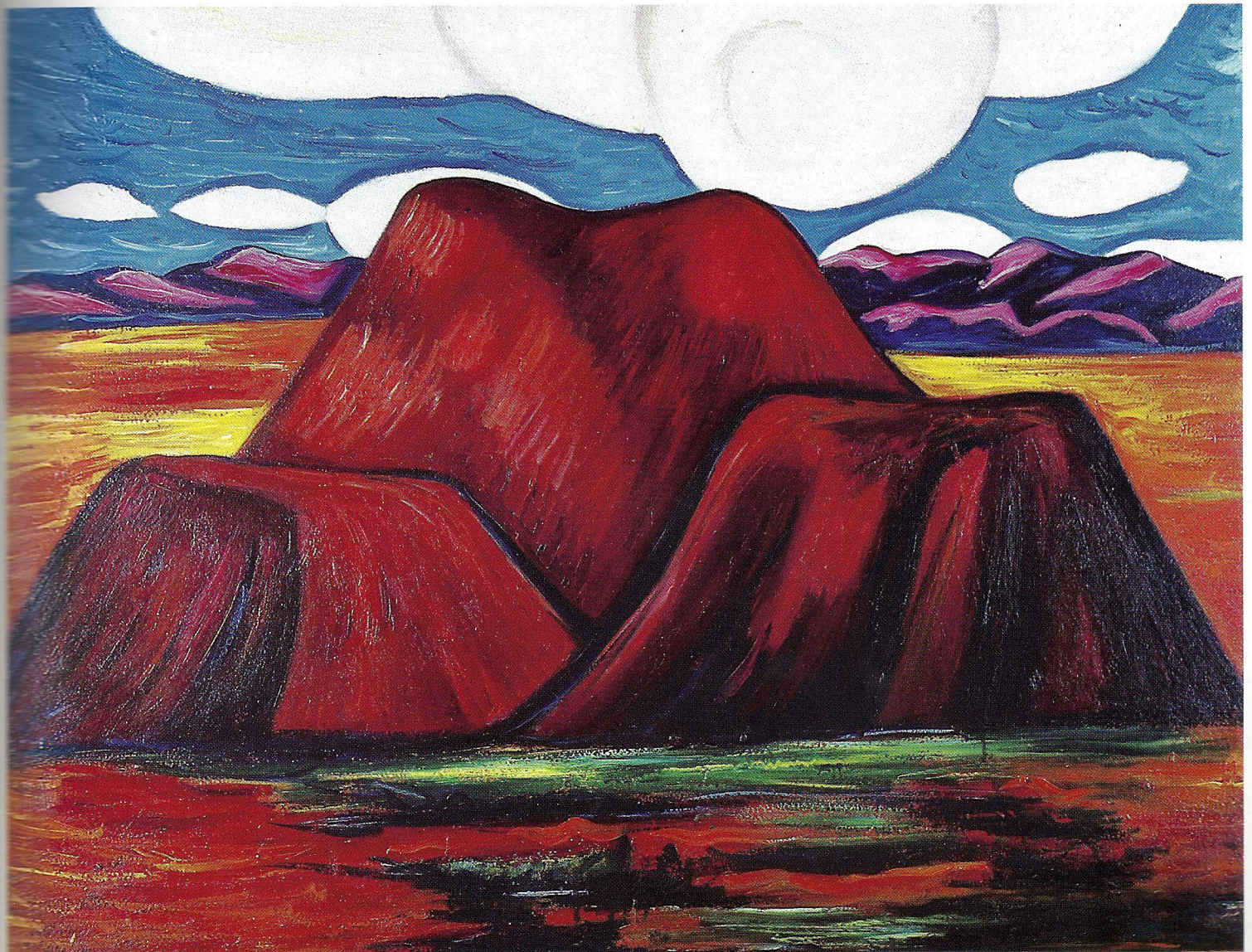
Fig. 12. Marsden Hartley, *Morgenrot, Mexico*, 1932. Oil on board, 25 x 23". Courtesy Babcock Galleries.

became intensely interested in Richard Rolle of Hampole (c. 1300-1349), the early English mystic, and Paracelsus (1493-1541) who practiced alchemy, the occult science for transforming base metal into gold, and who contributed to the development of contemporary medicine.

Having won a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, Hartley went to spend a year in Mexico, beginning in the spring of 1932. He spent his first two months studying Mayan and Aztec cultures in the national anthropological museum in Mexico City and then went to live in Cuen-

avaca. He found a collection of mystical writings in the personal library of a friend, May Ostlund. Reading Ruysbroeck again and Richard Rolle, Hartley noted "how much of a science introspection can be."³⁰ He identified Rolle as "the first English mystic and turned all his heart and soul into singing and would listen to no theologies and no philosophies."³¹ He also wrote about his ancestors from Yorkshire, "where Richard Rolle, the first English mystic was born, where he lived in the caves, prayed to and wrote songs for his divine *Yhesu*—and

Fig. 13. Marsden Hartley, *Earth Warming*, 1932. Oil on board, 25 1/2 x 33 1/4". Private Collection. Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery.



these symbols are not fictions because they create the first substances of my background."³² Hartley's friend Adelaide Kuntz gave him the book *The Life of Richard Rolle* by Frances M.M. Comper which he both read and recommended.³³

Hartley's painting, *The Transference of Richard Rolle* (1932-33), reveals a return to the symbolism of his earlier works of 1913-14. This canvas (Fig. 9), which contains a floating triangle with the letter R repeated on the cloud around it and in the monogram in the center of the triangle, is reminiscent of Hartley's *Portrait of Berlin*, where the triangle contained the mystical number 8. Such clouds were found in the votive paintings and Bavarian glass paintings reproduced in *Der Blaue Reiter*. In this same volume, Hartley had seen a floating triangle containing an eye and representing the Holy Spirit (Fig. 10). This parallels the text of Richard Rolle who wrote: "The soul goes up into this height while (soaring by excess) it is taken above itself, and heaven being open to the eye of the mind, it offers privy things to be beheld."³⁴

In *Yliaster (Paracelsus)* of 1932 (Fig. 11), Hartley referred to the Swiss physician and neo-Platonist whose experiments with healing emphasizing the spiritual life are said to have anticipated Mesmer and hypnotism. Contrary to what has been written of this intensely colored painting, it is anything but a traditional landscape. The halo-like disc in the sky sends down the divine healing beam of light, filling the crater of the volcanic mountain. Paracelsus wrote that "the things which heal a wound in Nature heal the same sort of wound in man."³⁵ This concept must have appealed to Hartley who sought his own spiritual healing at this time.

Hartley's *Morgenrot* of 1932 (Fig. 12) depicts a large emblematic red hand against a dark ground, rising up amid discs floating about it. Despite his presence in Mexico at the time he painted this image, Hartley chose a German title meaning dawn, suggesting that this image is in some way linked to the German mystics he had been reading. In the catalogue of his exhibition in Mexico City in 1933, Hartley offered the following description in Spanish: "La mano de la mañana nace de la noche triunfante," meaning that the hand of morning is born of the triumphant night. The hand appears to give a sign and is reminiscent of the raised hands giving the *abhaya mudra* in *Oriental Symphony* and *Portrait Arrangement No. 2* of 1912-1913. Hartley had been studying Aztec art and history and surely referred here to their belief in the solar deity to whom all sacrifices were addressed.

While in Mexico, Hartley spent some time with the poet Hart Crane whom he had known before in New York and had seen in the south of France. Then in a tormented state, Crane depended on Hartley even to the point of borrowing money from him. They discussed painting and poetry and walked across the local lava-crusted hills which Hartley painted in works like *Earth Warming* (Fig. 13).³⁶ Since his youth when he tried painting, Crane had made close friendships with visual artists. During the early 1920s in Cleveland, William Sommer, one of his painter friends, had introduced him to the *Bhagavad-Gita* and to P.D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World*, which quotes extensively from Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*.³⁷ Thus Crane was probably a sympathetic audience for Hartley's renewed investigation into mystical ideas.

When Hartley learned of Crane's suicide at sea off the coast of Cuba in April 1932, he was moved so deeply that he painted *Eight Bells, Folly: Memorial for Hart Crane* (Fig. 14) the following winter. He explained that the symbols were quite specific:

It has a very mad look as I wish it to have—there is a ship foundering—a sun, a moon, two triangular clouds—a bell with '8' on it—symbolizing eight bells—or noon when he jumped off—and around the bell are a lot of men's eyes—that look up from below to see who the new lodger is to be—on one cloud will be the number 33—Hart's age—and according to some occult beliefs is the dangerous age of a man—for if he survives 33—he lives on—Christ was supposed to be 33....³⁸

Hartley not only used the numerical symbolism of his earlier cosmic cubist works, but he also incorporated the same eight-pointed stars alluding to Crane's spiritual regeneration. The poet and the painter live forever through their art.

Hartley's theme, *Eight Bells, Folly: Memorial for Hart Crane*, must have been suggested in part by a book of poetry that he owned, John Cabbage's *8 Bells*, published in 1932.³⁹ This volume contains poems inspired by sea chanteys, including one called "Down Deep at the

Bottom of the Sea" and another called "Bury me not in a Pauper's Grave" which includes the lines:

Cast me out to the raving, wild Sea.
Let her waves be my lonely grave,
For I was in life free as the Sea.
So when I die, anchor my soul in the Sea.

Considering Crane's tragic death at sea, this poem must have been particularly moving to Hartley. One wonders if Hartley had this volume before Crane's death and if the latter ever read it.

During the spring and fall of 1932, Hartley also saw fellow painter Mark Tobey, who while visiting in Mexico was able to support Hartley's current preoccupation with mysticism. During the previous year, Hartley had written an introduction for the catalogue of Tobey's exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Gallery in New York. Tobey's own intense spirituality, grounded in his belief in the Bahai World Faith, must have appealed to Hartley who called him "a thinker and a mystic" and wrote:

Mark Tobey is a man who lives every moment, and by living is meant not only acting so much himself as letting life act every moment upon him. He visualizes every sensation plastically and gives the plastic sense of his encounter; and he is not troubled as to how exactly alike his pictures are for he is not a repetitionist, and his is likely to vacillate between abstracted, objective emotion and deep mystical interventions.⁴⁰

Hartley categorized Tobey as "a searcher and a revealer of the inner condition."⁴¹ At the time, Tobey was painting some experimental abstractions with biomorphic shapes such as *Before Form* (1929), but he had not fully renounced representation, as can be seen in other works of the same year such as *Middle West* which depicts buildings and a highway crossing flat fields.

Tobey's Bahai faith, which he found at Green Acre in 1918, influenced all of his painting from that time forward. The Bahai religion, begun in Persia in 1844, teaches that all religions are manifestations along the route to one unified world faith. Although there is no official Bahai art, Tobey did immediately paint works specifically based on religious themes. One such picture of about 1918, still figurative and related to symbolist art, depicts the *Conflict of the Satanic and Celestial Egos*. Later paintings also reflect Tobey's religious beliefs, but in a less illustrative manner. Tobey once explained how he saw the influence of the Bahai religion on his art:

The root of all religions, from the Bahai point of view, is based on the theory that man will gradually come to understand the unity of the world and the oneness of mankind. It teaches that all the prophets are one—that science and religion are the two great powers which must be balanced if man is to become nature. I feel my work has been influenced by these beliefs. I've tried to decentralize and interpenetrate so that all parts of a painting are of related value. Perhaps I've hoped even to penetrate perspective and bring the far near.⁴²

Tobey recalled that by 1919, he "felt keenly that space should be freed. As I remember, I really wanted to smash form, to melt it in a more moving and dynamic way."⁴³

It was probably in 1931 that Tobey produced the small tempera painting called *The Desert of Friendship* (Fig. 15) which he gave Hartley who made his own interpretation of this painting in a poem he wrote of the same title.⁴⁴ A token of their friendship, this composition features a large-headed cat emerging from the landscape which Hartley described:

From out of the center, with a feline leer
upon its labradorean disguise
a sinister, premonitory warning of distress
lies
openly upon its sneer, upon its queer
unfriendly brow

A skull at the bottom center suggested:
Grotesques disport in humanist design
like objects in a spiritist examine;
A yellow flame exudes, if pale,
above a crimson-flooded interval
where death in trivial mask endures
in silent hardihood
its old, accustomed mood.

Just beyond a beehive-like tower, Hartley described two male figures mystically merging or embracing on the right:

How humanly to the right
we come
for any sense of home,
upon two lovers, bright
with mystic interference,
one, whose side is light
and one, the man is physically brown.

There is a prominent face on the upper left between two moons:

Upon these two the stern
elliptical visages look down
as if to register a comic frown.

During his stay in Mexico, Tobey painted works like *Mexican Ritual Scene* and, though he eventually became an abstract painter, he never fully renounced representation.

With his friend Tobey gone by the time of his exhibition in Mexico City in April 1933, Hartley complained in a letter to his niece, Norma Berger: "Almost no one understood my pictures as they are a mystical nature—in fact only one person really understood because she is or was a student of ancient lore—and it was from her remarkable collection of priceless and rare books in Cuernavaca that I gained the actual knowledge."⁴⁵ The woman he praised was May Ostlund who liked his Mexican paintings which he admitted just left others mystified.⁴⁶ He insisted: "I have given up painting nature for I see so much beyond the physical appearances of nature that I can't be any longer interested in surface appearances."⁴⁷

Although Hartley continued to read mystical literature, particularly Plotinus and Ruysbroeck, after he left for Germany in April 1933, he began to paint more descriptively again. In October 1933, Hartley wrote to his niece, an avid Christian Scientist, explaining what he thought of mysticism:

I have read the Christian mystics quite thoroughly and the history of mysticism and while I can never go all the way with them—they are the most intriguing romancers imaginable... but I could never (and it interests me to hear you say the same)—get myself to form an image of God as a person and I still can't—it isn't that I don't want to—but it just won't come out that way—but it comes by way of Plotinus as "supreme intellect" as yours comes to you as Divine Mind...⁴⁸

Hartley also praised the "superb study of mysticism by one Evelyn Underhill—a very fine English scholar and she has done a glorious piece of work—in outlining the meaning of the idea and complete histories of all the famous mystics from the middle ages to Blake."⁴⁹ He announced that his favorite mystic was "Ruysbroeck on one side and Richard Rolle on the other."⁵⁰ Hartley was the first to admit that these readings had enriched his life and surely meant to have their influence recognized in his art.

1. This article is part of the author's ongoing project to produce a catalogue raisonné of Hartley's paintings and drawings, in conjunction with Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 22 East 80th Street, New York 10021. Any notification of the whereabouts of Hartley's work will be greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank Kathryn Hargrove, Curator of the Treat Gallery at Bates College, and David Schoonover, Curator of American Literature, Beinecke Library, Yale University, who provided invaluable assistance.

2. See, for example, Hartley's essay on Ryder in Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts* (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1921), pp. 37-41.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

4. See Lawrence W. Chisholm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 179-180.

5. For evidence of this friendship and mention of Hartley's deep admiration for Whitman, see William Innes Homer, ed., *Heart's Gate: Letters Between Marsden Hartley and Horace Traubel, 1906-1915* (Highlands, North Carolina: The Jargon Society, 1982).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 52, undated letter from Hartley to Traubel, postmarked September 18, 1907, Eliot, Maine.

7. "Song of Myself," reprinted in Mark Van Doren, *The Portable Walt Whitman* (New York: Viking Press, 1945), p. 89.

8. Roger Asselineau, "Whitman's Style: From Mysticism to Art," in Roy Harvey Pearce, ed., *Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 89.

9. "Song of Myself," reprinted in Mark Van Doren, *The Portable Walt Whitman* (New York: Viking Press, 1945), p. 89.

10. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1947), p. 32. This version is based on the Sadleir translation of 1914 with retranslation by Francis Gollfing, Michael Harrison, and Ferdinand Ostertag. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

11. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of December 1912, The Alfred Stieglitz Archives, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. (Hereafter cited as Yale.) For a more complete discussion of Kandinsky's impact on Hartley and other American

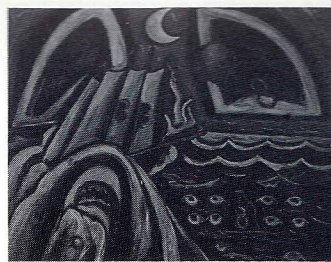


Fig. 14. Marsden Hartley, *Eight Bells, Folly: Memorial for Hart Crane*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 39'. University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

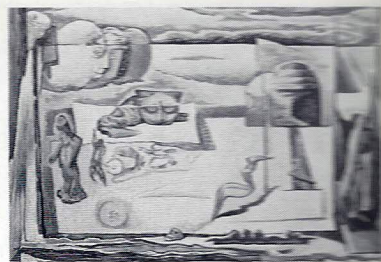


Fig. 15. Mark Tobey, *Desert of Friendship*, c. 1931. Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

artists, see the author's doctoral dissertation, Sandra Gail Levin, "Wassily Kandinsky and the American Avant-garde, 1912-1950" (Rutgers University, May 1976). See also Gail Levin, "Marsden Hartley, Kandinsky, and Der Blaue Reiter," *Arts Magazine*, 52, November 1978, pp. 156-160.

12. Marsden Hartley to Norma Berger, letter of June 12, 1924, Yale, indicates that he has sent the Buddha given him by Mabel Dodge to his niece. This Buddha is now in the Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. In a later letter of December 31, 1933, Hartley commented on his two Buddhas and how he got them when he was first in Paris.

13. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of August 1913, Yale. The subsequent reference is also to this letter.

14. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of September 1913, Yale. See also Gail Levin, "Hidden Symbolism in Marsden Hartley's Military Pictures," *Arts Magazine*, 54, October 1979, pp. 154-58.

15. For a discussion of Hartley's use of image and motifs from American Indian art, see Gail Levin, "American Art," in William Rubin, ed., *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), pp. 455-461.

16. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 47.

17. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, undated letter of February 1913, Yale.

18. S. Radhakrishnan, introductory essay and notes for *The Bhagavadgita* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1946), p. 298.

19. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of February 1, 1913, Yale.

20. Quoted from p. 13 of Hartley's copy of Jacob Boehme, *The Supersensual Life or the Life Which is Above Sense Being Two Dialogues Between a Scholar or Disciple and His Master* (London: H.R. Allenson, Ltd.), inscribed "Marsden Hartley, Paris 1912," in the Bates College Library, Lewiston, Maine.

21. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Random House, 1929, reprint of edition of 1902), pp. 387-390.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

23. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 32.

24. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of August 1913, Yale. An earlier reference to Kupka occurs in Hartley's letter to Stieglitz of April 1913, also Yale.

25. See *Frantisek Kupka, 1871-1957, A Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1975, p. 311.

26. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of October 22, 1913, Yale.

27. Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: Causeway Books, 1974, reprint of 1901 edition), p. 287.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

29. See Marsden Hartley to Rebecca Strand, letter of August 19, 1929, and Marsden Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, letter of August 29, 1929, both in the Archives of American Art.

30. Marsden Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, letter of April 1932, Archives of American Art.

31. Marsden Hartley to Norma Berger, letter of October 14, 1933.

32. Marsden Hartley, "The Education of an American Artist," Yale.

33. Marsden Hartley to Norma Berger, letter of December 18, 1933. The book, Frances M.M. Comper, *The Life of Richard Rolle Together with an Edition of his English Lyrics* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1929) is included in the surviving volumes of Hartley's library at Bates College.

34. Richard Rolle of Hampole, quoted in Francis M.M. Comper, *The Life of Richard Rolle Together with an Edition of his English Lyrics* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc. 1969), p. 94. This was pointed out by Carol Rice, *The Mountains of Marsden Hartley* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Art Gallery, 1979), n.p.

35. Quoted in Ralph Shirley, *Occultist & Mystics of All Ages* (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1972, reprint of 1920 edition), p. 85.

36. For information on Crane and Hartley, see John Unterecker, *Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1969), pp. 742-743.

37. For information about William Sommer (1867-1949), see Hunter Ingalls, "The Several Dimensions of William Sommer," Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1976.

38. Marsden Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, December 5, 1932, Archives of American Art.

39. John Cabbage, *8 Bells* (New York: Parnassus Press, 1932). This is one of the volumes from Hartley's library preserved at Bates College.

40. Quoted in Gail R. Scott, ed., *On Art by Marsden Hartley* (New York: Horizon Press, 1982), p. 184.

41. Marsden Hartley, *Mark Tobey*, catalogue of one-man exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Gallery, 12 East 10th Street, New York.

42. Mark Tobey, quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 237-240.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

44. This manuscript is in the Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

45. Marsden Hartley to Norma Berger, letter of April 9, 1933, Yale.

46. The author is preparing an article on Hartley's Mexican paintings which have not yet been properly understood.

47. Marsden Hartley to Norma Berger, April 9, 1933.

48. Marsden Hartley to Norma Berger, letter of October 14, 1933, Yale.

49. *Ibid.* Hartley referred to Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, first published in 1911 and reissued by E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1961.

50. *Ibid.*