

Fig. 1. Marsden Hartley, *Abstraction*, 1911. Oil on cardboard, 16 1/4 x 13 1/4". University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Gift of Irene and Hudson Walker.

MARSDEN HARTLEY AND THE EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDE

GAIL LEVIN

Marsden Hartley's association with the European avant-garde was an important phase in his artistic development. He had a remarkable ability to identify those artists who were producing the most innovative art of their time.

Marsden Hartley's paintings in the years 1910-11, just before he went abroad for the first time, clearly indicate his openness to new ideas and his own experiments with the styles of European modern artists. For example, Hartley painted *Abstraction* (Fig. 1) just after he had seen Picasso's Cubist watercolors on exhibit at Stieglitz's gallery "291" in April, 1911. In this painting Hartley used a flattened space, linear forms including semicircular shapes, and a preponderance of perpendicular lines similar to those in Picasso's Cubist drawing of 1910 called *Female Nude* (Fig. 2) which was purchased by Stieglitz at the time of this Picasso exhibition at "291."

By the time Hartley arrived in Paris for the first time, in April 1912, he was already well acquainted with the work of the three artists—Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso—most admired by the local avant-garde. Not only had Hartley been able to see examples of their work at "291," but reproductions were also available to him in *Camera Work* and other art magazines. Hartley's *Still Life* of 1912 (reportedly painted in the studio of the artist and future set designer Lee Simonson soon after Hartley arrived in Paris) demonstrates both his interest in Fauvist color and pattern and in a Cézannesque arrangement of forms (Fig. 3).¹ That April, he visited Ambroise Vollard's gallery, where he saw works by Cézanne, and the Salon des Indépendants. He disliked the Salon which he called "perfectly terrible... merely a National Academy of a better class," and commenting on the mediocrity of some of the contemporary art exhibitions, he exclaimed: "Matisse becomes one of the gods after this terrible stuff."²

Hartley lost no time in getting invited to Gertrude and Leo Stein's studio at 27 rue de Fleurus, where their art collection in-

cluded the work of Renoir, Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso. Introduced as a friend of Simonson, Hartley first made the acquaintance of Gertrude Stein during the late spring of 1912. Hartley's delight with both her taste in art and her writing is revealed in a letter he wrote to her in September 1912 in which he requested another invitation to visit and permission to bring along his friend Arnold Rönnebeck, a German sculptor:

I did not get to see the albums of Picasso drawings the one hour I was there and this you were kind enough to offer me for a time in the fall. I hope by this time you have received a copy of *Camera Work* of Alfred Stieglitz from the Photo-Secession of New York where, as one of the few young painters struggling toward individual expression, I have twice exhibited. It seems to me a very worthy presentation of your interpretation of the two artists concerned. I think your articles very interesting. They seem to get as close to the subjects in hand as words can go. . . .³

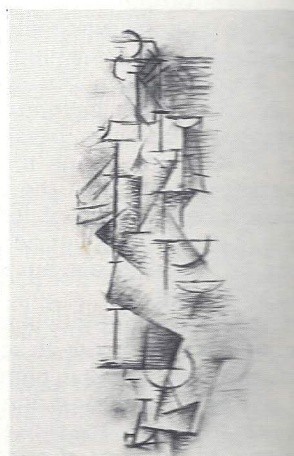
During the summer of 1912, while Gertrude Stein was in Spain, Hartley had become friendly with a German crowd (which frequented the Restaurant Thomas on the Boulevard Raspail) including Arnold Rönnebeck and a handsome young German officer, Rönnebeck's cousin Karl von Freyburg, who later became the "subject" of several of his abstract paintings.⁴

Hartley soon encountered a new direction in modern art with which the Stieglitz circle was not yet familiar when he left New York for Paris in the spring of 1912. He wrote to Stieglitz in July of 1912 about John Duncan Ferguson's publication *Rhythm*:

In one of the last numbers of *Rhythm* is a treatise on Gauguin's influence in which Kandinsky is talked of among others. He is evidently one of Gauguin's pupils and is I believe a modern light in Berlin or Munich—He has lately brought out a new magazine called *Die* [sic] *Blaue Reiter* which I shall look up—Very likely they talk much of modernism—and god knows they talk much about everything here.⁵

Stieglitz, however, had already discovered Kandinsky and had translated a passage from *The Spiritual in Art* (*Über das Geistige in der Kunst*) and published it in the July 1912 issue of *Camera Work*, which Hartley had not yet received in Paris. Hartley's first knowledge of Kandinsky was the result of his reading M.T.H. Sadler's article in *Rhythm*, "After Gauguin," in which Kandinsky was referred to as one of Gauguin's disciples, "a Polish artist," whom Sadler labeled as one of the "neo-primitives," because they have arrived in their search for expression at a technique reminiscent of primitive and savage art."⁶ Sadler also explained that the artist's expression of "the inner soul" would result in an art that will be

Fig. 2. Pablo Picasso, *Female Nude*, 1910. Charcoal on paper, 19-1/16 x 12-5/16". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949.



definitely "unnaturalistic, anti-materialistic."

In this same letter to Stieglitz of July 1912, Hartley remarked upon Picasso's use of words such as "jolie" or "bien" and numbers such as "75." He had by now had an opportunity to see examples of Picasso's painting at Gertrude Stein's home. He was probably referring specifically to Picasso's *The Architect's Table* of 1912 (Fig. 4)⁷ which Gertrude had just purchased that spring, for the words "Ma Jolie" appear predominantly on the left corner of the oval painting. Seeing Picasso's work and meeting the artist at Miss Stein's in September of 1912 impressed Hartley tremendously. He wrote to his friend the artist:

Rockwell Kent, exclaiming:

I assure you this man Picasso is a wonder. He is unique in the world at this time for his depth of understanding and insight into the inwardness of things He is only 30 now and is already one of the strongest forces in art—absolutely silent himself—teaches nothing—has no art theories whatsoever—and is a simple quiet Spaniard with a love for work.⁸

By this time Hartley had also come into contact with Jacob Epstein, the American-born sculptor who had moved to England. Epstein was in Paris during the summer and fall of 1912 in conjunction with the placement of his controversial tomb monument to Oscar Wilde. The Sadler article, Epstein's influence, and the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* all inspired Hartley to visit the Trocadero Museum with its famous collection of African and other tribal art. His response to primitive art was intense and he exclaimed in a letter to Stieglitz on October 9, 1912: "These people had no mean ambition. They created out of spiritual necessity."⁹ Hartley's use of the phrase "spiritual necessity" demonstrates his growing fascination with Kandinsky's treatise which he had purchased along with the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* at Clovis Sagot's art gallery. Hartley wrote to Stieglitz:

Kandinsky's Die [sic] Blaue Reiter . . . has turned out to be a fine thing. It is expensive but necessary for you to have over there and for me to have too—as I am taking a very sudden turn in a big direction owing to a recent visit to the Trocadero. One can no longer remain the same in the presence of these mighty children who get so close to the universal idea The results are proving themselves and I am showing a strength unknown in past efforts. These revolts must come and until they come one can only proceed according to one's artistic conscience. They must be revolts of the soul itself if they are to mean anything other than intellectual imitation¹⁰

Hartley's initial interest in the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* is apparent in some of the still lifes he painted in 1912 in which he depicted primitive art objects.¹¹ That autumn, he met the German art dealer Wilhelm Uhde at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery at an exhibition of the naive painter Henri Rousseau whose work was also included in *Der Blaue Reiter*. In a letter to Rockwell Kent in September 1912, Hartley had hinted at his interest in the art of primitive peoples:

. . . the more elemental and primitive the people, the more inwardly intense have been the modes of expression. It accounts I think very largely for the utter emptiness of modern art up to now when art is taking a plunge inward and men are revolting against the superficial ideas which have so long been expressed and each man is trying to look in to himself and seeing what he finds there¹²

Epstein had suggested to Hartley that he should travel to London. Taking his advice, Hartley visited London in mid-November, 1912 in hopes of having an exhibition of his work there.¹³ Upon returning from this brief trip to London, he wrote to Stieglitz of his latest work explaining that he had departed from still lifes "in favor of intuitive abstraction." He wrote:

I am rapidly gaining ground in this variety of expression and find it to be closest to my own temperament and ideals. It is not like anything here. It is not like Picasso—it is not like Kandinsky, not like any "cubism." It is what I call for want of a better name subliminal or cosmic cubism It combines a varied sense of form with my own sense of color which I believe has never needed stimulation My first impulses came from the new suggestion of Kandinsky's book, the *Spiritual in Art* I have shown the half-dozen things I have on hand of this nature and one German painter from Munich who is working on the musical principle says I am probably the first to express pure mysticism in this modern tendency. He may be right . . . I am making every effort by way of concentration and faith toward going to Berlin early in January and if it is in any way possible to come back and size up the Blaue Reiter group and its activity there¹⁴

An example of what Hartley referred to as his "cosmic cubism" is his painting *Musical Theme No. 1 (Bach Preludes)* of 1912 (Fig. 5). Although more colorful than Picasso's monochromatic cubist compositions, Hartley's picture

nonetheless emulated the linear shapes and patterns of Picasso's contemporary works such as *The Architect's Table* of 1912 and even the drawing *Nude* of 1910 owned by Stieglitz. The heavy lines, semicircles, and other linear patterns appear to have been inspired by these works which so impressed Hartley.

On June 20, 1912, Hartley had written to Stieglitz of his visit to Robert Delaunay's studio but lamented that the artist's latest work was "like a demonstration for chemistry on the technical relations of color and sound."¹⁵ In early November he indicated that he again intended to visit Delaunay, in the company of his friend Rönnebeck, who would be able to act as interpreter between himself and Delaunay.¹⁶ Hartley might have shared his enthusiasm for Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter with Delaunay, who had exhibited with this group in Munich and was included in the almanac.

Hartley's mention of showing his work to a "German painter from Munich who is working on the musical principle" coincides with the visit to Paris of Franz Marc and August Macke to meet Robert Delaunay in October 1912.¹⁷ It is possible that Hartley met Macke, who painted works such as *Color Composition (Homage to Johann Sebastian Bach)* in 1912. Just about this time, Hartley began his series of musical theme paintings originally known as *Bach: Preludes and Fugues*, and one painting even includes this phrase as a part of the composition.¹⁸ Of course, Hartley had probably seen Frantisek Kupka's purely abstract *Amorpha, Fugue à deux couleurs* of 1912 exhibited in the recent Salon d'Automne.

Hartley first traveled to Germany on a brief, three-week visit (about January 7-28, 1913) which proved inspirational in its impact. The single most important event was his trip to Murnau with Rönnebeck to meet Wassily Kandinsky. His enthusiasm for what he had encountered in Germany was unbounded. He felt that he had now entered his really creative period:

I have something personal to say—and that no one else is saying just this thing—It all comes out of a new growth in my life—a culmination of inward desires of longstanding—¹⁹

He announced his intention to go to Germany to live and work as soon as he could make arrangements: "It is more constructive and I am weary of this French nervosité."²⁰

Hartley wrote to Stieglitz that during five days spent in Munich he had found his place in the art circles of Europe. He described his visit with Rönnebeck to Kandinsky's home where they spent "a long and interesting hour with him and Fraulein Münter who has a studio with him—she also paints well."²¹ According to Hartley, it was Rönnebeck who described the new work that Hartley was doing, prompting Kandinsky to suggest

Fig. 3.
Marsden
Hartley, Still
Life, 1912. Oil
on composi-
tion board, 32
x 25-5/8".
University
Gallery,
University of
Minnesota,
Minneapolis,
Bequest of
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Walker from
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lection.



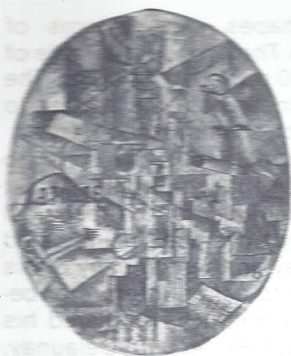


Fig. 4. Pablo Picasso, *The Architect's Table*, 1912. Oil on canvas mounted on panel, oval, 28-5/8 x 23 1/2". Museum of Modern Art, Gift of William S. Paley.



Fig. 5. Marsden Hartley, *Musical Theme No. 1 (Bach Preludes)*, 1912. Oil on canvas mounted on masonite, 26 x 21". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Paul C. Schorr, III, Lincoln, Nebraska.



Fig. 6. Marsden Hartley, *Berlin Anter-War*, 1914. Oil on canvas with painted frame, 41 3/4 x 34 1/4". The Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio.



Fig. 7. Franz Marc, *White Bull*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 38-3/8 x 53 1/4". The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

exchanging photos of their work. Hartley wrote:

You would like Kandinsky very much I know—I have never been in the presence of an artist like him—so free of convention with a hatred of all the traditions that cling to art—bohemianism, uncleanness, lack of mental order—this chaos which makes Paris so charming to those who live looseness—For myself I am weary of it . . .

Although Hartley admitted to Stieglitz that he had found intellectual and spiritual freedom through his Parisian experience, he stressed that he had found himself through sources other than the "art cults." The sources that Hartley credits with helping him find his personal means of expression are William James' pragmatism, Henri Bergson, and, more directly, "the fragments of mysticism" that he had found in Boehme, Eckhardt, Tauler, Suso, Ruysbroek, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Hartley may well have developed his interest in William James through his discussions with Gertrude Stein, who had studied with James while at Harvard. Hartley wrote that he felt in his painting the necessity of "leaving objective things" and that he found himself "going into the subjective, studying Picasso closely, finding a great revelation in the Cézanne watercolors—a peculiar psychic rendering of forms in space—and from this artistically I preceded . . ."

One is reminded here of the particular passage from Kandinsky's *The Spiritual in Art* which appeared in the July 1912 issue of *Camera Work*. In this passage, Kandinsky wrote of "the seekers of the inner spirit in outer things" and cited Cézanne's efforts in this direction through "new laws of form."²² Hartley's description of Cézanne's watercolors (which he had first seen at "291" in 1911) as a "great revelation . . . that is a purely spiritual rendering of forms in space" is nearly an echo of Kandinsky as quoted in *Camera Work*. This passage excerpted by Stieglitz ends with Kandinsky's praise of Picasso's "compulsion for self-expression," another idea which Hartley borrowed in reporting

that he was "studying Picasso closely" with the result being his personal development of "the first expression of mysticism in modern art." Hartley wrote that he was confident that Kandinsky would respond favorably to his art: "I know that what I have to express coincides perfectly with his notion of *Das Geistige in der Kunst*."

In a letter of August 1913 from Berlin, Hartley recalled to Stieglitz that the Czech artist "Francois" [Frantisek] Kupka, whom he called another theorist of the Kandinsky type, and Walter Rummel, the musician, had once visited his studio in Paris.²³ Hartley mentioned that Rummel was versed in "occult things" but denied that he himself knew anything of these matters. Kupka has recorded in his diary that he discovered Kandinsky's *The Spiritual in Art* through Rummel in July of 1913.²⁴ Thus, Rummel might have discussed such matters as Kandinsky and the occult with both Kupka and Hartley.²⁵ By October of 1913, Hartley's interest in the occult had reached its peak. He wrote to Stieglitz that he had read such books as [Richard] Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* and William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*.²⁶

Hartley left to live in Germany around the middle of April 1913. Before settling in Berlin, he renewed his earlier acquaintance with the artists of Der Blaue Reiter—Marc, Kandinsky, and Münter. On his way to Munich, Hartley visited Marc in his home in Sindelsdorf from which he wrote both Stieglitz and Gertrude Stein on April 29, 1913, noting that Heinrich Campendonk was present as well.²⁷ Hartley indicated that he was arranging for a Munich exhibition of his work at the Galerie Goltz.²⁸ With the help of Marc, with whom he had corresponded from Paris, Hartley had arranged to have him, Kandinsky, and Münter, as well as Albert Bloch, the only American contributor to the almanac, gather at the Galerie Goltz in order to see his work.²⁹ After viewing his paintings, Marc sent Hartley a note in English, lauding the sincerity of his art but allowing that with more experience Hartley would be able to do more with color and form.³⁰

When he wrote to Stieglitz to report the outcome of this meeting at the Goltz Gallery, Hartley had already begun to express growing reservations about Kandinsky's work, perhaps in reaction to the lack of an enthusiastic reception for his paintings:

. . . I have no knowledge—only an organized instinct—Kandinsky has a most logical and ordered mind which appeals so earnestly to the instinct which has been soon mastered—He knows why everything and that simply must not—cannot be in real creation—This is itself illogical. Gertrude Stein is right when she says that true art



Fig. 8. Sonia Delaunay in her *Simultaneous Dress*, 1913, standing in front of Robert Delaunay's *The First Disc*.

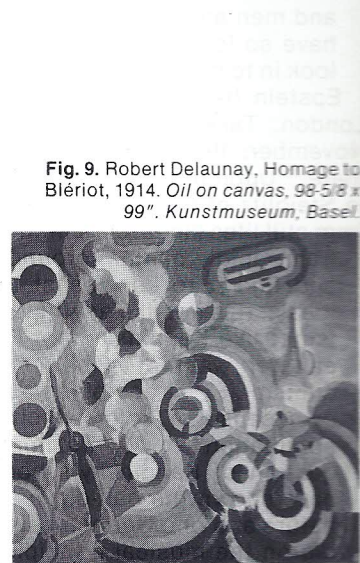


Fig. 9. Robert Delaunay, *Homage to Blériot*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 98-5/8 x 99". Kunstmuseum, Basel.

cannot explain itself, that Cézanne could not, Picasso could not—that I cannot—that Matisse can explain everything and it probably accounts for the fact that all Matisse's pictures now are studied logic and studied simplicity. Kandinsky also—all legitimate enough naturally—but not products of creation—that element of life which insists on self-expression before the mind has power—³¹

By early June 1913, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz insisting for the second time that Kandinsky's writing was better than his painting:

Kandinsky would stir the mind to action—arouse a thought—I seem only to arouse the self as I myself am stirred. I am convinced I succeed and Gertrude says I do—I am not convinced that Kandinsky ever does—It never quite comes to the point which makes all things perfect—It is without (for me) the life germ—He gets it in his writing but not in his painting. Therefore technical perfection is as much a failure as anything can be to my notion when it is not accompanied by spiritual enthusiasm.³²

Hartley's gradually increasing reservations about Kandinsky's work were at least supported, if not influenced, by the position of Gertrude Stein, who never openly expressed enthusiasm for Kandinsky's work. She went so far as to write to Stieglitz in Hartley's behalf:

In his painting he has done what in Kandinsky is only a direction. Hartley has really done it. He has used color to express a picture and he has done it so completely that while there is nothing mystic or strange about his production it is genuinely transcendent. Each canvas is a thing in itself and contained within itself, and the accomplishment of it is quite extraordinarily complete.³³

Hartley took Gertrude Stein's opinion very seriously and was no doubt flattered by the interest she showed in his work and the comparisons she made. He wrote to Stieglitz:

I know this—that it is a long time since Gertrude S. has gone outside of Picasso and Cézanne to interest herself She came twice to my studio to see them and then put the four of them on her walls with Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, and Renoir to show me they had a strength all their own and that she said they are like nothing else going.³⁴

Despite his protestations, several of the paintings that Hartley produced in 1913, the year when he first met Kandinsky, reveal the influence of the Russian artist's work. Although Hartley would continue to be influenced by both Kandinsky's art and his writings, his own work would never again borrow directly from Kandinsky's paintings.

Hartley became closer friends with Marc than with Kandinsky, perhaps because he communicated more easily with Marc who both spoke and wrote English. As a result of Marc's interest, Hartley showed his work with the artists of *Der Blaue Reiter* at the *Erster deutscher Herbstsalon* (First German Autumn Salon) organized by *Der Sturm* in Berlin in 1913. Soon Hartley adapted aspects of Marc's painting in his own. Looking at Marc's pictures Hartley had noted the German painter's "rendering of the soul of animals." These animals especially appealed to Hartley who sought themes appropriate to express his personal mystical experience. Some of Hartley's prewar paintings feature horses which reflect the influence of Marc.³⁵ One such painting demonstrating this effect of Marc's style on Hartley is *Berlin Ante-War* of 1914 (Fig. 6). The crouching horse and stylized plant forms recall Marc's *White Bull* which was reproduced in the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* as well as his various pictures of horses (Fig. 7).³⁶ Nonetheless, in his unusual organization of his picture, Hartley appears to be more original.

In September 1913, Hartley attended the banquet of the First German Autumn Salon in Berlin. He reported to Stieglitz that Marc attended but Kandinsky did not, that he was the only American present (although Albert Bloch, Patrick Henry Bruce, and Lyonel Feininger were also in the exhibition), and that the Delaunays' presence was noteworthy:

I do not quite see the importance of the Delaunay exhibit as to size—though I must and can say his show is a pleasant thing to look at—but his wife Sonia-Delaunay-Terk has also a big collection—pictures—book covers—sofa cushions—lamp shades—all demonstrating the Delaunay method "Simultanie." There is a table full of books—leather backed and pasted with patches of colored papers—charming color effects but coming to little as to real expression. A big placard on the table "Premiere livres de Simultanie" and at the banquet she was dressed in her own creation—a dress of simultane color effects [Fig. 8].

Amusing but not outside of the most ultracircles of Paris where aesthetics run mad.³⁷

Preparing to return to New York in late 1913, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz that in addition to his own work, he would also bring six Bavarian glass paintings which he described as "wonderful expressions of religious symbolism."³⁸ He also noted that Kandinsky owned over one hundred examples of these folk paintings and that Alexi Jawlensky, another Russian painter then living in Munich, also had a fine collection. When Hartley reminded Stieglitz that he had seen reproductions of the "Bavarian glass bilder" in the "Blaue Reiter," he was referring to as many as eleven examples of the glass paintings (*Hinterglasmalerei*) included in the almanac by the editors Kandinsky and Marc. Glass painting (or panes of glass with the paint applied to the back surface of the glass) was practiced by the artists of *Der Blaue Reiter* (including Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, Paul Klee, Auguste Macke, and Franz Marc among those who had tried the technique); Hartley did not experiment with glass painting, however, until after he returned to the United States during the First World War.

It has been claimed that Hartley's own paintings on glass in 1917 were the result of his interest in the early American folk art of saloon window painting, but more than likely he was also inspired by Bavarian *Hinterglasmalerei* and probably Kandinsky's own paintings on glass as well. Hartley wrote to Kandinsky and Münter from Berlin in May 1913 recalling his visit to their home: "I think often of your kindness and good will—and often of the beautiful pictures I saw there in your place. How fine to have such things. My own glassbilder give me great joy."³⁹

Hartley arrived in New York in late November 1913, and he remained until March of 1914. On his way back to Berlin he stopped briefly in London and in Paris, arriving back in Berlin by late April. In Paris, he saw the Salon des Indépendants where he admired Delaunay's *Homage to Blériot* (Fig. 9),⁴⁰ preferring the Frenchman's work to his compatriot Morgan Russell's celebrated *Synchromy in Orange: To Form*. It is certainly the impact of Delaunay's brightly colored geometric forms that one sees in Hartley's painting *Composition* of 1914 (Fig. 10).

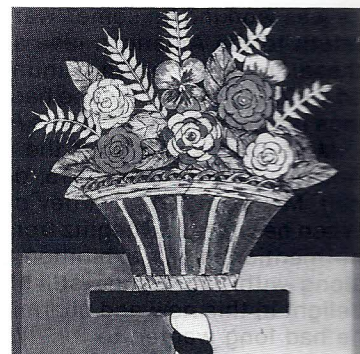
In late May or early June of 1914, Hartley wrote to Stieglitz telling him that Kandinsky's book was now out in English as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*. Hartley admitted that "it reads well," but he felt that it was a book for the unsophisticated in such private matters as spiritual thoughts.⁴¹ Indeed, Hartley felt that such a subject was very personal, one for discussion in the home. He noted, however, that artists of the English "Rebel Art Center" found Kandinsky's treatise of great interest.



Fig. 10. Marsden Hartley, *Composition*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 39½ x 31-7/8". The Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio.



Fig. 11. Marsden Hartley, *Still Life: Painting on Glass*, 1914. Oil on glass, 16½ x 16". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Hecht, Harrison, New York.



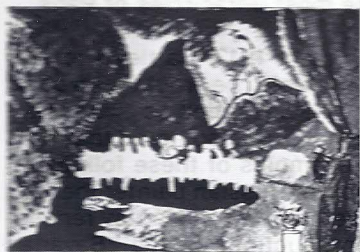


Fig. 12. Wassily Kandinsky, *Last Supper*, 1910. Oil on glass, 9 1/4 x 13 1/4". Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



Fig. 13. Marsden Hartley, *Vase of Flowers*, 1917. Oil on glass, 13-1/8 x 7-7/8". Private Collection.

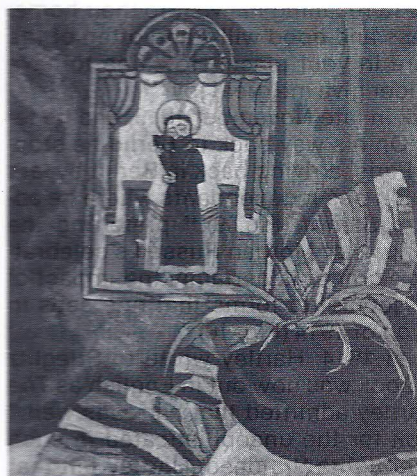


Fig. 14. Marsden Hartley, *El Santo*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 36 x 32". Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe.

Fig. 15. Wassily Kandinsky, *Sancta Francisca*, 1911. Oil and tempera on glass, 6-1/8 x 4-5/8". The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Mentioning the Vorticists, Hartley indicated his awareness of this new group whose publication *Blast* was to feature a review of Kandinsky's book in the first issue, dated June 20, 1914.⁴² Hartley, characteristically, had found the most avant-garde group in England with which to associate. He also mentioned to Stieglitz the invitation he received from Ezra Pound to write an article for the *Egoist* in London. Hartley had no doubt discussed his enthusiasm for Kandinsky with Pound, who was to relate Kandinsky's writing to Imagist poetry in his essay "Vorticism," published in September 1914.⁴³

About this time, when he resumed painting, perhaps as the result of the trip home to America, Hartley began a series of abstract paintings based on the theme of the American Indian. In a letter to Stieglitz of November 3, 1914, Hartley mentioned that when the war came he had almost finished four paintings on the theme of "Amerika." At the time of this letter he explained that he was working on some "war motives," but that he planned to return to the American idea at some later date.⁴⁴ In several of these American Indian paintings, Hartley seems to have adapted various designs that he had seen in the Bavarian glass paintings reproduced in *Der Blaue Reiter*.⁴⁵

More than a year after the war had caused him to return to America in December 1915, during an extended stay in Ogunquit, Maine, in 1917, Hartley decided to take up glass painting. When he wrote to Stieglitz from Ogunquit on September 7, 1917, he mentioned his exhibition there of ten paintings on glass along with five regular still-life paintings.⁴⁶ He expressed his delight in this new and charming medium, which he mentioned he had long wanted to try: "When I paint, it seems to just get there without me . . . the new developments on glass keep me in

a kind of thrill for there is a rich field for discovery of application of idea and of method. It is difficult, but very satisfying and that is its secret—and it will make a new word for me among the artists and the few who really appreciate . . ."⁴⁷ Although he certainly was familiar with early American glass painting, it was surely his experience among the artists of *Der Blaue Reiter* who had enthusiastically tried this technique as well as his personal collection of Bavarian glass painting that directly prompted these experiments.

Hartley chose to paint simple subjects such as a container of flowers on a table rather than more elaborate scenes. This may be, at least in part, the result of his efforts to master a new and different technique which he described as "charming . . . though difficult."⁴⁸ Such a painting is Hartley's *Still Life: Painting on Glass* (Fig. 11), which consists simply of colorful flowers arranged in a blue basket, set on a tabletop. In Kandinsky's glass painting *Last Supper* of 1910 (Fig. 12), a vase of flowers on a pedestal appears in the right foreground near the tied-back curtain, somewhat like a stage prop. Hartley's *Vase Of Flowers* of 1917 (Fig. 13), another of his glass paintings, is simply a vase with floral decoration containing a flower arrangement and placed on a tabletop against a plain background.

When he traveled to New Mexico in 1918, Hartley gave up this more difficult technique of glass painting to work in pastels and on drawings first, and later in oil on canvas. Although he had given up the technique himself, the memory of Kandinsky's glass paintings and the Bavarian primitives he collected must have remained with Hartley when he began to paint the primitive New Mexican *Santos*.

Some five years after he had painted his pictures with American Indian themes in Germany, Hartley wrote an article for the magazine *Art and Archaeology* called "Red Man Ceremonials: An American Plea for American Esthetics." Hartley, no doubt, had by now had time to put his European experience and his recent painting into perspective. The result, in part from his realization of just how much he had borrowed from Kandinsky and others of the European avant-garde, is this article, written in the summer of 1919 after a spring trip to California, during what was his last stay in Santa Fe, New Mexico:

A national esthetic consciousness is a sadly needed element in American life. We are not nearly so original as we fool ourselves into thinking . . . We have the excellent encouragement of redman esthetics to establish ourselves firmly with an esthetic consciousness of our own . . .⁴⁹ Also reproduced in this same issue of *Art and Archaeology* is

Fig. 16. Wassily Kandinsky, *Saint Vladimir*, 1911. Oil on glass, 11-3/8 x 10-1/8". Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



Hartley's painting *El Santo*, painted in Santa Fe in 1918 (Fig. 14). At first glance, *El Santo* reflects only Hartley's western surroundings, including a desert plant, an Indian blanket, and one of the *Santos* or painted images of saints that Hartley saw in New Mexico. "The mysteriously fragile quality of the Santos," as these religious images have been described,⁵⁰ is reminiscent of the Bavarian glass paintings that Hartley had admired and collected in Germany. His strong attraction to the primitive *Santos* of New Mexico undoubtedly owes to his earlier fascination with Kandinsky and Bavarian folk art. The *Santos* Hartley chose to represent, delineated by both a frame and a pair of curtains with the figure of the saint centrally placed in a symmetrical arrangement, recalls a glass painting called *Sancta Francisca*, painted by Kandinsky in 1911, with a very similar curtain effect flanking the centrally placed saint (Fig. 15). In both Hartley's *El Santo* and in the Kandinsky, the tied-back curtains are rendered in a similar fashion with lines indicating folds. Kandinsky also used this tied-back device in other glass paintings, including *Last Supper*, which has a similar curtain on the right side of the

composition. Kandinsky's glass painting *St. Vladimir* of 1911 (Fig. 16) has a depiction of a full-length view of a male saint holding a cross, similar to the image in *El Santo*. In *El Santo* the shape of the halo and the linear style of the closed eyes and the nose of the saint are nearly identical to Kandinsky's crouching female saint in *All Saints' Day I* (Fig. 17). It seems likely that when Hartley first saw the primitive *Santos* in New Mexico, he recalled similar primitive religious images painted on glass which he had admired several years earlier in Germany.

Also quite close to Kandinsky's glass painting *Sancta Francisca* is Hartley's *Blessing the Melon* (Fig. 18), which was probably painted in 1918 about the same time as *El Santo*. Inscribed in pencil on the back of *Blessing the Melon* is the sentence: "The Indians bring the harvest to Christian Mary for her Blessing." Like the image in *Sancta Francisca*, Mary is shown holding a bouquet of flowers and is flanked by both pulled-back curtains and candles. The pot of flowers is also similar to that in *Last Supper* by Kandinsky. Since so many of Kandinsky's glass paintings were of religious subjects, as were the Bavarian *Hinterglasmalerei* from which the technique was derived, it is logical that Hartley, who had painted few specifically religious subjects, referred back to memories of those works in choosing to paint the primitive *Santos*.

Hartley's association with Kandinsky and the other painters of the European avant-garde was an important phase in his artistic development. He had a remarkable ability to identify those artists who were producing the most innovative art of their time. That he chose to seek them out and learn from them is to his credit. He produced many strong paintings during these early years of his career which today stand out as among the best work done by America's first avant-garde artists.

1. Personal interview with Hudson Walker, the artist's last dealer, New York, November 15, 1975. Walker reported that Hartley said that he painted this work in Lee Simonson's studio and that this was the first work he painted in Paris. This essay is adapted from Sandra Gail Levin, "Wassily Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde, 1912-1950," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., May 1976.

2. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcards of April 13, 1912 and June 20, 1912. The Alfred Stieglitz Archives, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Hereafter indicated as (Yale).

3. Donald Gallup, ed., *The Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1953, p. 28.

4. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of July 1912 (Yale). The symbolism of these abstract paintings will be discussed in part two of this article.

5. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of July 1912 (Yale). Michael Sadler, "After Gauguin," *Rhythm, Art, Music, Literature* 1 (Spring 1912), pp. 23-29.

6. Sadler, "After Gauguin," pp. 23-24. The following quotations in this paragraph are from this source.

7. The Museum of Modern Art, *Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (New York, 1970), p. 171, illustration no. 50.

8. Garnett McCoy, "The Rockwell Kent Papers," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 12 (January 1972), p. 5.

9. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of October 9, 1912 (Yale).

10. Marsden Hartley, series of three undated, unpublished postcards probably from early September 1912 (Yale). By this time, Stieglitz may have already obtained a copy of *Der Blaue Reiter*.

11. For a discussion of Hartley's use of primitive art objects and motifs inspired by *Der Blaue Reiter*, see Gail Levin, "Marsden Hartley, Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter," *Arts Magazine*, 52, November 1977, pp. 156-160.

12. McCoy, "Rockwell Kent," p. 5.

13. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of October 30, 1912 (Yale). Hartley mentioned that Epstein wrote that he should go to London. In another postcard to Stieglitz of November 20, 1912 from London, Hartley indicated that he would like to exhibit in London (Yale). However, Hartley's hope to be exhibited in London, by Mr. Slade at the Chenil Gallery, as indicated in his letter to Stieglitz of December 20, 1912 (Yale), was never realized.

14. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of December 20, 1912 (Yale).

15. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of June 20, 1912 (Yale).

16. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of early November 1912 (Yale).

17. Gustav Vriesen and Max Imdahl, *Robert Delaunay: Light and Color* (New York, 1967), p. 50. They visited on October 2, 1912 and at least once again before returning to Germany. Macke actually lived in Bonn, but he arrived from Munich with Marc.

18. Elizabeth McCausland, *Marsden Hartley*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1952, p. 21.

19. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of January 14, 1913 (Yale).

20. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of February 1, 1913 (Yale).

21. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of February 1913 (Yale). The following quotations from Hartley are also from this letter, until otherwise indicated.

22. Wassily Kandinsky, extracts from "The Spiritual in Art," *Camera Work*, no. 39 (July 1912), p. 34.

23. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of August 1913 (Yale). Earlier mention of Kupka appeared in a letter Hartley wrote to Alfred Stieglitz on April 11, 1913 (Yale).

24. *Frantisek Kupka, 1871-1957: A Retrospective* (exhibition catalogue), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1975, p. 311.

25. In late May of 1913, Hartley had written to Stieglitz from Berlin that he expected to meet Dr. Rudolph Steiner and Eduard Schure, whom he described as occultists. Yet Hartley, while stressing his personal mystical outlook, insisted that he was ignorant of such ideas.

26. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of October 22, 1913 (Yale). Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia, 1901).

27. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of April 29, 1913 from Sindelsdorf, Germany (Yale). Marsden Hartley to Gertrude Stein, postcard of April 29, 1913 (Yale).

28. Hartley's exhibition plans at Goltz Gallery fell through because of an Egon Schiele exhibition which proved to be larger than Goltz expected (Hartley letter to Alfred Stieglitz, June 1913 [Yale]).

29. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of March 13, 1913 (Yale). Hartley referred to a nice letter he had received from Marc asking that he stop and see him on his way to Berlin; Hartley indicated that he planned to appear at the Galerie Goltz during the next month when he passed through Munich.

30. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, late May 1913 (Yale); Marc's letter is quoted in full for Stieglitz.

31. *Ibid.* These remarks were perhaps in part the result of Hartley's jealousy that Stieglitz had recently spent \$500 to purchase Kandinsky's *Improvisation No. 27* from the Armory Show. While Hartley was struggling just to pay his rent and buy supplies with which to work, Kandinsky appeared to have achieved a degree of financial success, and Hartley probably felt that Stieglitz's first loyalty with his limited funds should be to him, as Stieglitz's American protegee.

32. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of late May or early June 1913 (Yale).

33. Donald Gallup, "The Weaving of a Pattern: Marsden Hartley and Gertrude Stein," *Magazine of Art*, November 1948, pp. 256-61. Stieglitz had suggested to Hartley that he would be interested in Gertrude Stein's opinion of his work. Thus, Hartley had requested that she write to Stieglitz about him. The letter is at Yale and is published in part in this article.

34. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of May 1913 (Yale).

35. See Levin, "Marsden Hartley, Kandinsky, and Der Blaue Reiter," pp. 159-160.

36. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of June 5, 1913 (Yale). Hartley wrote that he had seen the Koehler collection with its many paintings by Marc. Koehler owned *White Bull*, now in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

37. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letters of September 22 and 28, 1913 (Yale). Hartley had earlier admired Delaunay's "orphistic" dress at the Bal des Quatres Arts in Paris on June 12, but he had been critical of Robert Delaunay's "ego mania" in a letter to Stieglitz of March 13, 1913 (Yale).

38. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of October 31, 1913 (Yale).

39. Marsden Hartley to Wassily Kandinsky, postcard postmarked May 19, 1913. Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner-Siftung, Munich.

40. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter received May 14, 1914 (Yale). For additional examples of Delaunay's influence on Hartley, see Gail Levin, *Synchronism and American Color Abstraction 1910-1925*, George Braziller, New York, in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978.

41. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter received June 12, 1914 (Yale). Wassily Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, translated by Michael Sadler, London and Boston, 1914.

42. Edward Wadsworth, "Inner Necessity," *Blast*, no. 1 (20 June 1914), pp. 119-125.

43. Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 96 (1 September 1914); reprinted in *Ezra Pound: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by J.P. Sullivan (Baltimore, 1970), p. 51. For a discussion of interest in Kandinsky among Hartley's literary friends Williams, Pound, and Stein, see Gail Levin, "Wassily Kandinsky and the American Literary Avant-garde," *Criticism*, in press.

44. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of November 3, 1914 (Yale).

45. For examples, see Levin, "Marsden Hartley, Kandinsky, and Der Blaue Reiter," pp. 159-160.

46. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of September 7, 1917 (Yale).

47. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, letter of September 11, 1917 (Yale).

48. Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, postcard of September 7, 1917 (Yale).

49. Marsden Hartley, "Red Man Ceremonials: An American Plea for American Esthetics," *Art and Archaeology*, 9 (January 1920), p. 14.

50. Van Deren Coke, *Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment, 1882-1942* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1963): "There is also a hint of his early concern with symbolism in a number of still-life compositions of this period. He was influenced by the direct and yet mysteriously fragile quality of the *Santos* he found in New Mexico. Their meaning as well as their flat design arrangements and raw color, had an attraction for him which was, perhaps, a carry-over from the brightly pigmented 1914-15 German pictures."



Fig. 17. Wassily Kandinsky, *All Saints' Day I*, 1911. Oil on glass, 13-3/8 x 16". Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

Fig. 18. Marsden Hartley, *Blessing the Melon, The Indians Bring the Harvest to Christian Mary for Her Blessing*, 1918. Oil on composition board, 32 1/2 x 23-7/8". Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

