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MARSDEN HARTLEY'S SECOND COMING: GLOUCESTER AND BEYOND, 1931-1943 LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

A retired professor of English and American studies and author of *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist*, Townsend Ludington provides context for the exhibition *Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown* that was on view at the Cape Ann Museum from June 9 through October 14, 2012. The

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topographically unique area of Gloucester known as Dogtown Commons has been a source of inspiration for many artists over the years, and Marsden Hartley was particularly taken by it during several visits to Gloucester in the 1930s. With a slideshow of Hartley's work before, during, and after his time in Dogtown as well as readings from several of Hartley's poems, Ludington demonstrates the special role that visiting Dogtown played in Hartley's artistic development and spiritual quest and offers deeper insight into the complex personality of this American Modernist artist.

Subject list

Marsden Hartley (1877-1943)	Taos, New Mexico
T. S. Eliot	Dogtown Commons
Townsend Ludington	American modernism
<i>Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist</i>	Cubism

Transcript

Courtney Richardson 0:13

Welcome to the Cape Ann Museum. I'm Courtney Richardson, Director of Education and Public Programs. This is a very exciting summer for us here. As you know, we brought the Hartley paintings, or some of them, back to Gloucester. If you didn't have a chance to see them this evening please come back; the gallery will be closed after the lecture. We have a full schedule of programs related to Hartley and Dogtown from walking tours to book discussions to gallery talks.

Tonight begins the first of four special lectures generously sponsored by the Cape Ann Savings Bank. Next month, author Anita Diamant will be here to discuss the inspiration behind her novel *The Last Days of Dogtown*. In August, author Alyssa East will be here to talk about Marsden Hartley's time on Cape Ann. And in September, art historian Gail Levin will talk about Marsden Hartley, the artist.

Tonight we welcome Townsend Ludington, Boshamer Distinguished Professor Emeritus of American Studies in English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Professor Ludington has written widely on American arts and letters. He's the author or editor of 11 books about American literature, art and culture. His biography, *Marsden Hartley: Biography of*

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an American Artist, appeared in 1992. This evening, he presents "Marsden Hartley's Second Coming: Gloucester and Beyond, 1931 to 1943".

After Hartley's return from years abroad during the 1920s, he began what were substantially a new life, new forms of painting and outpouring of poetry back in the United States in the early 30's. Gloucester and especially the wilds of Dogtown were at the center of this new beginning. Please join me in welcoming Townsend Ludington.

Townsend Ludington 2:18

Neither Marsden nor I usually have a group, had he had or I've ever had, a group both so knowledgeable and numerous. How many times have I lectured to one person? Thank you very much for being here and for giving me the chance to be in this museum. It's a wonderful place. It really is. I noticed it way back when I was beginning to look into Marsden and, but I, you know how memories go, and I don't remember much about it but among other things, the show itself is great and the people, and I thank Courtney for taking care of me via email. And would like to acknowledge John Driscoll, among others, who has been instrumental in the resuscitation of Marsden Hartley, in a very real sense. It's true. And his predecessor at the Babcock Gallery, Michael St. Clair, had, actually drove trucks up to Corea, Maine, right? Brought back a lot of paintings and so forth, and we were beneficiaries thereof. Anyway.

Let's see where I can go. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. In the first hour, I'm going to show you some slides, and in the second hour, read you some poems, and in the third hour, no. And, if I get over, much over 45 minutes, you can start, to well up here it's, "You(k), You(k), You(k)", not "boo boo boo", as I recall. Being Kevin Youkilis. I love baseball. Traded to the Pale Hose, as they say. My heart belongs to the Phillies and for Boston Red Sox fans, I have no sympathy for you because the Phillies have been even worse and for even longer.

Anyway, for just a couple of more maybe on the light side. First, I'm not quite sure how I got interested in, I know how I got interested in Marsden Hartley. I had to finish doing a thick doorstep biography about John Dos Passos right across the water. In Provincetown, where of course he spent quite a lot of time and I was interested in well, well art and sort of cultural history. And somebody said, I know what I did. There was a show, Marsden Hartley, Barbara Haskell's big show of Hartley in 1980. And I actually never saw it but I got the catalog and then I went and talked with Hilton Kramer. You may remember him, and he loved Hartley. And he said, "You know, this would be a very interesting thing to do." So, I got going on that and then somewhere, 1982, these are my notes from, from my first searches into Cape Ann. And it says, "Gloucester, Rockport, Dogtown Commons 9-22-82 wet rainy day. Never did find the Whales Jaw but walked behind, back in woods back from Rockport side." I mean I just didn't go far enough, I'd only walked for 45 minutes. "Rock paths through woods and rock foundations, or, rocky foundations, large boulders piled up. Again, the sense of mystery about the place. Also the force of nature" what a theme of his of course, "loneliness, the Hartley themes." 9-28-85 I came back and I went over and my only note from that day is "Fred Dillon loaned map." He's the guy that lives over the other side of the harbor I guess you said, right? And then I got out to

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Dogtown. And I said "Dogtown itself. The road is narrow, little more than a dirt path. The rocks around the open part of the common are sometimes huge. Now the biggest carved with words and phrases like 'integrity'" you all know these things, but it was fascinating. "Studied without word values, decay. All done in the 1930s by people hired by Roger Babson, of course. Whales Jaws off by itself, at the end of the Commons," well, you know that so I was just writing these notes.

And then I went back in 1990 with an artist friend of mine, and one, I think it's fair to say, John Driscoll's artists, Don Nice, a wonderful guy. He was very interested in Hartley. So I said, "Come on down, we'll go back there," you know. I said, so we got to the Whales Jaw and I think by that time, it was broken. I'm trying to remember if it was actually broken, or I saw pictures of it later broken, I think it was broken from the heat of many generations of fires underneath the jaw and so forth. But then I said, "Come on, man. Don, we'll go in there and we'll walk around," and at least two hours later, we were still walking. And I said to him, because I was very proud because I'd been in the Marines. I said, "Listen, I was great at map reading. I know where we're going." Luckily, some guy came along the path that we were trotting on, and with his dog, and I said, how do you get out of this place and he said, "Well, you turn around and go the other way." So, anyway, that was my early experiences.

8:21

But in my first hour, I won't try, I promise by eight o'clock I'll be done, okay? Anyway. I thought the best thing would be to just look at some slides some of which you have seen and it's not focused on Hartley, of course it is, but it's not focused on Dogtown particularly but by way of taking you through. This is Marsten posing, obviously. And I'm pretty sure it's by the Androscoggin River because as you may know, he grew up in Lewiston or he was born in Lewiston and moved across the Androscoggin River to Auburn. And he, some of the things he did was to get the hell out of there as fast as he could when he was about 16. That's not quite the way to put it but he wasn't a great fan of Lewiston. But later in his life, he came back. This was just visiting some of the relatives that still remained there, I'm sure, because this is 1912 or '13.

I'm just skipping ahead. I put it in because he went out after his journeys to Europe. And he had to come back because of World War I in 1916. And then he went out to Taos and that's a picture of Mabel Dodge Luhan, in whose house he'd stayed for a while. If you've been to Taos I'm sure you've seen the place. And finally, she, though it wasn't this time, when she was living in her place up the Hudson River, she asked Marsden to leave because he was so unpleasant, but he was just 16 or 17. But anyway, he went back out, he went to Taos and she took him in and he stayed in there and then went down to Albuquerque. And I think, I mean, the point of the, for me, I think for anybody who's interested in Hartley, you realize what an extremely important moment Dogtown in the 20's, 1931 and then again in '34 and '36, but particularly in '31, in some ways it solidified all he'd been trying to do. The other important moment, another important moment earlier was that time in Taos and Albuquerque, but I have a couple of, or Santa Fe rather, sorry, I have some slides of the work there, as I'll show in a moment, and he's,

he's struggling from the fancy abstraction as the German officer painting he had done earlier. He came back here disheartened and so on, and was trying to work out something new and I think you can see very, not easily, but you can see the relationship between the Taos and Santa Fe work and then what he does in a kind of, with the kind of maturity in this moment, or long summer in '31 particularly of just, he was painting more than this by the day, you know, I think, it was almost sort of Van Gogh-like in his fervent and in his fervor and in the things that he writes in his letters as I say some, some of that.

Okay. Okay, before he gets, no, he's been in Taos, Mabel Dodge and then down in Santa Fe. And then he went out to California and I just love, get a kick out of him posing. He had a sense of himself even though he couldn't always put his best foot forward or he put it in his mouth. This is Marsden sort of at the, he was ecstatic to be back in Europe after World War I and this is I believe on the beach at Cannes in 1925. He was in Europe, mostly in France and living very near Cezanne's Chateau Noir during the '20s until Stieglitz in '28, I think it was '28 or '29 said "you gotta come home, nobody's buying your stuff. And you haven't established a market for yourself abroad", which was true. And that was really kind of a low point in Hartley's life. I mean, even to the point of mentioning, why bother and so forth.

12:50

Okay? This is in 1941 if I remember correctly, and he's on the beach up in Corea, Maine, you know north of Ellsworth. Anyway, and he sent this picture, "Rebecca" is Rebecca Strand, who you may know of, she was an intimate friend of Georgia O'Keefe and for a while the spouse of Paul Strand, the photographer, but then went her own way. But they remained friends, Hartley and she remained very good friends. She would listen to him and he wrote her quite often. And then the last of the photos is, I think it is Alfredo Valente, have I got the name right, the photographer in New York. Late I think, this is '42 or '43. It's a very moving photo. And that's a quick photo trip for you, so on to some pictures.

He gets to Europe in 1912. I gotta tell you one other story. I've been writing away, I thought, fast but it was, it was hard sometimes because he was a difficult personality. Not so much the ideas. I mean, they were very, he's a very, very bright autodidact and remarkable in that sense, and a good poet, too, as we will come to a little later. But in Europe, he had been, he got, was given money by Stieglitz and Mrs. Havemeyer and I forget who the other person was, who really were the patrons of what little American modernist art there was in those days of 1910 and so forth. And in 1912, he goes to Paris and starts painting up a storm. And that can pass pretty, pretty well for a Cezanne. But right away he goes away he goes from that to this abstract stuff, partly because he gets, in Germany, which is where he really liked to be. He like the guys, he liked the masculinity that was part of German, German militarism.

And then, oh gosh, did Kandinsky write *On [sic Concerning] the Spiritual in Art*? Yes. Okay. He read *On the Spiritual in Art* and then got hooked up with, into the, with the idea of investigating the idea of the relationship between music and art. And this is "Musical Theme Number One" or two, maybe the one. And he goes on from this. Well, we have several years of this kind of

painting. Of course, you recognize this as one of the series of German officer paintings, which were painted really immediately upon the death of a young man with whom he, I know he had not been intimate with but he was in love with very much, Karl von Freyburg, "KvF," aged 24, he was killed in October, 1914 on the battlefield, right off the bat. But all of the various symbols, emblems and colors and so forth are regimental colorful pieces. Because of World War I, we think, although it had nothing to do with the military but nobody bought the pictures anyway because they were so far out. But that's the kind of thing he was doing. When he got back, and when he got back he moves away from this kind of abstraction and moves to, to things like I think there's one more maybe from his last days in, his last days in Europe, and this is called "One Woman". It's a portrait of Gertrude Stein, he brought in some sexual innuendos and stuff, but he admired her, she admired him, she bought some of his paintings, but Hartley was playing around. This shows a sense of humor, if you ask me, among other things with "One Woman."

And on we go to, a series, this is one of a series of really fine avant-garde Cubist paintings that he did in the summer in Provincetown in 1916. He was there with Demuth and others. But Barbara Haskell whom you know is really one of the outstanding Hartley historians calls, says this is, you know, some of the best Cubist, American Cubist, synthetic Cubism, I guess is the term to use, he did, and it's neat stuff. I'll tell you who bought two others. I think it's two of his paintings. A guy named Albert Barnes, they were hanging and still are hanging in the new and I gather beautiful museum. I haven't seen it yet.

When he went out to New Mexico, he, this is, really takes us into the matter of getting back to the fundamentals of landscape or nature and stuff, which is what he was grappling with, how do I find myself? How do I find meaning when things haven't been working very well for me? But I think that – this is a very, very personal opinion – I think his pastels of the landscapes are really wonderful. I think I keep mentioning John because I know it's because he has been so involved with Hartley but he has a wonderful – maybe you don't have it anymore, but it's the—you do?—but a fabulous mountainscape and the blues and so forth in it are just splendid and I think this is a very important one also. Let's move to some of the other stuff.

At the same time, out in Taos and in Santa Fe, Hartley was becoming more and more interested in folk art. I really do believe that he saw that there was a market among other things, but that Hartley does, you know, stuff that is very cerebral. But a lot of the stuff that he did in Santa Fe, in Taos and Santa Fe, was of Indian, that is Native American, of course. I can't think of the word, dolls and this kind of thing, which has religious significance. There's another one here. I can't think of the word for it. (Kachina.) Kachina, okay, thank you. So that's a very good painting, and it's a theme that he carries through so that I won't have all, I don't have examples of the late paintings of working people and fisherman and so forth that were very much a part of his life from the latter '20s on through to his death, but you can see this theme of what religion, basic issues and the working people and those became very, very important to him, probably always had been, but, but he understood this about himself and the basic things about life and death. Okay?

20:33

This is a, I don't like, I don't like this very much but, but I think it's very interesting, that's just me. But it's interesting what he's trying to do. I think if I'm remembering my titles right, this is called "The Last of New England". He's painting it out in Taos. And whether he means that this is reminiscence about New England, I don't see it myself, or this is the last that I will have to do with New England at that time. Of course he comes back here in the late '20s and begins to call himself, "The Painter" of Maine. And a couple years later, he becomes "The Painter" of Dogtown. And so on and so forth. Okay? I won't make comments just let you see where he's, what he's trying.

I don't think these are particularly successful, is what I'm trying to say. But he's struggling with, with basic, basic form, the colors of Taos, the deserts and the mountains and so forth and so on. And it's interesting, tiny, tiny little adobe hacienda, down at the bottom. Again, you know, this is already a theme of his and that is a really miniscule quality of individuals or whatever their place in the world. They're dominated by all kinds of natural things. Okay? Another. Sorry I couldn't remember the name of this one. But another example of I think, this is, this is no later than 1920. And then he goes back to Europe and does some memory paintings of New Mexico, and then has a kind of a, not a dead period but I think he's really reaching for something in France, and he loved France as well and he was, I think I mentioned a little while ago, living near Cezanne's Chateau Noire and he becomes infatuated to say the least with Mont Sainte-Victoire. And that relates at the very end of his life to the paintings that he did, 26 of them, I believe it was, of Mount Katahdin.

23:00

Okay, this is another this is a memory painting from the early '20s of New Mexico, but he was back in France, okay? This is a very good painting. There's one other of which I don't have a slide, I think of the same quality and he's found himself in some ways with basic ideas. One of the things, speaking of basic ideas, he said that in his work, I forget who he says this too. It might have been Rebecca Strand or Stieglitz that he's fascinated with the place from, as when you go by, when you're passing in a train and we wouldn't call this a train picture but you can see perhaps something of what he is trying for but that's not the real point, it's that the force and power of the landscape itself. Okay.

This always got, this is the second time that I've had it reversed. It's reversed in some publication that we did. And it wasn't our fault. And this wasn't my fault. It was the guy who cut the CD of the pictures that I've shown, it's supposed to be the other way around. It's a wonderful Dogtown painting that John handled or evidently, that, this is true, right? And we've got so many of the themes that you see in Dogtown, harshness of the rocks, the shapes of the bushes and of course, it works, I suppose, as well on this side, except the painting should be going this way. You've got a cross, which is touching the clouds, and so, it's the religiousness of the, of the motif or the scene, is certainly apparent there. Okay.

And I think I've another Dogtown. I personally like this very much, it's very smoky, I don't know where it is now, I'm sorry. It's a very small painting about this size but I think it really, to me captures, well, that's not what I want to say, really captures Dogtown, but so do the others so, but notice, look at that rock. That's the shape of Mont Sainte-Victoire from which he'd recently come back. It's a theme for him because he among other things admired Cezanne and Cezanne painted it repeatedly and to Hartley, mountains meant a great, great deal. They symbolized in a way individual's insignificance in the face of a very difficult and often cruel world.

The guy was gay and it was a time when you couldn't be openly gay, and that made life difficult. But more particularly he was, he was a loner. I always get the image of him circling on the outsides of various small social groups and he and he couldn't present himself well. You would never hire him to be a personnel manager. And then, in the '30s, and I know I'm jumping around a little bit now, but there's the tragic story of his going to Nova Scotia and ending up in Blue Rocks, am I getting that right, you know, Blue Rocks in 1935. And he was way up, and he was actually going to try to meet a friend and the friend never showed up. And he ended up living with a family, the Masons. He had an idyllic time there with them. And had an affair with a guy named Alty Mason, was one of two brothers. And Hartley went back up the second year all prepared for more, you know, when I say pleasure I don't mean that scurrilously at all, just happiness. And in September 18 1936, a hurricane swept through. The two brothers and a cousin, drunk on a Saturday night, got in a little round bottomed punt to go from the Blue Rocks over to the family's place very close by. And they were swept up to sea and they drowned. And Hartley did some of his most poignant painting. But it was really heartbreaking. I mean, truly heartbreaking. And this comes through in his work, then and all the way through to the end. The thing about Hartley is again and again, he comes back and he tries to make sense and make something of the, of things, such as the deaths of the two or three boys and so forth, and dies in 1943.

Let's see, what else. Fox Island, Maine. This is '36 I think. I mean I really it's up there this is a wonderful painting. If I'm not mistaken, it's at the Addison Gallery in Andover. It's got a lot of those qualities about landscape, seascape, and Maine itself. Mount Katahdin, one of, well this is the friend Don Nice that I mentioned who I led out of nowhere until the guy with the dog came by. But anyway, Hartley hiked in, and it must've been terribly difficult. He hiked in to something which is actually there called Katahdin Lake. And on a good day, you can look up and you see Katahdin. Don and I hiked in, it was four hours. And we were in a lot better shape than Marsden was at that point he had, well he had congestive heart failure. And we saw exactly where he, he'd painted this and you can understand, how it meant, and what it meant to him in terms of the world.

And this is one of any number of small paintings of small objects, which to him represent both the pathos and the, if you will, grandeur in miniature, I suppose, of things like seahorses and dead birds, and so on. If I get to the poetry I'll read you a poem about, I may even start crying. It's a, it's just a wonderful poem about a sea dove that he's found, very moving. And then the last painting, which is about my favorite, it's a big painting, bigger than most that he did, but I

think the date it's been given if I recall of 1941, '43. This is at the Addison Gallery in Andover, also. But all the Hartley themes are there. He did a lot of paintings of indoor-outdoor scenes, but you've got, what became his trademark, the schooner with the sailboat sailing out, little sailboat, great big sea. And some of you may be able to explain why the block clouds, but he always did block clouds like that. And well, the vegetables, a flower which has become a symbol for him particularly in Nova Scotia because the ceremony of casting flowers out onto the sea in memory of those who drowned meant a great deal to him and he did a number of paintings of that sort of thing. Anyway without being able to articulate very quickly, all the things that are, I think that this, this is one of the painting anyway that to me captures the essence, the grandeur of what Marsden was doing. Okay, that's the first hour.

31:27

And I thought although it's, it's not, it's not exactly new, of course it's not, because there's so much good stuff written and I'm not plugging myself, that's not the point, but the pieces that you have in that, in the new catalog, and if you've seen the older ones about Dogtown, this is a really beautiful progression of a show which is about Hartley but of course, and about Dogtown and with the same title, but it's, it's, it's much more, done with, shall we say, finesse. It's a beautiful catalog. That's what I'm trying to say.

Anyway, I thought you might be interested in hearing some of the poems that he wrote because, particularly when things were going badly for him, Hartley, Hartley took to and in fact, at the end of his life, wanted to call himself a poet who also paints, but he was not a great poet, but every now and then he could turn out a beautiful, beautiful piece such as "Soliloquy in Dogtown" which is in the front of your catalogue and, and various other pieces. And also, was a wonderful artist, I mean, writer. A remarkable writer for the clarity and simplicity of his writing, which I think doesn't usually, often doesn't come from those I won't say of us, it was a struggle that I got all my education you know, those who are autodidacts or whatever. And Hartley was very clear about art, about his own, himself and about religion and his frustrating but also fully acknowledged, and then understood inability finally to grab, not grasp, but to believe and that's probably a simple straightforward way. He tried so hard and, and it was almost there, you know. He found it, in something close to it, in Dogtown and then in the end, still hasn't found anything exact. He would not be going, well I won't get into some of the fundamentalist things, we have plenty up in my part of the country.

Anyway, I'll read you a couple of poems here. And the first one to talk about, I think, is the poem, well "Soliloquy" you have, and I'll read you that. Among other things, it's fairly long. Here is the first version and I forget whether your catalog has that. But in a 1931 Dogtown painting, Hartley wrote these words, in fact, now that I think about it, I think they are in the catalog. But anyway, you can imagine him sitting there, and I'll note and if I have time, get back to just a bit of it at the end. He'd read recently "Ash Wednesday" by T.S. Eliot and many, many, many other things but, you know, Eliot was big and Hartley knew his modern poetry. He would have read "Wasteland" and understood it. In 1930, Eliot published "Ash Wednesday" and in 1931, sitting in Dogtown, tranquil, if lonely, Hartley writes,

“Deep chested trills arise--
from organ pipes of juniper
Oboes throat expands -- mezzo cries
of blueberry and sage and ferns prefer
to die among the rocks, nobly perish.” I'm sorry, I'm having trouble seeing.
“mire of torrid green
Summer's strident blades of damascene
hot tone or here is garish
the vox human swells and dwells
Persistently amid nuances of lapis grey
So much more wonderful this way
than summer in a trance
of chlorophyll or other circumstances.”

Chlorophyll would be the manicured lawns of houses that most people prefer to the rocks, and so forth in Dogtown. Also, Hartley was scornful of all of those painters who we admire so much who came and painted Gloucester harbor. We know who they are and they were very good. But Marsden walked over to Dogtown or took the bus, I guess it was also, and hiked on in because that's where the essences really were.

He also wrote about, this would have been in 19, let's see, this would be, I think, 1928-29. Gail Scott, who was really a wonderful scholar of Hartley such as I'll never be put together a book of his poems, and she also has done a book about his essays and she's written wonderfully about him. There're two Gail's who work with Hartley. Gail Levin who you'll be hearing later this summer and Gail Scott. But anyway, this is one of the poems that, I forget, it was published somewhere later.

“The eagle wants no friends,
employs his thoughts to other ends--
he has his circles to inscribe
twelve thousand feet from where
the fishes comb the sea,
he finds his solace in unscathed
immensity,
where eagles think, there is no need
of being lonesome--
In isolation
is a deep revealing sense
of home.”

He's just come back, a disappointed, nearly penniless man from his years abroad and he's trying to get it together.

37:35

And another, which is I think also in your book, I mean in the catalog, "Return [sic 'to'] of the Native". It's not there? Oh, come on. 251. This was published in a, in a collection, *Androscoggin* in 1940 but I'm sure it was much, it was written, it could have been the return of the native coming back to New York and then up to Gloucester and Dogtown in '31. But it also could mean when Hartley went back to Maine and more, but it really captures the way he perceived himself as, as a native, and he says to Stieglitz when he comes back in the 20s, he said, I really have never left, I've always been American. Well, yes and no but anyway, he says that, and of course he's also trying to reestablish himself, but he writes:

“Rock juniper and wind,
And a seagull sitting still--
all these of one mind.
He who finds (the) will
to come home
will surely find old faith
made new again
and lavish welcome.

Old things breaketh
new, when heart and soul
lose no whit of old refrain;
it is a smiling festival
when rock, juniper and wind
are of one mind,
a seagull signs the bond--
makes what was broken, whole.”

He's trying. Then I was looking through this the last couple of days and came across a poem which was a translation of, I can't remember his first name, of de Nerval, a French poet. And it struck me how significant it was, and it goes, thus, and the book was called *Tangent Decisions*. Hartley had a way with bad titles, and the date of the book is 1935 and this is his translation:

“How is it, I said to myself,
that I could possibly have lived
so long outside nature,
without identifying myself
with her, all things live.
All things have motion, (I should say all things live, all things have motion.)
All things correspond
the majestic rays emanating from myself
to others, traverse without obstacle,

the infinite chain of creative things.

A transparent network covers
the world whose loose threads
communicate more and more clearly,
with the planets and the stars.

I want to govern my dreams instead of endure them.”

I would say that's hopeful, but it also reveals a great deal about him. Remember, this is the mid-30s and he's still working. He's been here to Dogtown, he's come back to Dogtown in '34, he's come back one more time in '36. But by that time, he's also painting, doing a lot more Maine painting up around Georgetown and of course in '35 and '36, he has the first very joyful and then very sad, tragic experience with the Mason boys and their family

41:08

1939. So “The Nameless One.” I mentioned that Don Nice and I walked into Katahdin Lake, that Don and I have nothing to do with, with that, except, except that I was impressed with how, what a difficult traverse, I mean, speaking of rocks and boulders, there wasn't a path. We hiked into this place. And he went in there. And he fell in love again with a, a wonderful man. I mean, it wasn't a sexual relationship. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, but he just admired the heck out of this guy. It was a Maine guy, and now I'm disremembering his name. But it meant a great deal to Hartley because this guy was, was one of these that Wilber was talking about a while ago, a person who both did the work and had the aesthetic taste, that often is the case. Anyway. And Hartley is struggling with, with all these things, and so he writes “The Nameless One”. Well, actually it's, it's not the name of the Maine guy, but you, a god of some sort, a force, whatever.

“Who have power over
everything obscure
Listen -- come over here, sit by
my side
and let me say the things I want
to say --
I want nothing in the way of artificial
heavens –
The earth is all I know of wonder.
I lived and was nurtured in the
magic of dreams
bright flames of spirit laughter
around my seething frame.”

That's a great deal of insight into this man, of, had many loves, Karl von Freyburg, and others and few of them sustained, and when you think about it, two of the great loves, von Freyburg

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killed very quickly after Hartley knew him, spent time with him, and Alty Mason, the very same thing.

And I, let's see if I can do what I'm just about to say. It moves me too much. 276, so be it right?
Well, here we go. "This Portrait of a Sea Dove, Dead"

"Sea dove in a shroud
of sand, all shiny
with thick clips of sun--
sea dove in a shroud
of sand and the last word
spoken, alone.
I did not carry messages."

(This is now the voice of this sea dove spirit, if you will.)

"I did not carry messages
for love or war to end their
ways,
I only bore flicked wave caresses
took them to a tiny place;
I gave them my brood to drink
a draft of silence on the brink
of death, I gave telling them also
to be brave,
have grace
to face
the loneliness of their days.
I shut my eye on a kiss
of sun,
and this I give to
everyone."

44:28

Okay, just a few more things. I was going to read you 10 or 12 pages out of my biography, but some of you've done that already. But I guess what I'd like to do is to close with two things. And here I go with John again, but it's all in justified praise. In 1998, John Driscoll, Babcock Gallery, and Jerry Bolis, who was the director of the Ackland Art Museum in Chapel Hill, got together, and I don't know exactly when and how, but they got together to do a show about Marsden Hartley. And we call it "Seeking the Spiritual, the Paintings of Marsden Hartley" and it first showed down in Chapel Hill. I'm sorry, I don't have slides of this, but you see the cover. There's another painting I want to put in. It showed down there and then it had a second showing in

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Babcock Gallery in New York. And really, it was very successful. Speaking of Philip Cramer, I think, didn't he do a review of it? I think so. Anyway, I was ecstatic.

But what I wanted to focus on, and this is again the late Hartley, but it ties in with his search, and his becoming, and his becoming, seeing the symbolic values, not a very good word for it, but seeing the symbolism and the meanings in the little seahorse or the dead dove or so many other things that he painted in those last days. And one of the paintings, I think, it is one of the most splendid paintings, painting, I've ever known. But I don't know how well you can see it. It's big. It's as big as this one here. And it is some shells on a black background. It just, I'm sure it doesn't carry everybody away. But let me read you what I wrote. And also what Gail Scott said about it, I think, can you all see it sort of at least? I'm sorry, I didn't have a slide of it. It's called "Shells by the Sea".

"In 1939 the painter Waldo Pierce drove Hartley along the coast of Maine as far east as the fishing village of Corea, forty miles beyond Ellsworth, 'Pretty name, God, was it a beauty', he wrote his friend Adelaide Coombs after his visit, and he described it to another friend as a "wonderful fishing village, a real one and so like my beloved Nova Scotia,' (remember this is 1939 after the boys were killed), 'Dear old boys sitting in their fish house doorways, quantities of lobster pots lying around, appeal and grocery, and a fish shop.'

"The last four summers of his life he stayed in Corea painting as copiously as ever, although ill health slowed him and he was sometimes confined to working in the chicken coop that had been converted into a studio behind the house where he lived. In the little studio he painted still lifes, such as 'Shells by the Sea,' reminiscent of the work he had done earlier, but if anything more powerful, because more correct and spare. 'Shells by the Sea' is an excellent example of what Gail Scott has written about Hartley's last work. That it is, quote, "The painting of essential reality, in which what is left unsaid, the profoundly empty space behind the image, conveys as much as the actual objects. Suspended in this Zen-like emptiness are small, mundane objects depicted with a deceptively simple, even at times ungainly directness. These shells are hardly ungainly," (this is Gail not me) "but set as they are against the dark mottled background, they are absolutely direct, and the painting becomes a blending of the abstract and the real. Painted late in his life, 'Shells by the Sea' was precisely what Hartley had come to understand as the essence of spirituality." And that was as close as he got, very close indeed.

I was going to read Eliot's, bits of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," but you can do that at least as well as I. It captures, it's very interesting how close Hartley's sense is to what Eliot was doing in those, in, this is after "The Wasteland", because Hartley never wrote anything about a wasteland at all in the same way. In Eliot's case, of course, it had to do with his conversion, profound conversion to basically Roman Catholicism although he was Anglican, but very conservative religious faith if you will, nothing wrong with that, and it's really, Hartley never got, made it there. He was still searching, but the search and Eliot's search as it was described in "Ash Wednesday" and poems prior to the "Four Quartets" and they are very interesting to look at. I always used to think that Eliot had visited Gloucester because of "Burnt Norton", which

Marsden Hartley's *Second Coming: Gloucester and Beyond, 1931-1943* – VL43 – page 15 was published in 1934. And it was Gloucester, of course, I didn't realize it was Gloucestershire in England. That's not in Massachusetts. So anyway, thank you very much.

(Applause)

50:30

I don't know if this is the question time kind of thing or not, but if you have some, yes?

Audience Member

Your mentioning of Hilton Kramer reminded me that Kramer and Richard Porrier and Richard Mello were in the same high school class at Gloucester.

Townsend Ludington

Was that Richard or James Mello?

Audience Member

James Mello, thank you.

Townsend Ludington

Who wrote about "Charmed Circle"?

Audience Member

Yes, sorry, were all in the same high school class at Gloucester, and they gave a great deal of credit of their success to an English teacher by the name of Hortense Harris. And the other thing is, I'm sure you know that Eliot used to summer in Gloucester.

Townsend Ludington

You know, I'd forgotten, if I did know, so I wasn't so off-base after all.

Audience Member

No, not at all. One of the Quartets is the rock formation in Rockport.

Townsend Ludington

Yeah, yeah. Okay, so that, somehow that was back in my, okay. I feel better. Yeah.

Audience Member

Thank you very much for putting bookends on the, the, the show, so you see what came before and what came after. But those of us who live in Gloucester feel that this is the world's epicenter of art.

Townsend Ludington

It's a known fact.

Audience Member

Here, we can look at all the way from, from Lane to Rothko, who else? It should be noted that Hartley came to Gloucester first in 1920, and why did he come, because over half of the Stieglitz school had come here as well. Strand, Sheeler. Georgia O'Keefe.

Townsend Ludington

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I, in some of the, Provincetown and Gloucester sort of, it didn't interchange exactly, well now things are very close, but some of the, some of those guys made, people made, went to both places.

Audience Member

Stuart Davis, for example, was in Provincetown first but Provincetown was too far out, there was better communication, and the artist recognized that they had Beverly and Beverly Farms. And the Coolidges right around the corner. And of course, their hope was to not only go to the beach in the afternoon, but sell in the evening. It should also be noted that, that in terms of titles, "The Last of" is a title that he seemed to have liked a lot, "The Last of New England", but there are two Cape Ann ones. One is "The Last Stone Walls" and the other is "The Last of the Stone Walls".

Townsend Ludington

Exactly. Those are '34 and '36 paintings, 1934 and '36.

Audience Member

He did the '36 ones from memory, he wasn't here.

Townsend Ludington

You know I, speaking of memory and how artists work, Hartley very often painted from memory. I came across gosh, I don't remember where it was, but you know, it's a little tiny, I guess there were some sketches, pencil sketches indicating what the colors were.

Audience Member

There's one upstairs.

Townsend Ludington

And there was a woman Chenoweth Hall, Chenoweth Hall, who is herself a sculptor and I met her at a small conference put on by Gail Scott up at Presque Isle, and met Chenoweth and then she, we hit it off and she said, come on down and I'll show you this. As a young, as a young woman, she had driven Hartley around when he was living in Corea but one of the places she took him and told me about was going to Schoodic Point. And Hartley, she said he wouldn't do a thing except sit on a chair and look and then he'd get back in the car sometimes crankily and she'd take him home. But you know, so, he was absorbing and some of the, couple of the, of his great late paintings are of Schoodic Point. There's one of a wave breaking over the rocks, and a couple of others. And you know, I guess you'd say that for an expressionist, that's what you

might do. On the other hand, in some letter late in his life, he's talking to somebody about, I think it is going back and painting around, he might even go back to Lewiston and Auburn and paint the river but he said you know there's that bridge there and I'd like to paint the same but the bridge is there and he didn't want to paint the bridge. Interesting,

Audience Member

Why did you write the book on Hartley and what would, just fantasize, what would he think of it?

55:11 Townsend Ludington

I forgot to tell one of the stories, I started to and something dribbled away, you know. I thought after I'd written a lot of this big fat book about Dos Passos and stuff, and I was, I've always been interested in American culture, as in, you know, not high culture necessarily but culture of America. Politics. And history, but primarily late 19th, early 20th century, whatever. And I, somehow I felt that Marsden Hartley was going to take me back to that through an artist point of view. Well, I shouldn't, I couldn't have been more wrong, I was sort of wrong. Hartley was not politically astute among other things. He went head over heels for big Adolph. Of course, he wasn't the only one who did. But it just wasn't his thing because he was a loner, for example, but, you know, seeing that show in 1980 and Hilton Kramer's enthusiasm and I've always liked American art and I figured this was a way to learn more about it. And that very simply, yeah, I wanted to learn more about American art of that period. I'm fascinated by, by the modernists and sort of what the writer Frederick Lewis Allen, he calls *The Big Change, Only Yesterday*, was made with fascinating moments. *America 1900-1950. Only Yesterday* was about the 20s.

And I realized that it also had to do with my parents, who were, my father was born in 1896. And he had a very if spendthrift but also very interesting career. My mother was four years younger and I guess I was, I'm wandering a bit, but speaking of Dos Passos, I mean, Dos Passos and Ludington aren't exactly, you wouldn't think there was much in common. But they were actually, Dos Passos's family was a very WASPy family. Mine is a very WASPy family. And I came across in Dos Passos's notes and journals and stuff like that, names of the same people that my parents knew. I'm not, Marsden didn't move in those groups, but I'm trying to, in a roundabout way, explain my interest in it. I know I was learning about my own immediate background through that. Yeah?

57:46 Audience Member

In your book, *Biography*, there's a tantalizing reference, for me, of Hartley's interest in Chinese art about the time he was in southern Bavaria, near Partenkirchen. I can't remember the name of the mountain.

Townsend Ludington

Zugspitze is one of the biggies right?

Audience Member

In view of the 26 paintings he does of Mount Katahdin, you mentioned, his near obsession with stone, and mountain and rock and definitive, almost pulsating affinity to yin and yang, can you comment on whether there's any more influence of Chinese theory and art and landscape on him and has appeared so far?

Townsend Ludington

If you ask me where it came from, at least at this point, I'm disremembering, and it's a stumper for me anyway. I know, I would say there hasn't been much except for maybe an observation that he did some paintings, did some paintings on glass, that were of Asian shapes and so forth. One of the things that I can imagine working on him. This was around the time and during this, some of these were in his first visits to Europe, if I remember correctly, there was a guy named Ezra Pound and others who were very taken. And I mean, I know that they knew each other well, because there's a picture somewhere of Pound and Hartley and maybe someone else. I'd like it to be Joyce but whatever. Sitting together, probably at the, I forget which of the cafes, but anyway, but I didn't really answer it, but I can't, I can't. Yeah?

Audience Member

Two very tiny points. First of all, it should be remembered that Hartley just didn't do Dogtown. He did a whole series of paintings that look very much like the one you have on the screen right now while he was in Gloucester.

Townsend Ludington

Boy, if I remember that I surely don't remember them, I'll be darned Are they extant. Are they, here, in the museum?

Audience Member

Not in our community, but he did them. The other very tiny point, you, we think we lead lives of going from tiny success to tiny success, whereas Hartley's life was going from tragedy to tragedy and if you talk just a moment, about the destruction of his paintings.

Townsend Ludington

Oh, my. Yeah, I did get into that in the biography but in 1935, destitute, one because he had no audience to speak of and two because it was the midst of the Great Depression, in order to consolidate so that he could pay less rent, he went to his storage place, I forget the name of it in 1935, and destroyed a hundred paintings. And he was accompanied by, wasn't Adelaide Koons, but he was accompanied by somebody who said it was just horrible because of course Hartley was, was literally torn apart and he was tearing apart these paintings. Imagine, anyway, luckily there were plenty still. Yeah?

1:01:36 Audience Member

Two questions. First, you suggested that this was a catalytic place for him. In what ways did Dogtown and his time here change him?

Townsend Ludington

Well, because he was, he was really desperate when he came back, psychologically and well, emotionally and no money to boot. And he's trying to find, find answers for himself, what he refers to William James's "the will to believe." And he wants to will it but then "why" is coalesced in his mind when he, you know, and he sees this terrain, which isn't a very popular terrain among other things, you know those paintings didn't sell, the Dogtown paintings, it's only our generation, two generations later or whatever, that people have caught up with what he's doing. Because Hartley is a very thematic painter. It's not, you know, I love abstract painting but it's sometimes you don't worry too much maybe, about particular meaning. Something like that. And Hartley definitely is making a statement. When he sees a landscape or a seascape, I didn't put any of those up except again that little symbol on there, you know, he is really talking about man's relationship, mankind's relationship to the natural world.

Audience Member

So it was important because it kind of was a way for him to make another jump in his seeking path.

Townsend Ludington

Seeking the spiritual.

Audience Member

And, and so that that was the importance of it, catalytic in the sense that it enabled him to move forward in his seeking.

Townsend Ludington

And also, you know, when you look at some of the paintings upstairs, again I didn't put, well there are only those two Dogtown paintings, but his Dogtown paintings sometimes are really abstract. I mean they are abstract. And what he of course, he understood full well, and he writes about this, I forget where exactly, but he writes about it not in letters, or the meaning of modern art or something like that. And he understands full well the relationship between abstraction and meaning. Because, of course, that's painting well, I say, of course, it seems to me a painting is always a matter of perspective. And the essence of painting is to get at what lies beneath the surface, even if, which is for him this ongoing narrative.

Audience Member

That actually connects to the second question, which is a number of his landscapes seem in their abstraction to have figures in them. One of the paintings you put up looked like it had a dead body laid out in the landscape. The landscape was a dead body. And I guess I wonder this isn't just my idea, I've read this in other people's views of Hartley, I wonder what you make of that idea that through the landscape he's kind of reconnecting to the figures, that he does these mountain-like figures late in his life. What do you make of that idea? And if you think there's something to it, what might that something be?

Townsend Ludington

Are they disguised, are there human figures disguised in the landscape and I'm thinking of Grant Wood, you know, because the fecundity of the Midwest which only he's, no, which he saw somewhere in stone. No, Hartley, I don't think he was doing anything with that. There is way back early in his career a picture from 1909, not a very interesting painting, but the sort of, but it's something kind of hood, hooded, what may be trees or something, I can't even describe it right, but then there's a Christ figure in the thing, but that was, I don't know of others. But on the other hand, what he's very much doing, I think what I'm trying to say is the relationship of all these things in land or seascapes and so forth to us, even if we don't recognize it. And when you talk about well, Gloucester, I mean, how much closer are lobster fisherman etc, etc, to that world, that rugged world, you know, maybe we don't know somewhat about. Anyway. How much closer that is to the people he knew and was trying to paint and stuff like that, these fishermen in Nova Scotia and so on and so forth. So we are related whether we want to be or not is his point. And he, that's his big breakthrough, I think. I mean, intellectually, emotionally and wonderful paintings, like the German officer paintings are off in another direction. I like everything from Dogtown on. This was stuff I like the most. Anyway. Yeah?

Audience Member

Is there anything in his biography that could explain him as a person the loner or his art in some way?

Townsend Ludington

Yeah. In terms of his family. He, let me see if I can get this right, this is what I'm remembering. I'm going to have to read the book again, no really, it's embarrassing what you forget. But anyway, he came, he was born here, but his parents came from Gloucestershire, maybe? His father, his mother died young, he was very close to her. And after she died, Hartley was sent to live with an aunt in Cleveland. So you have that sister, okay? You have that, that split in the family. He was a loner. And my faint recollections are coming through but I have an image of him wandering, sort of like Ferdinand the Bull, that's not a good analogy, out by himself, but Hartley wasn't out there playing football or whatever. I mean, he was a lonely, lonely kid. And, and also the circumstances from the beginning were tough. I mean he didn't live in any, he didn't live in a house. I think I found the place, exactly. It was an old, the second story of some sort of boarding house in Auburn, or Lewiston, where the family lived while he was still there. And he was sent away at the age of if I'm not mistaken of 16. So I think all of that is part of it, you know.

Audience Member

And another question. Was, did William Blake have an influence on him? And did he illustrate any of his poems?

Townsend Ludington

Not that I know of in terms of illustration. I'm not sure, without knowing specifically. I'm sure he read Blake. He read vociferously, you don't read vociferously, voraciously, he read

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voraciously, all kinds of stuff, the mystics, contemporary poetry, and on and on and on,
Santayana, William James. All of these mattered a great deal to him. But also creative stuff, too.

Audience Member

It might have been [?].

Townsend Ludington

That's exactly who I think that was like. I got to tell you a story. I'd been working, working, working, I don't think I'd finished it, I'd gotten Hartley to 1912. And I didn't like it. So I put him on a boat, which he did go on to Europe. But I sank the boat halfway across the Atlantic, the Germans were out practicing their torpedo or something and they hit the boat by mistake and down it went, and the last thing that you saw above the water was Hartley's nose. So a friend of mind said, well yeah, that's right, but then what do you do about this guy named Marsden Hartley who lived until 1943? And he said, I guess you'd have to call it, "Marston Hartley, the posthumous years."

Audience Member

I'm just curious about how his contemporary artists, about the artists I assume he knew on Cape Ann, Sloan and others, how they felt about his work.

Todd Ludington

I don't know about, you're talking about John Sloan? Yeah, he knew John Sloan and in fact, there's a photo of him out in again Taos, I think it is, of Sloan and him and somebody else standing together. I think they, they admired his work. They tolerated him some, but he was a tough number to live with.

Audience Member

I knew he was tough, I just wondered how they thought about his work because he was the earliest of the abstract. You know, he was more abstract earlier than they were, so I wonder how they, and I also was curious about Milton Avery, and I thought they were friends here.

Townsend Ludington

I'm really pretty vague about this but Hartley, well, Hartley was certainly at the forefront of near abstract, I mean American abstraction way back there. But don't forget that a lot of these same people were very much influenced, well they didn't all, but many of them took their trips to Paris among other places and they knew the Fauve and so on and so forth.

So, and then Hartley disappeared from the scene, first from 1912 to 1916. He maybe came back at one point, he quickly went back, then he got back over to Germany as soon as he could after World War I and was there for the next whatever it is seven or eight years. And, but he, you know, his stuff was tough, I think we understand and appreciate it now, but it was tough. And in the first years of Hartley's career, the, the American impressionists were avant-garde or even further out than that in the mind of the public, of which Stieglitz used to complain there was

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almost none, which was sort of true. How, how his relationships with others, he was jealous of Georgia O'Keeffe. She was doing well. And he was jealous of Marin. And who else would I think of, well anyway, you know, those people who succeeded more and he became more. The story of his years with Stieglitz are very interesting. And he finally, they finally bailed out of each other in 1937. But Hartley would tell somebody a story in the '30s and he by chance sees on the desk, a check or something like that for Georgia O'Keefe, Stieglitz's desk, for \$10,000. Hartley was furious, furious.

Anyway, thanks a lot.

(Applause)