arts

MAGAZINE OCTOBER 1979 $3.50

arts MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 1979
Volume 54 No. 2
Established in 1926

PUBLISHER
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ARTS MAGAZINE is indexed in **The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature** and **The Art Index**; it is reproduced on **University Microfilms**, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, and abstracted by **ARTbibliographies**, Box 9, Oxford OX15EA and **RILA (International Repertory of the Literature of Art)**, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267.

ARTS MAGAZINE

Published monthly Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, May, June, at New York, N.Y.
BUSINESS OFFICES
at 23 East 26th Street
New York 10010
Telephone: MU 5-8500
SUBSCRIPTION RATES
one year: 10 issues, $28.50,
two years: 20 issues, $55.00,
single copy, $3.50.
(Foreign postage for one year, $9.00)
CHANGE OF ADDRESS:
send both old and new addresses, and allow three weeks for change. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or photographs. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices.

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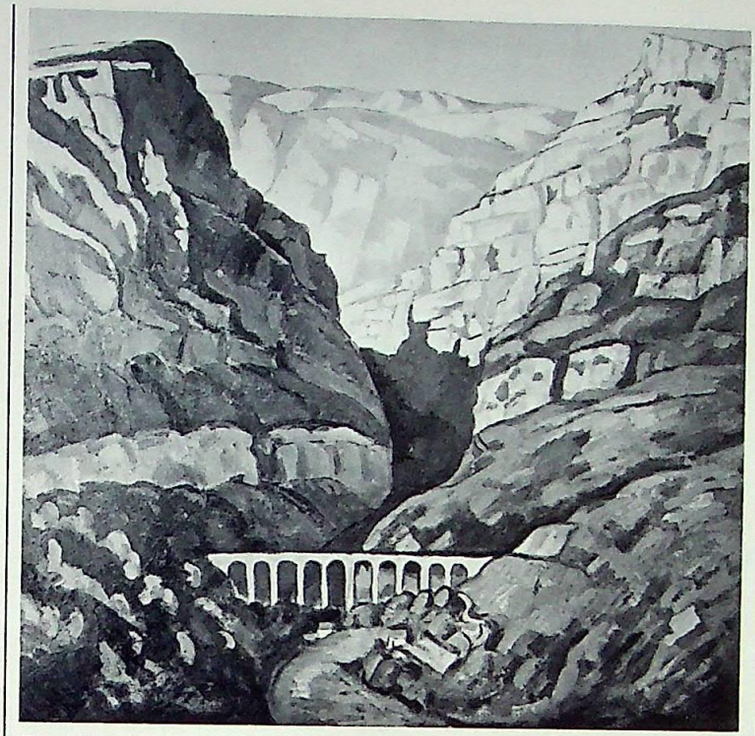

Fig. 1. Marsden Hartley, Maritime Alps, Vence, No. 9, 1925-26. *Oil on canvas, 30¾ x 31". J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky.*

MARSDEN HARTLEY AT DOGTOWN COMMON

GAIL R. SCOTT

Marsden Hartley's summer of 1931 at Dogtown Common promoted a radical new notion of place for the artist. Place is the result of the artist's spiritual encounter with the facts of experience, thus specific and universal at once.

The summer of 1931 which Marsden Hartley spent at Dogtown Common near Gloucester on Massachusetts' Cape Ann, and the paintings that issued from this and subsequent visits to the location, signal the artist's return to New England after long years abroad, and, more importantly, point ahead to years of assured creative mastery. Hartley would come again to Dog-

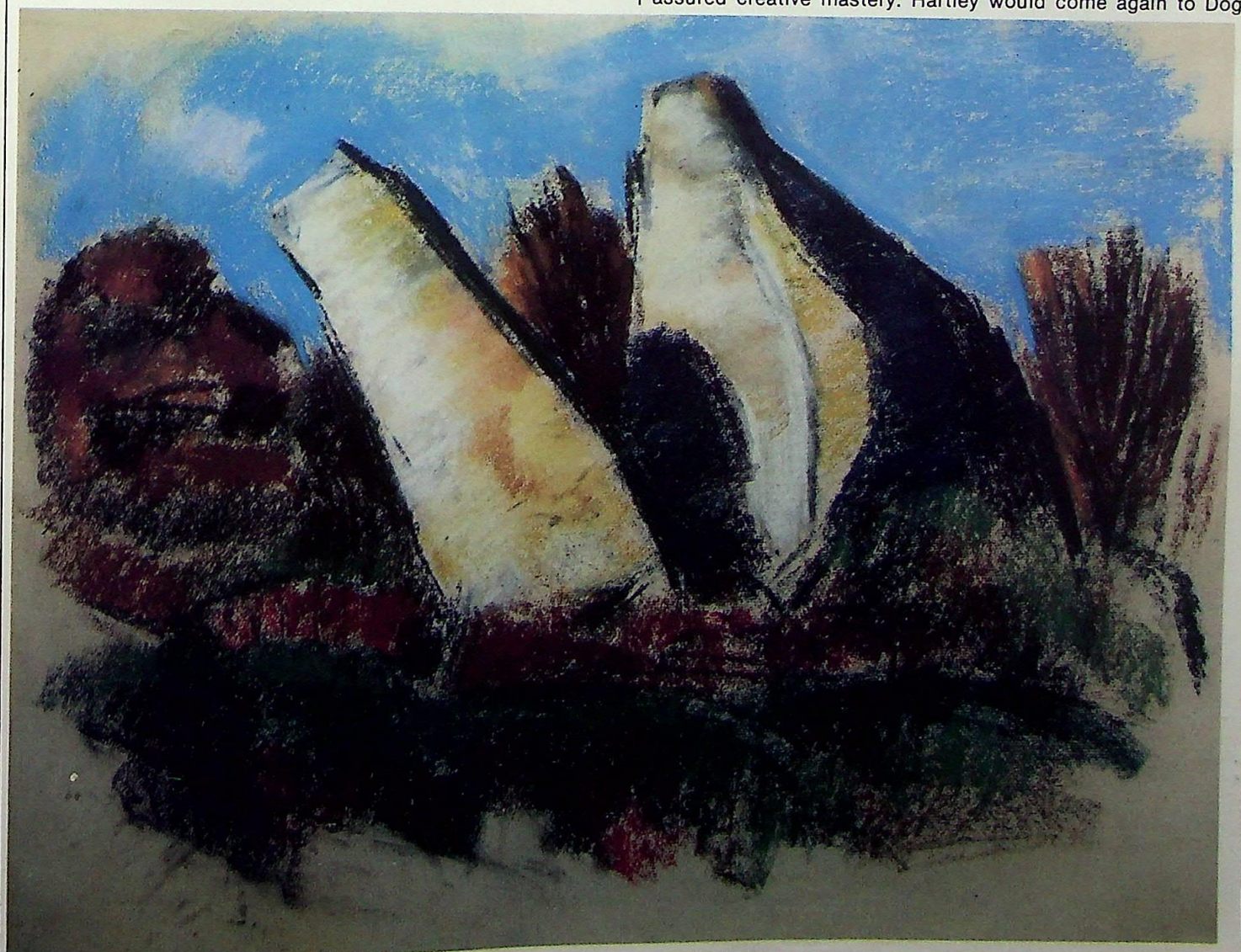

Fig. 2. Marsden Hartley, Whale's Jaw, 1931. *Pastel on paper, 18½ x 23¾". Private Collection, New York.*

town in 1934 and again in 1936, interspersed with further travels in Mexico and Germany, but his letters and autobiographical notes indicate that his experience at Gloucester in the summer of 1931 was of special import and constituted a mental breakthrough by which he achieved a clarity of focus and purpose which would sustain him in the years to come.

The 1920s—a decade of political isolationism at home and expatriates abroad—found Hartley living in Europe with only brief visits home, not so much a professed expatriate as, by this time, an inveterate wanderer. But the critical climate at home called for a resurgence of things American. Art critics like Thomas Craven and Henry McBride sounded the call from a rather narrow platform of chauvinistic and basically conservative views, attitudes which later become rigidified in the regionalism of the 1930s. A man like Paul Rosenfeld, on the other hand, represented an expansive and, at the same time, profound search for a truly American sense of identity. Rosenfeld's critical position stemmed largely from his contact with the circle of artists, writers, and photographers surrounding Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery and its journal *Camera Work*. But Rosenfeld also reflected the ideas of such critic-historians as Van Wyck Brooks and Waldo Frank, co-editors with James Oppenheim of *The Seven Arts*, which, during its brief one-year existence, had proclaimed the imminent dawning of a renaissance in American art. Their writings expressed a fervent hope for American cultural ascendancy, and they urged artists to remain at home, not from a reactionary stance of anti-modernism, but in order to establish native roots and render an American perception of *place* in poetry, painting, music, etc.

Rosenfeld's chief contribution to this effort was *Port of New York* (1924), a series of portrait-essays on fourteen American figures in the arts, each of whom grasped in some degree what is indigenously and uniquely American. In the essay on Hartley, Rosenfeld commends his ability "to record the genius of a place," remarking that some artists paint a tree of Labrador and a tree of Florida in the same mode, but that Hartley's "eye is intensely sensitive to the identity of the spot in which he finds himself."[1] But despite this gift Rosenfeld found something lacking in Hartley, namely an ability to give himself utterly to the thing being formed, "to lose himself in his object." Furthermore, Rosenfeld predicted that Hartley would never be able to do this, nor would his art reach a full flowering, until he returned to his roots, to his native New England soil.

History bears out Rosenfeld's prophecy; most critics agree that Hartley's mastery as an artist came only in later life, after, in fact, he had established himself again on home ground. But, we must ask, was this simply because he returned to native territory and was finally painting the American scene? His later landscapes are undeniably New England in character and contain the familiar geographical features common to the region: granite-lined coast, harsh sea, rivers thick with logging traffic, and magnificent pines. Such environmental elements usually constitute our notion of a given place or locale, but these objective components alone do not account for the emotive power in Hartley's late works. What was it that enabled him to invest these paintings with the something more that defines them as major works of art? To answer this question is the purpose of the present essay, and involves examining what amounts to Hartley's most valuable contribution to American art: his revisioning of what actually constitutes place and his reinterpretation of the artist's role in bringing forth the larger meaning of place.

Fig. 3. Marsden Hartley, Whale's Jaw, 1931. *Oil on canvas, 20-1/8 x 18-1/16". Collection Mr. and Mrs. George Harris, Austin, Texas.*

Unlike the period of Hartley's prewar European adventures when he was drawn into the avant-garde milieu of Paris, Berlin, and Munich, his sojourns of the 1920s, which immediately preceded the Dogtown venture, were largely solitary. Even while living in decadent postwar Berlin along with other American colleagues, he tells in his letters of shutting himself off from most social encounters. In late 1923 he traveled by himself to Vienna, Dresden, Florence, Arrezzo, Rome, and Naples, visiting museums with only the spirit of such Italian masters as Massaccio, Fra Angelico, and Piero for company. And from 1925-29 he lived alone in a series of rented houses in Venice and Aix-en-Provence, during which nature, Cézanne's genius, and Mont Ste. Victoire were his main companions.

Although Hartley had always been a loner, there was more than usual cause for this period of self-imposed isolation. In the earlier days, Paris and Germany had been alive with many cross-currents of new aesthetic ideas and expressions, and Hartley had participated with youthful enthusiasm in this artistic confluence. But when he returned to Europe after the war, he, like others, found great changes. For Hartley the art scene had gone flat; he felt that the artists of Paris made famous before the war were caught up in a commercial system that profited from repetition, allowing them to coast on previously gained reputations. Over and over again in his unpublished writings from this period, Hartley deplores what he calls excessive "personalism," a basically hypocritical approach to art that strives for success on the basis of personality alone, at the expense of experimentation and true originality.

In 1927 he wrote to sculptor George Biddle that he was "thoroughly sick of the way art smells these days," and that his seclusion at Aix was an effort to get "away from all artists and art lovers."[2] He thus lived and worked alone, endeavoring to eschew personality in his own work and to arrive at a form of authentic expression in what he called "self-less painting." He told Rebecca Strand that he wanted "to remove all trace of 'inwardness' to have the image revealed as immediate experience & not by thought or reflective processes."[3] He accomplished this by a kind of devout apprenticeship to nature under the guiding spirit of Cézanne, whose palpable presence at Aix is recorded in the following lines from a poem entitled "The Mountain and the Reconstruction" which figured as the catalogue foreword to Hartley's exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1928:

> the sweet old man appeared in vision—
> a man who had evolved some of the clearest principles
> for himself, a new metaphysic—a new logic—
> a new, inviolable conviction, a new law for the artist
> with ambitions toward truth, a belief in real
> appearances, and a desire toward expression without
> the HYPOCRISIES.[4]

Hartley sought to clarify his vision of nature through studies in drawing, oil, and drypoint of the territory surrounding Aix, particularly Mont Ste. Victoire itself which, as he says in the poem, contained the quality of "revelation / for the body, the mind and the spirit."

Just as he felt he was beginning to establish a new and more objective basis for his art, a means of expressing his own "ambitions toward truth," circumstances converged to bring him home to America. A five-year stipend that had given him a degree of financial freedom terminated. Then, in a succession of reviews of his New York exhibitions, he was severely criticized for his long absence from home and his failure to do justice to *American* landscape. The sting of these remarks was especially sharp because Stieglitz, though sympathetic to Hartley's need

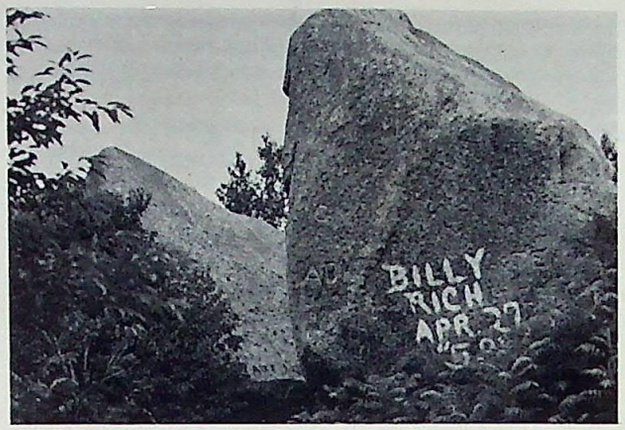

Fig. 5. Whale's Jaw site. *Author's photograph, 1975.*

Fig. 4. Marsden Hartley, Whale's Jaw, Dogtown Common, Cape Ann, 1934. *Oil on canvas, 17½ x 23½ ". Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Walter Bareiss.*

for freedom, felt obligated as his dealer to remind him (albeit in his usual tactful way) of his chronic inability to attract a buying public, a problem compounded by long years abroad. Furthermore, Hartley's pride was hurt because he had never thought of himself as anything but a Yankee. Somewhat defensively but also with a strain of truth, he wrote Rebecca Strand that he was eager to return home "and the curious thing about all this being over here is, that it has nothing to do with being in Europe. There are days, weeks, even months when I'm not even conscious of it. I live in spaces that are so integral to my nature as to make geography seem trivial—whole days when I see nothing or feel nothing but New England for example."[5]

Finally in March of 1930 he arrived in New York. That summer he tried painting in Franconia, New Hampshire; despite executing some fine pictures, he still felt alienated from the region, complaining that wherever he went he would no sooner set up his canvas than a whole flock of curious tourists would surround him. That winter Rebecca Strand encouraged him to apply for a Guggenheim Fellowship, which he did. To his surprise he was awarded a grant which stipulated that the grantee work somewhere abroad. He chose Mexico, but delayed his departure for about nine months because, as he told several friends, he wanted to do a stretch of landscape near Gloucester—Dogtown Common, which he had discovered on a visit there twelve years before. Because the previous season had proven an abortive effort—at least in terms of his own feeling for New England—Hartley must have felt the necessity to make one further attempt to connect with his native region before embarking again for foreign parts.

Thus, although Hartley's return home was to some degree motivated by pressure from critics and colleagues, it was based more on the realistic necessity to stay closer to home and win greater exposure by his actual presence in the art world than on a capitulation to the call for artists to paint the American scene. Hartley was too much the indomitable individualist to conform to a movement dictated by critical opinion. His choice of Dogtown Common attests his Yankee integrity and refusal to paint just any superficially appealing locale. If one were to select a site typifying New England or representing "the American scene," it would certainly *not* be Dogtown Common. The place is a remote, rather barren setting comprising huge glacial outcroppings, scrub, some juniper trees and blueberry patches. Throughout his career Hartley sought out such unpicturesque, forbidding terrain as subject matter for his landscapes—the deserted farms of Maine, the dry arroyos of New Mexico, stark volcanic mountains like Mt. Popocatepetl, the erosion-covered hills of the Maritime Alps, Dogtown, and the rugged Mt. Katahdin. In a wry bit of self-analysis, he observed on arrival at Gloucester: "What an anomaly it is anyhow that I for simple human reason prefer city sophistication—and for purposes of work I am always driven to the wastes, where little or nothing moves but the speechless progress of geologic structures of earth."[6]

Hartley's letters and autobiographical notes tell of his experience at Dogtown that summer—how he would go out by bus from Gloucester as far as possible and then walk about five miles through the abandoned quarries and blueberry patches to Dogtown. He relates that at first he would go empty-handed and just sit for hours at a time. Eventually he did some drawings, but the paintings would have to be done from memory, since he couldn't carry the necessary equipment on the long trek out from Gloucester.

What was going on in Hartley's mind while he *just sat* among the boulders? Obviously more than mere observation of the weird setting. This communion with nature must have necessitated coming to terms with his past—the years of searching in Europe—and the need for a new focus. On the reverse of one of the Dogtown paintings, *In The Moraine, Dogtown,* he quoted three lines from T. S. Eliot's poem *Ash Wednesday*, published the year before:

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks.

It is as if these lines voiced Hartley's own need. Indeed, *Ash Wednesday* marked for Eliot a moment of renewal when he began to turn from the disillusionment of the postwar years, seen in the despair of his earlier poems, *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925), toward the vision of the redemptive power of love in *Four Quartets* (1936-43). Hartley had begun to realize that his years of searching abroad were a kind of intellectual wasteland and that he must return to his roots, not just to the New England soil but, in a deeper sense, to his experiential base, his spiritual center, in order to move on.

The impact of this moment of regeneration which occurred at Gloucester emerges primarily from the pictures themselves, which reverberate with a strength lacking in the 1920 landscapes. During this earlier period in the south of France, he believed he had achieved a degree of objectivity in his work—selfless painting—but he was the first to admit that the products of these years (both painting and poetry) might not yet show what he had discovered mentally. And indeed, a painting like *Maritime Alps, Vence* (1925-26; Fig. 1) does not. It is a study after nature as the ones from Aix are studies after Cézanne. But it is not the deeply authentic work he longed to produce.

The Dogtown paintings are something else entirely. At first glance they strike one as bold, raw landscapes depicting strange rock configurations, broken fences, and unappealing scrub, rendered in somber earth hues dominated by heavy blacks. But when the viewer enters further in to these paintings, he cannot help but feel the struggle that went into their

making—not struggle in the sense of getting the paint or the composition right, but the effort of one man to bring a difficult and forsaken stretch of scenery to creative realization in the medium of his art.

In describing a book of poetry called "Pressing Foot," which he was writing simultaneously while at Gloucester, Hartley stated that his aim was to get at "the emotions *beneath the pattern* as sharply as possible,"[7] a phrase applicable as well to the Dogtown paintings. *Maritime Alps, Vence*, for instance, shows very little emotion, either beneath or on the visible surface of the pattern; on the contrary, it is rather emotionally sterile. In the Dogtown canvases, on the other hand, he has managed to communicate not only the physical aspects of the place, but also the *quality of experience* which the site made possible. But the effort at greater objectivity which had motivated his work at Aix paid off at Dogtown, because the artist's personality does not obtrude upon the paintings. The emotional intensity of his personal experience is there and constitutes a generative impulse behind the painted forms, but remains "beneath the pattern."

When speaking of El Greco's effect on Cézanne in his book *Adventures in the Arts* (1921), Hartley observed that the Spaniard "felt the palpitancy, the breathing of all things, the urge outward of all life." Moreover, Hartley adds, his pictures have a "life quality which lifts them beyond the aspect of picture-making or even mere representation. They are not cold studies of inanimate things, they are pulsing realizations of living substances striving towards each other."[8] Dogtown was a place fraught with something of this living, breathing quality of nature and offered Hartley a perfect opportunity to realize in his own painting what he felt so potently operative at Aix and in Cézanne's work.

Of the many geological formations at Dogtown, the most impressive is undoubtedly an abutment of two monolithic boulders known locally as "Whale's Jaw" because of its resemblance to the open mouth of a breaching whale. In Whale's Jaw Hartley found a subject well suited to his predilection for massive natural forms, not unlike the mountain theme that pervades his work from the earliest years on, but on a smaller scale. Over the course of his three visits to Dogtown, he rendered the motif many times in a variety of media including charcoal, pastel crayon, and oil.

In a pastel drawing (Fig. 2) and an oil (Fig. 3), both dating from 1931, Hartley has emphasized the whale-likeness of the rock configuration through contrasts of light and dark areas. The thin lower "jaw" and the underside of the upper "jaw" are bright in tonality, while the top of the "head" (or right face of the larger rock) is dark, just as is the case with most species of whales, whose bellies are lighter gray than their backs. But in a 1934 oil version, *Whale's Jaw, Dogtown Common, Cape Ann* (Fig. 4), the extreme light and dark contrast has given way to a more modulated tonal system. Whereas in the earlier examples Hartley had rounded out the edges of the rocks, thus making them resemble the body contour of an actual whale, in the 1934 painting the shape of the boulder is more jagged and angular. The effect of these changes is a subtle lessening in similarity of rock to whale and, at the same time, a heightening of expressive power in the picture.

Fig. 6. Marsden Hartley, The Last Stone Walls, Dogtown, 1936-37. *Oil on canvas, 17½ x 23½". Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Walter Bareiss.*

This evolution of the Whale's Jaw motif is underscored by the fact that in the later painting Hartley has included graffiti on the rock face—the initials "C.W." and "PEW." Such inscriptions can still be found on these rocks today (Fig. 5), ghostly reminders of human visitors who wanted to leave their sign in this deserted place. Furthermore, as if to echo these marks, Hartley has manipulated the paint surface by etching lines while the pigment was still wet, to indicate branches on shrubs and striated texture on the rocks. This practice occurs before in his work, but not to this extent or with this double purpose.

Other traces of human presence and activity are detectable all over Dogtown Common. Hartley was as fascinated by these appearances and by the strange history of the place as he was by its physical characteristics. He wrote to a friend describing in detail how, in the seventeenth century, Dogtown had afforded a hideout for white settlers from Indians and marauding pirates plundering the coast. The site was also once a quarry where great chunks of rock were hewed out and hauled away, and evidence of this activity is also abundant. Hartley's interest in these remnants of man's presence in this otherwise forsaken spot can be seen in several paintings from the Dogtown series: in the warped and broken wire fences and tumbledown stone walls of *The Last Stone Walls* (Fig. 6) and *Dogtown, the Last of the Stone Wall* (Fig. 7), and in the lonely road in *Blueberry Highway.* Like his earlier *Deserted Farm* series, Hartley's canvases are testimony to the decay and blight eroding the once grand promise of these New England hills. But the Dogtown paintings go even further in suggesting the decomposition of all man-made things in the face of geological forces. Hartley was moved by Dogtown Common because there he found nature magnificently alone, unto itself; in fact some pictures like *Winter and No Summer* (1931) and *Boulder and Brake* (1931) give no hint of connection to human affairs. But despite Dogtown's singular features of remoteness and loneliness, Hartley also chose to focus in some way on the juncture of nature and human existence.

Charles Olson, poet and long-time resident of Gloucester, understood what Hartley was trying to do in this respect and wrote about it in his *Maximus Poems*:

> Hartley had so many courages,
> and such defeats,
> who used to stay too long at Dogtown
> getting that rock in paint,
> he who was so afraid of night, and loons.
>
> But what he did with that bald jaw of stone,
> (my father differently usurped it,
> took it as he took nature, took himself,
> until all bosses struck him down)
>
> such cloth he turned all things to,
> made palms of hands of gulls,
> Maine monoliths apostles,
> a meal of fish a final supper
> —made of Crane a Marseilles matelot.
>
> Such transubstantiations
> as I am not permitted,
> nor my father,
> who'd never have turned the Whale Jaw back
> to such humanness, neither he nor I as workers,
> are infatuated with.[9]

Here Olson contrasts the artist's creative response with that of the ordinary man when he says that his own father "usurped" nature with brute force. His father "could have split that rock as it is split," he says a few lines earlier, and could not therefore, as Hartley did, turn "that Whale Jaw back / to such humanness." Olson suggests that man's typical approach to nature is to try to control it, to ravish it as the Yankee farmer was notorious for doing. The artist, on the other hand, released from the compulsion to manipulate the land physically, brings the power of creative "transubstantiation" to his encounter with nature.

Fig. 7. Marsden Hartley, Dogtown, The Last of the Stone Wall, 1936. *Oil on academy board, 18 x 24". University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Bequest of Hudson Walker from the Ione and Hudson Walker Collection.*

A prevailing notion of landscape painting implies that the artist must capture some likeness of a certain geographic locale. Even a perceptive critic like Paul Rosenfeld believed that to render a sense of place an artist must have a kind of primitive soil-consciousness of his native region. Furthermore, he felt that Hartley's alienation from his native soil could be attributed to the Yankee heritage of exploitation which prevented total identification with the land. But Olson saw that for Hartley the understanding of place includes but goes beyond the local characteristics of a given topography, and becomes a matter of the artist's intuitive grasp—not just of the immediate or local, but also of the larger, universal implications of what has been discerned in a given "place." In this way the artist brings back the "humanness" to raw nature, redeems it through creative imagination. Hartley seems to have instituted the truth of William Blake's proverb, "Where man is not, nature is barren."

In the case of the works from 1931, there is a consistency in formal structure from drawings to paintings. The medium of charcoal and pastel lends itself to the rendering of large and heavy objects which in the paintings become even more ponderous. In *Flaming Pool* (Fig. 9), for instance, the configuration of rocks climbs up the canvas in a kind of slow vortex around the pool, while the juniper trees accentuate the horizon in a druid-like fashion in keeping with what Hartley spoke of as the "Wuthering Heights" atmosphere of the place. He described these 1931 canvases as "painted sculpture and not ordinary painting,"[10] a characterization which also applies to the 1934-36 works, but with a noticeable difference. During these later visits he executed a series of pen and ink sketches, of which Figure 8 is typical, with its long fluid lines denoting trees, fences, boulders, and logs and also with sharp quick strokes giving texture and modeling to objects.The landscape forms seem to whirl together in a kind of animated dancelike pattern quite different in effect from the earlier drawings of Whale's Jaw. This feeling of animation, of energetic composition evidenced in the pen and ink sketches carries over into the oils of 1934-36, enriching their expressive force.

The broken fence posts and trees in *The Last Stone Walls* form vertical breaks in the rocky terrain along the horizontal flow of roadway, stone wall, and twisted wire fence. *The Old Bars* (Fig. 10) reiterates this pattern in a more complex design with greater depth of field, marked by a rich interplay of diagonals. In all these canvases the Ryderesque clouds are almost as solid and sculptural as the boulders themselves, but over all there is a sense of slow, rhythmic movement.

In one of his many descriptions of the place, Hartley strikes an analogy between the Dogtown setting and music, and even inscribed some casual poetic lines on the back of *Flaming Pool* which allude to musical themes. Such an analogy was not new in Hartley's work,[11] but its appearance earlier in his career had been limited to color harmonies and the interplay of abstract forms. That nature itself should evoke musical associations was a recent development inspired by the chromatic intensity of the New England fall colors and the orchestral cadences suggested by the Dogtown scenery. The following lines from an unpublished poem entitled "Soliloquy in Dogtown" convey this sense of musical correspondence:

> To have come among you, rocks. . .
> where junipers stand thick beside you, and
> themselves,
> making organpipes for fugues and fierce
> recessionals of wind that parry and pierce
> the flesh and bone of mortal mind
> left to suffer its own windblown oblivion. . . .
> Come among you rocks then, solemnly, and speak
> not even to the wings that pass in flurry
> to encompass earth and sea, and other windwing
> worry;
> I sit a spell, clutching at plain thoughts, wrenching at
> no secrecies, hearing the magnificat
> of afternoons and mornings united in their theme
> but broken up in segments by the bought
> extravagances of dream, wrenched and torn
> warped and twisted, whisperings of the forlorn
> deceptive moment they were born. . .[12]

The dominant mood in this poem is one of acute *aloneness*, psychic and physical. But the voice in the poem addresses the rocks and echoes again, "come among you rocks," as though

Fig. 8. Marsden Hartley, Untitled (Field with Rock, Wall, and Fence), c. 1934-36. *Pen and ink on paper, 6-7/8 x 9-7/8". Marsden Hartley Collection, Treat Gallery, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.*

they are companions, or perhaps agents by which he comes to a state of self-knowledge. It would seem that these rocks have provided Hartley with a lesson, because what is communicated in the paintings—overriding even the powerful mood of loneliness—is the solidity and tensile strength inherent in these geological giants. They have been alone for eons, but they have endured in their aloneness. That durability is what Hartley discerned about the Dogtown rocks and is the substance of his statement about them.

The thought processes suggested in this poem—the "wrenched and torn / warped and twisted" dream of the speaker—reflect the violence of the geological forces that originally brought these rocks to rest at this site. But here music enters in, acting as an alternative to the speaker's consciousness. He hears the "fierce recessionals of wind that parry and pierce / the flesh and bone of mortal mind" as an organ fugue, a "magnificat" which breaks in on his turbulent thought, bringing a state of order out of the objective unredeemed chaos of nature.

The artist has entered into this experience so fully that the objective natural phenomena of rocks, wind, and trees have been transformed or transmuted (to use one of Hartley's own terms): the scene becomes a portrayal of energy, of the fluid possibilities inherent in nature and its processes. Contemporary poet Robert Duncan, in writing about Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems*, discusses the aesthetic of energy which he observes as characterizing much twentieth-century art, especially that of the Abstract Expressionists of the Fifties. He refers specifically to the Hartley passage already quoted from Olson's poem:

> John Dewey in *Art as Experience* points to the difference "between the art product (statue, painting, or whatever) and the *work* of art," . . . . In this esthetic, conception cannot be abstracted from doing; beauty is related to the beauty of an archer hitting the mark. . . .
>
> In "Maximus," Olson points to Marsden Hartley: "to get that rock in paint"—a getting, taking grasp, a hand that is the eye. "But what he did with that bald jaw of stone." "Did with," not "saw in". . .
>
> American 20th century painting: the difference between energy referrd [sic] to (seen) as in the Vorticist and Futurist work—particularly Wyndham Lewis and Boccioni—and energy embodied in the painting (felt), which is now muscular as well as visual, containd [sic] as well as apparent; the work of Hofmann, Pollock, Kline . . .[13]

It is this quality of energy that distinguishes Hartley's Dogtown works from mere landscape—energy deriving from a total (felt) experience of place. Neither physical perception alone nor stylistic idiosyncrasy can account for these pictures. Hartley had to "get that rock in paint," which Duncan sees as a muscular action, "a getting, a taking grasp." The works did not emerge from a purely subjective response to an eternal scene, he suggests; they arose from Hartley's total creative involvement with the place, an energetic, integrated commitment of mind and heart, occurring at a level of consciousness deeper than sense perception. And, significantly, Duncan sees in Hartley's "taking grasp" of the Dogtown rocks an aesthetic harbinger of the action painting of Hofmann, Kline, Pollock, and others.

Fig. 9. Marsden Hartley, Flaming Pool, Dogtown, 1931. *Oil on academy board, 18 x 24". Yale University Art Gallery: Gift of Mrs. Charles P. Kuntz for the Marsden Hartley Collection, Yale University Collection of American Literature.*

Indeed, this discernment on Duncan's part of the relevance of Hartley's work to later developments in American modernism is not as anomalous as might at first appear. A full study of this question lies beyond the scope of this article, but it can at least be noted that the general concept of *place* has been a central concern in the work of a number of conceptual artists like Douglas Huebler and Carl Andre, and in that of earthwork artists like Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria, Robert Morris, Christo, and others. Smithson's work, for instance—different though it is in form from Hartley's Dogtown paintings—strikes remarkable parallels in many respects and deals with some fundamentally similar issues. What Hartley discerned about place from an intuitive and essentially poetic standpoint, Smithson approached from a more conscious and philosophically sophisticated position. Both artists were basically seeking to break down surface appearances which limited perception imposes on the environment. Smithson used Anton Ehrenzweig's term "dedifferentiated vision" to describe this process of depth perception. For his part, Hartley claimed that "the true quality of appearances cannot be understood until the depth of our dimensions has been probed and understood."[14] Like Smithson, Hartley was convinced that this deeper dimension could be attained only by seeing the minutiae of experience in terms of universal ends. Furthermore, Hartley's interest in the geological formations at Dogtown and the effect of the place itself on his consciousness look forward to Smithson's view of landscape and geology as parallel to mental processes, as expressed in his articles "A Sedimentation of the Mind" and "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectic Landscape." Both Smithson and Hartley instinctively disdained the picturesque setting as subject matter for their art and chose instead the earth's remote waste places. Most importantly, they each sought, within their respective art forms, a reclamation or redemption of place through creative evaluation.

This creative revisioning of the meaning of place has perhaps the most far-reaching implications of all Hartley's achievements. In "What I see in *The Maximus Poems,*" another contemporary poet, Edward Dorn, points out that without creative perception, place (man's environment, including nature) has no meaning whatever. He writes: ". . . but when the Place is brought forward fully in form, conceived entirely by the activation of a man who is under its spell, it is a resurrection for us. . . And it is then the only *real* thing. I am certain, without ever having been there, I would be bored to sickness walking through Gloucester. Buildings as such are not important. The wash of the sea is not interesting in itself, that is luxuria, a degrading thing; people as they stand, must be created. . . ."[15] The idea of place cannot be fully understood in terms of mere phenomenal elements of buildings, natural forms, or even people. But the artist, by bringing imaginative perception to bear on these things, reconstructs and reinvests them with otherwise undetected meaning. He thus helps to regenerate or, as Dorn says, "resurrect" the viewer's perception of the *real*.

"Resurrection" is a word Hartley himself used privately to Stieglitz to describe that summer of 1931. In a letter to another friend, he reveals in similar terms the outcome of his long meditative confrontation with the Dogtown rocks:

> I am clearing my mind of all art nonsense, trying to accomplish simplicity and purity of vision for Life itself, for that is more important to me than anything else in my life. I am trying to return to the earlier conditions of my inner life, and take out of experience as it has come to me in the intervening years that which has enriched it, and make something of it more than just intellectual diversion. It can be done with proper attention and that is to be my mental and spiritual occupation from now on.[16]

Hartley is saying here that the horizons of experience can be expanded to include a universal sense of "Life, and that art must move beyond "intellectual diversion" to become, for himself at least, a "spiritual occupation." Seen from an intellectual point of view, Dogtown Common is nothing but an unpicturesque

Fig. 10. Marsden Hartley, The Old Bars, Dogtown, 1936. *Oil on composition board, 18 x 24". Whitney Museum of American Art.*

spot of earth, remote from man's interests, needs, and purposes. But because of Hartley's creative experience of it, which became a kind of spiritual struggle, a Jacob wrestling with the angel, the place took on an enlarged meaning, a meaning communicated through the paintings to the receptive viewer. Although he did not see himself as a religious person in any orthodox sense, Hartley had always been open to experiencing life on its deepest spiritual levels. His predilection for the mystical dimension of experience is well documented from his earliest years on. But he did not feel such matters could be formulated into aesthetic theory nor could he claim any doctrinal belief.[17] Perhaps the reason for this lies in his firm conviction—repeatedly spelled out in his prose writings—that one's basic attitudes must be grounded in the facts of experience, in "Life itself," not in some ethereal realm apart from experience.

In his book *Saving the Appearances*, Owen Barfield argues that if the "appearances" or natural phenomena are to be saved from "chaos and inanity," the systematic use of *imagination* will be required; furthermore, as he seeks to establish "if the appearances are. . . correlative to human consciousness and if human consciousness does not remain unchanged but evolves, then the future of the appearances, that is, of nature herself, must depend on the direction that evolution takes."[18] What happened to Hartley at Dogtown Common was an evolution of consciousness by which he came to a deepened awareness of just what he could do as an artist to transform the raw data of experience into a meaningful work of art. This new understanding of the creative process, of the role imagination must play, opened the way for the powerful works of his final years.

Olson in *Maximus* saw the genetic connection between Hartley's Dogtown paintings—turning the "Whale's Jaw back to such humanness"—and the later works where he made "a meal of fish a final supper," "Maine monoliths apostles" (*Fisherman's Last Supper,* 1940-41); "palms of hands of gulls" (*Two Gulls,* 1940-41); "made of Crane a Marseilles matelot" (*Eight Bells Folly: Memorial for Hart Crane,* 1931). Hartley has endowed the people and objects constituting the subject matter of these later paintings with significance beyond external events and surface appearances. The works of Hartley's final years glow with a kind of aura that makes them more than mere portraiture or still life. It is not the people or the rocks or the gulls that are important in themselves. "People as they stand," said Dorn, "must be created," and Hartley's paintings from the Dogtown period on testify to that creation.

Hartley's lifelong unwillingness to remain in one locality became paradoxically a strengthening factor, forcing him to come to his own unique understanding of place as a state of consciousness. Dogtown was the environment where he first penetrated through to this radical notion of place. It provided him, he said, with a "metaphysical landscape" where he was able to "scale fresh metaphysical heights."[19] Hartley's confrontation with nature that summer makes clear that place is not a matter of private interpretation. The identification of place may occur in individual consciousness—in the realm of creative imagination—but it is not a static mental or perceptual construct converted to paint and canvas. It is the result of the artist's spiritual encounter with, and active reconstruction of, the facts of his experience. Place thus becomes a vehicle by which the artist moves from his own creative center out to discern the "depths of our dimensions," the universal meanings inherent in man and his environment. In this process lies the potential to so affect consciousness as to actually cause a change or evolution in man and his grasp of the universe.

1. Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1924; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), pp. 91-92.
2. Letter to George Biddle from Chateau Noir, Aix-en-Provence, Dec. 1, 1927, Archives of American Art (hereafter referred to as AAA).
3. Letter to Rebecca Strand from Paris, Feb. 7, 1929, AAA.
4. "The Mountain and the Reconstruction," catalogue foreword for Hartley exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago, Feb. 28-March 13, 1928.
5. Letter to Rebecca Strand for Aix, n.d., AAA.
6. Letter to Adelaide Kuntz from Gloucester, July 16, 1931, AAA.
7. Letter to Adelaide Kuntz from Gloucester, n.d., AAA.
8. *Adventures in the Arts* (New York: Boni, Liveright, 1921; reprinted by Hacker Books, 1972), p. 33.
9. Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems* (New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1960), p. 33.
10. Letter to Rebecca Strand from Gloucester, Sept. 31, 1931, AAA.
11. In the 1913-15 period when Hartley was associated with Kandinsky, Marc, and others of the Blaue Reiter, as well as with the Delaunays, he shared their interest in the relationship between music and painting. He read at that time Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* the conclusion of which discusses Kandinsky's own use of such categories of titles to his paintings as Improvisation, Impression, and Composition to denote the differing levels of musical association. Hartley also used the term Improvisation as well as Movement, and, more explicitly, *Bach, Preludes and Fugues*, as titles to his own paintings. Musical themes occur also in his poetry, such as a group of unpublished poems entitled "Provencal Preludes."
12. Unpublished Hartley manuscript, Yale Collection of American Arts and Letters, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
13. Robert Duncan, "Notes on Poetics: Regarding Olson's Maximus," *The Black Mountain Review,* #6 (1956); revised and reprinted in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, ed. Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), p. 188.
14. Letter to Norma Berger, August 22, 1940, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
15. Edward Dorn, "What I see in *The Maximus Poems*," A Migrant Pamphlet, 1960; reprinted in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, pp. 298-99.
16. Quoted in *Feininger/Hartley* (Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 63. (The Sprinchorn/Hartley letters are still unavailable to researchers.)
17. Hartley read widely in the Christian mystics—Boehme, St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse, and Richard Rolle, among others; he loved poets and painters of a decidedly mystic nature like Ryder and Francis Thompson; he painted in a quasi-mystical vein in some of his prewar German abstractions and would do more in Mexico; and, moreover, he had considered himself in the early years as a kind of self-styled mystic. See also: Gail Levin, "Marsden Hartley, Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 52, no. 3 (November 1977), pp. 156-160. As noted before, Hartley read Kandinsky's writings and sympathized with his avowal of the spiritual element in art, but he wrote to Stieglitz that he found *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* too much of a private confessional, that Kandinsky had said in public things that should be kept private, and this was basically his own stand on such issues.
18. Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., n.d.), pp. 144-46.
19. Letters to Rebecca Strand from Gloucester, Sept. 31 and Nov. 27, 1931.