Church at Head Tide #2
Marsden Hartley,
American, 1938 – 1940
Accession #: 64.43.1

medium: Painting, Oil on academy board
culture: North American, US
physical description: Landscape. Architecture
Life dates: 1877 - 1943
on view G360
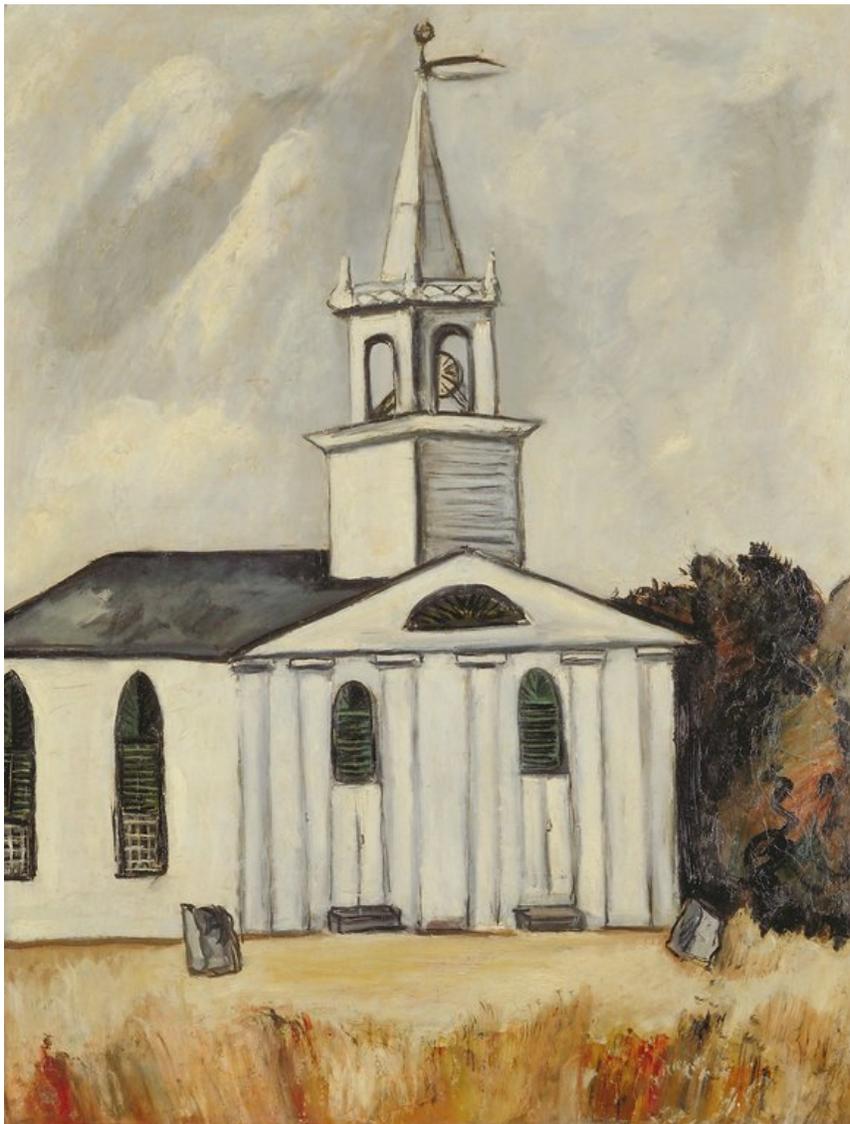

Questions:
- What can you about the subject?

- What can you say about the realism of this picture? (does the artist attempt to be realistic? accurate perspective?)
- What can you say about the foreground and the background? (Are these areas depicted realistically or abstracted?)
- What can you say about Hartley's view of religion? society?

Key Points:

- In his early career, Hartley was inspired by French masters, primarily Cézanne, and by German Expressionists, notably the Blue Rider group, which included Wassily Kandinsky.
- Peripatetic, "He fit in nowhere. Solitude owned him". (1)
- perfected a rugged, often dark but always glowing style of understated symbolism.
- "You always recognize a late Hartley immediately—you feel it as a complete, solid, wise thing almost before you see it." Peter Scheldahl (1)

Biography:
Marsden Hartley was born in Lewiston, Maine in 1877, the youngest of nine children. His mother died when he was eight. His birth name was Edmund Hartley, but he changed his first named to the maiden name of his step mother (Martha Marsden) in his 20s. His family moved to Cleveland when he was 15 and he started his formal art instruction at the Cleveland School of Art. Later, in 1999, at age 22 he moved to NYC to study at the New York School of Art and the National Academy of Design.
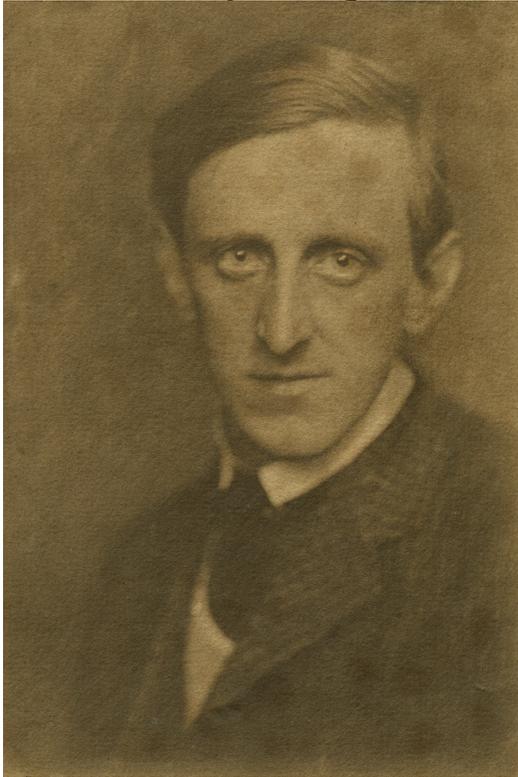
In NY he met Alfred Steiglitz who introduced him around. In 1907, aged 30, at a mystic/ intellectual retreat in Eliot, Maine, he became influenced by Eastern religions. He lived in Paris

in 1912 and Berlin from 1913 – 1916. He painted images of German military pageantry until WWI changed his views, believing that war was no longer 'a romantic but a real reality'.

Portrait of a German Officer, 1914

In Germany, Hartley became close friends with a German lieutenant, Karl von Freyburg who was killed during the war. Some art historians feel this picture represents Hartley's homosexual feelings for him. (3)

In America, Hartley traveled and painted around the country. He participated in the Armory Show in NY in 1913. Throughout much of his life he moved around a lot, never really settling in one place. He lived in Paris, Berlin, Provence, Mexico, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, California, and New York City.

In 1930 he pent time in New Hampshire recording his love of mountain landscapes. In 1931, living in Gloucester, Mass., he painted a desolate area known as Dogtown Commons emphasizing its sculptural qualities and monumental landscape. While there he became enchanted by the mystical and metaphysical which gave his art a new optimism, energy, clarity and simplicity. The Dogtown works seemed to be a turning point in his career.

In 1937 he moved to his home state of Maine where he attempted to depict life there at a local level. There, in his later years he devoted himself to a poetic adventure depicting the landscape very much like Gauguin in the Tahiti, Monet at Giverny, or O'Keeffe at Ghost Ranch.

He died (of heart failure) in Maine at age 66 in 1943.

In addition to painting Hartley wrote and published poetry, essays, and short stories.

We have only this painting at the MIA. The Walker has ten.

Painting Styles:

- Early: in Berlin he was attracted to the expressionism of Kandinsky where he exhibited with the Blaue Reiter in Berlin in 1913.
- Middle: in NY abstract paintings in pastel hues.
- Later: primitive simplified manner (2); sculptural and stark monumentality (4)

Bibliography

(1) The Searcher – Marsden Hartley's Eloquent Restlessness, by Peter Scheldahl, The New Yorker, February, 2003
(2) The Oxford Dictionary of Art, Oxford University Press, 1988
(3) Art History, Marilyn Stockstad, Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009
(4) Hollis Taggart Galleries
(5) Wikipedia