

Image 17

**Marsden Hartley**

(American, 1877–1943)

*Movements*, 1913/15

Oil on canvas

119.5 x 119 cm (47 x 46 7/8 in.)

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

1949.544

Poet and painter Marsden Hartley witnessed momentous changes during his lifetime. From his birth in 1877 to his death in 1943, two world wars were fought, and American culture transformed into an urban, industrialized society. Such changes profoundly affected Hartley, and the many shifts he made in his art reveal his effort to understand the changing dynamics of his world.

Born in Maine, Hartley's talent won him a scholarship to study at New York's **National Academy of Design**. His work eventually received the attention of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who ran the "291" gallery, an influential commercial gallery of **avant-garde** art in the early 1900s. Through exhibitions Stieglitz organized, Hartley saw works of modern European art, including paintings by Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse. Hartley's early work reflects the styles of these French modern masters. He traveled frequently and lived abroad several times during the course of his life. Hartley lived in Paris in 1912, then relocated to Berlin in 1913. While in Germany, Hartley made his way into the most progressive art circles and embraced **abstraction**.

*Movements* was painted during Hartley's stay in Berlin. While there he met artist Vasily Kandinsky, a pioneer of abstract art in which shape, line and color bore little or no relationship to recognizable objects or subject matter. Kandinsky instead believed that art should convey a particular feeling or emotion, and often associated painting with music. He thought, for example, that certain colors evoked particular musical sounds. In Hartley's painting, the abstract forms that surround the central red circle and black triangle move with a rhythmic flow not unlike that of a musical composition. The title itself also refers to different sections of a musical piece.

*Movements* also appears to allude to the fast pace and modern excitement of living in the city of Berlin. Hartley emphasized that his art derived from personal experience, and the city stimulated his creative energy. He employed rough, **gestural** brushstrokes throughout the **composition**, rendering bursting shapes and explosive colors with a vigor that suggests the noisy and chaotic impact of urban life.

The artist eventually returned to America and settled in Maine in the 1930s, where he had grown up, but he continued to travel. His later style became less abstract, with recognizable images and subjects, which included **genre** and landscape, including views of New Mexico.

**THEME:**

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Marsden Hartley, *Painting No. 50*, 1914–15

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