

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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PAINTINGS BY FEININGER AND HARTLEY SHOWN AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Two native American painters--Lyonel Feininger, born seventy-three years ago in New York City, and Marsden Hartley, born sixty-seven years ago in Lewiston, Maine--share a double retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art from October 25 through January 14. The Museum is publishing a joint catalog on the two artists and after the New York showing will circulate the exhibitions throughout the country.

Although Feininger lived in Germany for half a century and Hartley spent most of his life in his native America, the present exhibition is not the first in which works by the two painters have been shown together. Paintings by the two men were exhibited in 1913 in the First German Autumn Salon in Berlin and, at different times, both were invited by Franz Marc to exhibit with the Blue Rider group in Munich and Berlin.

In the shaping of the careers of these two American artists Europe had an effect on the work of the artist who stayed principally in his native land, while America played its part in the life of the artist who lived chiefly abroad. Hartley made his first trip to Europe in 1912 and during the next decade or so returned several times to study and work in England, France, Italy and Germany. In 1906 Feininger, living abroad, became a cartoonist for the Chicago Sunday Tribune, drawing two pages of comics weekly: The Kin-der-Kids and Wee Willie Winkie's World.

Yet the art of each of these artists remained strongly American, nourished but not dominated by external influences either at home or abroad. Hartley once wrote:

"I refuse to accept any status as a Europeanized artist or person, for Europe culturally speaking makes no difference in my life. I am as I always was and will remain to the end. America offers one thing, Europe another, and neither is more remarkable than the other or preferable."

Feininger, who returned seven years ago to live permanently in the land of his birth recently said:

"Coming back after so many years of absence has been a strange experience. I went away as a musician; I came

back as a painter. People I had known before were most of them dead. Of the conditions and surroundings I had been familiar with nothing was left. I had to readjust myself in every respect and sometimes felt my very identity had shriveled within me. But I was met with kindness and good will all around. That helped a great deal, yet it took me some time to put forth new shoots. In Germany I was 'der Amerikaner'; here in my native land I was sometimes classified and looked upon as a German painter--some have seen relationship to Chinese art in my work--but what is the artist, if not connected with the Universe?"

The Feininger exhibition, directed by Dorothy C. Miller, Curator of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, includes approximately 70 oils, 75 watercolors and drawings, 12 prints and studies for murals. Hudson D. Walker, friend and patron of Hartley during the latter part of the artist's life, has directed his exhibition. Mr. Walker is treasurer of the American Federation of Arts and a Trustee of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Retrospective in scope, the exhibition is in effect a memorial to Hartley who died suddenly September 2, 1943 at Ellsworth, Maine, not far from his birthplace. Some weeks before his death Hartley knew that the Museum had scheduled a one-man exhibition of his work. The exhibition comprises 92 oils and 19 drawings, prints and pastels. The joint catalog includes essays on Feininger by Alois J. Schardt and Alfred H. Barr, Jr.; Monroe Wheeler has written an introduction to the Hartley section, which contains excerpts from Hartley's autobiographical notes and his letters.

Lyonel Feininger was born July 17, 1871, (at 85 St. Mark's Place, New York City, the son of musicians. After a childhood and early youth spent principally in New York, with visits to Connecticut and South Carolina, he went to Germany to continue the study of music which he had begun at the age of nine with violin lessons from his father.

Soon after reaching Hamburg, he decided upon the career of a painter and for several years studied art both in that city and in Berlin, then went to Paris for six months of further study. He has said, however, that "music has always been the first influence in my life. Bach before all others....without music I cannot see myself as a painter."

He settled in Berlin where for twelve years he was active as a cartoonist and illustrator for publications such as Ulk and Lustige Blätter. In 1906 he went to Paris to live for two years. Toward the end of his residence there he gave up cartooning and illustrating to devote his full time to painting.

From 1908 until 1936, when he returned to the United States to teach art in the summer session at Mills College, California, he lived chiefly in Germany with an occasional trip to England and to France. From 1919 to 1924 he taught painting and graphic arts at the Bauhaus in Weimar and from 1925-1933 was artist in residence at the Bauhaus in Dessau.

From 1917 until the advent of Hitler in 1933, Feininger was one of the leading modern artists in Germany and received many honors. His paintings were purchased by German museums and municipalities and he was honored by innumerable one-man exhibitions not only in Germany but in other parts of Europe. Also during these years his works were exhibited in group showings in the United States. In 1931 he received the greatest honor of his career in Germany--a comprehensive

retrospective exhibition in the National Gallery, Berlin; after 1933 he was included in Nazi exhibitions of "degenerate" art. Since 1936 he has exhibited extensively throughout the United States.

Feininger never gave up his American citizenship and in 1937 returned to live permanently in the United States; one of his sons, also an artist, is in the United States Army. In 1938 Feininger executed mural commissions for the Marine Transportation Building and Masterpieces of Art Building, New York World's Fair 1939. He now spends his winters in New York and his summers in Falls Village, Conn.

Feininger has said that when he lived here from his birth to his sixteenth year in 1887 the island of Manhattan could really be seen for what it was: a small piece of land surrounded by water--now largely hidden by the multitude of skyscrapers. He was always fascinated by the boats he saw in the harbor and in the rivers that bound Manhattan. Another of the early fascinations which he carried through life was locomotives; a third, though less absorbing in his childhood, was the tall buildings which even then were beginning to characterize Manhattan. These three motives have been almost constant in his art, particularly the ships. A sense of height in the skyscrapers of his youth took new form, when he was abroad, in the tall reaches of Gothic churches and high-gabled houses. Dr. Schardt writes of him:

"The sailboat is the favorite motive. With its swimming body it belongs to the deep; its flying sails catching the wind belong to the heights. The conflict of height and depth resolved, it moves toward a remote destination, and thus becomes one of the most beautiful symbols of man's ability to unite opposing forces....."

"The constellation of these forces have infinite possibilities. Their rays merge and create hills and mountains. They cross one another and ships and sailboats emerge. Embracing again, they produce houses and skyscrapers. Feininger's form has reached its greatest concentration, his color and technique are reduced to the utmost simplicity. His energies are devoted to the creation of a space in which the universal forces, absolute and free, manifest the reality of their ordered being. What Feininger as a young man had sought instinctively, driven by the dark premonition of an unknown goal, he now possessed in his maturity. He had discovered a higher truth in nature, he had discerned in it the symbol of man's being and striving."

Through all his development both as an artist and as a person Hartley remained a son of Maine. He went in childhood from his birthplace to Cleveland where he attended the Cleveland School of Art. Six years later, in New York, he studied at the Chase School and the National School of Design. His first exhibition, held at Alfred Stieglitz's Photo Secession Gallery (better known as "291") showed the influence of Ryder. He speaks of the first time he saw a painting by Ryder:

"It was a picture that so affected me that I in all truth was never the same after the first moment--for the power that was in it shook the rafters of my being...."

The great American mystic painter and the realist Homer were Hartley's principal enthusiasms among American artists, although his earliest artistic allegiance was to the Italian, Segantini. Later came other Europeans, chief among them Rembrandt, Cézanne, de la Fresnaye and Rouault.

With the help of "291" and the American artist Arthur B. Davies, Hartley had his first trip to Europe in 1912-1913. Years later he wrote of "291":

"This room was probably the largest small room of its kind in the world--certainly then--probably now. Everybody in the wide world came there sooner or later--everybody was free to come--it was an open room--and anyone said what he liked.... This room 291 left a lasting impression in the development of art in America and no other room has had precisely this meaning or precisely this effect..."

In his forward Monroe Wheeler says of Hartley:

"The peculiar strength and interest of Hartley as a type

of American artist lies in an integrity and obstinacy of which he himself seems to have been, for the most part, unaware. Even in old age, he spoke of his life work as a struggle, a discipline, a research and an evolution, as if he were still, in his own opinion, a promising youth. Though scornful of easy success and compromise, on his own behalf he was exceedingly humble. Disappointed as to public recognition during four-fifths of his life, obliged to live modestly and uncertainly, he maintained a happy nature, never indulging in any thwarted rebelliousness against the hard modern times or the inartistic habit of mind of his countrymen. He was unbending and unbreakable, as stubborn as a rock, but cheerful, hopeful and indefatigable. Therefore the sense and the lesson of the whole of his life work is greater than the sum of its parts, and already he has become a kind of prototype and legendary personality, inspiring to younger artists.

"He was the type of artist who sought freedom from subject matter as such, but on the other hand, as he developed, he judged his style not as innovation but for its expressiveness with regard to a series of themes which cast a spell upon him. The most obvious instances of this are in still life, but in his portrayal of human figures we see the same search for essential form and less concern with individual characterization. Perhaps his greatest preoccupation, in which he achieved the most striking differentiation of style and originality of design, was landscape: the Alps; the mountains of the Southwest, and Mt. Katahdin and the lighthouses and the stormy waters of Maine. Each is epitomized in thematic variations and certain uniquely impressive masterpieces."

Hartley left behind him seven hundred or more paintings and a rich fund of autobiographical notes, letters, and comments on art. His financial difficulties and the way they were met for a period of two years, are indicated in the following note:

"Mr. Montross had already asked me--how I lived and how much I lived on in the Maine woods--I said \$4.00 a week for board and house rent--but I had no outlook at all then. He said he would like to supply that for me for two years--I replied to Mr. Montross that is extremely kind of you--but you are a dealer and may be expecting something of me--and I can't promise anything--I must have the right to work by myself and fail by myself--and he kindly assured me his interests were completely human--that he was sorry he couldn't do more but he would gladly do this much--and so each month for two years sent me the reckoned sum by the month for which he refused compensation of any sort at the end of the two years --a complete gift which helped enormously to send me on my way."

Hartley himself unconsciously wrote his own summing-up and epitaph:

"The essential nativeness of Maine remains as it was.... The Androscoggin, the Kennebec, and the Penobscot flow down to the sea as solemnly as ever, and the numberless inland lakes harbour the loon, and give rest to the angles of geese making south or north according to season, and the black bears roam over the mountain tops as usual. If the Zeppelin rides the sky at night, and aeroplanes set flocks of sea gulls flying, the gulls remain the same and the rocks, pines, and thrashing seas never lose their power and their native tang. Nativeness is built of such primitive things, and whatever is one's nativeness, one holds and never loses no matter how far afield the traveling may be.... We are the subjects of our nativeness, and are at all times happily subject to it. This quality of nativeness is coloured by heritage, birth and environment, and it is therefore for this reason that I wish to declare myself the painter from Maine."