

Exhibition: *Marsden Hartley: The German Paintings 1913–1915*
On View: August 3–November 30, 2014
Location: BCAM, Level 2



(Image captions on page 4)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Marsden Hartley: The German Paintings 1913–1915* (August 3–November 30, 2014), the first focused look and the first solo exhibition on the West Coast in almost 10 years of the American-born artist's German paintings in the United States. From 1912 to 1915, Hartley lived in Europe—first in Paris and then in Berlin. There he developed a singular style that reflected his modern surroundings and the tumultuous time before and during World War I. Berlin's exciting urban environment, prominent gay community, and military spectacle had a profound impact upon him. *Marsden Hartley* features approximately 25 paintings from this critical moment in Hartley's career that reveal dynamic shifts in style and subject matter comprised of musical and spiritual abstractions, city portraits, military symbols, and Native American motifs.

"The timing of this exhibition at LACMA is right, as it coincides with the centennial anniversary of World War I and the period in which Hartley made these paintings," says Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. "It also affords our visitors a unique opportunity to see three different exhibitions looking at art made in Germany made in and around this era: in addition to *Marsden Hartley*, LACMA is also presenting *Expressionism in Germany and France: From Van Gogh to Kandinsky* through September 14; and opening on September 21 will be *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*."

"This is the first exhibition focused on Hartley's Berlin paintings in the United States," says Stephanie Barron, senior curator and department head of modern art at LACMA. "The Los

Angeles showing positions Hartley both at the forefront of American modernism and within the context of the European avant-garde.”

Exhibition Overview

Throughout his career, Hartley moved between modes of abstraction and representation and experimented with portraiture, landscape, and symbolism. The paintings in the exhibition reveal the effects of the war and demonstrate his adoption of military symbols and Native American motifs in two major series: the *War Motif* and *Amerika* paintings—characterized by the bold use of color and complex abstract compositions. In 1912, Hartley met Prussian officer Carl von Freyburg and soon developed a deep infatuation for him. Von Freyburg was killed in the first few months of World War I, and Hartley’s sorrow over his death greatly affected the direction of his paintings, resulting in the *War Motif* series. Hartley incorporated his interest in the German military and its regalia, often in reference to Von Freyburg, into a coded approach to portraiture. For example, the Iron Cross, which Von Freyburg was awarded, and the number four, his regiment number, often appear interwoven with boldly colored flags and monochrome backgrounds. Though the series began as a memorial to his lost friend and love, over time the paintings transformed into rich explorations of abstraction, color, and military motifs.

In his *Amerika* paintings, Hartley explores Native American imagery with geometric configurations of arrows, bows, and tipis comprising geometric compositions. During his time abroad, Hartley developed an admiration for Native American spirituality and visited ethnographic museums in Paris and Berlin to explore the art and traditions of these peoples. Hartley’s paintings reflect a long history in Germany of interest in Native American cultures and aligned him with other German modernists such as the Blaue Reiter artist August Macke, who painted similar subject matter. Hartley’s *Amerika* series also reveals affinities with the work of other modernist peers, including Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, who explored in their work elements of what they considered “primitive” art. In addition, Hartley’s paintings expressed the growing contempt for the way the United States government treated indigenous communities. His use of symmetrical geometric compositions incorporated both abstraction and figuration with various Native American motifs and vivid colors. Hartley’s other paintings from this period similarly combine representational objects and abstract designs, resulting in vibrant studies of spirituality and mysticism.

Accompanying *Marsden Hartley: The German Paintings 1913–1915* is a companion show of works from LACMA’s permanent collection that offers examples of the artistic movements and historical events Hartley experienced firsthand during this important period of his career. Including works by Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Curtis, Wassily Kandinsky, and

Franz Marc, as well as rare World War I art periodicals, the selections demonstrate Hartley's unique exposure to both American and European influences.

About the Artist

Marsden Hartley (1887–1943) received his artistic training from the Cleveland School of Art, the Chase School in New York, and the National Academy of Design. In New York, he met photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who offered Hartley solo exhibitions in 1909 and 1912. Later in 1912, Hartley moved to Paris, where he met Carl von Freyburg and was exposed to the art and literature of the European avant-garde. The following year, Hartley traveled in Germany and moved to Berlin, where he engaged with leading artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, and Franz Marc, and was included in the first German Autumn Salon. Soon after the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Von Freyburg was killed in France, an event that profoundly impacted Hartley's painting style.

Hartley left Berlin in 1915 and returned to New York. In 1920, he was appointed first secretary of the Société Anonyme, an art organization founded by Marcel Duchamp, Katherine Dreier, and Man Ray. He continued to exhibit in galleries and museums throughout the United States and Europe, and in 1942, he was awarded a prize for his work in the *Artists for Victory* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Hartley died of heart failure in 1943 at the age of 66.

Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue (published in both English and German by Walther König), including essays by Dieter Scholz, curator of modern art at the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Ilene Susan Fort, senior curator and the Gail and John Liebes Curator of American Art at LACMA; Bruce Robertson, Professor of History of Art and Architecture and Acting Director of the Art, Design & Architecture Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Director of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; as well as other leading American and German scholars. The catalogue will act not only as a historical mapping of Hartley's engagement and relationship with Germany but also as a catalyst for further scholarly investigation of this pivotal time in his career.

Related Programming

Free 50-minute docent-led tours will be offered every Friday and Sunday at 2 pm for the duration of the exhibition

Credit

This exhibition was organized by Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It was made possible through a generous grant from the Terra Foundation

for American Art. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.



Image Captions

(Left) *American Indian Symbols*, 1914, oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. (99.06 x 99.06 cm), Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas

(Center) *The Iron Cross*, 1915, oil on canvas, 47 ¼ x 47 ¼ in. (120.02 x 120.02 cm), Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis. University purchase, Bixby Fund, 1952

(Right) *Abstraction (Military Symbols)*, 1914–15, oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 32 in. (99.7 x 81.3 cm.), Toledo Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1980.1013

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 120,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art, Latin American art, ranging from pre-Columbian masterpieces to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over a million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives, such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement at lacma.org. Situated in Hancock Park on over 20 acres in the heart of Los Angeles, LACMA is located between the ocean and downtown.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

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About The Terra Foundation for American Art

The Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. Recognizing the importance of experiencing original works of art, the foundation provides opportunities for interaction and study, beginning with the presentation and growth of its own art collection in Chicago. To further cross-cultural dialogue on American art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, research, and educational programs. Implicit in such activities is the belief that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them.