



Marsden Hartley

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

CLASSROOM CONNECTION

- » Have students create a work of art based on a piece of music.

Encourage students to listen carefully to the music, thinking about how it makes them feel.

After a few listens, students should create a response to the music in visual form.

Marsden Hartley declared in 1937 that he wanted to become “the painter of Maine.” With this statement, Hartley aligned himself with the Regionalism movement, a group of artists active from the early to mid-twentieth century who attempted to represent a distinctly American art that illustrated life at a local level.

Hartley painted *Hall of the Mountain King* in the rugged hills of Stoneham Valley in his native state of Maine. The painting is among the first of Hartley’s mature works and is one of a series of seasonal views of the mountains that reflect the influence of Swiss artist Giovanni Segantini. That influence can be seen in the use of short, staccato brush strokes that make up the

mountainous landscape. However, the painting also reveals Hartley’s own unique vision of the mountains. Hartley chose a square format rather than a traditional rectangular one for his landscape. He also disregarded conventional methods of landscape painting by merging the foreground and background into a single plane, as opposed to rendering a realistic perspective and feeling of depth. The impasto technique of applying paint thickly to the canvas—as well as Hartley’s brightly keyed color palette—are also distinctly modern techniques that work together to produce a feeling of dancing or flickering light on the canvas. Hartley’s reduction of the mountains into stylized waves and his sculptural treatment of the thickly painted clouds suggest that he was less concerned with representing objective reality than he was with expressing his spiritual approach to mountains, which became a recurrent theme in his art.



The title *Hall of the Mountain King* likely refers to the piece of orchestral music written by the

Norwegian Romantic composer Edvard Grieg for Henrik Ibsen’s 1876 fantasy play, *Peer Gynt*. The play has been described as anticipating the fragmentations of emerging Modernism in theatre and poetry, in much the same way as Hartley’s early modern work presaged American Modernism in the visual arts. The relation between music, spirituality, and painting was key in Hartley’s body of work and is easily seen in paintings such as *Hall of the Mountain King*.



Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Educator Programs are sponsored by
Neff and Scarlett Basore.

Marsden Hartley, *Hall of the Mountain King*,
ca. 1908-1909, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in.

¹¹ Maciejunes, Nannette V., and Norma J. Roberts. *The American Collections*. Columbus Museum of Art. Columbus, OH: Museum, in Association with H.N. Abrams, New York, 1988, 88.