



Alpspitze, Mittenwald Road from Gschwandtnerbauer

Date

c. 1933-1934

Primary Maker

Marsden Hartley

Medium

Oil on cardboard

Description

Mountains were a focal point of Marsden Hartley's work as early as 1908, when he painted views of the White Mountains near North Lovell, Maine. Alpspitze, Mittenwald Road from Gschwandtnerbauer is one of a series of mountain "portraits" the artist made during the nine months he spent in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in the Bavarian Alps of Germany, from fall 1933 until spring 1934. Hartley, who admired traditional Chinese painters' depictions of mountains, particularly with respect to their spacing and rhythm, wrote that the central peak of the Waxenstein range alone could "start another school of Chinese painting." This painting of Alpspitze—another favored subject—demonstrates a strong axiality, with the masses of craggy rock distilled to flattened, pyramidal shapes. In the geometric facets of the mountain, one may also detect the influence of Paul Cézanne and his famous series of watercolors and oils of Mont Sainte-Victoire. In fact, Hartley had painted that peak as well, in 1927, when he was living in Provence. Hartley's German sojourn followed a year-long stay in Mexico, where he had been inspired by Aztec art and archaeology, theosophical mysticism, and spirituality. His paintings of the Alps maintain an element of mystical symbolism but differ from the paintings he made in Mexico in that they are derived from direct observation rather than mostly fantasy. Along with this and other paintings, Hartley produced many naturalistic sketches and four lithographs while in Germany. He considered these activities abroad to be "proud preparation for recovering the 'eye' for the native scene" and went on to paint views of Mount Katahdin in his home state of Maine for many years, following a visit in October 1939. This work's wood frame was recently fabricated specifically for it by the frame restorers Eli Wilner & Company, whose services were generously donated by the company and Kevin W. Kennedy, Class of 1970, H2004. The techniques used are identical to those employed by frame makers in the 1930s, and the carving relates to the "wormy chestnut" type of frame associated with Hartley. The painting itself was donated to the Emerson Gallery in 1986 by James Taylor Dunn, Class of 1936. While serving in the United States Army from 1942 to 1945, Dunn sent his earnings to his brother, Montfort Dunn, director of the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art in Saint Paul, Minnesota, for the purchase of works of art for his collection. This painting was included in a 1944 exhibition of Hartley's work held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which subsequently toured the country. Montfort Dunn likely purchased it after seeing the exhibition at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (see also cat. no. 82). (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) This work's wood frame was recently fabricated specifically for it by the frame restorers Eli Wilner & Company, whose services were generously donated by the company and by Kevin Kennedy, Class of 1970. In selecting a frame for the Hartley, reference was made to known frame styles associated with the artist. We made particular reference to the silver-gilded frame found on the closely related painting Garmisch - Partenkirchen, also dated 1933, in the collection of the Milwaukee Art Museum (see attached). Together with the Wellin Museum's curatorial team, the decision was made to find an appropriate frame with a silver finish, which we felt would compliment the tonality of the painting. After reviewing a number of options, a mid-20th century American period frame was selected from the Eli Wilner inventory with both a silver-gilded surface and a hand-carved rhythmic detail at the outside edge. The carving relates the frame to 'wormy chestnut' style frames of the same period, which are also associated with Hartley (see attached image of the frame on Hartley's Mount Katahdin Maine). The Eli Wilner master carvers, gilders and finishers replicated this period frame using the same techniques that would have been used by the finest frame makers of the 1930's.

Dimensions

Overall: 17 9/16 × 29 9/16 in. (44.6 × 75.1 cm) Frame (11/2016): 24 1/2 × 36 1/2 × 1 7/8 in. (62.2 × 92.7 × 4.8 cm)