

# CAPE ANN Museum

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### MARSDEN HARTLEY ON CAPE ANN : HARTLEY'S 16 YEAR RELATIONSHIP WITH CAPE ANN LECTURE TRANSCRIPT

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#### Video Description

From 2012 Press Release: In 1931, the American Early Modernist painter Marsden Hartley spent a life-altering summer in Dogtown. But Hartley had a long-standing relationship with Cape Ann that began years earlier. Elyssa East, author of *Dogtown: Death and Enchantment in a New England Ghost Town*, will discuss Hartley's sixteen-year relationship with Cape Ann and how it

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changed his life and work. “Marsden Hartley on Cape Ann” is offered in conjunction with the special exhibition Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown, which is on display at the Cape Ann Museum through October 14. The lecture is generously sponsored by the Cape Ann Savings Bank.

Elyssa East is the author of Dogtown: Death and Enchantment in a New England Ghost Town, which won the 2010 P.E.N. New England/L. L. Winship award in Nonfiction. A Boston Globe bestseller, Dogtown was named a “Must-Read Book” by the Massachusetts Book Awards and an Editors’ Choice Selection of the New York Times Sunday Book Review. Elyssa has received fellowships and awards from the Ragdale, Jerome, and Ludwig Vogelstein Foundations; Columbia University; the University of Connecticut; the Phillips Library; and the Corporation of Yaddo. Her short fiction has been anthologized in Cape Cod Noir and her nonfiction has appeared in The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The San Francisco Chronicle, and other publications nationwide.

Funding for this program was made possible through a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which promotes excellence, access, education and diversity in the arts, humanities and interpretive sciences, in order to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents and to contribute to the economic vitality of our communities.

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## Subject List

Marsden Hartley	Dogtown history
Alfred Stieglitz	T.S. Eliot
1984 murder in Gloucester	Dogtown conservation

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## Transcription

Courtney Richardson 0:02

Welcome to the Cape Ann Museum. I'm Courtney Richardson, Director of Education and Public Programs. If you are a member and supporter we thank you. And if this is your first visit to the museum, we hope that it will not be your last. Please return with family and friends often. Summer 2012 has been a landmark season for us. Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown has received an overwhelmingly great response. It has been featured by the Boston Globe, Yankee Magazine, American Art Review, and in Art New England, stating the exhibit is not to be missed. If you haven't had a chance to see it, please head upstairs afterwards. Also afterwards, just to note, Elyssa will be signing books and you can purchase them upstairs at the reception desk and then bring them back down here.

0:51

We are deeply grateful to the Cape Ann Savings Bank for their generous support of the lecture series which was offered in conjunction with the exhibition. The Cape Ann community and its visitors have been treated to the many views of Hartley in Dogtown by biographer Townsend Ludington, novelist Anita Diamond, and by author Elyssa East this afternoon. We hope you will join us for the final lecture of the series by scholar Gail Levin on September 22.

1:20

In 1931, Marsden Hartley spent a life-altering summer in Dogtown. Anyone who has read her book knows that it was Marsden Hartley that brought Elyssa East to Cape Ann and to Dogtown. In an effort to learn more about his inspiration and to find some of her own, she uncovered a deeper story. *Dogtown: Death and Enchantment in a New England Ghost Town* won the 2010 PEN New England/LL Winship Award. A Boston Globe bestseller, *Dogtown* was named a must read by the Massachusetts Book Awards and an editor's choice selection of the New York Times Sunday Book Reviews. Elyssa has received fellowships and awards from the Ragdale, Jerome, and Ludwig Vogelstein Foundations, Columbia University, the University of Connecticut, and the Phillips Library. Her short fiction has been anthologized in *Cape Cod Noir*, and her nonfiction has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and other publications nationwide. Please join me in welcoming Elyssa East.

Elyssa East 2:37

Thank you all for being here. Can you hear me okay? Louder? Louder? Can you hear me now? Is that better? Hi. It's a pleasure to see so many familiar faces and some dear friends. And so I'm going to talk to you today about Hartley and Dogtown. I'm going to read a little bit from the book and show you some pictures. I'm going to drink a lot of water. So don't mind. Don't mind my drinking habit up here. I'm going to have a little right now.

3:13

Much better. So and that's, that's going to be my presentation for you. And I now have glasses, and I'm going to be negotiating them because they're, they're new for me. There. I got them like a couple of weeks ago. I call them my wisdom accessory. Really smart.

But thank you so much for coming. And I really, really want to thank the museum for putting together this exhibit. I walked in last night and started to cry just... Oh no, I'm not going to cry today.

4:00

These paintings that Marsden Hartley made changed his life. They changed my life too. And they're really small. They're very intense. They're really lovely paintings. They're very powerful. And if it weren't for those paintings, I wouldn't have written my book. And so to see them all together, not all of them but many of them, was very moving for me. I hope it will be as moving for you. And I hope that what I have to say to you today will help you connect to them in a very visceral way. But one of the things that I think is really worth saying is before I was a writer, I

studied art history. I worked in some museums. I know how hard it is to put together an exhibit, particularly an exhibit of this scale. Now, again, it's not a large exhibit. But these paintings if you look at the wall text, you'll see that they came from all over the country. And some of them came from private individuals. It's a lot of work, particularly because Hartley's Dogtown paintings are among collectors. They're so renowned. Because there are so few of them, people don't necessarily want to part with them for an exhibit. It took a lot of work on the behalf of the museum's staff to pull the show together and all of the programs that they've done this summer as well, of which this talk is only a mere fraction. So I actually want to give them a round of applause.

5:38

Now I want to thank you all for supporting this museum which made the exhibit possible. My husband and I were recently on Cape Cod, and we thought there would be some great museum there kind of like this and there wasn't and, of course, I'm going to say Cape Ann is so much better. But for him to say that is like really something. He was like Cape Ann is soooo much better! Thank you. Thank you. I know!

6:12

All right, so um...I can see some of you have your [listening aid]. Is that better for those of you in the back? Okay? Good. All right so anyway I think that I like to think of this museum as sort of the jewel in the crown that is Cape Ann and Dogtown, of course, is the heart, but you, you all knew I was going to say that, right? Well, I'm not alone in this line of thinking and feeling. So Marsden Hartley...let's see if my show works. Here we go. Here he is.

6:54

All right, Marsden Hartley first set foot in the region at age 54 in 1931 when he produced most of the paintings upstairs. He also painted in 1934. He described Dogtown in his autobiography as follows. (When you see me do jazz hands, I'm quoting, okay?), so "A sense of eeriness pervades all the place, therefore, and the white shirts of these huge boulders, mostly granite, stand like sentinels guarding nothing but the shore. Seagulls fly around away from the marshes to the sea. Otherwise, the place is forsaken and majestically lonely, as if nature had at last formed one spot where she could live for herself alone." Now, you may sense from this passage that in addition to being a painter Hartley was also an accomplished writer. He published essay collections and volumes of poetry, and I loved the poetry of this description in particular, and other descriptions that Hartley wrote about Dogtown. And most of all, I just loved the idea that a place, not Paris, not Rome, not Buenos Aires, but a forgotten place, essentially in someone's backyard, could be such a life-altering experience. So I wanted to know how this happened for Hartley and what this particular place was. So to set the stage for that I want to read a very condensed passage from the opening of my book, and here let's see another visual.

8:38

There we go. So we had to do a little technical switch at the last minute, which is why this is a little clunky. Forgive me.

9:01

Do this for 40 minutes. Just kidding. Okay. Here we go. All right. So for those of you who are unfamiliar with the book, it is in its essence, a biography of Dogtown that was inspired by Hartley and these paintings. As I said, the story dovetails my experiences, my explorations of Dogtown, Hartley's life and work, Dogtown's history, as well as how I learned about the murder of Ann Natti, which took place in the area in 1984. So this passage will introduce Dogtown. It'll introduce where it's located, and it will also set up Hartley in this pivotal summer for you.

After crossing the Merrimack River, I turned on to Route 1A continuing south through the picturesque towns of Massachusetts' North Shore. I was traveling on a hunch in search of an abandoned colonial settlement called Dogtown Common, or simply Dogtown, though it wasn't identified on any map I could find at the time. I was feeling rapturous and inspired, dreaming of paintings coming to light. I was on my way to Gloucester, hoping to find the site that had inspired a series of paintings by Marsden Hartley. The New York Times has called Hartley the most [cough in audience] of the early American modernists, while New Yorker critic Peter Schjeldahl has written, "Hartley's best art looms so far above the works of such celebrated contemporaries as Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, and John Marin that it poses the question of how his achievement was even possible." The answer I had learned was to be found in Dogtown. Hartley, a peripatetic lonesome soul had been obsessed with Dogtown's primordial highland expanse, which he painted on three separate occasions in the 1930s, and while Hartley's Dogtown paintings helped lay the foundation for some of his later greatest work, he also claimed to have been forever changed and possibly healed by his time there. As for me, I was obsessed with Hartley, these paintings, and the 1931 that he spent in this forgotten corner of America. Now Hartley's Dogtown paintings are altogether unusual, hauntingly lonesome, and entirely unpicturesque. But these images of rocks and earth thrive with profoundly felt distillations of energy. Though they evince a spiritual intensity that comes from Hartley's deep meditation upon form, shape, texture, color and place, they are so unusual as to seem almost unreal, as if they could only be found in Ultima Thule, the far-flung ancient mythical land believed to exist beyond the borders of the known world. If Dogtown were indeed a life-altering place, so original in its appearance as not to be duplicated either in New England or anywhere else, as Hartley claimed and his painting suggested, I want to see it. Like a Doubting Thomas I hoped to finger its wounds.

By visual estimation, Dogtown is an unpopulated 3000 acre expanse, some say more that fills the geographical center of the island of Cape Ann. Let's proceed to that map, shall we? Okay, here we go. This is Nathaniel Southgate Shaler's map of Cape Ann. And the dark area, all the colored areas are showing the marks of the Pleistocene era epic glacier that covered Cape Ann and that left most of the rocks on Dogtown and the area.

13:04

So you all can look at that and I'll continue. Dogtown's terrain varies considerably from forest to field, where one can stumble upon stone remnants of colonial homes, to swamp and bog and hill and dale. Much of this highland area, the former pinnacle of an ancient Precambrian mountain, is strewn with a preponderance of giant boulders. These boulders, some of which measure more than 20 feet in height, are glacial erratics from the Laurentide ice sheet, the continent-sized Pleistocene epic glacier that once covered half of North America. Dogtown's northern end is pockmarked with abandoned granite quarries. A commuter rail track that runs between Rockport and Gloucester before continuing southwest to Boston cuts through the area's eastern edge. The Babson and Goose Cove reservoirs demarcate its borders to the southeast and west respectively. Taken together these features define an area that is roughly equivalent to three and a half times the size of Central Park. Today Dogtown is heavily forested, 14:21

as it was in the 1600s before settlers cleared the land, which lends it a wilderness like feel, but the area remained treeless for nearly 300 years. Writing in his journal on September 23 1858, Henry David Thoreau described this sere, barren wasteland as the most peculiar scenery of the Cape. He noted its hills strewn with boulders as if they had rained down on every side. These same rocks captured Marsden Hartley's attention 73 years later.

So that's a little bit from the book.

As you can tell from Hartley's paintings, for those of you who've been upstairs, these rocks were fascinating in their own right. But the region's lore is as much a part of Dogtown as the land itself and Hartley found what he knew of that to be equally compelling. And so I actually am going to read to you from Hartley's sort of understanding of the history. He wrote, (jazz hands) "I found two available entrances to that strange little forsaken Hamlet. No houses left now of that time, the time of pirates when the people had taken refuge in this uncanny upland at the top of Cape Ann, the rocks all heaped up there in the glacial period. The great shipping period opened up in the 60s, whaling traffic to India and all that. The men found new occupations leaving the wives and children alone. And because there's so many dogs, came eventually to be called Dogtown, which name is fixed upon it and remains."

Now, as many of you know, this isn't fully accurate but it captures the mystery. Gloucester was a fishing community, not a whaling one. And as far as I know, it wasn't predominantly involved in the India trade, unlike the fleets out of Salem and Boston. But there are a few things that Hartley didn't mention that I'll touch on briefly. I'm sure he came to know a little bit more about the region's history as he was here. But it's often said that the Highland Common settlement, which was the colonial village that came before Dogtown, started in 1650. But the village was actually laid out 71 years later, in 1721. It's also often said that people moved up there fleeing Indian attacks. This is an engraving of a Wampanoag warrior. Most of the Indian attacks actually happened to the west and to the south of here. There weren't any here on Cape Ann. There was this collective hysteria over an attack.

17:09

What I like about this engraving...I'm just going to move the mouse out of the way, if I can. Hopefully this will... There we go. So in the right you see the colonials coming upon the scene. And then in the lower left hand side, there's actually a warrior who's scalping someone, so the fear of Indians was very real, even though they weren't here. They were in the region and certainly King Philip's War, which happened in the 1690s, was actually one of the deadliest conflicts in American history. But Hartley was absolutely right about the time of the pirates. This is an image of Captain John Phillips. You see in the bottom, it says John Phillips. This is from a book that was published in London. Phillips attacked the Gloucester fleet not far from here off the Isle of Shoals. The year that he attacked the Gloucester fleet was 1724, three years after that village was created. Now the village, this Commons settlement, was full of fishermen, farmers and sea captains, but it began depopulating not long after it began, starting in the 1740s with a parish dispute. But the decline really accelerated after the Revolutionary War when many Gloucester men died. I believe Gloucester lost one sixth of its population. At this time the Common settlement was largely deserted, but for some destitute war widows, and others that Hartley didn't mention that have certainly become part of the region's lore, such as some very colorful witches and two former slaves. Here is an image. This is an artist's rendition of Dogtown from a 1920 Harper's Magazine article. The writer, Sarah Comstock, went all over from Danvers all the way up to here looking for a sort of haunted New England sites. She came to Dogtown and she determined that it was the veritable home of the witches. Salem ain't got nothing on Gloucester's Dogtown.

19:28

Now you see this, this line that sort of goes up toward the moon. Those are not, you know, owls or spooky crows. They're witches! It's an action shot. There they are on their brooms, paint brushes exactly. So were there are a lot of dogs in Dogtown as Hartley presumed? Well, I don't know. This is my dog. She's trying to help me write this talk. Those are her teeth. Um, let's see, she's a really good editor as you can see here.

20:19

She's telling me to type the letters to the word "pet" and then "me". And you'll see her paw is on my hand. She's very forthright in her editorial opinions.

In the late 1800s... During the 1800s and early 1900s, there were at least 60 different places in America called "Dogtown" in 30 different states. It was actually a common pejorative. But by 1839 that village was essentially formally abandoned. The last resident was taken away to the poorhouse. He was a former slave. He died soon thereafter. Now Hartley arrived like nearly 100 years later in 1931. Dogtown was still unpopulated and relatively unchanged. It was still treeless. It was very different and it looked closer to what it had looked like in the 1800s and when people actually visited the region. This is an engraving from 1858 from a weekly magazine called Gleason's Pictorial Weekly. The text says "The erratic blocks of rocks at Gloucester Mass". Now you'll see there are these little boys hiding behind the rocks, there's a family strolling there, couples, and there are some carts going through. Now whether or not there's a lot of wagon traffic, one of the reasons that has been given for the village's decline has been



that the roads were really horrible. And, in fact, Salem's Reverend Bentley wrote that the highland routes were quote, "in a neglected state and by far the worst of any we found on the island." In fact, Bentley said that "most Cape Anners would never think of stretching three miles over the worst roads when they can sail pleasantly only one." I just love this. I think we should go back to that "sailing pleasantly". Not "sailing" but "pleasantly". So the roads might have slowed the wagon traffic but they did not stop people such as Hartley or others from visiting and enjoying the rocks. I'm sure many of you have seen this postcard image. It's actually in the case upstairs in the exhibit. These gentlemen have climbed the Whale's Jaw and they're hanging out. And it was such a fun, popular pastime that even the ladies did it. Here they are.

22:49

These are Victorian era women climbing rocks. I love this image!

So let's continue with Hartley. Here he is. This is a portrait of Hartley by Alfred Stieglitz. I'll explain who he is in a minute. Hartley was born Edmond Hartley in 1877 in the little town of Lewiston, Maine. His mother died when he was eight and soon thereafter his father moved to Ohio with his wife and daughters, leaving Hartley, his only son, behind in the care of an older sister. Hartley was forced to leave school at age 15 and work in a shoe mill to support his family. His childhood was very Dickensian, and it was quite traumatic. It haunted him for a long time. By the time he was 16, though his father said, "okay, kid, come on, come to Ohio". Hartley worked in a quarry office. He eventually began drawing and painting, and he started working with a teacher there who arranged a scholarship for him to attend the Cleveland School of Art. After a semester there, Hartley got some funding and he ended up in New York at the New York School of Art, which is William Merritt Chase's prestigious academy. Once he finished art school, Hartley changed his name to his mother's maiden name, "Marsden". He moved back to Maine and in Maine he began to paint in earnest. He struggled a lot with his spiritual identity and his sexual identity. Hartley was gay. He made his paintings in the Maine White Mountains, which he showed in a group show in Boston. And from there his career took off. He was led to Alfred Stieglitz. Stieglitz was a New York gallery owner. He's the person responsible for bringing European modernism to America. Hartley so impressed Stieglitz that Stieglitz granted him his first solo show of an American artist in his gallery's history. Soon, Hartley was part of Stieglitz circle of artists, which included Paul Strand, Arthur Dove, John Marin, and Georgia O'Keeffe who Stieglitz eventually married. Now with support from Stieglitz, Hartley went to Europe in 1912. When he was in Paris, Gertrude Stein saw his work and exclaimed, "At last an American original!" That's high praise coming from Gertrude Stein. While in Europe, Hartley's style became increasingly abstract, and he created some of his greatest paintings most notably these abstract portraits of a German officer with whom he fell in love. Hartley really moved around a lot. As I said he was very peripatetic, and by 1920, he was painting here in Gloucester. So were Edward Hopper, John Sloan, and Eli Nadleman, but Hartley was miserable. He was so miserable, in fact, he referred to Gloucester as "the cesspool of American vulgarity and cheapness".

25:41



So you've gotta think that guy ain't never coming back there. But, we'll get to that. So years later, he claimed that he meant to go for a walk in Dogtown, which he might have heard about from Sloan who painted the region in 1916. I think that Sloan's Dogtown paintings are here in the museum. But Hartley never went, and by the end of 1920, he was back in Europe where he stayed for most of the decade. He would paint in southern France. And, of course, the stock market crash happened in 1928. He was forced to come home. He ran out of money. He exhibited those French paintings. They were a tremendous flop commercially, incredibly. So you can imagine, basically 10 years of work down the tubes. This was devastating to Hartley. Art tastes had changed. People were now interested in American subjects. They were interested in regional subjects. So Stieglitz said, "Marsden, go paint New England." But Hartley really didn't want to, because he associated his traumatic childhood with the entire area. In fact, he said that whenever he heard a New England accent, "a sad recollection rushed into my very flesh like sharp knives". So, I mean, that's quite a statement. It's a little over the top. But the point is Hartley's anxiety and suffering were that, I mean, they were that strong. He was really still grappling with this. But by the summer 1930, Harley was like, okay. He goes to New Hampshire. He painted, and he, he fell apart. He hated, he hated it. He thought the trip was a complete failure. It depressed him so much, he stopped painting altogether. In fact, he wrote to a friend and said, "I lost most of my willpower and moral courage for what remains to me of the thing called life." So he's sounding suicidal here.

27:44

He's hitting bottom. And before returning to New York, he said, "I've learned one thing, never, never, never to turn north again, as long as I live." All right, so he was done. He was done. He fell into a major depressive episode and he got very sick with mastoiditis, which is an infection of these bones at the base of your skull. It's very easy to get spinal meningitis from a mastoiditis case. So, he, you know, he was potentially fatally, terminally ill. His doctor was concerned that he would suffer permanent hearing loss. He was having a hard time hearing. But more urgently he told one of Hartley's friends that Hartley's condition was so severe that he thought he would only live for a couple of years at most. But Hartley received a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation to paint Mexico and this buoyed his spirits tremendously. And so he, you know, he had that little bit of good news that he needed to sort of pull himself up, and he decided to break his vow against coming north and to paint Dogtown. Now again I just can't stress enough how significant this decision was. I mean, Hartley was clearly moody, anxious, depressed. He really struggled tremendously. But he wrote to Steiglitz, and he said that he had carried the memory of Dogtown everywhere for 11 years. It had that strong a hold on him. He's in the south of France, folks, and he's thinking about Dogtown. Like that says something I couldn't be thinking about! I'd be like, hey, where's the wine...

29:34

All right, so he came back. He came back but he was still very sick. He went to the boarding house on Rocky Neck where he lived in 1920. He was too weak to travel five miles into Dogtown. He slept almost continuously for the first two weeks, and he was still very discouraged. I mean, even when he got that grant, he still wasn't confident or feeling good

inside. But he told a friend, "I must see if I can get to work again." And his health really depended upon it. But there were three lines from a poem by TS Eliot, his poem *Ash Wednesday* that finally inspired Hartley to get going. And they were, "Teach us to care and not to care. Teach us to sit still, even among these rocks." Hartley actually to build up his strength was walking from Rocky Neck to Niles Beach and then out Eastern Point Road, and he was passing the childhood home of TS Eliot, but he didn't make any note of this in his journals or letters. But I really liked this idea that here was Eliot, who inspired him to, you know, get up and get going. And there he is walking by his childhood home every day. It's really a nice symmetry. By mid-July Hartley was strong enough to take a bus from East Gloucester to Dogtown's eastern side. That's where he found his two little entrances. So approaching Dogtown from that side forces one to cross the train, what we think of today as the Babson Boulder Trail. And so Hartley wrote that he found scrambling over the rocks and boulders to be a little tedious. But he walked alone and empty-handed for up to five miles. Now Hartley is doing this and once he found a place that he liked, he just sat. He said, "I did as I always have to do about a place, look at it, see it, and think of nothing else." So here's some of what Hartley might have just sat and looked at. This is what the landscape looked like. This postcard I believe dates from 1920. Really in 1931, 11 years later, things are not that much different. Now Hartley traveled without materials. He just went and looked. Okay. So he's just sitting and looking, which is what we're going to do right now. So 10 weeks after arriving on Cape Ann, his health had improved enough for him to pull through and get some decent work done. And he confided in Steiglitz that he had hoped to "undergo a general resurrection, revelation, evolution out of revolution, to become the painter of Dogtown." And I think it's really critical to point out that he not only wanted to do this, like establish himself as the painter of this region, he really was on an internal journey. He wanted to cross over to a new place inside. So Hartley soon wrote that he was casting off a "wearisome chrysalis", and he arranged to extend his stay. He moved down Rocky Neck Avenue, and he fell into this rhythm of writing in the morning, walking Dogtown most afternoons, and painting at night. Sometimes he did make some sketches in the field, but he wasn't like these plein air painters who travel around with their easels and their paint brushes and their paints. But I think it's really critical that he fell into this, this sort of working method, and he told Stieglitz, "I think I have set the pace for the rest of my life." So as an artist, I can't stress how critical this is that you sort of know your daily rhythm, that you have a working practice, and a habit. To have a system worked out for yourself is critical. And this sort of satisfied everything that Hartley needed, the writing in the morning, the walking in the afternoon, the painting at night. By October Hartley wrote, "I think I'm succeeding in giving my entire being to this extraordinary stretch of almost metaphysical landscape. Although my pictures are small, they are more intense than ever before."

34:00

This is an image titled *In the Moraine, Dogtown*. It's actually upstairs. It's owned by the University of Georgia Museum of Art. Some of you know I'm from Georgia. So that's all I'm going to say about it. That TS Eliot poem Hartley actually wrote on the backside of this painting. So painting in Dogtown for Hartley, as I said, it was an internal journey. In many respects it was like a meditation practice in paint. And certainly, Hartley seems to have felt that way himself.

Hartley finally began to produce the kind of paintings he wanted to create New Hampshire the previous summer. He was writing prolifically. He finished enough poems to fill up a volume that he planned to title Pressing Foot. And by December, this is about six months in, and he basically planted his flag like he's standing on the moon and planting his flag, and he said, "Dogtown is mine. And as far as I know, I have put it on the aesthetic map. I must do some more Dogtown pictures. It is so in my system." Dogtown gave Hartley the New England homecoming that had so eluded him in New Hampshire that he previously vowed never to return to the region. He wrote that Dogtown had given him, quote, "a real connection with my native soil. It's a place of psychic clarity". There you have again a "place of psychic clarity". This is that internal journey. He composed a poem that he titled Return of the Native, and it included these telltale lines, "He who finds will to come home will surely find old faith made new again and lavish welcome." The native had at last returned. Now the hold that Dogtown had on Hartley really did stay in his system. He came back to Gloucester in 1934. I would say about 40% of the paintings upstairs are from 1931, another 40% from 1934. And the rest are from 1936, when Hartley painted Dogtown from memory. So it really did stay in his system. Eventually he fully embraced his New England identity. He moved to Maine where the inspiration and some of the painting techniques that he found in Dogtown really served as a springboard for his later less critically acclaimed work. He died in Maine in 1943, at the age of 66, so he certainly lived for more than two more years. But Dogtown as I said, was a very, very pivotal, pivotal experience for him, and I hope that that you will all go and see the exhibit after this and look at these images and think about that internal journey as well as just his experience of the landscape itself. So thank you very much for being here and thank you for your time.

37:20

Shall we do some...Do any of you have any questions, comments? Have you all seen the exhibit? Those of you who haven't, you must go running up there. It's really fantastic. Any questions? Yes?

Unknown Speaker

When I hear you talk about Hartley...

Elyssa East 37:37

Nice t-shirt, by the way.

Unknown Speaker 37:43

I read your book. I loved your book.

Elyssa East

Thank you.

Unknown Speaker 37:50

But when I hear you speak, you speak about half of the book. I wonder if you could address the other half of the book about the murder. Someone told me that you were pushed by your publisher to include that part of the book.

Elyssa East 38:01

Well, so, that's right. Half of the book tells the story of this murder. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the story, and essentially the way that my book evolved is that, I mean, it made perfect sense to me that this story of Hartley it is not dramatic enough. It's an internal journey. And I certainly had some people tell me, "Don't go to Dogtown, Elyssa. There was this murder." I was personally very reluctant to write about it, and then it just, it did start to click, and people did say, "You know, that murderer. You should write about that murderer." And, and I did and I'm actually really glad. I actually really understand now on the level of storytelling why that was so critical, why that was so important, and actually, for me, made the whole thing come together and afforded me an opportunity to talk more about Dogtown's conservation and all the efforts that, how the community came together after that event. For those of you who are curious about the murder, who haven't read the book, there was a local school teacher. The man who attacked her was a very troubled member of the community, and it was really an awful, horrible, trashy... but he did. I don't want to give away the ending of the book if you haven't read it. But he's no longer here, so Dogtown is very safe and certainly the museum has, has really taken the lead with doing a lot of wonderful programs up there this summer. I wish I was living here to go do some of them. So yeah. Yes?

Unknown Speaker

Are you planning to do any more personal works on Dogtown?

Elyssa East 39:51

Probably not. I mean, I'm, you know, this book came out in December of 2009. And I'm trying desperately to finish another book. So, so yeah, I'm moving on. But I'm always thrilled to be back here and to be going to Dogtown, of course.

Unknown Speaker

What's the book you're writing?

Elyssa East

I'll say about the book that I'm writing is that it's a novel, and it's very different in many respects. But I do think that some of the ways that Hartley influenced me are still part of the story. The main character is a garden designer, and she really views herself as being an artist who works with plants. This idea of just involvement, concern for the environment, which is a big part of Dogtown for me. And it actually was for Hartley as well. So that is all part of the book, but it's, it's sort of an anti-romance romance. One of these days I'll finish it. Maybe I'll publish it and then I can talk to you guys about that. So we'll see. Knock on wood. Thank you for asking though. Yes, in the back?

Unknown Speaker 41:08

Yes, first thank you very much. Your talk and the book, It's wonderful. I live just on the edge of Dogtown and I teach here in Gloucester, taking students out into the woods. But my question for you, what I find intriguing is trying to match what I see with what Hartley saw. And you said that he didn't take his easel with him, so he's not painting a particular thing. But other than that, other than his painting and sketch of Whale's Jaw, is there any way of knowing which rocks he was looking at or what spot he was looking?

Elyssa East 41:55

I love this question. You know that this is sort of hitting me right in the heart, because when I first came up here I had all these Hartley books with me, and I was like, I'm gonna find the paintings. I'm gonna do it. I mean some people can explore temples and ruins in you know, in South America, but I'm finding paintings and I really flopped at it horribly. So there are some images that are not in the exhibit. There's an image that clearly has to be Peter's Pulpit. It's not in the show. And it's great. It's like this giant squat marshmallow of rock and next to it is like tall skinny cairn like this and, and it's just a giant rock standing completely alone. I think that might be Peter's Pulpit, but part of the story was I was actually looking for this particular painting in the landscape. And I thought I had found it by the end of the book, but I was in Dogtown last fall, and I was like, that's it. That's that painting. That's the painting. That's it right there. And of course, you know, I could be wrong both times. I don't really know. I do think that it's significant that Hartley stayed on Rocky Neck. And so he's going up that Babson Boulder Trail. He's going to the east side. I was largely approaching Dogtown from the west. So if you are looking for the paintings, I think that's one way to do it. But he did paint from memory, and so that is significant. There's another painting called Flaming Pool. It's very likely that that's Briar Swamp. But who's to say? You know, it could be Grannie Day's Swamp, but I think it was probably better or easier for him to access Briar Swamp. Again, you have to try to imagine it without any trees and at which time Grannie Day's Swamp might have been really just like. Hey, there it is. That's a swamp, whereas today it is harder to see from the trails. But I think it's a great exercise. And certainly these paintings, this painting Summer Outward Bound and Blueberry Highway, which are upstairs, I mean, those have to be the Dogtown Road or the Common Road. And in fact, I was once walking with Ted Tarr, who's here today, and we were going up the Dogtown Road, and he goes, "There's your painting" and it looked... I think it could have been this image. This is Summer Outward Bound. And, and yeah, it looks like a very good contender for it.

So just to bring something back to the book and the Natti murder, this painting was originally owned by Bob French, and Bob French chaired one of the first Dogtown committees that sort of helped really get people out and back into Dogtown, to reclaim, sort of take back the woods after that incident. And I, Bob was a really wonderful man. He was really involved with protecting Dogtown after that, sort of helping people recover and helped the community recover. And I met him. I got to interview him. I got to see his collection before he died and donated it to the museum. And it was really wonderful. But we had a very similar conversation and Bob, he knew Dogtown very well. And he was like, "I don't know. He's an artist. He's making it up." And so, you know that.

45:31

Anyone else? Yes?

Unknown Speaker 45:33

Just out of curiosity, everybody who's read the book, just raise your hand. So my question is, and there was something in your book that struck us all and, and because, you know, in probably vastly different ways for everyone of us we have some kind of relationship with Dogtown, you know. So what is about Dogtown that prompted you to sort of jump so deeply into it? Yeah. And produces a room like this, you know, with all these people who have this sort of interesting and hard to define relationship with this mystery place?

Elyssa East 46:20

Yeah. Well, it is a mystery, isn't it? And, in fact, if we went around one-by-one, we would all come up with a different hard to define answer. You know, I think part of it for me was that it still exists, and that this place that you could just go to this place and that you could have that experience of almost like being a kid. And I felt it's almost Narnia-like. You know, you walk through the wardrobe and then you're in this place, and there are these stone remnants, and they are these giant rocks. And today, there's all this wildlife. Then there are these trees and it's quiet, and there is a different kind of vibe there, and I think that Hartley captured it, that the place sort of stands for itself alone. It really has that feeling. And, and of course, there's all the lore, but the place itself, there's something about that land I think even if you didn't know the stories, you know that it's just distinct. And it's really wonderful. It's incredible. And it's entirely unique. And, you know, I came, I grew up in Georgia. I grew up, and I say this in the book, I grew up next to this Civil War battlefield. So I also spend, you know, all this time going there with my dog as a child. It's got a totally different vibe, if you will. It really does. And also I, the town that I grew up in, you know, when I was younger there were cornfields everywhere, and now it's all houses. I mean, wild, open spaces are so rare and they're so valuable. To just stumble upon something so big in such a densely populated place I think is also part of it. That sounds so wonky, but I really do think that that's part of the magic of it. That it's still there. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 48:14

I was just thinking about that. One of the pictures you've had you talked about being reforested? Showed that dam.

Elyssa East 48:20

Right.

Unknown Speaker 48:23

It's an interesting mixture of things which were, as you say, ruins, where you see mankind's attempts to contain certain parts of it, yet it's completely overgrown.

Elyssa East  
Yes.

Unknown Speaker 48:34  
Yeah, and all the quarries. All these activities are going on.

Elyssa East  
Right.

Unknown Speaker  
It's still this natural sense.

Elyssa East  
Right.

Unknown Speaker 48:42  
We failed to overcome it.

Elyssa East 48:45  
Yeah, it's so, it is wild. I mean, that's what and I totally agree with you on that. I mean, the place is so.... I've been coming here since 1999, and it just seems to be getting wilder all the time. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 49:02  
I grew up in Gloucester, and as a child or as a kid, Dogtown had a different feeling for me. And it wasn't really 'til I saw a Hartley painting, that it just struck me in a completely different way. So I, I assume that it's a different experience than a lot of people have. And when I saw the paintings, it was like a magical moment. And it just... all the eeriness and all the stuff that I hadn't seen when I was a kid came to me from him.

Elyssa East 49:41  
Yeah, and if that, I think that's a really revealing comment about the paintings, and in Hartley's writing he so often the adjectives that he uses most when describing Dogtown are “forsaken” and “eerie” and that's how it really struck him. Also “majestic”, the “majestically lonely”. You know, you still can go there and have I think some of that eeriness or some of that comes from the fact that you do feel that nature, that time, that geology, they are bigger and larger and more enduring than you. And that's a very powerful, powerful sentiment. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 50:24  
The thing about Dogtown and Hartley is that they're loaded with myths and legends about Dogtown. He really legendized it. I think that the big thing about Hartley is that he made, not exactly new, but it was a set of really powerful myths all over again, about a place that already



had layers of myths. So that's, I think, one reason why, you know, so, I mean, local places need writers or painters.

Unknown Speaker 51:01

You know, artists to mythologize the place, and they need to do it over and over again.

Elyssa East 51:08

Right. Right. I mean, one of the things that's interesting about these images of, you know, the, the erratic blocks of rocks, and that was made in 1858. And then the painting, the watercolor of the rocks with the witches, which was done in 1920 when people were really into spirituals and séances. You know, it's after the war. So there's a different, there's a totally different time. We project, you know, our era and who we are on to the landscape. Hartley did that. And you're right. People have to, people have to come and sort of redefine the place for themselves. I just think it's really fantastic how much this museum this summer has done programs there and introducing children to Dogtown so that they learn it for themselves and it can become their place as well. It's, that's such an important, such an important key, because if people don't know it, and don't experience it, not just in a book but also on foot, then they won't learn to appreciate it. Yes?

Unknown Speaker 52:15

You're an art historian or you started as an art historian and a writer. But so much of Dogtown is geology. Was that hard for you to dig into?

Elyssa East

Well, no because, you know, when I went to college I took geology at the, you know, at the local university. The Rocks for Jocks class was a lot easier than the biology or chemistry requirement. But that wasn't really why I did it. It was more that I was just, I really like rocks, and I grew up next to a mountain. Hartley has these comments. Let me go back, about when Babson is up there carving his boulders, and he, he says, "Oh, this is the worst kind of intervention. It's similar to, to this horrible thing happening down there in Tennessee." And he actually means Georgia and Georgia Stone Mountain which is a granite outcropping. But I... Did I say my brother was a rock climber? He was a mountaineering guide. And so he, my brother actually taught me a lot about rocks, how to read a rock, to climb, to climb them even. And I used to. I have a terrible fear of heights, but I used to do rock climbing with my brother. And from, from him I learned a lot about rocks but in a tactile sort of physical way. And, and that was when I was really young. So this whole Hartley rocks thing, geology, it was not so foreign or so strange to me. And I love this geologic map of Cape Ann and I'm sorry that it doesn't show any more detail. So, I just find it really, really fascinating. I find rocks fascinating. They really have a wonderful spirit. I'll tell you this very funny story about a giant rock in Iceland that was sort of in the middle of a road or next to it, and they wanted to widen the road because of the traffic, and in Iceland apparently people, you know, believe that (for certain people, I don't know if this is true of everyone) that the rocks are where the little people live, and there was a big community debate about what to do with the rock. And, and so finally, you know, they call

in this geologist. He's sort of the expert in the country and folks are like, so come on, tell us. You know, what about these little people? Shouldn't we just blast the rock or just move it? And do you really think, you're a man of science, that these folks exist? And he said, "I wouldn't deny the possibility of their existence." So I just love that, this idea of just, you know, that there is a real, you know, you say animal, mineral or vegetable, mineral in many cases being the rock, but they really do have a presence. And, and so in terms of understanding the geology, I'm not, I'm not an expert on that. I'm not an expert on art history. I'm not an expert on anything. I'm just this curious person poking around. So this new book, the main character being a garden designer, I'm learning everything about plants and driving some people crazy because I'm like, "Hey, look, there's some amaranth." But so yeah, next time I'm sure I'll be asked about my scientific expertise on botany and all. And I hope I'll have another really roundabout answer. All right. Thank you.