



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

JOHN MARIN (1870–1953)

Cape Split, Maine

Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.

Signed, dated, and inscribed (at lower right): Marin 40; (on the back): Cape Split / Maine [faint] /

Property of No. 1 Cousins / Lyda ^{or} Retta Currey / John Marin

RECORDED: Sheldon Reich, *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. II (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1970), p. 705 no. 40.7, illus. // William C. Agee, *John Marin: The Late Oils*, exhib. cat. (New York: Adelson Galleries, 2008), plate 3 illus. in color, pp. 10, 33 // Debra Bricker Balken, *John Marin: Modernism at Midcentury*, exhib. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), plate 9 illus. in color // “Maine Attractions,” *The Boston Globe*, July 15, 2011, page G3, illus. in color

EXHIBITED: Adelson Galleries, New York, November 7–December 19, 2008, *John Marin: The Late Oils* // Portland Museum of Art, Maine, June 23–October 9, 2011; Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas, November 4, 2011–January 8, 2012; Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts, January 27–April 1, 2012, *John Marin: Modernism at Midcentury*

EX COLL.: the artist, 1940–52; by descent to his son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. John Marin, Jr.; private collection, Massachusetts; private collection, Connecticut; [Alexandre Gallery, New York]; [Babcock Gallery, New York]; to private collection, until the present

In 1948, Clement Greenberg, the renowned critic and influential advocate of Abstract Expressionist artists, including Jackson Pollock, postulated, “...is it not beyond doubt that Marin is the greatest living American painter....” (*Art and Culture: Critical Essays* [Boston: 1961], p. 81). Indeed, in February of that year, *Look Magazine* surveyed prominent American museum directors, curators, critics and art historians and published an article on the 10 best living artists, naming Marin “Artist No. 1.”

A key figure in the history of American Modernism, John Marin was one of the most popular and prolific artists of his generation. Described as a “poet in paint and an individualist,” Marin strongly believed that an artist should develop “a seeing of his own choosing,” and he did just that, working in a vigorous semi-abstract style in which he synthesized cubist fragmentation and his concern for outdoor effects with a highly personal approach to line, form, and color (as quoted in “John Marin Is Dead: Water-Colorist, 80,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1953, p. 21; for Marin’s life and career, see Ruth E. Fine, *John Marin*, exhib. cat. [Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1990]). Marin’s oeuvre includes views of New York City; however, his primary thematic interest was landscape, especially the scenery he encountered in coastal Maine.

Born in Rutherford, New Jersey, Marin studied at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken in

1886–87, after which he worked as a draftsman for several years until joining an architectural firm in Union Hill (now Union City), New Jersey, an experience that enhanced his understanding of structure and design. In his spare time, he painted watercolors, attracted to the medium’s transparent, light-reflecting quality, as well as its inherent spontaneity and easy portability. In 1899, at the age of thirty, Marin decided to study art seriously, taking classes under the American impressionist William Merritt Chase, Thomas Anshutz, and others at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Marin made friends and gained recognition there before moving on to the Art Students League in New York, where he studied from 1901 until 1903. In 1905, he went to Paris, where he spent the better part of the next five years. While residing in the French capital, Marin produced etchings of local scenery and painted delicately rendered watercolors. It was there—through his association with the painter and photographer Edward Steichen—that he met Alfred Stieglitz, the influential gallery impresario who went on to organize a groundbreaking exhibition of Marin’s watercolors and oils at his 291 Gallery in New York in 1913. Stieglitz continued to promote Marin’s work until his death in 1946, giving him exhibitions at 291, and later at the Intimate Gallery. He also ensured that Marin’s pictures were shown at other leading Manhattan venues, such as the Montross Gallery and the Daniel Gallery. (For a selection of Marin’s letters to Stieglitz, see Dorothy Norman, ed., *The Selected Writings of John Marin* [New York: Pelligrini & Cudahay, 1949]. See also: Lisa Mintz Messinger et al., *Stieglitz and His Artists: Matisse to O’Keeffe: The Alfred Stieglitz Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, exhib. cat. [New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011]).

Following his return from Europe, Marin continued to paint in oil but eventually turned to watercolor as his preferred medium. Eschewing the evocative style of his Paris period, he began

depicting the skyscrapers and bridges of New York, capturing the energy and optimism of the modern metropolis by means of a dynamic technique that reflected his assimilation of the lessons of Paul Cézanne, Orphic Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism. Marin also began making summer sketching trips to northeastern locales such as the Berkshires in western Massachusetts, the Hudson River Valley, Long Island, and the Adirondacks. However, a major turning point in his career occurred in the summer of 1914, when, at the suggestion of fellow artist Ernest Haskell, Marin made his first trip to the coast of Maine, which he would visit regularly for the remainder of his life. Indeed, in an article published in the October 1928 issue of *Creative Art*, Marin stated that it was important for an artist commune directly with nature: as he put it, “the true artist must perforce go from time to time to the elemental big forms—Sky, Sea. Mountain, Plain—and those things pertaining thereto, to sort of re-true himself up, to recharge the battery” (John Marin, “John Marin, By Himself,” *Creative Art* [October 1928], as quoted in Norman, p. 127). Maine certainly sparked Marin’s creative energy like no other locale. As noted by one of his early biographers:

The Maine coast was the happiest discovery Marin ever made. It struck him like a revelation.... He found here what he was unable to find in the Berkshires, the Adirondacks, on Manhattan Island,—a complete world: islands, trees, grass, mountains, flowers, sand, rocks, ... and an endless expanse of sea and sky” (E. M. Benson, *John Marin: The Man and His Work* [Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Arts, 1935], p. 68).

Marin continued summer visits to Maine’s rocky and turbulent shores for the remainder of his life. For many years his primary output were watercolors, but Marin soon realized that only the thick, viscous impasto of oil paint could truly and best capture his intentions in painting Maine’s rugged and dynamic sea and shore.

In Marin's *Cape Split*, vigorous and fluent brushstrokes forcefully convey the impression of waves crashing and spray exploding off shoreline rocks. The pounding Maine ocean appears as a turbulent amalgam of hues and forms and brushstrokes: energetic and uncontained. Marin already had a longstanding relationship with the Maine sea, and as early as 1914 had written in a letter to his dealer Alfred Stieglitz that the Maine shore represented a "fierce, relentless, cruel, beautiful, fascinating, hellish place." *Cape Split* then became a mainstay of his painting and life, particularly after he bought a house in nearby Addison in the early 1930s. He spent nearly every summer and early fall there until his death.

Painted during a decade of brilliant achievement and critical acclaim, and certainly one of Marin's finest paintings, *Cape Split* demonstrates the exquisite balance between elements of abstraction and realism that earned Marin distinction and continuing recognition as one of the most venerated American artists of the twentieth century.

In his 1987 Marin exhibition catalogue essay for the Parrish Art Museum, New York curator and gallerist Klaus Kertess noted:

Marin would unite the medium of oil with the subject of the ocean to create deeply moving medleys of paint. The rhythmically charged flatness and openness, the willed surrender to paint's liquidity, and the entrancement with the workings of nature so crucial to Marin become totally compatible and congruent with the movements of the ocean. Its incalculable repertoire of flux, flow, and reflectiveness moving into and out of flatness would bring Marin into full mastery of his newly favored medium. In oil, Marin immersed himself not in its ambiances but in the nature of the ocean itself" (Klaus Kertess, *Marin in Oil*, exhib. cat. [Southampton, New York: Parrish Art Museum, 1987, p. 46).

In *Cape Split*, Marin particularly emphasizes the unpredictability and unruliness of the ocean's nature. Kertess explains, "Marin's Maine is not a hospitable bather's resort.... The Maine coast invited drama more than dalliance" (ibid, p. 47). Indeed, *Cape Split* demonstrates Marin's strong, articulate brushwork setting down on canvas the dynamic, dramatic crescendo of wind and waves pounding shoreline rocks in the timeless meeting of earth and sea.

This painting relates directly to another Marin painting, [*My-Hell Raising Sea*](#), which was part of the prominent Barney Ebsworth collection, and which sold at auction in November 2018 for over \$1.5 million. Both paintings were included in the most recent major traveling Marin retrospective (2011–12) and were exhibited together side-by-side.

Cape Split is one of the great works from one of the most significant and recognized periods of Marin's career. In its conception, date, authoritative creative brushwork and palette, its size and state of preservation, it stands as one of the defining masterworks of his life.

Selected Related Works

Reich 38.14

[*Grey Sea*](#), 1938

Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Marin, Jr.

Reich 38.15

[*The Sea, Cape Split, Maine*](#), 1938

Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 in.

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Reich 38.29

[*The Sea, Cape Split, Maine*](#), 1938

Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Mrs. Henry Potter Russell

Reich 39.49

The Sea, Cape Split, Maine, 1939

Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.

Private Collection

Reich 40.16

Green Sea, Rocks and Boat, Cape Split, Maine, 1940

Watercolor on paper, 15 1/4 x 20 1/2 in.

The James Michener Foundation, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pennsylvania

Reich 41.17

[*Green Sea, Cape Split, Maine*](#), 1941

Watercolor on paper, 15 1/2 x 22 1/2 in.

The Wadsworth Atheneum, of American Art, Hartford, Connecticut

Reich 41.26

Movement: Boat, Sea, Rocks and Sky, Maine, 1941

Watercolor on paper, 15 1/4 x 21 3/4 in.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Reich 41.28

[*My-Hell Raising Sea*](#), 1941

Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in.

Formerly Barney A. Ebsworth Collection, Seattle, Washington; sold at Christie's New York, November 13, 2018, Lot 32B, for \$1,572,500.00

Reich 41.40

Two Boats and Sea, Cape Split, Maine, 1941

Oil on canvas, 21 3/4 x 27 3/4 in.

Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Winona, Minnesota

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