

AGNES MARTIN



Canadian-born Agnes Martin (1912–2004) was among the pre-eminent painters of the second half of the twentieth century. A contemporary of the abstract expressionists, though often identified with minimalism, Martin was one of the few woman artists who came to prominence in the predominately masculine American art world of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Her subtle yet powerful work has had a significant influence on artists of her own time and subsequent generations.

This groundbreaking survey provides an overview of Martin's entire artistic output, from lesser-known early experimental works through to her characteristic striped and gridded paintings and a group of her final works that reintroduce bold forms. Essays by leading scholars provide the richest context for Martin's work yet published, showing how an artist who aimed to work with her 'back to the world' was influenced by her artistic contemporaries and spiritual writings, and exploring how this enigmatic figure has been presented and received through exhibitions and photographic portraits. With 150 illustrations, a chronology and in-focus texts illuminating aspects of key paintings, this book introduces the artist to those unfamiliar with her oeuvre and provides new insights for her many admirers.



AGNES MARTIN

Edited by
Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell

With contributions by
Marion Ackermann
Rachel Barker
Jacquelynn Baas
Christina Bryan Rosenberger
Briony Fer
Lena Fritsch
Anna Lovatt
Maria Müller-Schareck
Richard Tobin
Rosemarie Trockel

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Photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni

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Directors' Foreword

'To progress in life you must give up the things that you do not like. Give up doing the things that you do not like to do. You must find the things that you do like. The things that are acceptable to your mind.' Agnes Martin, *Beauty is the Mystery of Life*, 1989

Agnes Martin worked with singular focus and purpose. Yet her paintings and drawings of six decades constitute a vocabulary that is endlessly varied and subtle. Belying the systematic appearance of her use of grids, symmetry and stripes, her canvases are complex in construction and finely nuanced. Martin is one of the pre-eminent painters of abstract art of the twentieth century. One of the few woman artists who came to prominence in the predominately masculine art world of the late 1950s and 1960s, her work has had a significant influence on artists of her own time and subsequent generations.

Our exhibition is the first large-scale retrospective exhibition of the work of Agnes Martin since her death in 2004. The show opens at Tate Modern in June 2015 before travelling to Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. It is Martin's first major retrospective in the United States since the exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1992, and the first in Europe since the Serpentine Gallery exhibition in London in 1993.

In Europe, Martin's work is relatively unknown, even amongst art lovers – perhaps due to the fact that we rarely encounter it in museum collections. Our show presents the first opportunity for international audiences to engage with the full breadth of Martin's practice, providing an overview of Martin's career from the biomorphic paintings of the late 1950s to her very last drawing, made in 2004.

Tate first acquired a work by Agnes Martin, *Morning* 1965, in 1974. Since 2008, five paintings from the 1990s were added to the collection, three of which were acquired jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland through The d'Offay Donation with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund. It is a privilege to represent Martin, who we believe to be a major but under-represented artist. The exhibition is the latest in a series of important exhibitions of the work of women artists at Tate Modern, which has included *Eva Hesse* in 2002, *Frida Kahlo* in 2005, *Louise Bourgeois* and *Doris Salcedo* in 2007, *Yayoi Kusama* in 2012, *Saloua Raouda Choucair* and *Mira Schendel* in 2013, and *Marlene Dumas* and *Sonia Delaunay* in 2015.

For Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, the exhibition is of particular relevance. Various supporters, including artists, helped the museum to acquire a later Martin painting in 2011, *Untitled #5* 1998. It is displayed together with works by her contemporaries – Jackson Pollock, Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, Ad Reinhardt

and Mark Rothko – in the so-called ‘American hall’. To experience this painting in the context of a major retrospective of this unique painter fulfills our desire to engage with Martin’s work thoroughly. The exhibition demonstrates the Kunstsammlung’s intensive engagement with female artists whose role and relevance in art history have not yet been researched and valued sufficiently.

Born in the Canadian prairie, Martin lived in New York City in the 1950s, but it was in the American southwest desert that her work and life found its natural terrain after moving to New Mexico in 1968. Martin first showed in Los Angeles in 1967 at the Nicholas Wilder gallery, then at Margo Leavin during the 1970s and 1980s, and her first retrospective travelled to the Pasadena Museum of Art in 1973. LACMA owns three works that represent three different mediums. The painting *Untitled V* 1981 was acquired in 1986, while the early drawing *Not the One* 1966 was acquired in 2005. Between 1967 and 1973 Martin completed only one body of work, *On a Clear Day*, a portfolio of thirty screen-prints demonstrating the great range of her imagination and her clarity in experimenting with the structure of the grid. We acquired this triumph of printmaking in 2007. It is an honour to reconnect with this important artist in Los Angeles.

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum’s interest in representing Martin’s practice dates from the beginning of the artist’s long career and her early days in New York City. The Guggenheim acquired a canvas by Martin in 1963, the first example of the artist’s work to enter a museum collection. Martin’s work was featured at the Guggenheim in Lawrence Alloway’s landmark 1966 exhibition *Systemic Painting*, representing the minimalist art then current in New York. The Guggenheim has continued to collect Martin’s work in depth – including examples of paintings and drawings that span her entire career – and its holdings are a staple of the museum’s collection of postwar, abstract art. In turn, these works serve as an extension of the Guggenheim’s founding mission to collect and promote abstract art, while also enabling the museum to represent the most immediate roots of today’s expanded and richly pluralistic art field.

Chris Dercon *Director, Tate Modern*

Marion Ackermann *Artistic Director, Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen*

Michael Govan *CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art*

Richard Armstrong *Director, Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum and Foundation*

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We would like to express our profound gratitude to all those who have contributed to the making of this Agnes Martin retrospective. It is impossible to thank everyone who has been a part of putting together this major exhibition at four venues, but our sincere thanks go to all involved.

We are most grateful to Arne Glimcher, Marc Glimcher and Rachel Boyle from the Estate of Agnes Martin. Their generous support from the earliest days of the project has encouraged and helped us to assemble this exceptional retrospective offering new insights into Agnes Martin's work.

At Tate Modern, the exhibition has been generously supported by the Henry Luce Foundation and the Terra Foundation for American Art. We are also grateful for the support of the Artworkers Retirement Society and members of the Agnes Martin Exhibition Supporters Group; Pace Gallery; Froehlich Foundation, Stuttgart; Tate Americas Foundation; and those who wish to remain anonymous. The exhibition has also been supported by Tate International Council. Joe and Marie Donnelly have kindly contributed towards the catalogue. We owe all our supporters a huge debt of gratitude.

All exhibitions rise and fall with the generosity of their lenders. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the lenders, institutional and private. Many have allowed their works to travel for more than eighteen months, enabling people in Europe and the USA to experience Martin's work at first hand, often for the first time.

The success of this project is due to the excellent curatorial collaboration between Frances Morris, Tate Modern and Tiffany Bell, editor of the Agnes Martin Catalogue Raisonné (Artifex Press), together with Lena Fritsch, Tate Modern. We would also like to thank David Grosz, Artifex Press, for his continuous support for Tiffany Bell's participation in this project. We would like to thank everyone else in the curatorial team at Tate Modern for their contributions behind the scenes, but especially Achim Borchardt-Hume for offering invaluable advice and Helen Sainsbury for the logistical oversight of the exhibition and tour. Rachel Kent was instrumental in realising the tour of this project and Carol Burnier Magno deftly coordinated the loan and transport of works. Helen O'Malley has provided valuable administrative support. The exhibition design and installation was overseen by Phil Monk together with Rhona O'Brien. Rachel Barker has given considerable conservation expertise to the project. We are grateful to our curatorial interns Belén Lasheras Díaz and Bar Yerushalmi for their contributions. We would also like to thank all our colleagues in Tate's conservation department, press office, design studio, marketing team, development team and public programme department.

We appreciate very much the involvement and collaboration of our tour partners. We would like to thank the directors: Marion Ackermann at the Kunstmuseum Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf,

Michael Govan at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Richard Armstrong at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Deep thanks also go to the curators: Maria Müller-Schareck at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen; Franklin Sirmans at Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Tracey Bashkoff together with Natalia Lauricella at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

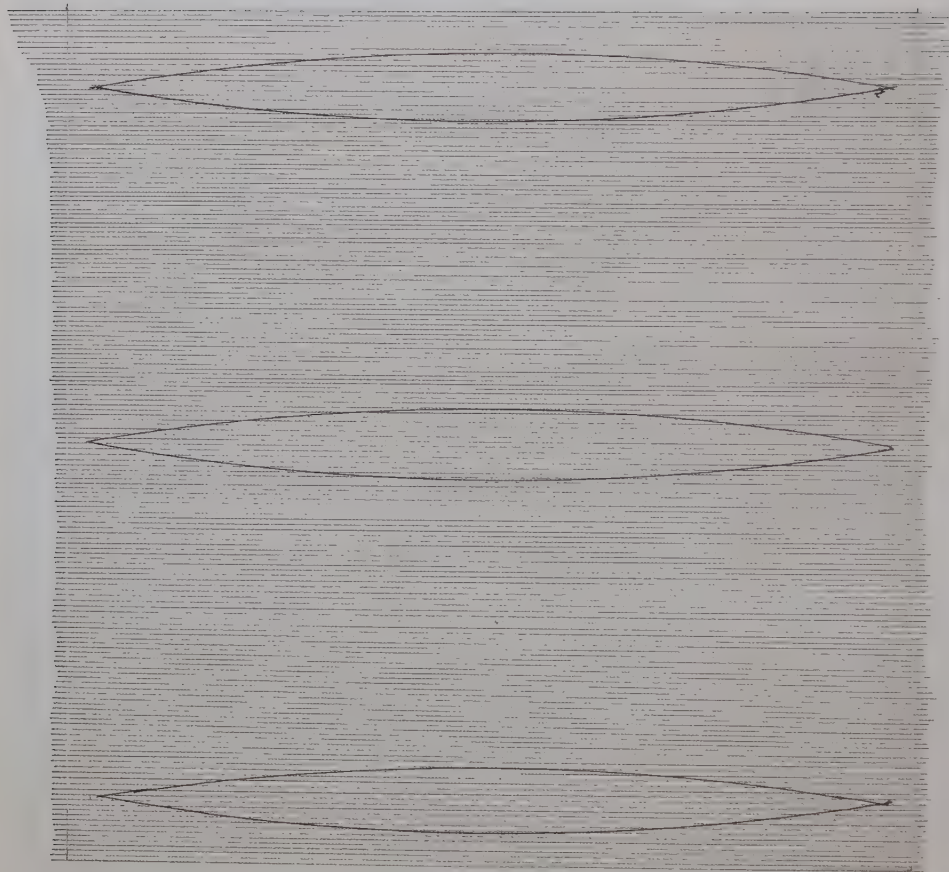
The exhibition is accompanied by a book which opens up new readings of Agnes Martin and her work. At Tate Publishing, deep thanks go to Rebecca Fortey, who worked diligently to accomplish the successful realisation of the publication. We would also like to acknowledge Emma Woodiwiss's work on the colour proofs, Abigail Grater's copy-editing and Fiona Elliott's translation. We are grateful to P.G. Howlin' for designing this book, which beautifully captures the spirit of Martin's art. We are hugely thankful to Robert Feldman, Barbara Moore, Sean Ryan and all photographers who have generously allowed us to reproduce their photographs.

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A number of friends and neighbours of Agnes Martin were especially generous with their recollection. We are grateful to Ellsworth Kelly and Jack Youngerman. In New Mexico, we would like to thank Tony Abeyta; Bill Katz; David McIntosh; Richard Tuttle; Kristina Wilson; Donald Woodman.

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Chris Dercon *Director, Tate Modern*



Introduction

— Tiffany Bell and Frances Morris

In recent times, one hundred years after the ‘birth’ of abstraction, the practice of painting – and especially abstract painting – appears as lively, relevant and debated as ever. There is, it seems, even in our globalised and digitalised world, a deep curiosity about the nature of the medium, how it works, what constitutes good painting and how a painting engages the viewer. There is also a real hunger to examine the history of the medium, from its genesis in the radical ferment – cultural, political and spiritual – of the early twentieth century and its development through the paradigm shifts of modernist art history.

Agnes Martin regarded as her lodestars a number of the painters now in the pantheon of Western abstraction, most particularly her near-contemporaries Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. The uncompromising, restrained stance of Martin’s mature painting, the elliptical and often opaque nature of her statements, as well as, surely, her gender and her reluctance to be seen as part of a historical discourse, have ensured her – at most – a privileged place on the margins of that historical record. Now, over ten years after her death, her position deserves to be looked at afresh.

This survey undertakes close examination of the two distinct periods that define Martin’s career, presenting the full range of early and late work together for the first time. Her early work, rarely exhibited, is, we suggest, essential to an understanding of her oeuvre: it demonstrates how embedded Martin’s practice was in the visual language and literature of her time. Our narrative of her early period begins during her brief stint as a student at Columbia University in New York City, continues in New Mexico with her earliest experiments using biomorphic form, and ends back in New York City with her commitment to a delicately refined form of geometric abstraction, in the early 1960s. In 1967 Martin abruptly ceased to paint, and made an extended journey across the United States and Canada to experience silence and solitude. Martin’s first recorded poetic meditations on creativity and beauty date from this period; they form part of a memorable body of written work examined in this volume by Jacquelynn Baas. The distinctive voice of the artist is represented here by a selection of her published writings.

The second period, which begins when she began to make art again in the early 1970s, spans three decades in which Martin, now settled in New Mexico, adopted a self-imposed template of vertical or horizontal stripes using a reduced colour palette; from then on she restaged the quiet drama of painting continuously for almost three decades. Critics and observers have marvelled at the intensity of these quiet works, all so alike but each one so different from the last. In this volume Marion Ackermann describes a late painting as the ‘synthesis of all that had gone before’, modest in form and subtle in colour though with ‘an immense presence’ and ‘powerful energy that almost takes physical hold of the viewer’.

Martin was her own most rigorous critic. From the beginning she ruthlessly edited out paintings that did not meet her particular standard of perfection. Later she attempted to purge works from her own back history that did not conform to what became her signature style and method. She particularly disliked her biomorphic paintings and those experimental and constructed works from her earliest years in New York. In interviews and conversations throughout her life, Martin regularly deflected questions related to her studio practice and to the hard-wrought development of her work. She did not keep records, and very few studio photographs exist. She discouraged interlocutors from considering her painting in the context of her time or as the outcome of her responses to external artistic stimuli. She privileged experience over interpretation, feeling over understanding, and inspiration over planning. Martin was even more reticent about her life beyond the studio. Her schizophrenia and homosexuality, defining characteristics for those who knew her well, were subjects out of bounds beyond Martin's inner circle.

Building on Tiffany Bell's research undertaken for the forthcoming catalogue raisonné, which informs her overview essay in this survey, it is now possible to reconstruct a much fuller and more complex picture of Martin's development. Essays by Frances Morris on her experimental paintings and sculptures and Anna Lovatt on the importance of drawing in Martin's work, as well as 'in focus' texts by Rachel Barker, Richard Tobin and Christina Bryan Rosenberger, shed new light on aspects of her practice and show her unique mature style to be informed by close association with her contemporaries as well as by a rich array of inspiring role models. Above all, her paintings, even those canvases made towards the end of her life – examined here by Briony Fer – were shaped by lessons she had learnt through rigorous experimentation and innovation many years before. On a more personal note, Lena Fritsch's essay examines the difference between Martin's public and not so public persona as evidenced in a number of known and not so well-known portraits of the artist.

As Maria Müller-Schareck points out in her essay on the presentation and critical reception of Martin's work in Europe, there has been a long-standing appreciation of the artist and her art among art enthusiasts but often without a full knowledge of the works themselves. Martin always had an ambiguous attitude towards exhibitions and the scholarly and critical attention they generate, sometimes even obstructing the planning of major exhibitions. As a result, the full range of her work has been difficult to consider.

To a large degree, enthusiasm for Martin's work has been generated by artists, both American and European, across several generations. From her earliest shows, she gained support from her peers: Newman installed her exhibitions at Betty Parsons Gallery, and Ad Reinhardt recommended her work for an important early

show at Virginia Dwan's gallery. Donald Judd wrote about her exhibitions, and the work of artists such as Eva Hesse and Dorothea Rockburne among many others has been associated or compared with Martin's. The following generation of artists encountered Martin's work principally through her Pace Gallery exhibitions of the 1980s and 1990s as well as, increasingly, on the walls of museums in Europe and North America. A steady trickle of devotees made their way down to New Mexico, and were inspired by the uncompromising stance of her chosen lifestyle as well as in her painting. Richard Tuttle, Roni Horn, Richard Serra and Rosemarie Trockel (in this volume) are among the many senior figures – to cite just the sculptors – who have found in her work resonance within their own practices.

Abstract painting, imbued with new terms, contexts, conditions and methodologies, has come under scrutiny from a generation of younger artists and their critics who are claiming the genre for themselves. There will be many for whom this is the first opportunity to view Martin's work in depth, to reflect on the contemporary relevance of her distinctive practice and its place in art history. What more appropriate moment could there be for reanimating the discussion around Agnes Martin?





Happiness is the Goal

Agnes Martin is revered as an artist of quietly serene paintings that evoke a meditative response using simple, reductive means. She is also admired for her decision to live a life of solitude and extreme simplicity in the New Mexican desert, having left New York City at a moment when her art was gaining considerable acclaim and attention. Conflating her lifestyle with her art, admirers have described her as an ‘artist’s artist’ and a ‘high priestess of Minimal painting’.¹ Martin’s writings, a compilation of journal entries, poems and lectures, have further enhanced the impression of her as a wise and spiritual, creative being. Primarily directed to younger artists, these texts advocate an unencumbered life spent in pursuit of a kind of perfection and beauty that is non-intellectual, though held only in the mind. Her remarkable story, plus her art and writings, have inspired not only visual artists but also poets and musicians over several decades.²

Martin’s art came to public view in the late 1950s when she began exhibiting at Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. Because Parsons was already renowned for showing innovative artists such as Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still, Martin’s work immediately attracted notice from the New York art world.³ Though Martin herself identified with the aspirations of the abstract expressionist generation, her work became associated with the geometric abstraction of minimalism that emerged in the early 1960s. Today, she is seen as a pivotal figure between these two tendencies, her content – an expression of essential emotions – relating to that of the older generation, but her methods – repetition, geometric format, reduced means – adopted by the younger. In the 1970s, she was also embraced by feminist artists both for her position as a female artist who had achieved success in a male-dominated art world and for her art that rejected the more aggressive, forceful stance associated with male artists of the abstract expressionist and minimalist generations in favour of a quieter, ego-less approach.⁴ As a result of the broad identification with her work, it has been exhibited widely and collected with enthusiasm internationally.

As well known as Martin and her work are, however, there is still mystery surrounding her history. To a large extent, this situation was instigated by Martin herself. Throughout her career, she was a careful editor of her own work, often making many paintings but discarding those she deemed unworthy. Later in life, she was known to repurchase earlier works that she felt no longer represented her vision in order to destroy them. In addition, she fiercely maintained privacy in her personal life, effectively concealing aspects such as her homosexuality and bouts of mental illness, to allow her work to take precedence. She consistently maintained a low public profile and in the interviews and accounts she gave of her past, mostly later in life, there is much contradiction and evasiveness. As pointed out by the art historian Anna Chave, Martin’s stance kept her from

being marginalised as a ‘woman artist’ and helped her avoid the ‘ruthless objectification’ other successful women have been subject to, ‘as their physical appearance and their intimate lives have become inextricably tied to the public’s fascination with their art (one thinks of [Georgia] O’Keeffe and [Eva] Hesse, or of Frida Kahlo)’.⁵ On the other hand, the lack of clear biography, together with Martin’s insistence that other artists or thinkers did not influence her art, has made it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of her work.

For an internationally prominent artist, Agnes Martin had an unlikely background. Descended from Scottish pioneers, she was born in 1912, the same year the *Titanic* sank (as she liked to remind people), in Macklin, Saskatchewan, a small town in the rural, open plains of western Canada.⁶ Her father died when she was two years old, leaving her mother to support four children. Much of Martin’s childhood was spent in Vancouver, where her mother bought, renovated and sold houses to make a living. By her own account, Martin had a troubled relationship with her mother, who was a stern disciplinarian, but Martin remembers time spent with her devout Presbyterian grandfather as happy and influential on the development of her work ethic, sense of humility, and egalitarian world view.⁷ She left Canada in 1931 (by most accounts) for Bellingham, Washington, to help care for her sister, who was having a difficult pregnancy. There Martin finished high school at the age of twenty-one and, as she related to some, was then awarded a swimming scholarship – a strong athlete, she had qualified for the Canadian Olympic swim team in 1928 but did not attend the games – to the University of Southern California. Finding few like-minded students, she quickly dropped out. She returned to Bellingham, completed a three-year teaching certificate in 1937 at Western Washington College of Education, and taught in schools for a number of years. In 1941, in what may have been the first of many cross-country expeditions, she drove a Model T (or A) Ford to New York City, taking a month to camp along the way.⁸ In New York, she attended Teachers College, Columbia University, and it was here in 1942, at the age of thirty, that she decided to become an artist, changing her major to Fine Arts and Arts Education.⁹

Very generally speaking, Martin’s art can be grouped into two distinct periods: first, the work done up until 1967, when she left New York and temporarily abandoned art making; second, the work made from 1972, when she began making art again in New Mexico, until her death in 2004. The first phase was developmental in nature. It spanned more than twenty years in which Martin honed her technique and progressed from early portraits, still lifes and landscapes that show understanding of early modernist painting; to more abstract works influenced by cubism, surrealism and early abstract expressionism; to more geometric compositions that finally

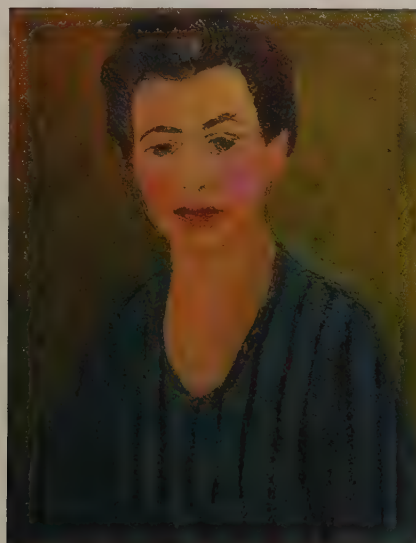
evolved, around 1964, into what might be called her classical phase, her radical and innovative presentations of pencilled grids on large, square, seemingly blank canvases. This first phase of her career coincided with a time in her life characterised by frequent moves and breaks in production, as she sought to earn money, deal with mental illness, attend school and teach. The second phase was non-developmental in terms of style, as Martin relied on the nuances of difference observed through and enhanced by repetition.¹⁰ During this time, Martin, who could now support herself on sales of her art, lived continuously in New Mexico. She did, however, move around within the state and travel extensively, while continuing to experience breaks in her work due to mental illness and broken bones. She also experimented with various media, making an important series of prints, *On a Clear Day* 1973 (PP.125–33), and worked on two films, one of which, *Gabriel*, was completed and distributed in 1976. But her paintings from these thirty years, despite a few exceptions, follow a clear pattern. They were made and exhibited in series of eight to twenty related canvases. All her paintings from these years are square and made of horizontal or vertical stripes (and occasionally both). In some series she used softly applied primary colours to make the stripes, though the majority are made in black and white, or in shades of grey. Usually, pencilled lines define the edges of the stripes or become lines in their own right.

Up to 1967

It is difficult to present a comprehensive picture of Martin's very early career (c.1941–53) given the limited number of existing works from that time. Nonetheless, there are enough works that were obtained and saved by friends and early supporters to give some idea of what she was doing. The earliest datable examples are landscapes produced when Martin was a student and teacher at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque and Taos from 1946 to 1949. A portrait and a self-portrait (LEFT), both made in encaustic, a torso of a nude woman (a model at the art school), and a still life showing flowers in a vase, again encaustic, probably date from this time as well. Photographs from the period also show some early attempts at abstractions. While certainly accomplished, especially the landscape watercolours that resemble similar scenes by John Marin made during his visit to New Mexico in 1929 (OPPOSITE), Martin's works do not particularly distinguish themselves as original. However, her watercolours, which were painted outdoors, give the first indications of her embrace of the New Mexican landscape, an environment she would take solace from through the rest of her life.

Besides its physical beauty, New Mexico was also important for the people it attracted. Since the late nineteenth century, it had been a haven for artists and writers seeking an escape

Self Portrait c.1947
Encaustic on canvas 66 × 49.5
Collection of Christa Martin



from urban industrialisation. Taos especially, which sits in a wide plain surrounded by majestic mountains and is home to an ancient Native American population, offered a life and culture that embraced nature, unencumbered by modern distractions. Artists such as Marsden Hartley, Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper and the writer D.H. Lawrence had visited. Georgia O'Keeffe, an independent, successful female artist who was a role model for Martin, had famously moved to New Mexico by 1940.¹¹ Several other strong-minded, independent women, including the art patrons Mabel Dodge Luhan, Helene Wurlitzer and Millicent Rogers, lived in Taos. In the decade after the Second World War, a new group of artists moved there too. Louis Ribak and Beatrice Mandelman came from New York, where they had studied and been associated with many of the city's most influential artists. Ted Egri, a student of Hans Hofmann, and a group of west coast abstract expressionists that included Richard Diebenkorn (who lived for a short time in Albuquerque), Edward Corbett and Clay Spohn also came. They in turn attracted friends such as Ad Reinhardt and Rothko, who visited Taos in the early 1950s.

Although it was not until a few years later that Martin's work started to resemble the abstract painting of these artists, she probably became acquainted with them and their work in Taos around 1950–51.¹² In the autumn of 1951, she returned to Teachers College at Columbia University, where she obtained a Master of Arts degree in June 1952 and it is very likely that she would have seen Corbett's paintings (and perhaps the artist himself), together with those of William Baziot, Pollock and Still, among others, in the *15 Americans* show at the Museum of Modern Art.¹³ It seems that an exposure to the issues concerning the Taos artists led her to engage directly in the artistic dialogue in New York as well.

Martin's style shows a number of influences in these years. The few works from 1952, such as a watercolour in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, with loosely drawn figural forms in gestural ink lines and blocks of colour, suggest that she was working towards more abstract imagery. Prints and drawings from around the same time suggest familiarity with European modernists such as Paul Klee, André Masson and Joan Miró. In 1953, when she returned to Taos after a year of teaching in Oregon, she was making oil paintings of subdued fields of colour with abstracted symbolic-looking shapes that resemble the biomorphic paintings of American artists such as Baziot and Arshile Gorky.

By the time Martin returned again to Columbia in 1954 (for a special course in education), her ambition and direction had started to come together. It was during this visit to New York that she first showed her paintings to Parsons, who took a few canvases for the gallery and offered the artist a show. Too poor to stay in New York, Martin returned to Taos, dedicating herself full-time to making art.

New Mexico Mountain Landscape, Taos c.1947
Watercolour on paper 31.1 × 41.3
Raymond Jonson Collection, University
of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque,
New Mexico. Gift of Mercedes Gugisberg



In a 1954 letter requesting a grant from the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, she expressed an aspiration consistent with that of the abstract expressionists she had been in contact with, writing of her interest in ‘assisting in the establishment of American Art, distinct and authentic... an acceptable representation of the expression of the American people’. Martin explained that she had been working to prepare a show for Parsons and needed another year to make a more mature body of work that might ‘prove adequate’.¹⁴ Martin won the grant (the first ever given) and was awarded \$40 a month in 1955. She would later report that during that year she painted ‘one hundred canvases of which I had a good opinion and sold seven’. However, she was unsuccessful in securing an exhibition with Parsons.¹⁵

Autumn Watch c.1954 and *Untitled* c.1955 (BELOW LEFT; P.34) were probably among those seven sold paintings.¹⁶ Both resemble works created a few years earlier by American abstract expressionists. In its all-over composition, large size, black-and-white tonality, and vaguely cubist structure, *Autumn Watch* recalls paintings done by Willem de Kooning in the late 1940s. *Untitled*, which retains somewhat figural forms and some suggestion of landscape, is largely black and white (Jackson Pollock showed black-and-white paintings at Parsons’s gallery in late 1951 when Martin was in New York), is larger in format, and has symbol-like forms reminiscent of images in early paintings by Rothko or Newman. Martin might have been looking at Native American patterns and design here, too. In both paintings, Martin aligned herself with the abstract expressionist objective of creating an American painting characterised by large scale, primal subject matter and a certain rawness evocative of the expansive American landscape.

In 1957, Parsons travelled to Taos and again offered Martin a show, on the condition that she relocate to New York. To help finance the move, Parsons purchased some paintings. She put Martin up when she arrived and then took her down to Coenties Slip, the seaport area in lower Manhattan, and introduced her to other gallery artists who in turn helped Martin find a loft in which to live and work. Then aged forty-five, Martin came into close contact with a number of artists, most of whom were considerably younger than her, but with whom she formed a close bond. Her new neighbours included Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, James Rosenquist, Lenore Tawney, Ann Wilson, and Jack Youngerman. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg lived around the corner. As has been well documented, what united this group of artists was less a stylistic affinity than a common desire to distance themselves and their art from the macho camaraderie and sense of exalted content associated with the abstract expressionists, who lived a few miles uptown.¹⁷ In their quest for a more impersonal, quotidian art, however, these younger artists did take clues from each other.

Autumn Watch c.1954
Oil paint on canvas 88.9 × 134.6
Bidstrup and Mahaffey Collection



In New York, Martin's work changed quickly. As is evident from a number of surviving large paintings, biomorphic images were replaced with larger more abstract forms and geometric shapes such as rectangles, squares and circles. Her surfaces became flatter and were presented more frontally, a direction that perhaps suggests the influence of Kelly, among other artists with whom Martin was coming into contact.¹⁸ When Martin finally did obtain her first exhibition at Section Eleven, Parsons's annexe gallery in 1958, two paintings shown, among others – *Dancer No.I (L.T.)* 1956–8 (BELOW LEFT) and *Heather* 1958 (P.41) – represented the change in direction. The former work retains remnants of her biomorphic painting, while the latter – in its square format and direct presentation of two vertical rectangles of colour – more directly anticipates later developments. The grid format, already present in paintings such as *Buds* c.1959 (P.50), became more pronounced in works such as an early tour de force called *The Islands* 1961 (P.77), which was included in her third and final show at Parsons. By the time she made this painting Martin had incorporated all the fundamental aspects that would distinguish her classical work: square canvas, grid format, integration of canvas texture into the perception of the image, and pencilled lines marked directly on the canvas.

But this transition to a signature style was not direct. Though Martin usually discarded works that were preparatory to the presentation of more fully resolved pieces, from the period 1958 to 1962 there exist a number of small canvases, sculptures and drawings that exemplify a process of experimentation with different media, formats and images. *The Garden* 1958 (P.42), for example, is a sculptural relief that appears to have been made of debris – pieces of wood and knobs of some sort – probably collected from the lofts and streets in the Coenties Slip area. The incorporation of found objects, integrating materials with reference to real-world functions as subject matter into a pictorial setting, was a pervasive strategy in the work of many artists at the time, perhaps best exemplified by Rauschenberg's 'combines' of a few years earlier. Another apparent anomaly, *Dominoes* 1960 (P.70), which references pieces of the table game, is reminiscent of Johns's direct, frontal presentation of popular imagery. On the other hand, a number of small paintings done around the same time show Martin experimenting with more abstract imagery such as lozenges, arches, triangles and grids, all rendered in techniques that suggest an involvement with the materially expressive possibilities of paint, line and various ways of making marks. Martin used a spare palette – black and white, browns, greyish blues – with pencil lines drawn directly on the canvas or scored through the paint.

According to the curator Barbara Haskell, Martin's 'central problem' was 'how to render in concrete form that which is inherently immaterial and thus incapable of being objectified'.¹⁹ A group of

Dancer No.I (L.T.) 1956–8
Oil paint on composition board 120.7 × 181
Stanley D. Heckman, New York

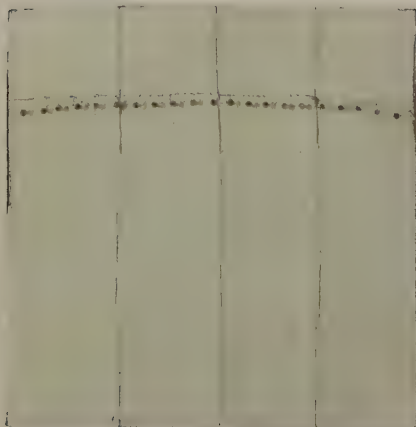


related works made from 1959–62 shows Martin dealing with this issue. The earliest of these, *Homage to Greece* 1959 (BELOW) is made of small squares of canvas, painted white and collaged into a grid format on a larger square canvas, which is mounted on board. A row of nails, projecting out from the surface and loosely following the horizontal line formed by the bottom edges of the top row of canvas squares, makes a slight arch across the top. In *Little Sister* 1962 (p.86), lines of a grid are drawn directly onto a flat canvas, and the nails, fully inserted, form slightly protruding dots, which reinforce but materially contrast with the pencil lines. In several drawings from 1961, and in *The Islands*, the dots are inked or painted points within rectangles formed by ink or pencilled grids. In all of these works, the compositions are related – grids punctuated by points – but the emphasis on the material presence of the object varies from one to the next. Compared to the compositions formed by the application of nails or cut pieces of canvas, the works rendered on a flat plane in pencil lines and marks on the surface are more discreet. Embracing conventional materials – graphite line, paint, paper and canvas – and presenting them in a direct, non-representational way, Martin was able to assert the material presence of the artwork while allowing it to evoke something less tangible than found objects.

Martin's work was interrupted in late 1961 or early 1962 when she was found wandering the streets of New York in a catatonic state and placed in hospital. Diagnosed as having schizophrenia, she would be hospitalised for most of 1962 (the illness would continue to plague her episodically throughout the rest of her life).²⁰ Though she had a show in 1962 at the Robert Elkon Gallery, her new gallery representation, there are no large paintings from that year, only drawings and small paintings. By 1963, however, her experimental work had coalesced in the production of an impressive group of large square paintings in which an overall grid became the predominant compositional structure.

At the time, the grid was already a symbol of modernist abstract painting referencing in particular Piet Mondrian. Its non-hierarchical structure, articulation of the flat surface, and imperviousness to representational imagery made the grid a powerful form for artists seeking to convey content without the use of symbols or other referential images. In addition, Newman and Reinhardt, both friends of Martin, were already pairing reduced geometric form with sublime content, Newman finding in it a creative renewal and Reinhardt, a significant end. For Martin, the blank slate offered by the grid represented innocence, as she explained in a 1989 interview: 'Well, when I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees [laughs] and then this grid came into my mind and I thought it represented innocence, and I still do, and so I painted it and then I was satisfied.'²¹

Homage to Greece 1959
Oil paint on pieces of canvas laid
on wood panel and nails 29.8 x 29.8
Private Collection



The paintings from 1963, including *Flower in the Wind*, *Friendship*, *A Grey Stone*, *Night Sea* and *Falling Blue*, are all six feet square or slightly larger, and they have coloured fields, structured on an overall grid drawn or inscribed directly on the canvases. In every case an unpainted canvas border frames the central painted field. All five convey a strong impression of the painstaking effort it must have taken to make them – it is as though the energy of a Pollock drip painting has been stretched out and carefully sustained over time. In *Friendship* (P.97), the surface is covered with gold leaf incised with a fine grid. *A Grey Stone* is made of very many small dabs of paint aligned in a tight grid. And in *Falling Blue* (P.85), many long thin uneven lines of blue and grey form the horizontals, with a few graphite lines marking the verticals. Martin's process, the repetitive aspect of her marking, and the look of the grids, have also been linked to weaving.²² It was a labour-intensive effort in which a large, all-encompassing image was produced by seemingly simple, direct means. The non-referential compositions and frontal presentations of these 1963 paintings emphasise the material presence of the object, while comprehension of the process – making something grand and beautiful from small, simple repetitive gestures – evokes more ambitious, expressive content.

By 1964, Martin had taken her most radical step of 'collapsing the distinction between painting and drawing' by applying grids directly on minimally prepared, usually white canvases using graphite and coloured pencils.²³ These paintings use little paint, little colour, and simple hand-drawn marks, which simultaneously map and veil the surface. Martin associated the move with humility and modesty of means. But the effect is powerful. In an oft-cited review, the critic Kasha Linville describes the way these paintings are perceived. Up close, one is mesmerised by the delicacy of the lines and how they are made, but as one steps away, the lines 'blend finally into a single tone; a beautiful gray or gray-white that still carries the emotive image of the lines that have by this time almost disappeared from sight'.²⁴

In *The Tree* 1964 (LEFT), the overall linear grid is contrasted by what appear to be solid grey horizontal bands, which upon closer examination are seen to be made of many parallel pencil lines placed close together. In *White Stone* 1965 (P.94), the lines of a tight grid that does not quite reach the edges of the canvas shimmer beneath a slightly shiny, glazed (probably varnished) surface, which is noticeable only from up close. In both works, nothing is materially hidden and the creative process is fully available, yet the whole is not perceived at any one time. These paintings rely on a process of looking and remembering.

After preparing a show for the Nicholas Wilder Gallery that opened in Los Angeles in October 1967, Martin 'retired' from art making. Packing up her belongings in New York, she used the

The Tree 1964
Oil paint and graphite on canvas 182.8 × 182.8
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund



proceeds from a grant from the National Council for the Arts (now the National Endowment for the Arts) to purchase a pickup truck and caravan, in which she travelled across the United States and Canada for almost two years. She gave any number of explanations for her decision to leave New York and abandon her art career. Most often, she referred to the imminent destruction of the building containing her loft.²⁵ Others have speculated that Reinhardt's death in late August 1967 had something to do with it.²⁶ According to Arne Glimcher, founder of the Pace Gallery which represented Martin from 1975 until her death, she was fleeing a corrupting sense of pride caused by the growing recognition and adulation her work was receiving. Certainly her illness also had something to do with it.²⁷

But perhaps she was also confounded by the directions the art world was taking in the late 1960s.²⁸ By 1967, Martin had been embraced by a new generation of artists who would come to be known as minimalists. Donald Judd had reviewed two of her exhibitions. Carl Andre laid metal plates in grids on the floor, works that are reminiscent of Martin's composition and modest means. Sol LeWitt's drawings executed directly on the wall evoke Martin's use of pencil directly on canvas. In 1966, Martin was included in two early shows of art that gathered examples of the new approach: *Systemic Painting*, curated by Lawrence Alloway at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and *10*, featuring work chosen by Robert Smithson at the Dwan Gallery. While Martin certainly appreciated aspects of this new approach – what she termed the artists' attempt to convey an ideal perfection – she nonetheless understood her work to be different. In the years following her departure from New York, she more clearly formulated her thinking about her art in notes and journal entries.²⁹ And by 1972, when she began making art again, her work incorporated a refined understanding of certain minimalist strategies without abandoning those aspects that made it distinct.

The Field 1965

Oil paint and graphite on canvas 182.9 × 182.9
E. ON Art Collection, Düsseldorf



After the break

A mental vision of an adobe brick led Martin back to New Mexico where she rented a remote piece of land on a mesa and proceeded to build a house and other structures, constructing them herself with occasional help from friends and local residents.³⁰ She lived there alone without modern conveniences for several years. Two events in 1971 encouraged her to begin making art again. Robert Feldman of Parasol Press approached her about making some prints, and the curator Suzanne Delehanty contacted her about plans to organise a retrospective exhibition of her work for the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia (which opened in 1973). In 1972, Martin added a studio to her structures on the mesa and travelled to Stuttgart, Germany, to work on a portfolio of prints published in 1973 by Parasol Press and titled *On a Clear Day*.

According to the printer Kathan Brown, in *On a Clear Day* Martin had a ‘particular problem she wanted to solve. She wanted the printer to straighten out her lines, which she said she could never paint straight enough.’ She chose silkscreen over etching, Feldman’s originally proposed medium, because it would render a sharper image.³¹ The result was a portfolio of thirty prints, all differently proportioned grids or just parallel horizontal lines with different spacing, rendered in clearly defined dark grey lines.

In comparison to her final works made in New York, these prints contain two important changes or refinements, which would be pervasive in all of Martin’s later work. Both modifications suggest a consideration of strategies that came to be identified with minimalism, though a more relevant comparison might be made to the work of Newman and Reinhardt.³² First was the clarity of line, a sharper mark that reduced emphasis on the hand-made process of creating the work. Second was the concept of seriality, which spread meaning over the perception a body of work rather than locating it in a single image. Repetition – not within a single image, but throughout a complete body of work – became the point. For Martin the change was one of content, which she described as a shift from joy to happiness (and relatedly praise and innocence).³³ This distinction might also be discussed, borrowing from Briony Fer’s analysis, as a move from the language of sublimity to that of infinity.³⁴ The effort and intensity previously compressed into a single image, providing the viewer a sublime moment, now would unfold as a sequential experience with infinite potential, as the viewer sees multiple renditions of a similar idea in time and space.

In adapting these strategies, Martin managed to distinguish her vision from that of those artists associated with minimalism. Most obviously, her work never seems industrial, either in material or production, as theirs often does. She continued to ‘hand make’ her paintings, allowing visible breaks or slight ‘mistakes’ to evoke a human aspect despite the use of rulers and taped lines. And for her, nature remained a constant point of reference. Although she continuously denied that her work represented landscape and mostly stopped using titles that evoked natural imagery, she continued to use metaphors from nature to describe the experience of seeing her work and the feelings she wished to convey. Most beautifully, she compared the experience of looking at her work to watching clouds and never seeing any the same, or viewing waves of the sea, continuously breaking on the shore always the same but always different.³⁵ In her art, a contrast between material presence and the suggestion of something other – a memory or feeling – is always present.

Martin finished her first new set of paintings in 1974 and showed them in 1975 at the Pace Gallery. These paintings, and all of those

made thereafter, were exhibited in related groups all drawing from the same basic visual language. From 1974 to 1992, she worked in two primary scales: small (12 by 12 inches) and large (72 by 72 inches). In these years, her large paintings were made of vertical or horizontal stripes, the grid showing up only occasionally. Each body of work was distinct from the next, while each painting within a group was related to though also different from the others. In a few cases, she designated an entire group, such as *The Islands* 1979 (PP.148–51) or *With My Back to the World* 1997 (P.174), as a multi-panelled, single piece. From 1993 to 2004, after a move to an assisted living facility in Taos, Martin reduced the size of her large paintings to 60 by 60 inches so she could more easily handle them. In these years, the distinction between the groups of works lessened and the relationship among the paintings within any one group was less definite.

The paintings from 1974 and 1975 were distinguished by their surprising (at the time) use of colour. The first group, represented by *Untitled #3* 1974 (P.137), has pink and blue washes of watered-down acrylic paint applied in mostly vertical stripes outlined in graphite pencil, in symmetrical patterns. The second, as in *Untitled #10* 1975 (P.134), uses primarily a rusty red colour that varies in intensity and is applied in deceptively asymmetrical vertical stripes. In 1980 and 1981, she made two exquisite series of red, yellow and blue, some painted rather boldly in multicolour thin bands bordered by blue pencil lines, others made in barely visible colour. A slightly later group utilises red ochre, similar to the colour of adobe, that washes over a textured surface interspersed with thinly drawn horizontal lines. With a few exceptions (especially in 1985 and 1992), Martin did not use much colour again until she began her 60-by-60-inch paintings, at which point primary colours, in thin washes, became more frequent.

The predominant groups from 1977 to 1992 comprise grey paintings. Clearly related to her pencilled works of the late 1960s, they have white gessoed grounds, which are sometimes quite textured. Graphite pencil lines and black or grey acrylic or sometimes ink horizontal bands are applied over the textured grounds. The different series are distinguished by the way they are made, with brush or utility knife, or by a play of proportional divisions or colour. They range in tone from the largely white group, *The Islands* 1979, which demands concentrated looking to perceive the play of line and faint colour, to an untitled group from 1989, designated informally by the artist as her ‘Black Paintings’, which are made of a variation of dark grey stripes. In the first group, the viewer slowly perceives fullness within a seemingly empty space, while in the second, perhaps Martin’s most opaque paintings, the solidity of the surface reads as silence or stillness. Groups from 1983 and 1984, such as *Untitled #6* 1983 and *Untitled #12* 1984 (P.152), are perhaps Martin’s most other-worldly, with textured surfaces washed with diluted black, one group

with darker horizontal bars, which activate the surface, the other with thinner lines. Though Martin might have been intending to convey happiness, these paintings seem charged with angst.

During the years she lived in New Mexico, Martin travelled often. Several friends or visitors have spoken of agreeing to go for a car ride and ending up travelling hours or even days on a spontaneous road trip into the desert or up in the mountains. One particularly audacious trip, described by a neighbour from Galisteo (where she lived from 1977 to 1992), involved a drive to northern Canada in 1978 to venture up the Mackenzie River in an open metal boat, just after the ice had thawed, so Martin could 'go over the edge of civilization'.³⁶ With another friend, she took several boat trips, albeit more comfortably on cruise ships, travelling through the Panama Canal (c.1981); from Vancouver to Alaska (1989); from Hamburg, Germany to Norway, Sweden and Iceland (1990); to Greece and the coast of Turkey (1993); and elsewhere. In 1995, Martin and the same friend travelled by train from Vancouver to Halifax.³⁷ Martin's trips often in the open landscape or the sea suggest that she constantly sought the experiences in nature that she intended her paintings to evoke.

In the last few years of her life, Martin started working less systematically. Her paintings appear less serial in format, the brushstrokes are sometimes looser, the colour more varied. In several paintings she incorporated forms such as squares, triangles or a trapezoid in a definite departure from her norm. As suggested by the title of the 2003 work *Homage to Life* (P.188), her output from this period seemed to consciously conjure paintings from her past while also making something new.³⁸ *The Sea* 2003 is like a black-to-white inversion of a 1961 painting called *Dark River. Untitled #1* 2003 (P.189) recalls works from the early 1960s in its use of triangular forms (P.108). At the end of her life, as though reflecting on her oeuvre as a whole, Martin made paintings that drew on her past even as she stepped courageously beyond it. It was typical Agnes Martin – independent, self-reliant, and always in the moment.

When Martin died on 16 December 2004, having painted up until a few months before, she was universally praised in numerous published tributes. Jill Johnston called her a great and 'otherworldly woman with a magnificent aura and fiercely independent nature', and Holland Cotter noted that she had a 'reputation that grew and took on the aura of a legend'.³⁹ Her life was exceptional and probably more difficult than many people knew. Nonetheless, she always insisted her art was not about her. 'The value of art is in the observer,' she explained in one of her wonderfully elliptical statements. 'When you find out what you like, you're really finding out about yourself. Beethoven's music is joyous. If you like his music, you know that you like to be joyful. People who look at my painting say that it makes them happy, like the feeling when you wake up in the morning. And happiness is the goal, isn't it?'⁴⁰

Blessings 2000

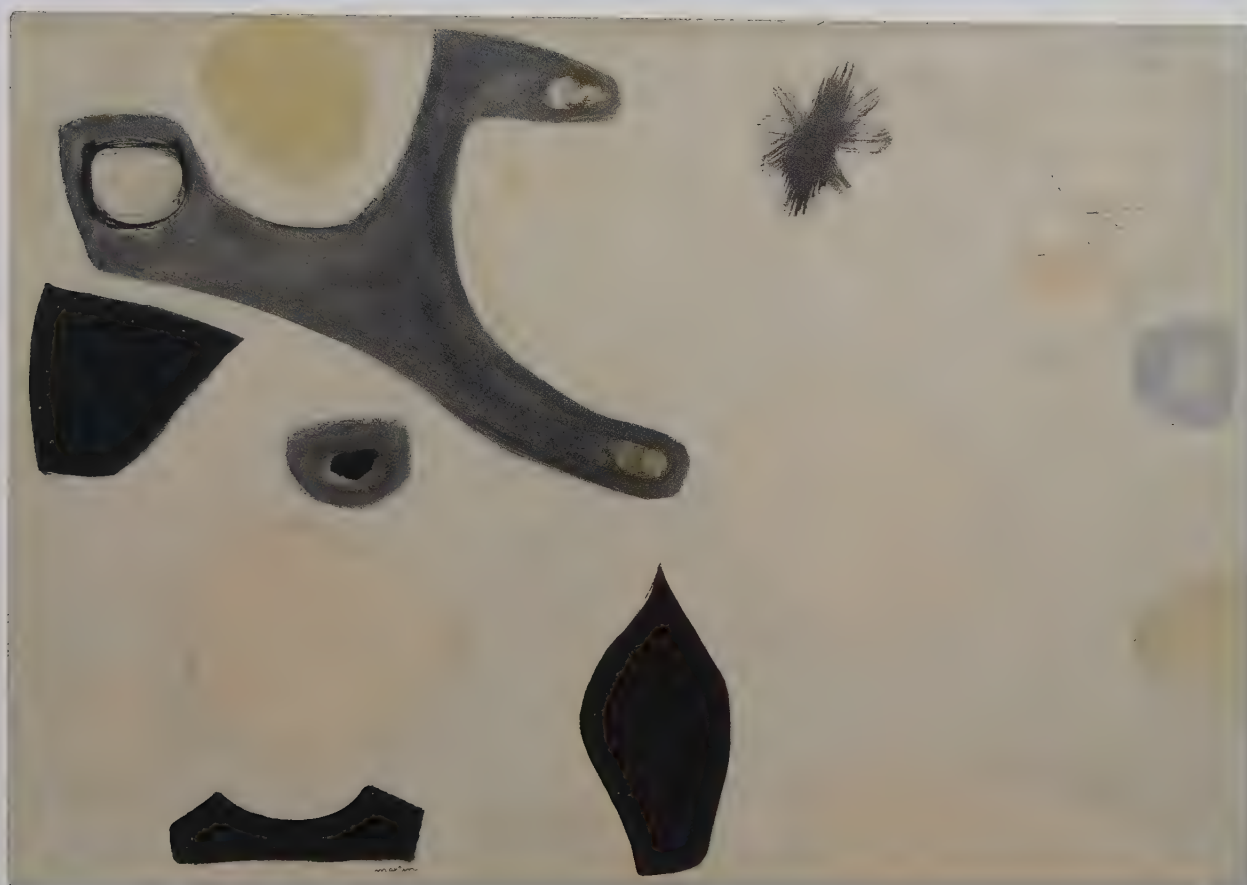
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas 152.4 × 152.4

Private collection

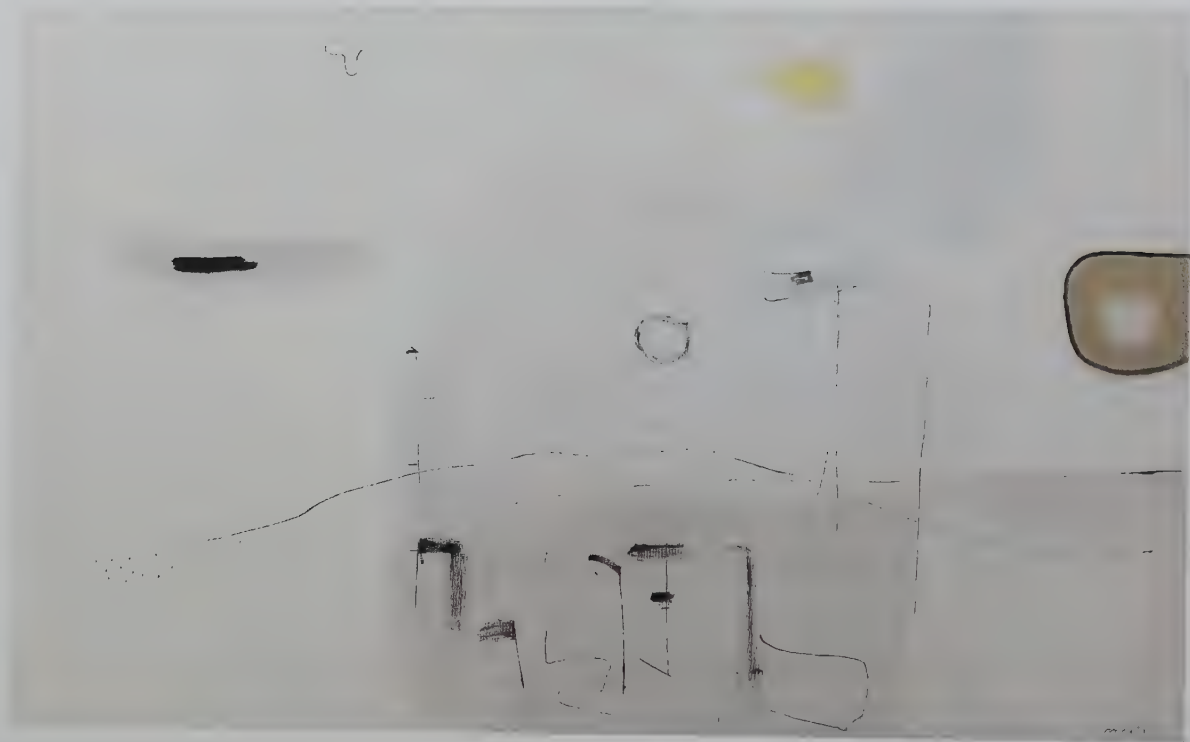


Untitled c.1954
Oil paint and graphite on gypsum board
121.9 × 182.9





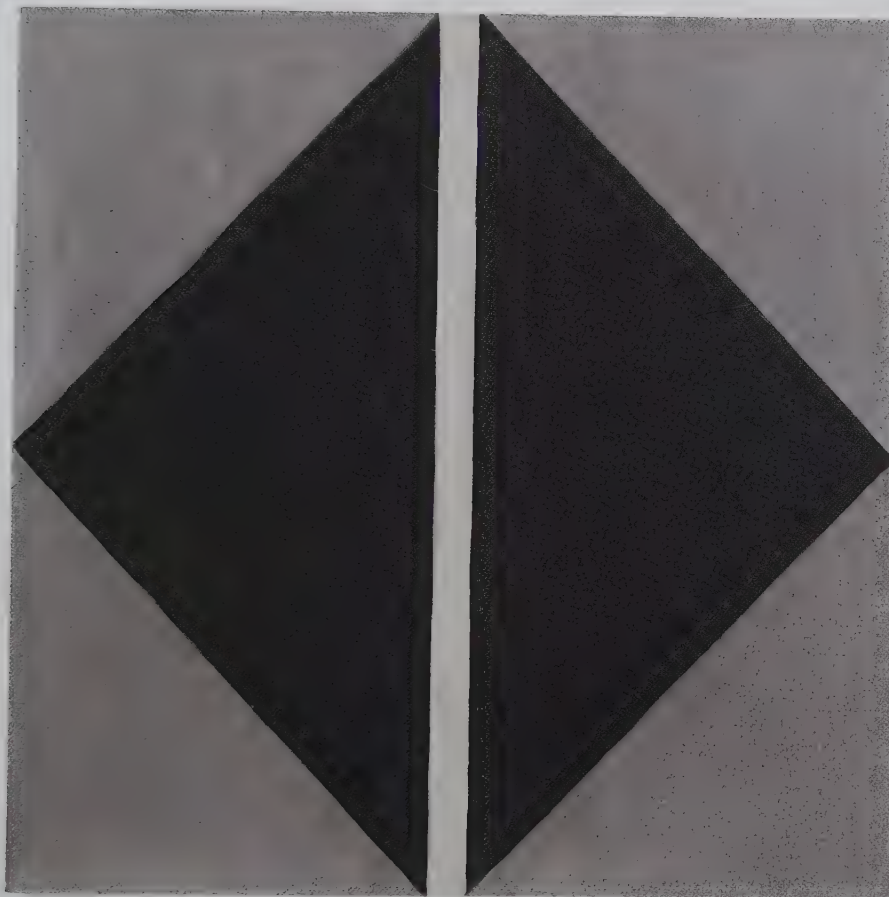
Untitled c.1955
Oil paint on canvas
83.8 × 134.6





This Rain 1958
Oil paint on canvas
177.8 × 177.8





Untitled 1958
Oil paint on canvas
60 × 60





Untitled c.1957
Oil paint and graphite on canvas
132 × 97





The Garden 1958
Oil paint and found objects on wood
134.6 × 25.4 × 5.1





Water 1958
Painted wire and bottle caps
mounted on wood
99.1 × 99.1



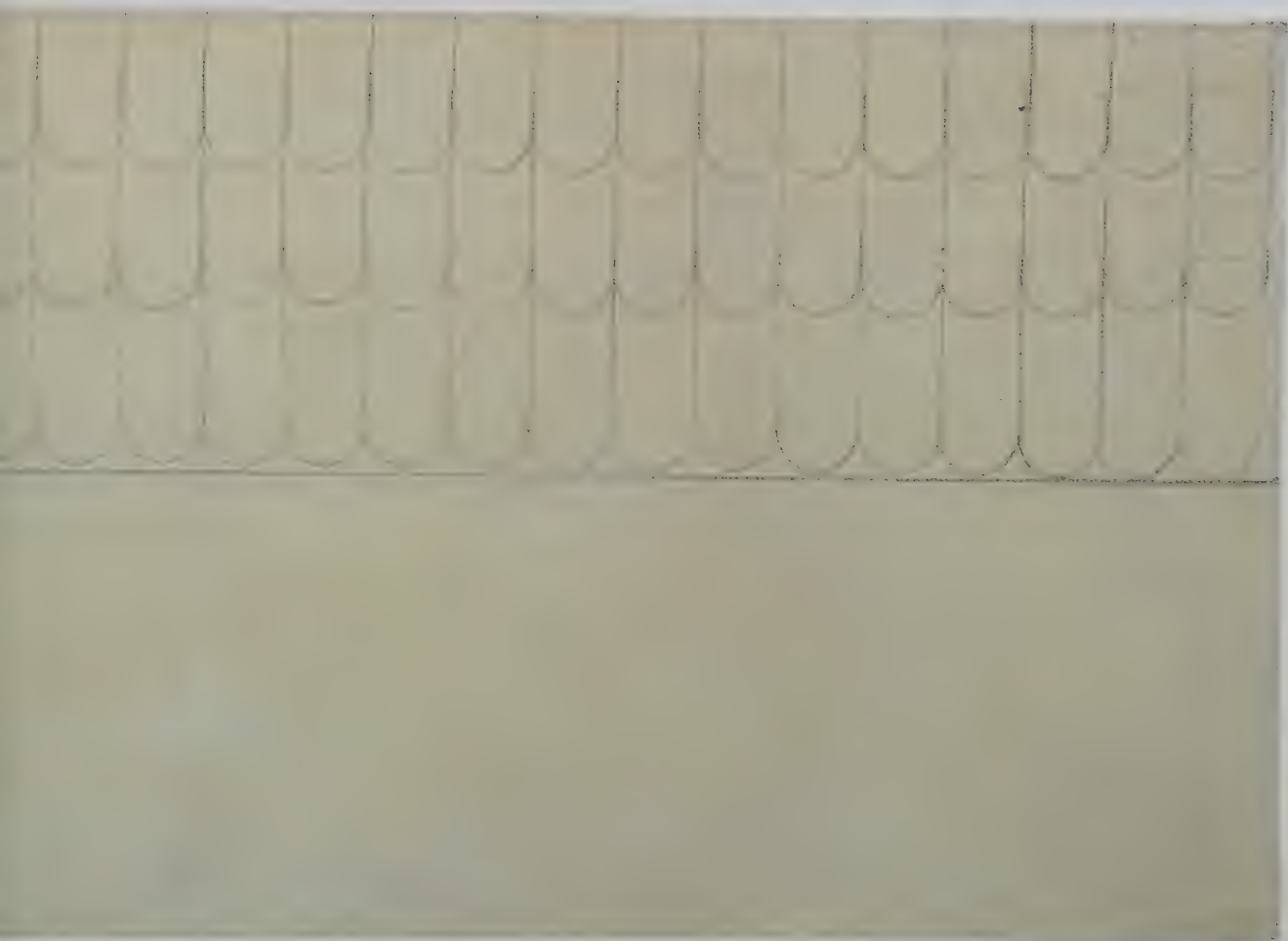
The Book 1959
Oil paint on paper mounted on canvas
60.8 × 45.4





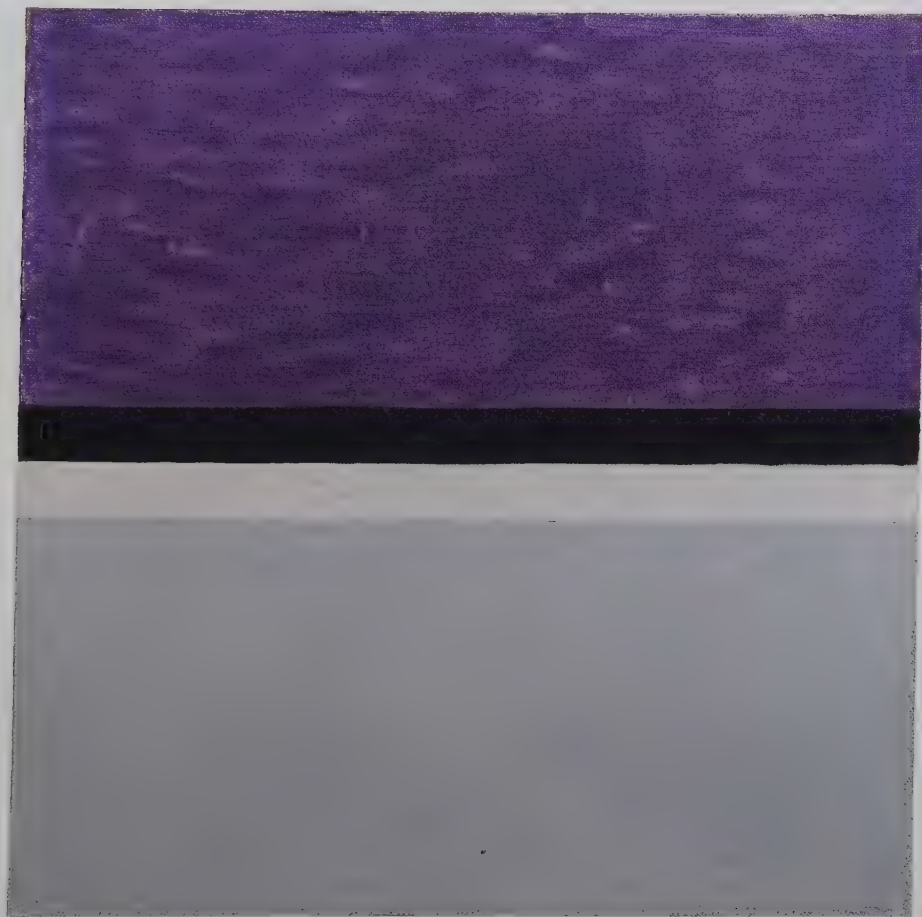
The Heavenly Race (Running) c.1959
Oil paint on canvas
30.5 × 90.2



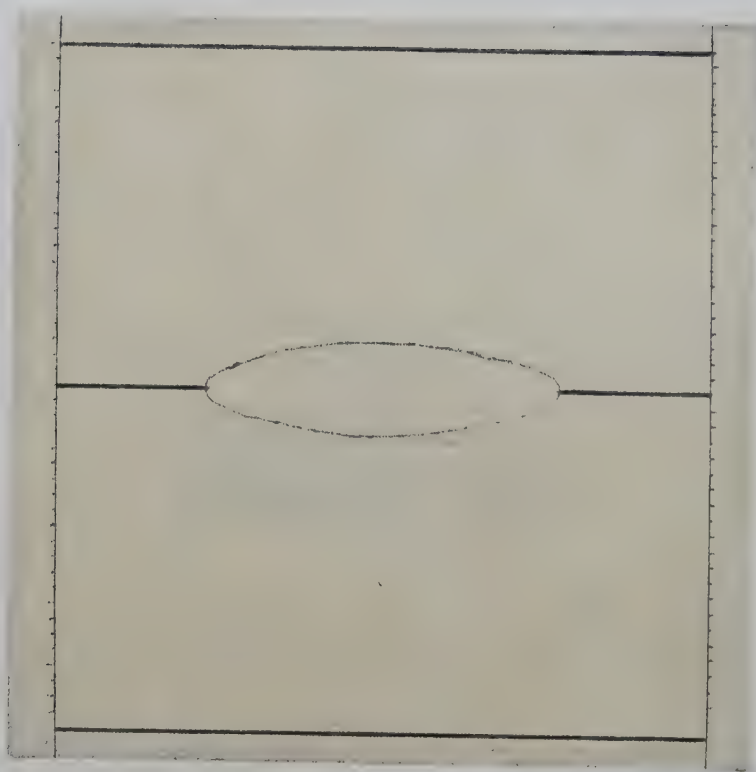


Buds c.1959
Oil paint on canvas
127 × 127





Untitled 1959
Oil paint and ink on linen
30.5 × 30.5





Agnes Martin: Innocence and Experience

'When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees and then this grid came into my mind and I thought it represented innocence, and I still do, and so I painted it and then I was satisfied. I thought, this is my vision.' Agnes Martin, 1989¹

Agnes Martin's coupling of innocence and the tree resonates with the familiar symbolism of creation myths, and tales of revelation and enlightenment from Buddhism to Christianity. Yet there is some irony in the fact that Martin accounted for the appearance of the grid in her work with such unworldly overtones when the grid was a structure emblematic of modern art's most extreme and minimal position, and one that is conventionally seen in opposition to art's potential for symbolic and other-worldly expression. This birthing myth, its internal contradictions masked by Martin's simple homely language, is embedded within the broader personal narrative of her life and her development as an artist, as told and retold in many written texts, statements and interviews. The artist would rarely – and then only obliquely – allow the notion of external artistic influence on her practice, preferring to privilege solitude and contemplation as the conditions for making her art. Martin's denial of influence is closely allied to her repeated crediting of 'inspiration' as the source of each painting. By old age Martin had so wonderfully honed this notion that she was able to recount the way in which, under the right circumstances of solitude and calm, the image of a painting – in miniature – would be 'given' to her. All she then had to do, she said, was scale it up and get it down in paint.

Martin's much-quoted yet frustratingly epigrammatic observations on life and art infuse much of the writing on the artist and her work. Jill Johnston, recalling visits to Agnes Martin's studio in the early 1960s, related the artist's confident assurance that 'the work is completely apart from the person', and that 'her paintings paint themselves'.² Many commentators have placed Martin's historical context on one side and instead have dwelt on the 'affect' of looking at a Martin painting and the sensations arising therefrom – a genre of writing that encourages a Blakean 'whole thing in the one thing' kind of criticism and, with a doubling of irony, displaces critical scrutiny of the object itself.

Returning Martin to a historical context is salutary. In her development from conventional landscape and portrait painting to pure abstraction, described in this publication by Tiffany Bell, Martin borrowed from both the organic and biomorphic versions of abstract expressionism, through the 1940s and 1950s,³ in regular contact with the New York art scene, as a student at Columbia and as a frequent visitor to Manhattan's museums and galleries. Martin's well-known writings, as well as her 'habits of mind', were shaped, as Jacquelynn Baas demonstrates, by even more wide-ranging source material:

they are full of references to identifiable texts, from the poetry of William Blake to the various Asian belief systems – including Taoism and Zen Buddhism – that attracted widespread interest from American artists in the postwar years.⁴

These new studies, building on the work of other scholars⁵, have successfully drawn Martin back into the context of art history broadly written, setting the compass on track for a fuller understanding of her development as an artist. We can no longer subscribe to the notion that her singular artistic innovations of the early 1960s were born either in isolation or entirely through inspiration; but nor do we yet fully understand the mechanics of that development. This essay proposes that there is still plenty to be learnt by setting Martin's own words to one side and looking, instead, with a bit more focus – drawing on fact, anecdote and conjecture – at her response, eager, deft, intuitive and knowing, to the people and practices she encountered on her journey to the grid.

Martin arrived in New York from Taos, New Mexico in 1957. Her first show, in Betty Parsons's adjunct space, Section Eleven, was held in December 1958. The paintings she exhibited eschew overt references to the external world, a development possibly encouraged by closer contact with artists from Parsons's stable: Mark Rothko, whom she met once but whose work she admired greatly; Barnett Newman, who hung her shows; and Ad Reinhardt, whom she especially revered. Martin restricted her formal vocabulary to the square or rectangle, the circle and the triangle, which she rendered for the most part with soft-focus edges in a muted palette of earth colours. Dore Ashton, the only critic to review the show, noted the 'warm glow' of Martin's paintings – the result, it seemed to her, of an 'observed and deeply-felt benign essence of the mesa country, so long Miss Martin's home'.⁶

Only five years later the critic Barbara Rose was able to relate Martin's new canvases to 'the most advanced painting being done today', noting their 'all-over pattern', the 'absence of any visual climax' and 'a unified image which cannot be disassembled'.⁷ Rose was describing the first great cycle of paintings, referred to by subsequent commentators as 'grids', in which Martin consciously or otherwise appeared to be adhering to a systematic methodology and an *a priori* schema.

If the genealogy of Martin's grid can be traced back to her exploration of line and form undertaken in relative isolation in New Mexico before 1957, it was conceived and born in Manhattan after a half-decade of intense activity and enhanced momentum within her work. Suddenly Martin was in daily contact with artists new to her, younger men and women who were engaged in their own similar experimental practices. She was exposed, also, to the varied and sometimes provocative content that New York's

museums and the handful of downtown galleries had to offer.⁸ After the comparative solitude of New Mexico, here was immersion in a new and stimulating environment, one shaped by creative alliances, dialogues and confrontations in which Martin steered her own course through a constellation of others' evolving practices.

Martin's studio/home throughout this period was in the now near-legendary dockside neighbourhood of Coenties Slip, on the southernmost tip of Manhattan. 'The Slip' – home to a group of artists that included Jack Youngerman, Robert Indiana and Ellsworth Kelly and Lenore Tawney – was a picturesque bohemian enclave immortalised by the photographer Hans Namuth.⁹ Martin described this community as almost monastic, emphatically dismissing suggestions of creative interchange.¹⁰ Constitutionally 'a loner',¹¹ she did in fact make enduring friendships there. Ellsworth Kelly remembers a 'close fraternal relationship' with a 'real pal'¹² (LEFT) and others testify how her artist neighbours and friends supported her through periods of fragile and fractured mental health. If a little solitary, Martin did not always shrink from the limelight: her commanding performances of Gertrude Stein's erotic poetry, of which she was particularly fond, are recalled by Robert Indiana.¹³

Martin flourished, and at times floundered, in this environment. While painting continued to be her principal preoccupation, she was prolific, and adventurous, in drawing and more surprisingly, perhaps, she made an uncharacteristic detour into three-dimensional work. For an artist whose practice had been – in purely technical terms – somewhat conventional, to swap canvases, oil paint and brushes for materials scavenged from the detritus of derelict dockland, and to work with implements most likely to be found in a toolbox, was radical stuff. Martin was not alone in her adoption of bricolage. This was a period of collective experimentalism in which many of the painters took to constructing works with 'discovered' materials, as Robert Indiana described them, encouraged by poverty and each other. This was a localised manifestation of a broader generational shift towards assemblage.¹⁴ Briefly, in Coenties Slip, means and methods coalesced.

The relief constructions that Martin made using found objects range from large-scale totemic wood constructions, such as *The Laws* 1958 (P.43), to small wooden panels incorporating nails or tacks, some four years later. She fashioned a couple of even more surprising works: *Burning Tree* 1961 (P.80) with its multiple wooden protuberances capped in metal, and the tiny kinetic *The Wave* 1963 (P.81) which she made in an edition, using small blue plastic balls 'stolen' from a hardware store¹⁵ for Betty Parsons's exhibition of *Toys by Artists* in 1964. Her preference was for objects with regular, circular or square shapes. Bolt heads, nails and tacks, buttons and wires are components used to hold and bind things together; Martin used them, in conformity with their original function, in a structural

Ellsworth Kelly and Martin,
Coenties Slip, 1958
Photograph by Hans Namuth
Center for Creative Photography, Tucson



way, to mark out spatial co-ordinates – like the grid – or to delineate elements such as the edge or the centre of her works. This emphasis on the co-ordinates of space rather than the forms themselves was a reversal of her practice in painting. It had an almost immediate impact: canvases from 1959 show multiple geometrical shapes, generic forms such as circles and rectangles, arranged frontally, symmetrically and compartmentalised within an underlying grid. In a palette of black, white and grey which serves to emphasise the clarity of the shapes, these paintings are confident exercises in hard-edged abstraction, at some remove from the soft-focus style which she continued to practise in other works.

This development, too, evolved in conversation with her peers. Martin had moved into the same building as Ellsworth Kelly in 1958, and they breakfasted together for over a year. Kelly undoubtedly contributed to the evolving gene pool of Martin's version of abstraction, both by encouraging her interest in Mondrian and through the example of his own painting, especially his use of a modular system or grid in works such as *Cité* and *Colors for a Large Wall* (both 1951); Kelly himself recalls that his work in collage 'intrigued her'.¹⁶ Influence rarely works in only one direction; it seems that Martin herself encouraged Kelly's own first experiments with sculpture.¹⁷ Her influence was also felt by Robert Indiana, who stopped painting his gridded circles in 1960, 'stymied when I saw Agnes's direction into circles'.¹⁸

One of Martin's most challenging interlocutors at this time may have been her sometime girlfriend, Chryssa, the Greek-born sculptor who was a prominent and volatile presence in the downtown art scene and a frequent visitor to Martin's studio.¹⁹ Chryssa had made a series of monochrome clay reliefs, *Cycladic Books*, in 1955, cast from packing cases, each one differentiated by simple horizontal and vertical linear divisions alone (LEFT). Like Martin's later constructions, these were works in three dimensions with strong associations to painting; Chryssa was, sometimes in advance of Martin, defining a simple geometric vocabulary, working with reduced means and employing a process of repetition.

Chryssa's later 'signature' work was to be in neon, but in the late 1950s she was alive to the possibilities offered by a range of experimental materials. She explored newspaper collage, printmaking techniques and aluminium casting, finding repetition and the grid as key organisational and procedural principles. A significant coincidence can also be detected between Chryssa's experimental relief structures made from 1959, in which small T-shaped metal plates were fixed perpendicular to the background, and Martin's own work with nails and tacks made around the same time. In a photograph of this time taken by the photographer Peter Moore (OVERLEAF), Martin is seen sitting before a large two-dimensional

Chryssa (Vardea)
Cycladic Book 1996
 Marble 40.8 × 38.5 × 5
 (Original plaster version, 1954–5)
 Alpha Bank Collection, Athens



surface into which are driven hundreds of upstanding nails, casting their shadows across the plane to create what Chryssa would have described as 'formless forms'.

This is the work, now long lost (or more likely destroyed) that Martin described as 'a construction with the heads of three thousand nails (that) I fixed to boards'. This was a rare, early interview, in which she came close to acknowledging the importance of her experimental constructions within her development as a painter.²⁰ Referring to the small collage she made with canvas and nails, entitled (with reference to Chryssa?) *Homage to Greece* 1959, Martin avowed that her 'lines began as points in space', and that she 'started off on the right path with the line of nails'. Even long after she had stopped making such complex constructions, Martin continued to work with nails: the half-a-dozen or so small works from 1960 combining drawn lines and nails may be seen to constitute her first true series of grids.

Later in life, finding her constructions 'too aggressive',²¹ Martin made efforts to retrieve and destroy them. Among the surviving works, which include *Homage to Greece* (P.26), were several acquired and safeguarded by Lenore Tawney, an artist now acknowledged for her innovative weaving, but who was at the time somewhat relegated as a 'fibre artist'. Tawney stayed briefly in Coenties Slip in 1957 before moving to nearby South Street the following year. She and Martin formed a close allegiance and remained in daily contact throughout Martin's New York years. Comparisons have often been drawn between the work of these two women, in different media, and the idea that Tawney, like Chryssa, provided Martin with an important point of reference during this period of formal development is worth examining more carefully.

By the time she arrived at Coenties Slip from Chicago, Tawney had already begun her large-scale unconventional 'open warp' work in which she occasionally included 'found' materials such as feathers. In New York her work underwent a marked transformation. Not only did she fully embrace abstraction but she also challenged the technology of weaving itself, finding ways of departing from the conventional rectilinear format of the loom and weaving gaps or interstices into the fabric. This was another journey of investigation into materials, process and formal language akin to Martin's own, and it was an achievement Martin acknowledged in her only published text on another artist's work. In the brief introduction she contributed to the catalogue of Tawney's exhibition in 1961 Martin described an art world replete with 'new expression in many new media'; in contrast, she admired in Tawney's work the 'absolutely new and original expression in a very old medium ... a wonderful and gratifying experience'.²²

In 1961 Tawney began the experimental weaving that would result in a series of tall, hanging, fabric sculptures – 'woven forms', as she described them – which Martin herself 'named' for her: *The King*,

Martin in the early 1960s
Photograph by Peter Moore

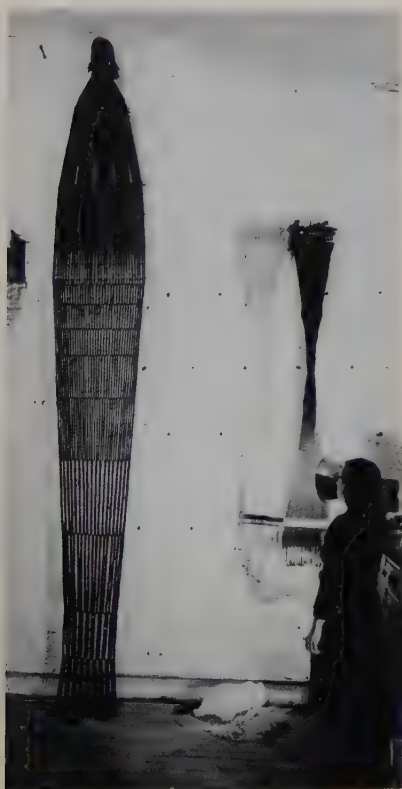


The Queen and *The Bride*. These were delicate works in which light flowed through the weave, allowing the pattern of individual threads to appear like lace. Around the same time Martin made drawings that evoke quite specifically the intersections and terminations of warp and weft on the loom. The way in which she indented her margins – in a drawing such as *Balconies* 1962 (P.117) – appears to demonstrate exactly what happens when the warp is put under pressure by the weft, an innovative technique that Tawney made her own in these years. In other drawings by Martin there are exact compositional equivalents to details in Tawney's woven forms. Compare, for example, the arching rectangular forms in Martin's *Untitled* 1960 (P.113, TOP RIGHT) and the arching apertures in Tawney's *Dark River* 1961 (BELOW LEFT); note the way in which Martin experimented with open forms laid over or across her grids, in drawings such as *Untitled* 1960 (P.12), in the manner of Tawney's *Triune* 1961. According to Barbara Haskell, Lenore Tawney recalled how Martin evolved a method of drawing straight lines onto her canvas by tracing in pencil along a thread pinned at either side of the stretcher,²³ a technique that enhanced the fragile and mutable quality of her line and which suggests Martin's deep identification with aspects of Tawney's practice. It seems most likely that Martin used a related pin-and-thread technique to construct the two-dimensional geometrical forms with curves, such as in *Untitled (Study for 'The Egg')* 1960 (P.110) and the ellipses, ovals and lenses which began to appear in her work at this time.

Analogies with textiles were not lost on contemporary critics.

In her review of Martin's 1961 show at Betty Parsons, Natalie Edgar described 'what might be the design for a woven fabric', an inference subsequently taken up by others, from Donald Judd to Lawrence Alloway.²⁴ The analogies themselves do not account for the character of her paintings but enable us to see how Tawney's weavings may have functioned as a significant driver in Martin's work at a crucial moment of innovation. Close in size and intention to Martin's drawings was the series of small oil paintings that she made from 1960, which appear to address fundamental questions about geometric abstract painting, specifically (so it seems) the relationship of the grid to the surface and edge of the canvas, formal questions which affect the appearance, or illusion, of depth and movement in painting. In most of these canvases the grids function as containers for marks – dots or dashes and ticks often likened to stitches – and borders separate the grid from the edge of the canvas. In one painting, *Untitled* 1960 (P.67), Martin incised her grid into the wet ground: blue paint bleeds like a cut along the horizontal incisions, seeping into the raw canvas border. The cuts and stains have the effect of reducing the distance between surface and support, between grid and border. In another work, also *Untitled* 1960 (P.66), the paint has been wiped away from the perimeter, allowing edges to blur and

Lenore Tawney with *Dark River* 1961
and *The Torch of Night and Day* 1962
South Street studio, New York, 1962



the grid to hover over the painted ground. Martin's experiments drew not only on her recent experiences but also on thirty years of studio practice and on the transferable skills of printmaking, drawing and sculpture. We might discern here, also, the continuing legacy of Rothko, who deliberately blurred the edges of his shapes to create an impression of floating forms. Barnett Newman – whose paintings are 'all about the edges'²⁵ – may have offered an alternative direction.

At a time when abstract painting remained ascendant but in transition, this concern with the figure/ground relationship and the role of the border evidenced in Martin's paintings of the early 1960s was of interest to her critics: Barbara Rose noted the artist's use of framing bands,²⁶ and Donald Judd remarked on the effect the borders had of creating a distinct rectangle rather than an 'implied continuum'.²⁷ Martin progressively pared away these distractions from her compositions, in 1963 and 1964 eliminating incidental marks and extending lines to the edges of her canvases, finding therein the coincidence between image and object that Judd had found lacking. Even then it was difficult not to be diverted from the path of 'pure' abstraction. In 1962 and 1963, for example, Martin made three large paintings, including *Friendship* 1963 (p.97), using gold leaf and gesso, materials rich in historical associations. By the following year, however, Martin had pulled back from such 'excesses', once again adhering to the grid as her 'ready-made' template, but settling for the more seemingly prosaic combination of acrylic and graphite. Acrylic's fast drying time would have allowed Martin to work without interruption on a single canvas and it was in acrylic that she finally achieved the remarkable visual effects of translucency and tremolo that characterise her subsequent work.

During the tail end of her New York years, before leaving the city abruptly in 1967,²⁸ Martin allowed her work to appear in a number of epoch-defining group exhibitions, such as *10* at Dwan Gallery in 1966, selected by a trio of artists that included Ad Reinhardt: the show has been described as a 'bellweather for Minimalism'.²⁹ Lawrence Alloway's contemporary group exhibition *Systemic Painting* at the Guggenheim Museum in the same year situated Martin within a loose sub-category of monochrome 'white' paintings alongside Jo Baer, Al Held and Robert Ryman. Alloway was attempting to identify in painting the emergence of a sensibility akin to that identified in sculpture in the landmark *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum three years previously.³⁰ Defining the territory of his exhibition Alloway noted, in contemporary painting, a 'shift in sensibility away from the expressionist forms of abstraction' towards a new stance in which 'the end state of the painting is known prior to completion'.³¹

Martin's discomfort with this association, the formulation of an approach that came to be associated with minimalism – indeed her aversion to any form of categorisation – was not widely recognised

Lenore Tawney in her Spring Street studio,
New York, 1971. Martin's *The Laws* 1958
on the right-hand wall



until, on the occasion of her exhibition at Philadelphia's ICA in 1973, she made her first ever extended statement on her work. 'The Untroubled Mind' is an extended prose poem peppered with references to the Bible, myth and fable, and in it Martin highlights the importance to her of inspiration. Not unlike Alloway's notion of pre-planning, Martin's inspiration ensures that the end-state of the painting be known in advance and Martin, like Alloway, downplays the role of process in the execution of the work of art, albeit for different reasons and to different ends. But while both Alloway and Martin might have wished to remove subjectivity from the process of making art, and the refusal of planning might seem to run in parallel, they could not have been more at odds. Whereas Alloway sought to privilege the artist's role in conceptualising the work of art over his or her execution of it, Martin's 'inspiration' operated in opposition to both idea and ego: 'the error', Martin suggested, 'is in thinking we have a part to play in the process'.³²

Martin was not alone among her contemporaries in speaking of the creative process in terms of inspiration: from Barnett Newman to Lenore Tawney there were many in her 'circle' who downplayed personal agency in favour of revelation, through inspiration or intuition.³³ Martin's stated position, in which the work of art is generated through immaculate conception and delivered via miraculous birth, appears, however, to have been an extreme one. While usage and understanding of the term 'inspiration' has no doubt shifted over the decades, in Martin's case there is plenty of anecdotal evidence, particularly from the later years, to suggest that her personal version of inspiration was allied, pathologically, to the inner 'voices' that rarely left her undisturbed and that were symptomatic of a schizophrenia that sometimes overwhelmed her.³⁴ Habitually she would spend time, in her rocking chair, clearing her mind until inspiration came. We might therefore wish to understand her inspiration in much more prosaic terms, as a description of how the creative process taps into and harnesses the subconscious when our minds are idling. Martin's stated position with its rather transcendental language complicates this reading but does not make it incompatible with notions of process or the ready-made in her work.

Shortly after the publication of 'The Untroubled Mind', Martin began to paint again, after a period of over six years, now from the relative seclusion of New Mexico where she continued to live and work until her death in 2004. She painted horizontal or vertical bands of almost luminous dilutions of colour or grey and rarely departed thereafter from this formula, using it in rather the same way as she had used her grid.³⁵ To watch the elderly Martin at work, in *Agnes Martin: With My Back to the World*, Mary Lance's memorable film of 2002, is to witness the unfolding of a virtuoso studio performance, as Martin achieves a faultless painting without hesitating or appearing

Short pipes across for 80 yds 240 ft 160 pipes

Short pipes 160 pipes 40 ft long 640 ft of pipe

Long pipes 80 ft long 2080 ft of pipe

Altogether 5080 2720 ft of pipe.

80 yds 96 floats Length 8 Feet with 4 Feet depth 2 ft

100 piles

$14\frac{1}{2}$ $14\frac{1}{2}$
 $58\frac{1}{2}$

4 14

$$\begin{array}{r} 18 \\ 16 \end{array} \begin{array}{r} 2 \\ 2 \end{array} \begin{array}{r} 2 \\ 5 \end{array} \begin{array}{r} 29 \\ 10 \end{array}$$
$$\begin{array}{r} 29 \\ \times 2 \\ \hline 58 \end{array}$$
$$7 \times \frac{3}{4} = \frac{21}{4}$$
$$10\frac{1}{2} \quad 12$$
$$\begin{array}{r} 12 \\ 1 \overline{) 12} \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 2 \\ 3 \overline{) 6} \end{array}$$

33/9/30

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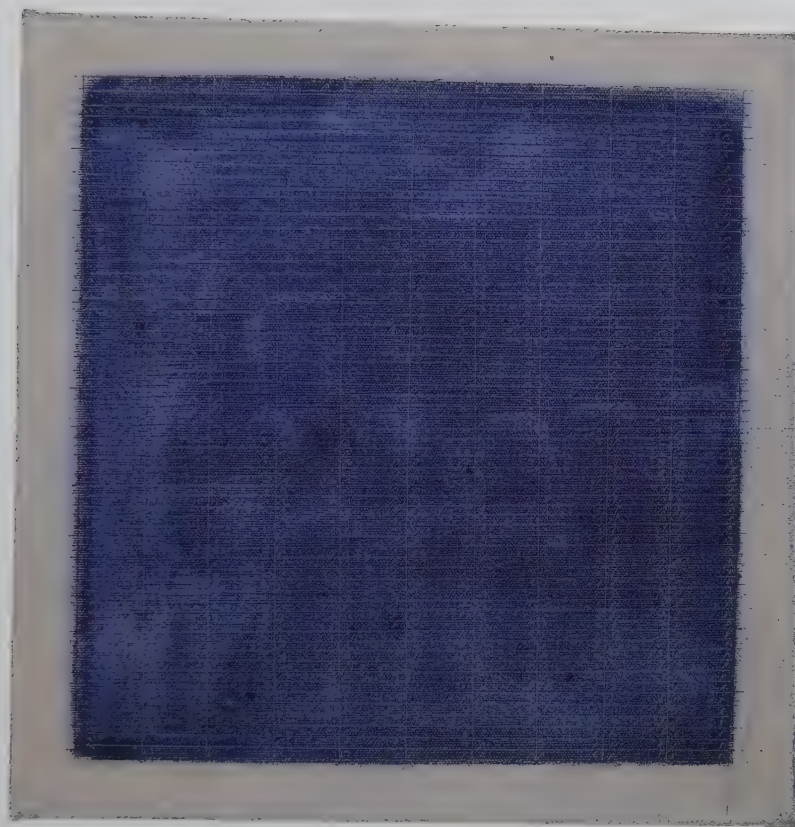
to reflect on its making. In fact we know that between the inspiration and completion of such paintings lay a complex procedure which began with extensive mathematical calculations, often progressed through small-scale studies and drawings and was achieved only with frequent recourse to a substantial portfolio of skills accrued through training, trial and error, over a long period of studio practice. Martin's paintings often feel very alike, and perhaps because of this we become, with time, more aware of many nuances of difference. Each canvas is singular in ways that suggest not hazard, but planning, decisions taken during the process and very careful making.

In light of the evidence of the works themselves and our growing understanding of Martin's personal history as an artist, we might then want to revisit her story of innocence, the tree and the grid, with which this essay begins. With its Old Testament resonance, we could see it as an allegory of arrival, referring to a moment of realisation when things, much worked towards, fall into place. Once arrived at, the grid was her default mode, a singular vehicle for personal expression, so much so that the images, brought to her through inspiration – 'ready-made', as it were – seem always to have been envisaged within an 'already-made' template.³⁶

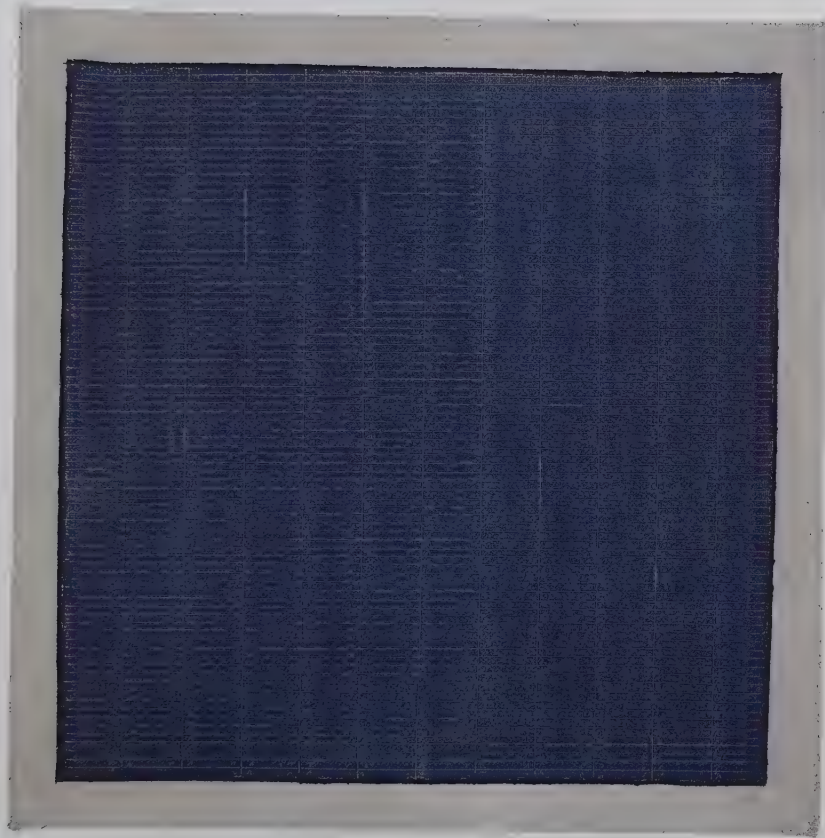
Behind this arrival – itself a new beginning – was a long journey, unique to Martin but not so dissimilar in direction and schedule to the journeys of her associates and contemporaries with whom she exchanged experiences and discoveries. Martin always disliked referring to her personal art history, and her reticence has been respected in much scholarship and appraisal. Behind the line she drew and the storyline she recounted, her art was the product of interweaving narratives, of warp and weft. Such were Martin's literary and verbal powers of deflection that she was able, Houdini-like, to extricate herself from the scene, leaving almost no evidence of her presence. It is in the works themselves rather than in her own accounts that this remarkable presence and the meticulous processes of making are reasserted – in the touch of her pencil line, the liquid wash of her colour and the soft blurring of the paint at her canvas's edge.

Untitled 1960
Oil paint on canvas
30.5 × 30.5

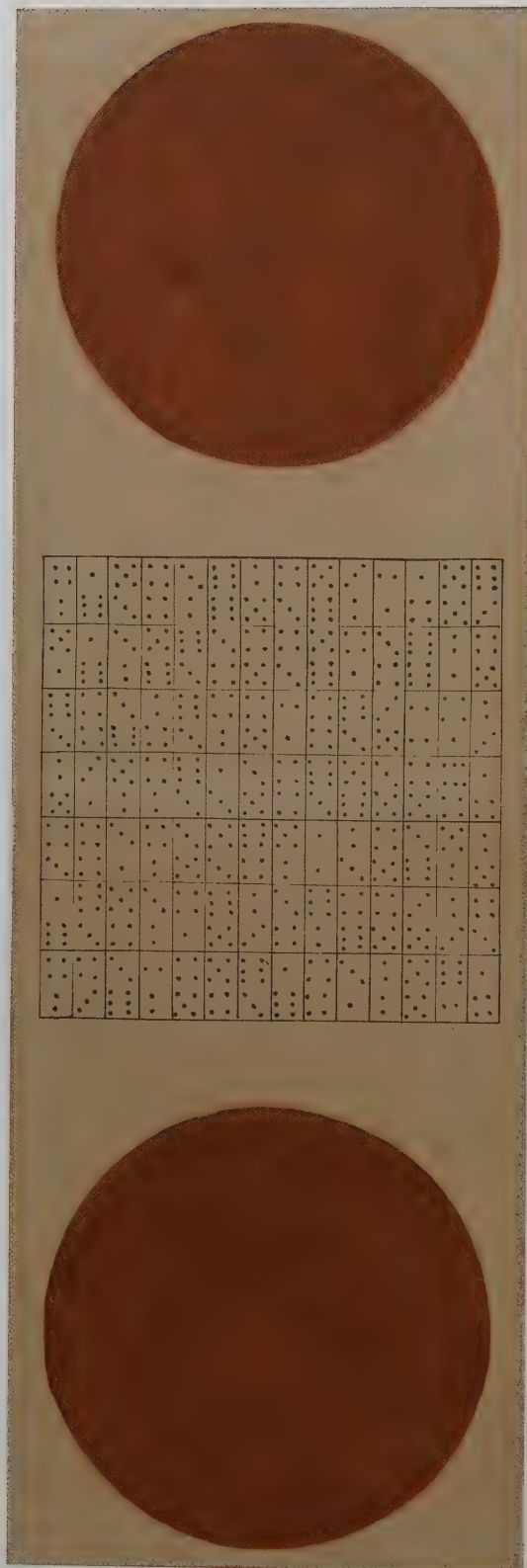


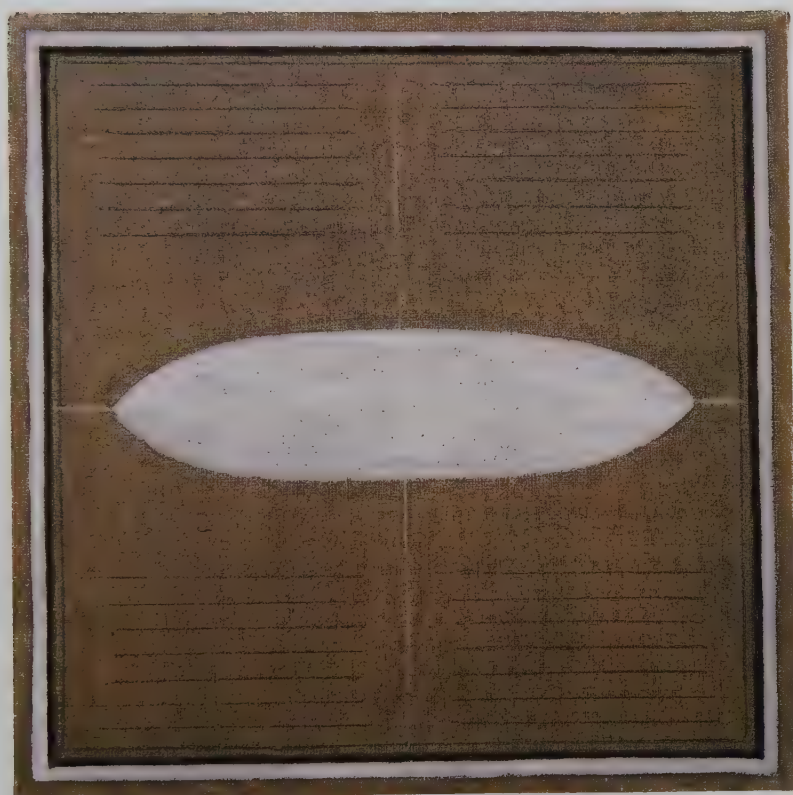


Untitled 1960
Oil paint and ink on canvas
30.5 × 30.5



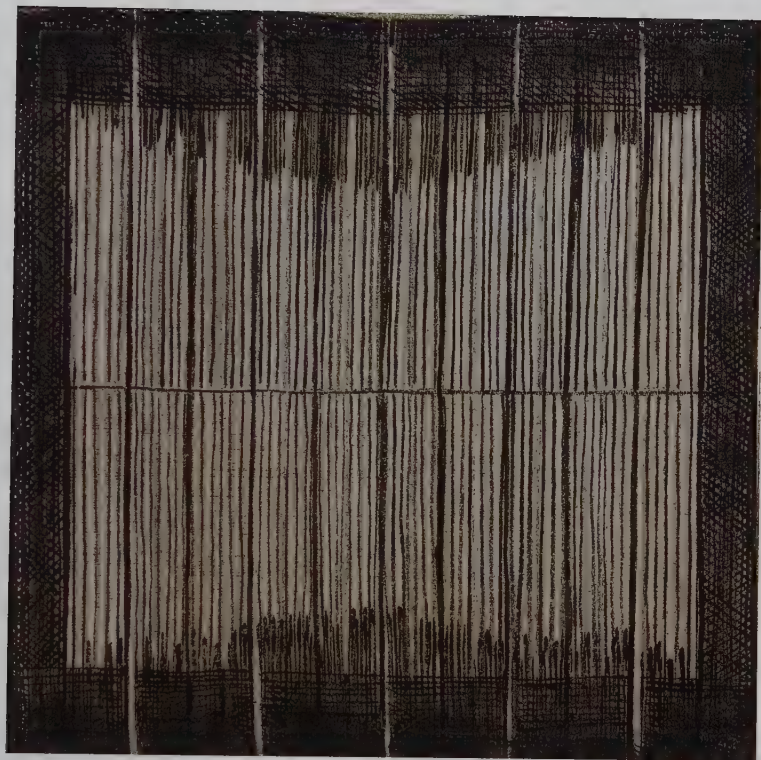
Dominoes 1960
Oil paint on paper mounted on canvas
91.4 × 30.5





Horizon 1960
Oil paint on canvas
38.1 × 38.1





***Islands No.4* c.1961**

— Christina Bryan Rosenberger

Agnes Martin spent decades refining her aesthetic vision, and her art of the early 1960s is marked by revelatory transitional paintings. *Islands No.4* c.1961 is one such work, incorporating materials and techniques that Martin developed in New Mexico while using the armature of the grid, a formal device employed by many artists in New York City during the decade. The painting is executed in ink and oil paint on an exposed linen support, which Martin used as a compositional element. The soft texture of the fabric, which has a thin layer of sizing, contrasts with the hard, shiny paint. Martin's translucent application of ink around the dark lines is controlled, acting as a mid-tone between the black outlines and the white paint. Her neutral tones, carefully calibrated textures and nuanced reflectance confirm her complex understanding of her materials.

Early in her career, Martin developed a vocabulary of formal elements that she tested across various media. The lozenges in *Islands No.4* can be seen in *Untitled* 1960 (p.12) and *Eight Fish Under Water* 1963 (p.119), as well as in *Untitled* 1959 (p.52), *Blue Composition* 1961 and *Brown Composition* 1961 (p.71). In *Islands No.4* Martin divides the picture plane into six equivalent parts bisected by a vertical line – an explicit grid, framing each lozenge. Registration marks, visible on the left and right edges, indicate how Martin divided each 2½-inch high rectangle into ten quarter-inch units, showing her attention to proportion. Despite its intimate scale, *Islands No.4* is not a preparatory work for a larger grid painting such as *The Islands* 1961 (p.77), but a finished painting, evident in the wooden lath frame Martin created and nailed directly to the stretcher.

In the early 1960s, Martin lived in a loft at 27 Coenties Slip near Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Lenore Tawney and Jack Youngerman. Searching for a form of abstraction to distinguish themselves from second-generation abstract expressionists, they found subject matter in their surroundings: Kelly sketched the leaves of a ginkgo tree on the pavement, and Indiana created paintings based on the form of an avocado seed in his loft. Kelly made a prototype for his 1959 sculpture *Pony* 'from the top of a coffee container we [Kelly and Martin] used at breakfast'.¹ By contrast, Martin said that her work was 'non-objective. Not about the world or nature, or things like that.'²

A photograph of Indiana in his Coenties Slip studio resonates, unexpectedly, with *Islands No.4*. The studio's nineteenth-century tin ceiling is divided into rectangles punctuated by lozenges – the same composition seen in *Islands No.4*. This striking congruence suggests that Martin's eye was attuned to the world around her, even if her art was not 'about the world.' Further, these patterns of observation were ingrained among the artists of Coenties Slip. Behind Indiana is one panel of his painting *The Melville Triptych* 1961, which transcribes the opening of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. 'Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon,' Melville writes, 'Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?'

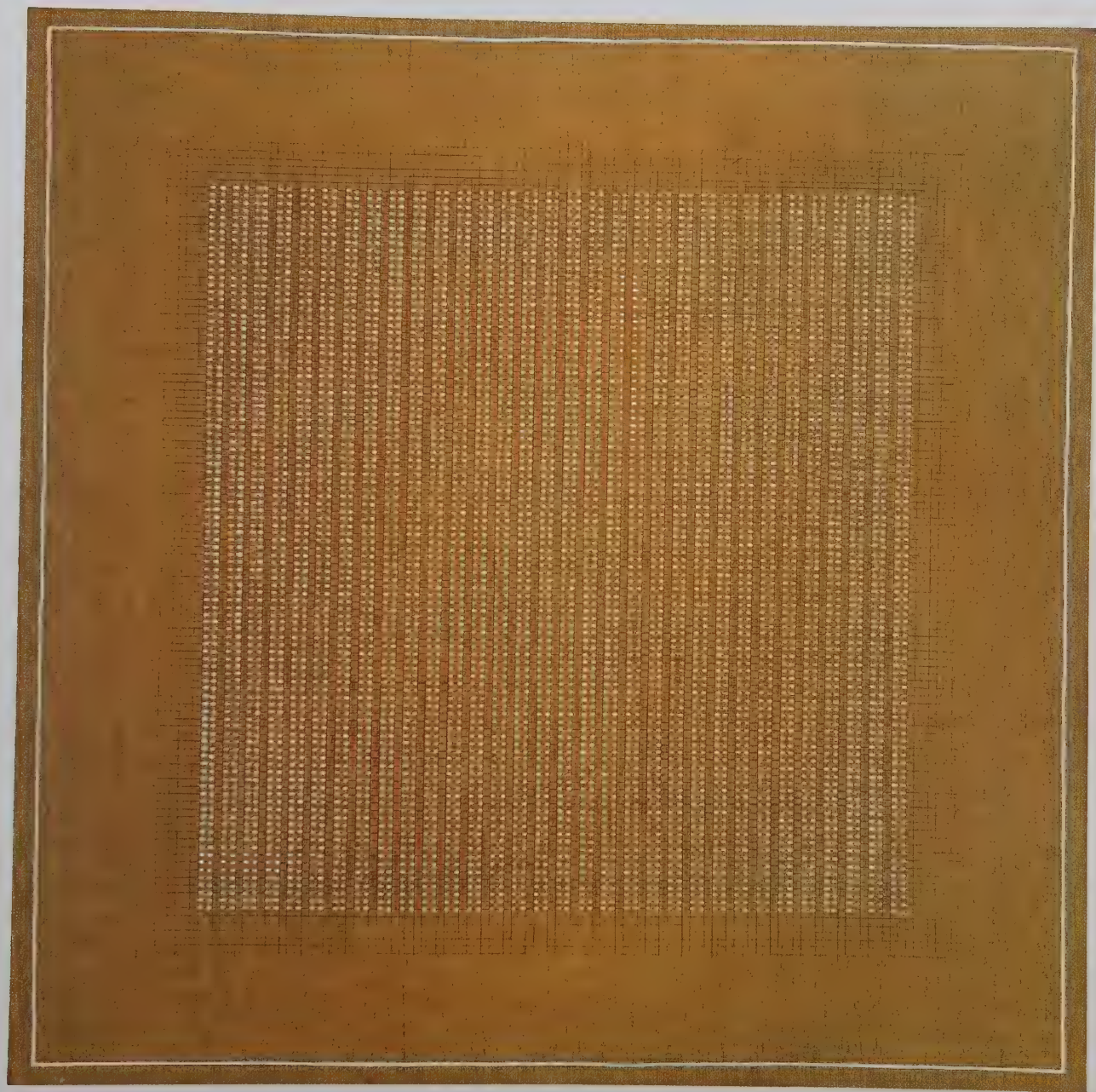
For Martin, as for Indiana and Kelly, that remained a fundamental question.



The Islands 1961

Oil paint and graphite on canvas

182.9 × 182.9



In *The Islands* 1961, Martin has drawn and cross-hatched an internal square grid with graphite directly on the linen's flaxen surface, leaving a border of around 12 inches on all sides of the 72-inch-square canvas. The centre-to-centre cell spacing along the horizontal lines is made visibly wider than the corresponding centre-to-centre intervals down the vertical lines, yielding a linear grid of equal squares, or cells, forty-eight rows down and thirty-two columns across, with each of the 1,536 cells divided by the cross-hatching into four equal quadrants. Martin articulated each of these cells with a touch or dab of ochre or other pale yellow oil paint in all four quadrants of each cell ($4 \times 1,536 = 6,144$ quadrants). Eschewing a modular 48-by-48 cell structure here for a 48-by-32 cell distribution that stretches across the grid square is an early stratagem to create a dynamic grid, displacing the static mass of the square. She would achieve this same effect of horizontal stasis or arrested motion by replacing the square cells with rectangles. Martin described the practice in 1967: 'When I cover the square surface with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power.'¹

The Islands belongs to the critical period of 1957–67 at Coenties Slip, and in particular to Martin's early association with fibre artist Lenore Tawney, whose innovative weavings of open warp, free-hanging fibre forms woven with vertical threads of varied thickness and texture (e.g. *Vespers* 1961) lent a seminal path to Martin's route to her grid format (e.g. *Valentine* 1962). At close range, *The Islands*' thirty-two columns of four-point yellow squares suspend like parallel lengths of finely knotted cord fashioned on a loom. At middle distance, they become a translucent veil: 'Nature is like

parting a curtain, you go into it.'² Finally, at full distance, the grid's mesh of nodes and parallel strands merge into a dense mist, a haze of vast ocean in deep *crepuscolo*.

Martin frequented New York museums and galleries. The brief span between *Autumn Watch* c.1954 (p. 24) and *The Islands* 1961 attests to Martin's capacity to absorb past and current advances in abstraction into a highly personal and authentic style – early on with her full grasp of Arshile Gorky and his 'tremendous intuition of true discipleship'.³ That intuition – for Martin, a mode of intellection – would draw upon Ellsworth Kelly's debt to Mondrian's early grids, then on Mondrian's transformative *Tree* series itself, almost palpable in a later reflection by Martin on her painting *The Tree* 1964 (p. 27): 'When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees and then this grid came into my mind'.⁴ And Martin's early grid format as seen in *The Islands*, 'a large square, within an empty border',⁵ would soon give way to her extension of the grid structure to the edge of the canvas – in part a response to Judd's astute observation in January 1964 that the empty borders render the perception of the grid field as a rectangle, 'not a section of an implied continuum'.⁶

The Islands dates to Martin's periodic descents into what Coenties Slip neighbour Jack Youngerman called 'an extremity of distress',⁷ a dark night of the soul mired in her severe Calvinist roots. As Martin later recalled (in 1972): '[T]o be penetrated by the night ... that is to be overtaken. One feels as though one is in the

outer darkness ... We go from reading religious doctrine and occult practices ... we ... tremble with fear and dread.’⁸ ‘The Untroubled Mind’, an essay dictated to Ann Wilson by Martin in 1972, is a remarkable personal account of the syncretic resolution of her Calvinist legacy, Taoist-Zen beliefs and Western classicism. This fragile conciliation had found inchoate form at Coenties Slip, subtly shaped from the ongoing spiritual entente of fellow Columbia alumni Ad Reinhardt and Thomas Merton. After 1967, it would support her subsequent return to painting.

Martin’s interest in Taoist-Zen philosophy can be traced to her friendship with Reinhardt from the 1950s and, by extension, to Merton, with whom Reinhardt shared his study of Zen Buddhism during a lifelong friendship, and whose writings espoused the congruence of Western and Eastern contemplative and mystic traditions that figures so prominently in ‘The Untroubled Mind’. A close reading of that text reveals a remarkable concordance between her themes and literary allusions – classicism, nature, inspiration, perfection, the sublime, William Blake, St Augustine – and their treatment in Merton’s ‘Nature and Art in William Blake’ (1939) – including his singular rooting of Blake’s aesthetic in a hybrid soil of Neoplatonism and Eastern mysticism. His Blake notebooks list D.T. Suzuki (with whom Merton would correspond years later) and Chuang Tzu, and two of Merton’s books on Taoist Zen philosophy spoke directly to Martin’s Zen Pursuits *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (1965) and *Mystics and Zen Masters* (1967), whose photographic cover featured the iconic San Francisco de Asis Church in Taos.

The Islands offers an early glimpse of her working methods from Coenties Slip. The very personal nature of Martin’s facture – ‘the humbleness and physicality of her means’, as Lawrence Alloway described it⁹ – yielded the classical, understated arrested motion that emerged in *The Islands* 1961 and was fully realised by 1967. It is an effect described by Lucy Lippard as ‘channels of nuance, stretched on a rack of linear tensions’¹⁰ – what Betty Parsons called ‘heartstrings pulled out’,¹¹ that bridges, then overwhelms, the viewer’s initial perceptual lag. By 1967, Martin’s grid paintings were charting her passage through the dark night: ‘I perceive now [c.1970] that they were all conceived in purest melancholy.’¹²

The Islands is a harbinger of that passage. In his January 1964 review of paintings by Martin from 1963 similar to *The Islands*, Donald Judd observed that ‘the horizontal lines go through, but the irregular vertical gaps between the rows of [white] dashes are dominant. The field is woven.’¹³ The root word for ‘grid’ in both Latin and Greek denotes wickerwork – flexible twigs or shoots woven crisscross into a horizontal-vertical format. Martin would have liked that.

Burning Tree 1961
Wood and metal
33 × 53.3





Song 1962
Oil paint on canvas
61 × 61



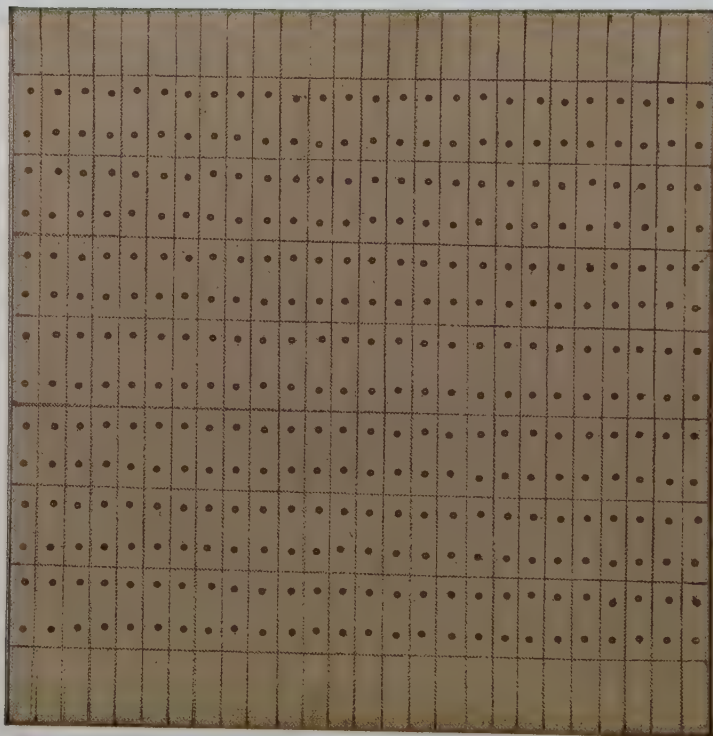


White Flower 1960
Oil paint on canvas
182.6 × 182.9





Little Sister 1962
Oil paint, ink and brass nails
on canvas and wood
25.1 × 24.2





Morning comprises a drawn grid on a white acrylic primed linen canvas supported on a modified 'turnbuckle'-tensioned adjustable wooden stretcher.¹ It would appear that the canvas was stretched prior to preparation. The artist has applied a thick glue size to the linen. Although it appears the artist focused on applying the size to the tensioned face of the canvas, it has flowed onto the tacking edges and the overlay of linen on the reverse (TOP LEFT). The drips of size on all four overlay edges suggest that the tensioned linen canvas was flat, face-up on the ground when the size was applied.

The white priming was most likely applied to a tensioned surface. Its even and level distribution would have been difficult to achieve on an untensioned canvas. Scientific analysis shows the priming to consist of an acrylic medium (water-borne polyethyl acrylate/methyl methacrylate copolymer) with a high concentration of chalk pigment.² This formulation suggests Martin was using a commercial artists' product similar to Talens Acrylic Gesso.³

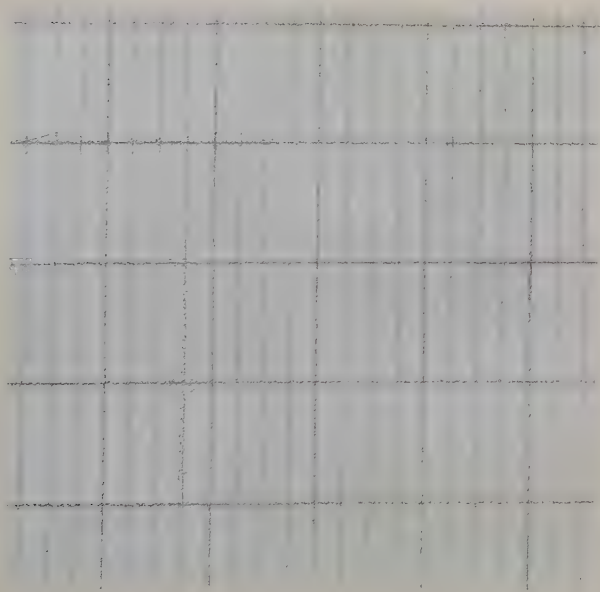
Two even layers of acrylic gesso were applied with a thick brush in long vertical sweeps, up and down the surface. The pattern of these vertical sweeps is visible on the reverse of the painting (OVERLEAF). The loaded brush was pushed quite vigorously against the surface and in doing so Martin has forced the gesso right into and through to the reverse of the linen. Despite this, the resulting double layer of priming has uniformity whilst retaining some of the texture of the underlying linen. This flat gesso film evenly absorbs the light like an expanse resembling unimpacted snow.

Martin, pencil and straight-edge in hand, would have faced a beguiling surface. She had switched from using oil to acrylic paint in 1964, so at the

time of painting *Morning* she would still have been familiarising herself with the qualities of this new medium.⁴ Quite possibly she was excited by the rapid drying time and faster reworking opportunities acrylic offered. If Martin had wanted to abandon the vehicular and translucent quality of oil, with its tendency to yellow with age and dry slowly, then acrylic was the way forward. She continued to explore the possibilities of this medium throughout her career. Martin applied acrylic gesso only to the face of the work (extending only 3 to 4 millimetres over the edge onto the tacking margin) presumably because the edges of the painting were offstage in her creative theatre. This provided a contained white surface onto which the grid was then drawn.

The drawn grid was created using several different pencil lines, small flaws in the lines generating just enough dissonance to assure the viewer they were made by Martin's hand. The art historian Barbara Haskell has described the artist as moving the pencil along the top edge of a measuring tape or string that has been stretched across the canvas, the tape or string acting as a loose guide so that her lines assume a subtle unevenness or trembling effect. Haskell observes that the wavering hand-drawn undulations soften the impression of order and the uniformity of the grid.⁵

In *Morning* the grid is certainly visually uniform yet deceptively off square in dimension. Martin has covered the surface with 1,152 square units, regularly placed and each being dimensionally identical with only 0.5- to 1-millimetre variations. However, there are thirty-six square units drawn across the width of the surface yet only thirty-two down the



length of it. Martin said: 'My formats are square, but the grids never are absolutely square; they are rectangles, a little bit off square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance, though I didn't set out to do it that way. When I cover the square with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power.'⁶

Each of these squares encases three vertical lines. The perimeter of each square unit is distinguishable as dark soft-graphite pencil lines, two vertical and two horizontal. The inner vertical lines are drawn with a hard graphite pencil creating a lighter mark. Martin has accessorised the vertical graphite lines by drawing a parallel-running red pencil line to the left of each of them. She has emphasised the horizontal lines by applying a red line below and above them.

Microscopic examination of the grid shows the sequence of these soft, hard and red pencil lines as they were applied (**PREVIOUS PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT**). First Martin drew the series of vertical, fairly hard graphite lines. These would have been the least likely to smudge as she continued to work the surface. To one side of these she applied the line of a waxy red pencil. Martin then applied the soft dark pencil horizontals, finally adding the parallel waxy red lines.⁷

By examining the grid closely one can see many imperfections in these apparently sharp straight lines; something so seemingly perfect yet flawed by a human hand. At times the pencil tip appears to glide along the relatively flat primed canvas surface. Then it will encounter irregularities within the surface and will rise and fall erratically, visually softening the line. In places the pencil tip veers off course completely for several centimetres. The artist

may take a second to awake from this meditative drawing process in order to lift and reposition her pencil tip back on course. The viewer has only a subliminal awareness of these variations. They fail to derail us from our looking because some of these flaws may have been deliberate, asymmetry and asperity being necessary for truly encountering the Buddhist idea of beauty.⁸

The effect of this grid superimposed on the white field offers the viewer a dazzling sensory experience, a very particular sublimation of visual cues. If the viewer stands a certain distance from the painting, the eye is not hooked to any compositional detail. Almost like a holographic image, the eye tries to rest on a flat surface but finds it focuses on a space between the field and grid. This is an Elysian space, where we may momentarily encounter Martin's insight on a philosophical level.

At some point after completion, *Morning* was varnished (scientific analysis of this varnish identified it as a solvent-borne butyl methacrylate homopolymer⁹). Tiny traces of cellulose nitrate, of the kind found in some spray-on materials, would suggest it may have been a commercial varnish. Ultraviolet fluorescence examination of the painting carried out prior to extensive conservation treatment in 2011 shows this material was probably sprayed in wide vertical bands of varying thickness (suggested by the variation in the depth of fluorescence within these bands; **PREVIOUS PAGE, TOP RIGHT**)

The painting was in the artist's collection until Tate acquired it in December 1974. Martin's friend and fellow artist Ellsworth Kelly has declared that she rarely varnished her paintings,¹⁰ although the artist herself said that on occasion



her paintings could be coated with an acrylic varnish product called 'Blair'.¹¹ As there is no known written evidence to confirm the artist's intentions in regard to the varnish layer present on this work, its retention was anomalous. The varnish was excessively glossy and had imbibed atmospheric dirt, with the effect that the surface was dulled and certain surface features were enhanced (**BELOW**). To eliminate this overly saturating and obscuring effect, the varnish was removed during the conservation treatment (**P.89, BOTTOM RIGHT**).

Our hope is that the painting's current post-conservation condition will allow the viewer an authentic viewing experience, as coined by Martin herself: 'You just go there and sit and look.'¹²

p.89, clockwise from top left
Detail of drips of size on right
side linen overlay

UV fluorescence photograph
of painting prior to treatment
2010–2011

Detail of dirt imbibed varnish.
Right-hand side shows recovery
of Martin's gesso surface after
varnish removal in 2011

Detail of the grid before
treatment 2010–2011

p.91
Verso of the painting

This page
Whole recto during varnish
removal 2011





White Stone 1965
Oil paint and graphite on canvas
182.9 × 182.9

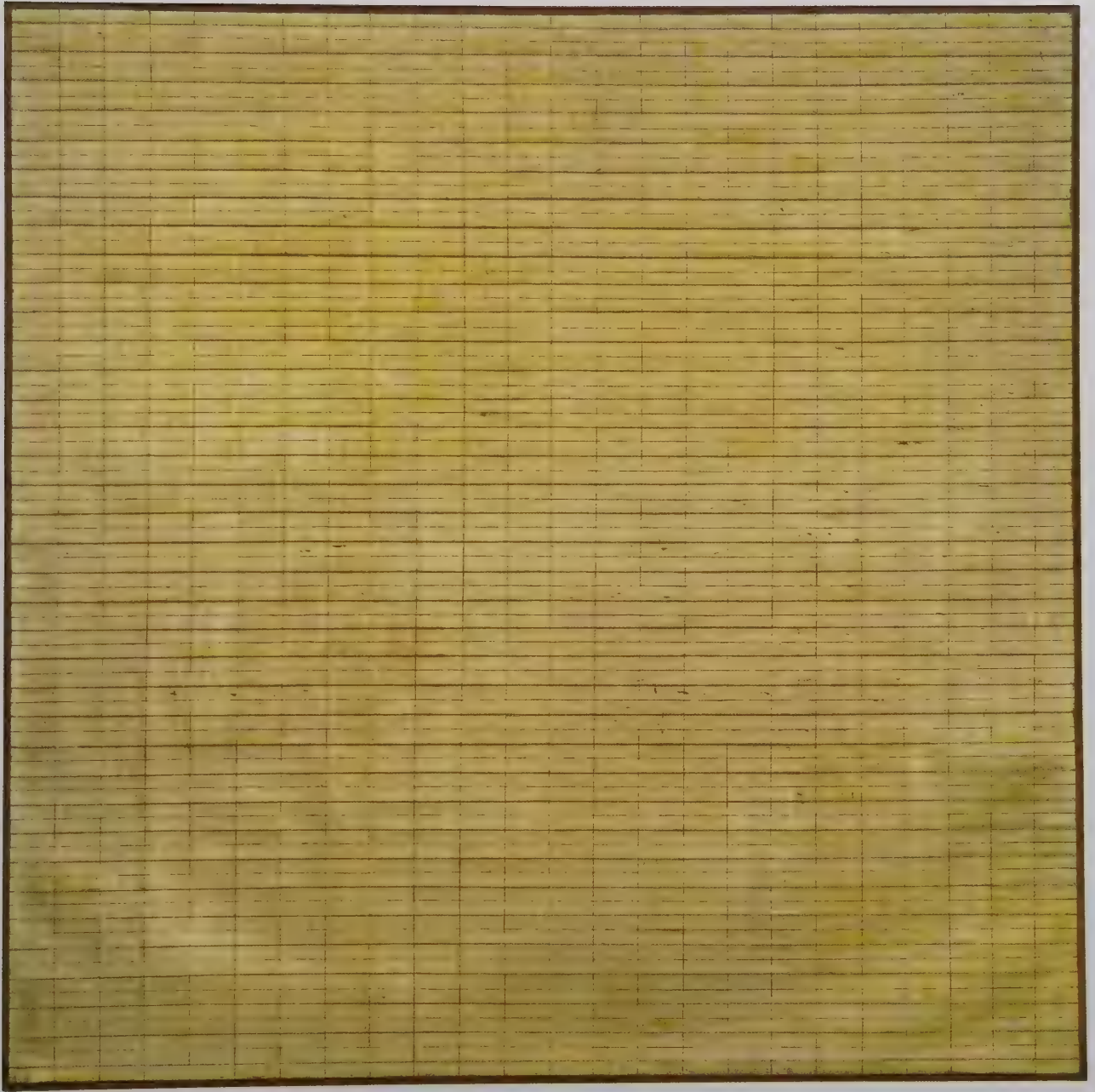




Friendship 1963

Incised gold leaf and gesso on canvas

190.5 × 190.5

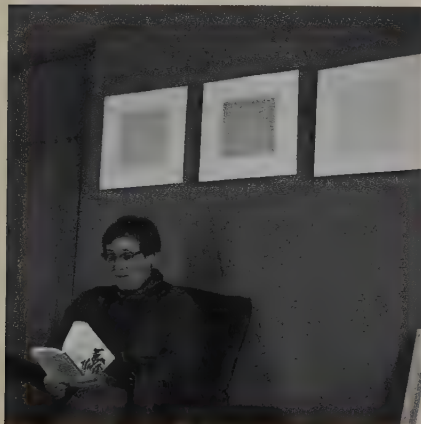


In Pursuit of the Neutral: Agnes Martin's Shimmering Line

'Is Graphic Art on the way out?' was the somewhat glib question posed to Agnes Martin by an editor of *Artforum* magazine in 1973.¹ At that point, Martin had not made a painting for several years, since her abrupt departure from New York and her subsequent relocation to New Mexico during the late 1960s. But she had just completed *On a Clear Day* 1973, a portfolio of thirty screenprints based on two new sets of drawings.² In these serigraphs, the watercolour washes and ink blots that had pooled sporadically in her earlier work had drained away, resulting in a mode of inscription that was emphatically graphic in both senses of that word – at once insistently linear and unflinchingly clear. In a statement on the portfolio, Martin offered the editor a reply of sorts: 'When interest in graphic art wanes I suppose it is possible to imagine its slipping out of sight but I do not believe in that possibility.' She then drifted into a poetic meditation on 'The Still and Silent in Art', which remained unpublished until many years later.³

Perhaps Martin felt the portfolio spoke for itself. Alone, each print appears ascetic and absolute, the definitive move in an abstractionist endgame. But the series unfolds into a dazzling array of permutations on the grid, spinning endless possibilities out of that most familiar of modernist myths.⁴ Beginning with a grid of eighty units that are almost but not quite square, the portfolio consists of dramatic dilations and contractions of that structure, each configuration related to yet distinct from the one before. Far from being 'on the way out', graphic art – which I take here to mean drawing as well as printmaking – seems to have offered a way forward for Martin, the production of *On a Clear Day* (pp.125–33) precipitating her return to painting. And despite *Artforum's* intimation of its obsolescence, there had in fact been a resurgence of interest in graphic art among New York-based artists, curators and collectors since Martin's departure from the city. *On a Clear Day* was first shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1973, coinciding with Martin's first retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia.⁵ Elsewhere in New York, Sol LeWitt's wall drawings were on display at the John Weber Gallery and Dorothea Rockburne's *Drawing Which Makes Itself* 1972–3 had been installed for the first time at the Bykert Gallery. At the Whitney Museum of American Art, Martin was placed in the same room as LeWitt, Rockburne, Mel Bochner, Robert Ryman and Robert Mangold as part of the survey *American Drawings 1963–1973* – a curatorial constellation reconfigured in numerous exhibitions throughout the 1970s.⁶ Introducing one such show, curator Rudi Fuchs attributed this turn to drawing to a fundamental 'change in contemporary aesthetics' prompted in part by Conceptual art's embrace of more humble methods of presentation'.⁷ By 1976, curator Bernice Rose would argue that drawing had been transformed from 'a "minor" support medium' into 'a major and independent medium with distinctive expressive possibilities altogether its own'.⁸

Martin in the 1972 photograph used by Parasol
Press to advertise *On a Clear Day* 1973
Photograph by Robert Feldman



Martin both prefigured and participated in these developments – indeed, her work might be productively understood within the context of a reconsideration of the practice of drawing that occurred in New York and elsewhere during the 1960s and 1970s. But this resurgence of interest in the graphic arts was predicated upon a radical critique of drawing as it has traditionally been conceived: a systematic dismantling of the assumptions that continue to shape the discourse on the medium. I will call the kind of practice in which Martin was engaged a form of ‘drawing degree zero’ – a concept that will be developed over the course of this essay.

In her journal, Martin added a postscript to her public statement on the graphic arts: ‘In graphic arts and all the arts technique is a hazard even as it is in living life.’⁹ As a postgraduate in fine art and art education who taught drawing, creative design and portraiture at the University of New Mexico, Martin had mastered and taught a range of drawing techniques long before she was taken up by Betty Parsons Gallery in the late 1950s. Throughout her career, critics were quick to praise her supreme sensitivity and skill in handling that humblest yet supposedly most revelatory of instruments, the graphite pencil. For some, Martin’s use of pre-planned grids, standard-sized canvases and straight edges only served to highlight the delicacy of her technique, focussing the eye on her unique talent as a draughtsperson. Reviewing her 1973 retrospective, the critic Carter Ratcliff proposed that ‘The smallest perceivable detail of pencil line, of crayoned color, of paint surface and of the weave of the canvas takes on an intensity for the eye actually comparable to virtuoso stylistics.’¹⁰ More recently, the art historian Jonathan Katz has claimed that ‘Martin’s work is nothing if not an index of her hand, the sensitive response to imperfections in the canvas’s weave, the famed “tremolo” that is guarantor of the artist’s presence.’¹¹ In these accounts, Martin’s ruled pencil lines become charged barometers of technical facility and personal style, so that her austere grids succumb to a rather conventional mode of connoisseurship, in which the artist is identified with and in her mark. But what would it mean for a draughtsperson to view technique not as a skill to master, nor a quality to admire, but as a hazard – as something perilous, to be avoided at all costs?

In the four years preceding her departure from New York, Martin gradually eliminated the found materials, organic forms, structural idiosyncrasies and manual slippages that had characterised her work of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In a painting like *Grass* 1967 (P.95), one has to work very hard indeed to detect the autographic trace so cherished by many of Martin’s admirers. Steady and precise, her graphite line refuses to yield to the connoisseurial gaze, even as it scans each mark for microscopic displays of ‘virtuoso stylistics’. Where shifts in pressure do occur, they stem from the exigencies of Martin’s materials – finding that a long ruler caused her line to

give with the canvas, for instance, she used a smaller one to draw each line in sections. In her works on paper, on the other hand, the small scale and smooth surface of the support allowed her pencil or pen to glide seamlessly across it. Consider *Drift of Summer* 1964 (P.118), where Martin's lines never falter save a slight thickening at each end as her pen slows to a halt. Rather than inviting and celebrating such irregularities, her works on paper show just how thoroughly Martin sought to expunge them from her practice.

Responding to the same 1973 retrospective as Ratcliff, the critic Douglas Crimp went as far as to describe Martin's work as a form of 'anti-drawing'.¹² He borrowed the term from the modernist critic Clement Greenberg, who had used it to describe colour field painting's reduction of the function of drawing to the delimitation of vast, unmodulated areas of paint. Crimp identified Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still – the colour field painters Martin most admired – as the key proponents of this strategy, which, he claimed, subsequently 'solidified into various forms of art opposing any recording of sensibility in terms of sensitivity of line'.¹³ As the culmination of this approach, Martin's work systematically debunked what Crimp termed the 'drawing cliché': the well-worn conception of the medium as private, intimate and revelatory of the artist's true sensibility.¹⁴ By making the graphite line a key component of her finished paintings, Martin confounded the distinction between the speculative 'private' work of drawing and the conclusive public statement. Her works on paper are not preparatory studies for paintings – indeed, they often evince a greater degree of precision than her works on canvas. As a result, Crimp observed, Martin's works on paper are less 'revelatory' than her paintings, their smoothly ruled, densely packed lines impervious and anonymous.

Like Crimp, I believe that Martin's confrontation with drawing confounds many of the assumptions that continue to attend the discourse on the medium. Yet the term 'anti-drawing' implies an antagonistic stance that fails to accommodate the nuanced and deliberately un-polemical tenor of Martin's work and writings. Rather than opposing the graphic mark, her works on paper serve to neutralise it, subtly defusing its representational and autographic functions. From 1964 onwards, her lines approached what I will call a kind of 'drawing degree zero', purging the medium of its conventional associations.

I borrow this concept of the 'zero degree' from the literary theorist Roland Barthes, whose book *Writing Degree Zero* was first published in 1953 and translated into English during the late 1960s. In a series of articles published throughout the 1950s, Barthes described how the French *nouveau roman* novelists Albert Camus, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor had emptied their writing of metaphor, characterisation and subjective expression, in an attempt to dissociate the word 'from the husk of habitual clichés and from the technical

Hieronymus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights 1500–5
 Closed triptych showing external panels:
 grisaille on wooden panel 220 × 195
 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



reflexes of the writer'.¹⁵ This strategic reduction of literary means resulted in what Barthes described as 'a neutral, colourless writing', 'a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style'.¹⁶ While many critics regarded the *nouveau roman* as cold or indifferent, for Barthes it offered a literary freedom determinedly wrought, a mode of writing that was both innovative and 'innocent' of tired conventions.¹⁷ The word 'innocent', so frequently found in Martin's own statements, was used by Barthes to describe a radical position that was neither naïve nor sentimental.¹⁸

I am not suggesting that Martin was directly influenced by the French *nouveau roman* writers – although we know that her friend Ellsworth Kelly was a keen reader of Robbe-Grillet. Rather, I want to propose that their strategic neutralisation of writing might offer a way of understanding Martin's confrontation with drawing, which entailed a tactical disengagement of the medium from its conventional associations. Instead of scanning Martin's work for microscopic indications of artistic sensibility, it is important to recognise just how strenuously it resists the processes of graphological disclosure and connoisseurial consumption with which the medium of drawing has historically been aligned.

Barthes elaborated upon the idea of the 'zero degree' in a series of lectures he gave during the late 1970s on the topic of 'the neutral'. There he returned to his earlier observation that in mathematics the zero degree occupies the space between plus and minus, while in grammar a noun is called 'neuter' if it is neither masculine nor feminine.¹⁹ The attraction of these terms for Barthes lay in their ability to elude the oppositional categories that structure language and, by extension, our understanding of the world. He opened one of his lectures on the neutral with a verbal 'self-portrait' by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: 'I am as if colourless . . . neutral as the newborn who has not yet felt his first emotion, as if without project and without goal.'²⁰ This citation was juxtaposed with Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* 1500–5 – not the well-known interior of the triptych, with its lurid narrative of temptation, hedonism and damnation; but the monochromatic exterior, which is painted in grisaille (LEFT). Although this palette was customary for Netherlandish altarpieces, it gains particular significance here since it is used to represent the third day of Creation according to Genesis, the moment before the sun and the moon gave light to the earth. Both iconographically and chromatically then, Bosch's painting conjures a moment before opposition, and thus before meaning. The monochrome, Barthes wrote, 'substitutes for the idea of opposition that of the slight difference, of the onset, of the effort toward difference, in other words, of nuance'.²¹ He called the infinitely nuanced space that results the 'shimmer': 'that whose aspect, perhaps whose meaning, is subtly modified according to the angle of the subject's gaze'.²²

Bosch's neutral yet scintillating sphere is echoed in the circle paintings Martin produced during the late 1950s. In *Untitled 1958* (P.39), a dusky circle is centred on a square canvas, doubly framed by two painted borders as on the exterior of Bosch's triptych. Suspended in a perpetual state of becoming, Martin's painting is likely to have been informed by her awareness that in Taoist philosophy the undifferentiated unity from which all existence arises is represented by a circle or sphere.²³ In her essay 'The Untroubled Mind' she urged the reader to 'Try to remember before you were born ... As it was in the beginning, there was no division and no separation.'²⁴ Throughout her work and writings, this ideal space before language and difference is summoned via a complex blend of biblical references and Eastern philosophy also found in Barthes's lectures on the neutral. Yet Martin subsequently abandoned the circle as 'too expansive', substituting for it the non-hierarchical, subtly modulated shimmer of the hand-drawn grid. Asked why the grid was important for her, she replied that it represented 'innocence'.²⁵

Martin's grids have been variously described as 'impermeable mists', 'channels of nuance' and 'luminous containers for the shimmer of line'.²⁶ But I want to suggest that – rather than simply describing the optical effects of these works – Barthes's concept of the shimmer might help to articulate a kind of structural play that is operative throughout Martin's practice. As several critics have noted, Martin's work confounds familiar oppositions – representation versus abstraction, objectivity versus subjectivity, materiality versus spirituality, to name a few. Such oppositions are indicative of what Barthes called 'the fascism of language', which requires us to choose between opposing values in order to communicate.²⁷ The shimmer refuses to submit to this demand, eliding these oppositional terms and confounding the production of meaning. Stealthy and fugitive, it slips between and glides beyond our habitual patterns of thought, longing for the absence of every sign.²⁸

'My paintings have neither objects, nor space, nor time, nor anything – no forms,' Martin once said. 'When you give up the idea of right and wrong, you don't get anything. What you get is rid of everything, freedom from ideas and responsibility.'²⁹ Politically, Martin's relinquishment of difference and accountability is not unproblematic. She dismissed feminist readings of her work, even declaring to one interviewer that she was 'not a woman'.³⁰ Yet her refusal to acknowledge her own gender or sexuality has recently been productively interpreted as an anti-identitarian stance, which resonates with a younger generation of artists and writers.³¹ Although it speaks to more formal concerns, her approach to the practice of drawing likewise indicates her refusal to assume a fixed identity. The systematisation of artistic production was of course a key trajectory in art of the 1960s, encompassing painting, sculpture,

(First executed by) Sol LeWitt
Wall Drawing #1: Drawing Series II 18 (A&B)
First installation: Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, NY, October, 1968
Black pencil, dimensions variable to walls



photography and dance. But by bringing this programmatic approach to bear on the medium of drawing, Martin thwarted the familiar urge to identify, to characterise and to know the maker by her mark. Evading fixity, identity and meaning, Martin's shimmering lines are emblematic not only of her approach to art-making, but of her resistant and rebellious attitude to imposed classificatory structures.

When Martin left New York in 1967, her approach to drawing reverberated in the work of a group of younger artists active in the city. The following year, Sol LeWitt installed his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery, as part of a fund-raising exhibition in protest against the war in Vietnam (**OPPOSITE**). His reconfiguration of drawing as impersonal rather than personal, public rather than private, and monumental rather than intimate would have been unthinkable without Martin's earlier practice, which had effectively dismantled clichéd notions of the preparatory, intimate and revelatory nature of drawing. If Martin's approach to drawing substituted anonymous labour for the autographic gesture, LeWitt extended this logic still further, employing teams of draughtspeople to execute his wall drawings according to his instructions. His shimmering, site-specific installations thwart conventional modes of ownership and spectatorship far more explicitly than Martin's drawings, which might nevertheless be said to prise the medium from the clutches of the connoisseur.

Like LeWitt, Dorothea Rockburne was an admirer of Martin's work, who visited the older artist at the adobe house she had built in New Mexico.³² Rockburne's *Drawing Which Makes Itself* series of 1972–3 broke with the grid favoured by Martin and LeWitt by folding the paper in on itself and tracing its displaced corners with a pencil (**LEFT**). When unfurled, the paper was marked and scored by horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines that served to archive these manoeuvres. In her installations based on the same concept, Rockburne flipped and folded paper sheets across the walls and floor of the gallery, marking their paths in pencil and pen. Although the *Drawing Which Makes Itself* was more dynamic than monumental, Rockburne like Martin made a major statement of drawing, transforming expansive spaces via a radical economy of means. Her series also drove a wedge between drawing and subjective expression by proposing that these sparse networks of lines led back not to the personality of the artist, but to the paper itself.

Finally we might consider the work of Richard Tuttle, who became a lifelong friend of Martin's after meeting her in 1963. Describing their shared interest in Eastern philosophy, Tuttle has said: '[It] has very little to do with artistic signature, about me expressing myself to you. It's an attitude about getting beyond both of us to being able to see basic structures of reality. That's where Agnes and I come together.'³³ Distinct from the systematic

Dorothea Rockburne
Drawing Which Makes Itself: Neighborhood 1973
 Paper, graphite, coloured pencil,
 and felt-tip pen on wall 271.8 × 381
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
 Gift of J. Frederic Byers III

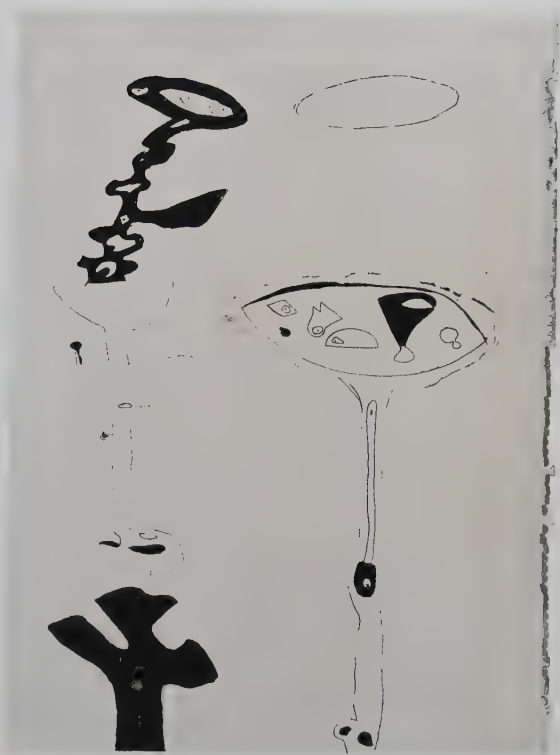


**IN PURSUIT OF THE
NEUTRAL: AGNES MARTIN'S
SHIMMERING LINE**

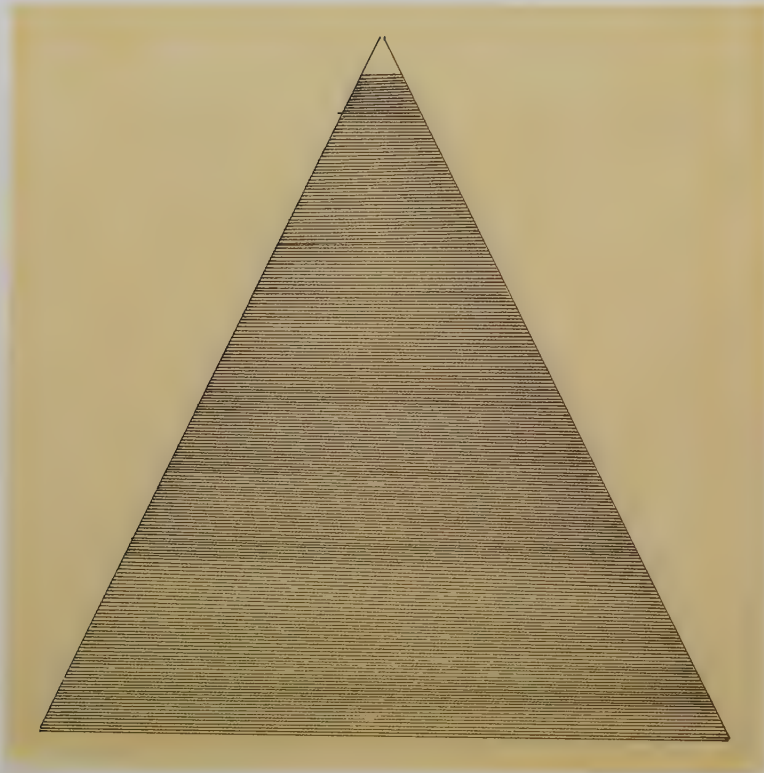
permutations of LeWitt, or Rockburne's engagement with that branch of mathematics known as Set Theory, Tuttle's desire to transcend the self in pursuit of a more enlightened mode of perception comes closest to Martin's own influential project. He has described the wire pieces he began during the early 1970s, such as *13th Wire Piece* 1972 (BELOW), as an attempt to 'empty every capacity I have', rescinding control over the line by combining graphite pencil with tenuous three-dimensional wires and their mercurial shadows.³⁴ Against the notion of the autographic trace replete with meaning, Tuttle has deliberately drained his lines of reference and identity. Like Barthes, he views this evacuation as an act of liberation, freeing the process of drawing from himself. What results is not a desiccated, ascetic form of 'anti-drawing' but something akin to Barthes's 'shimmer': a glinting line that eludes capture and classification, much as Martin herself sought to do.

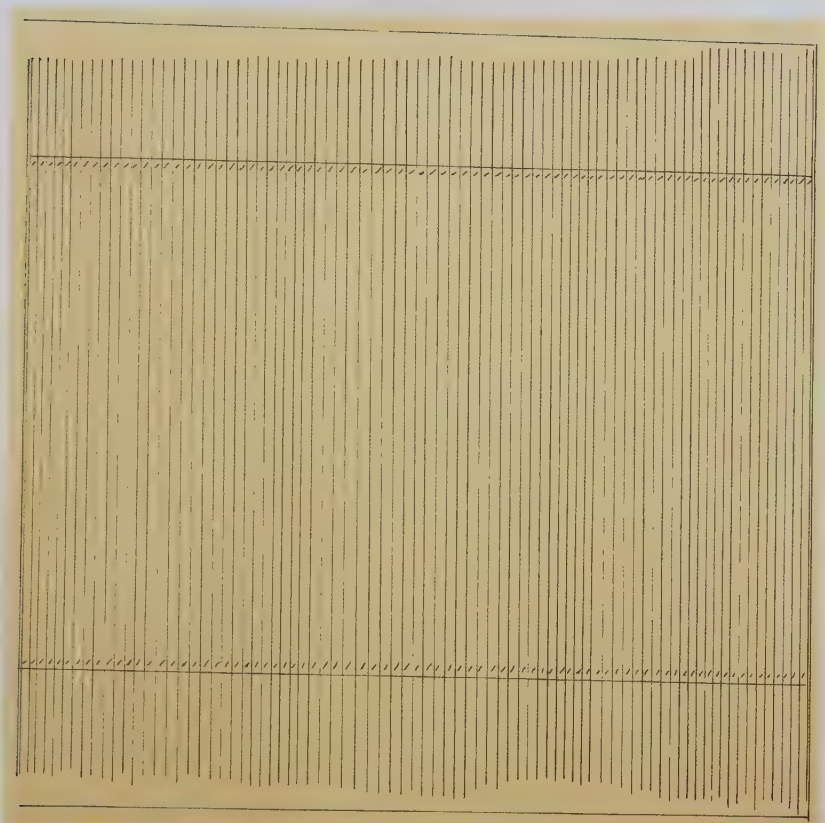
Richard Tuttle
13th Wire Piece 1972
Florist wire, nails and graphite
Dimensions variable
Executed at Dublin City Gallery
The Hugh Lane, 2010



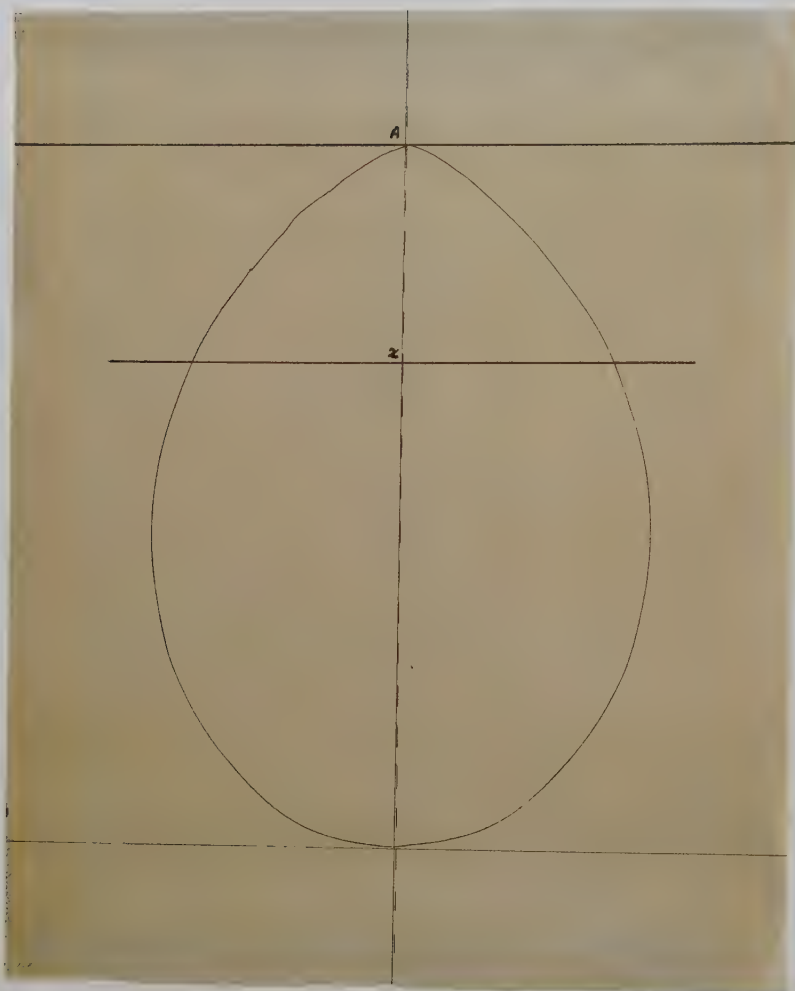


Untitled c.1961
ink on paper
21 x 21





Untitled (Study for 'The Egg') 1960
Ink on paper
29.7 x 23.6





Clockwise from top left

Untitled 1960

Ink on paper

22.9 × 22.9

Untitled 1960

Ink on paper

21.6 × 21.6

Untitled 1963

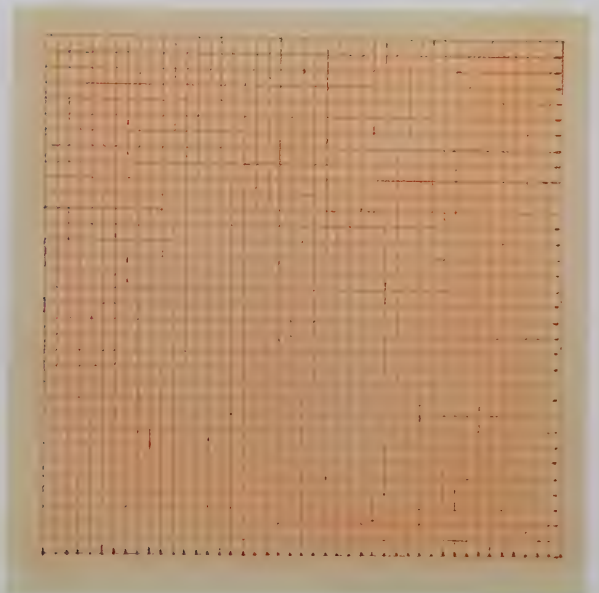
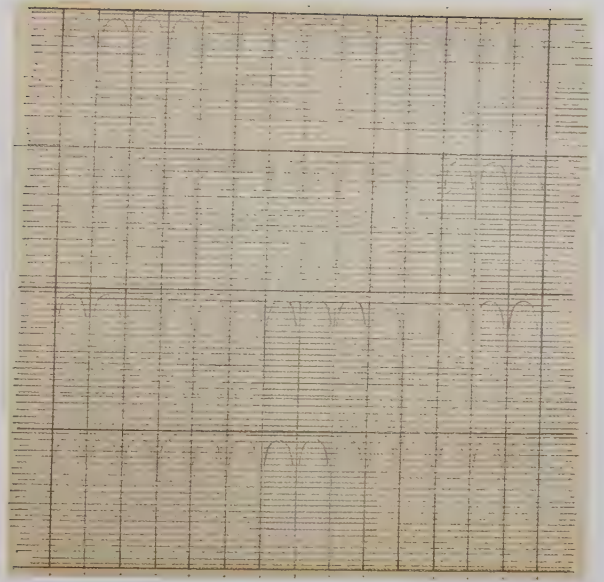
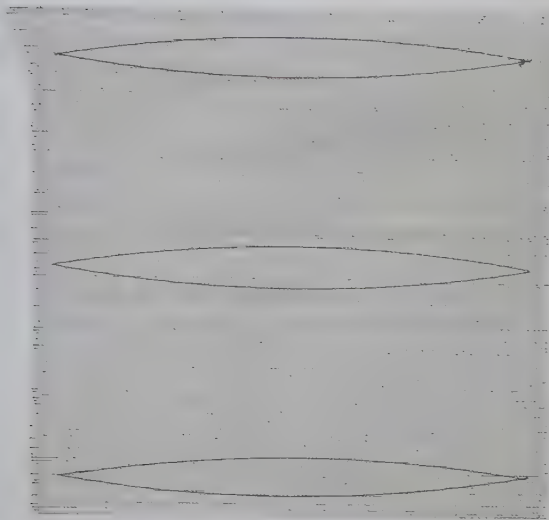
Ink on paper

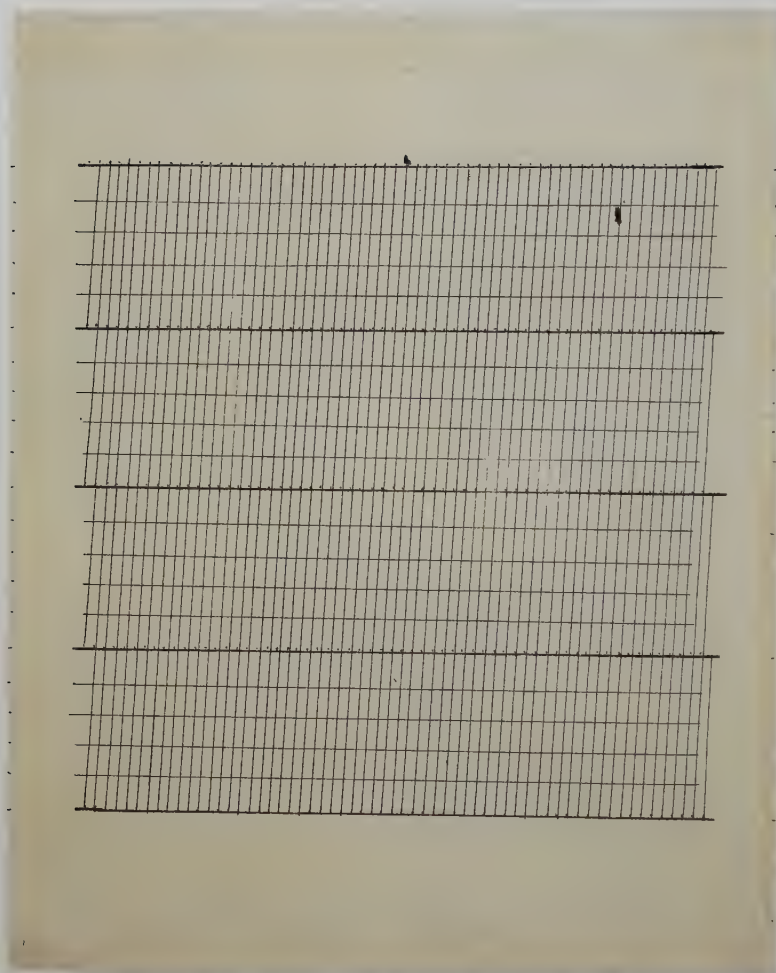
21 × 21

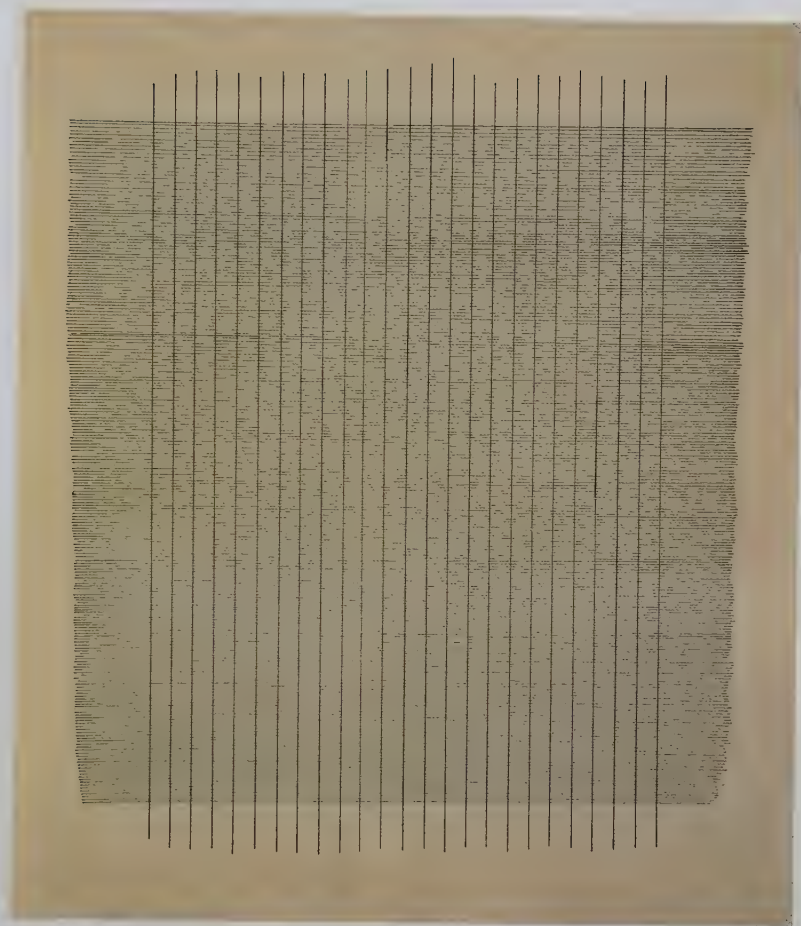
Grey Bird 1964

Ink on paper

22.9 × 22.9

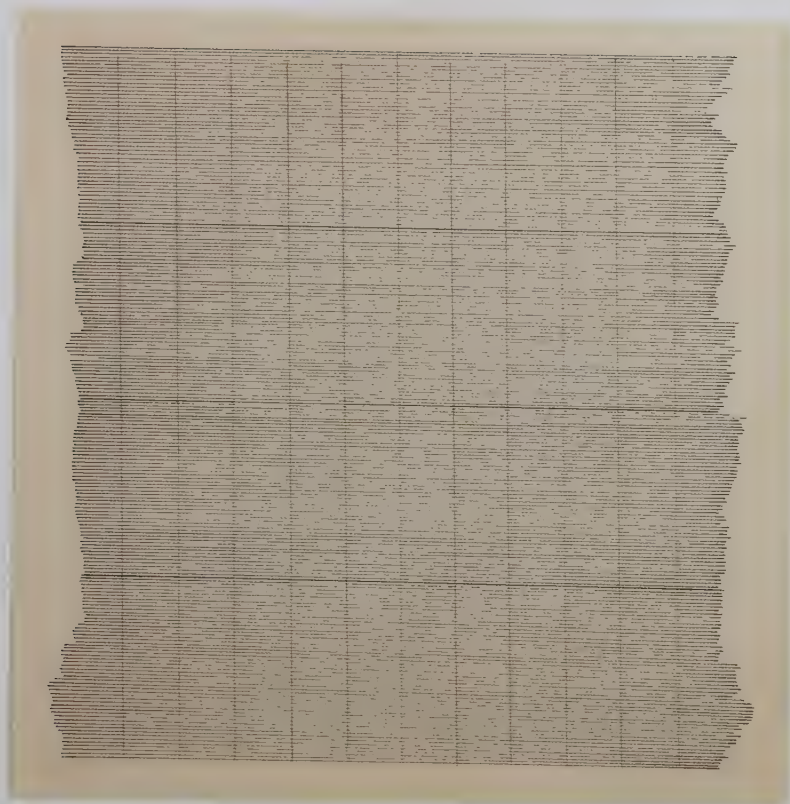






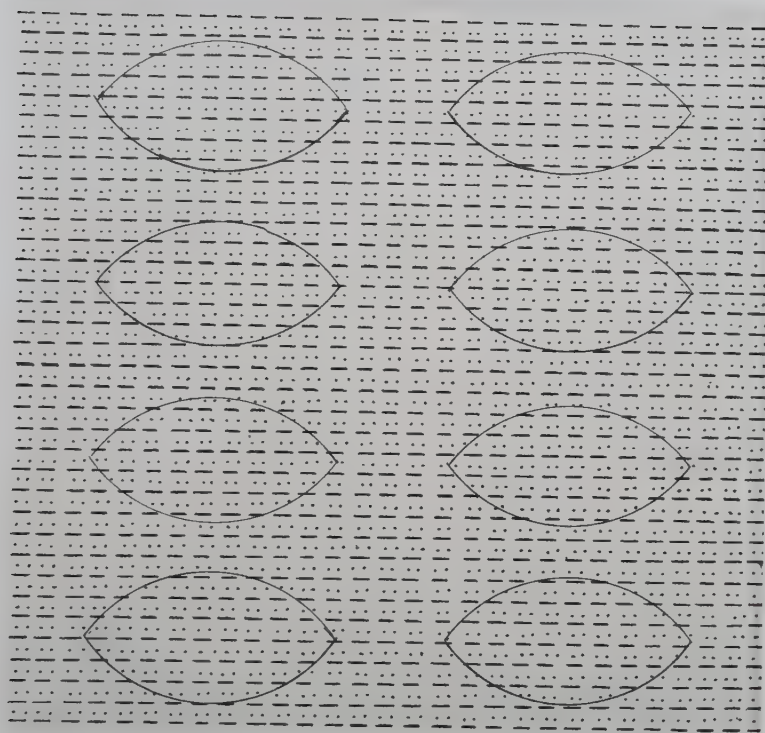
Untitled c.1961
Ink and graphite on paper
27.9 × 27.9





Drift of Summer 1964
Ink on paper mounted on board
30.5 × 30.5



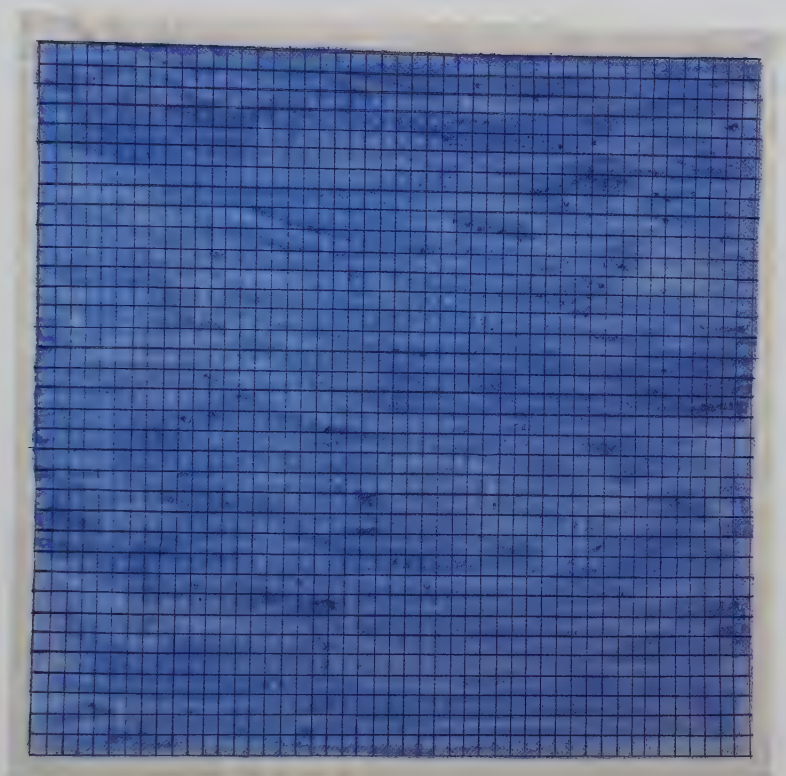


The Peach 1964

Graphite and ink on paper mounted on board

30.5 × 30.5





Untitled 1966
Ink and wash on paper
19.7 × 20.3



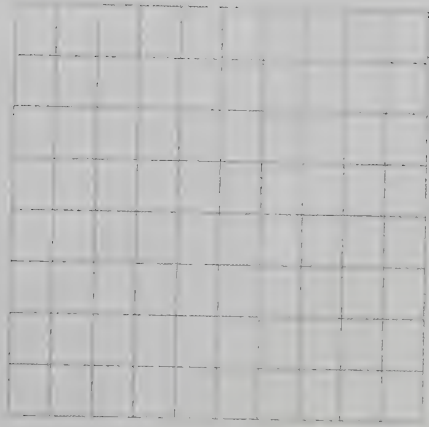


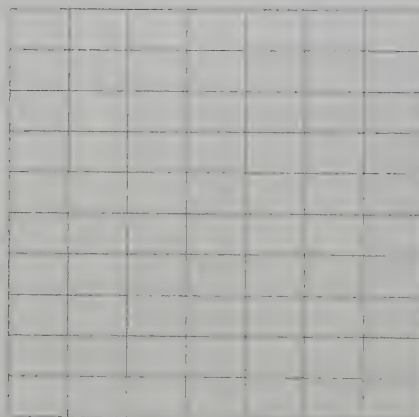
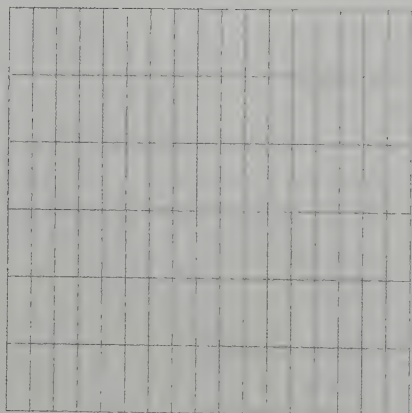
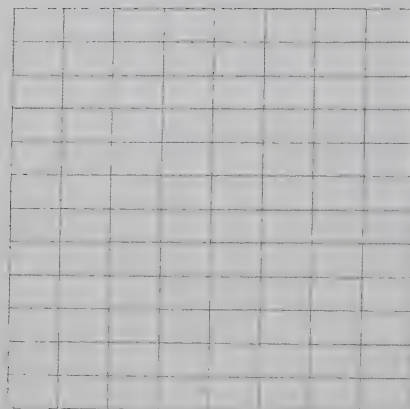
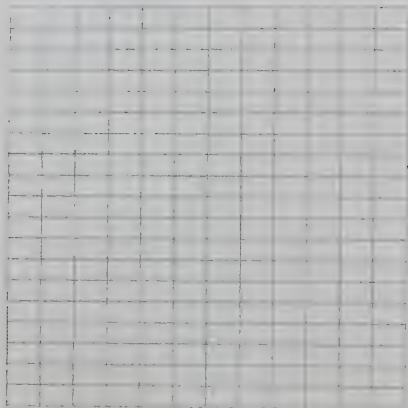
On a Clear Day
— Agnes Martin

[October 15, 1975]

Art work that is completely abstract – free from any expression of the environment is like music and can be responded to in the same way. Our response to line and tone and color is the same as our response to sounds. And like music abstract art is thematic. It holds meaning for us that is beyond expression in words.

These prints express innocence [sic] of mind. If you can go with them and hold your mind as empty [sic] and tranquil as they are and recognize your feelings at the same time you will realize your full response to this work.





[illegible]

1362

1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. This is essential for ensuring the integrity of the financial system and for providing a clear audit trail. The second part of the paper focuses on the role of the auditor in verifying the accuracy of these records. The third part discusses the challenges faced by auditors in this process, and the fourth part offers suggestions for improving the audit process.

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1992

1993 1994 1995

Untitled #10 1975

Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

182.9 × 182.9

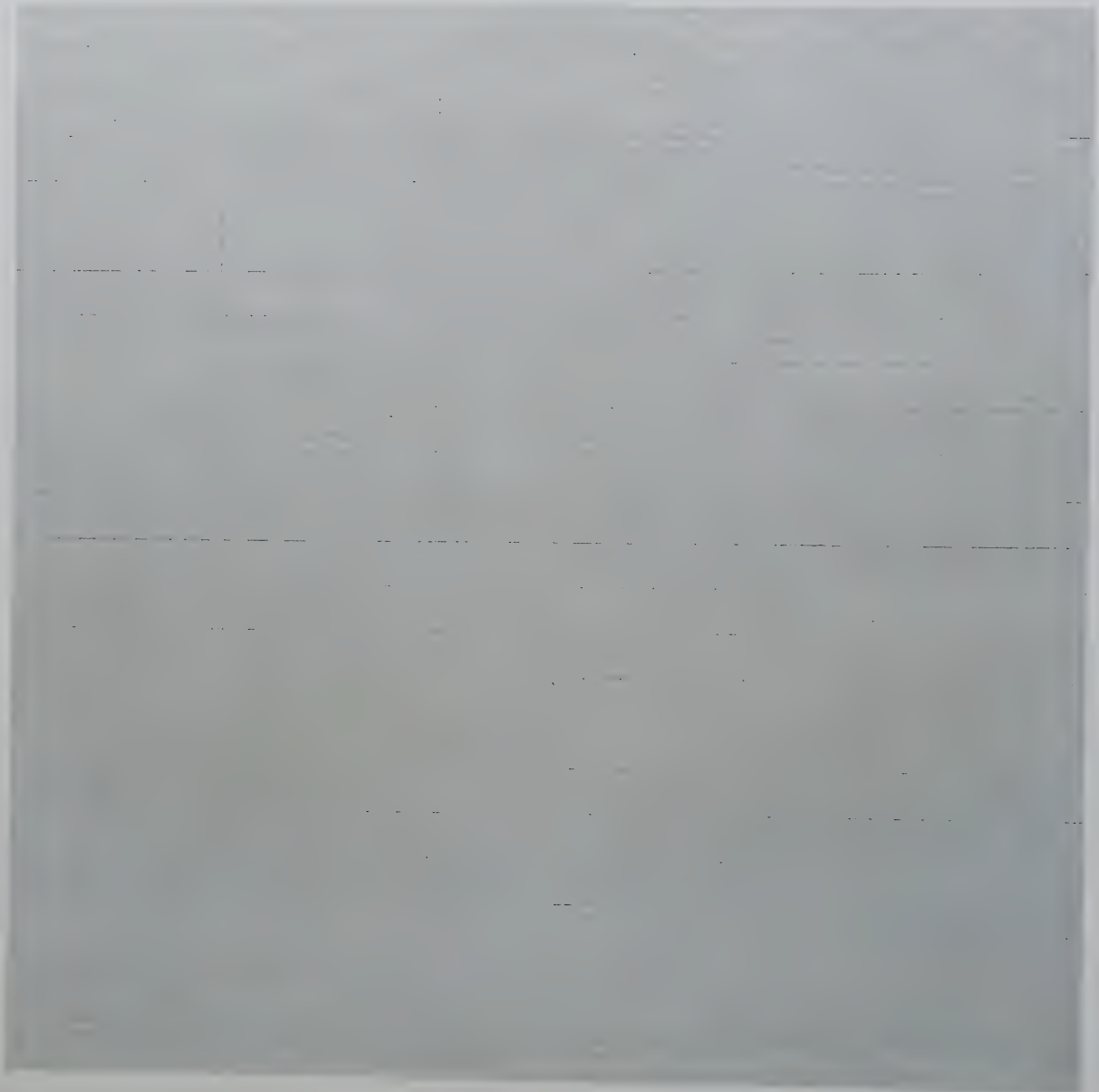


Untitled #8 1974
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
182.9 × 182.9





Untitled #14 1977
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
182.9 × 182.9





Untitled 1977
Watercolour and graphite on paper
22.9 × 22.9





Untitled IX 1982

Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

182.9 × 182.9



Untitled 1978
Watercolour and ink on paper
22.9 × 22.9





Untitled #12 1981
Acrylic and blue pencil on canvas
182.9 × 182.9





The Islands I–XII 1979

Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

Twelve parts, each 182.9 × 182.9

Installation view





The Islands (detail, I of XII) 1979
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
182.9 × 182.9



Untitled #12 1984

Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

182.9 × 182.9





Untitled #15 1988
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
182.9 × 182.9

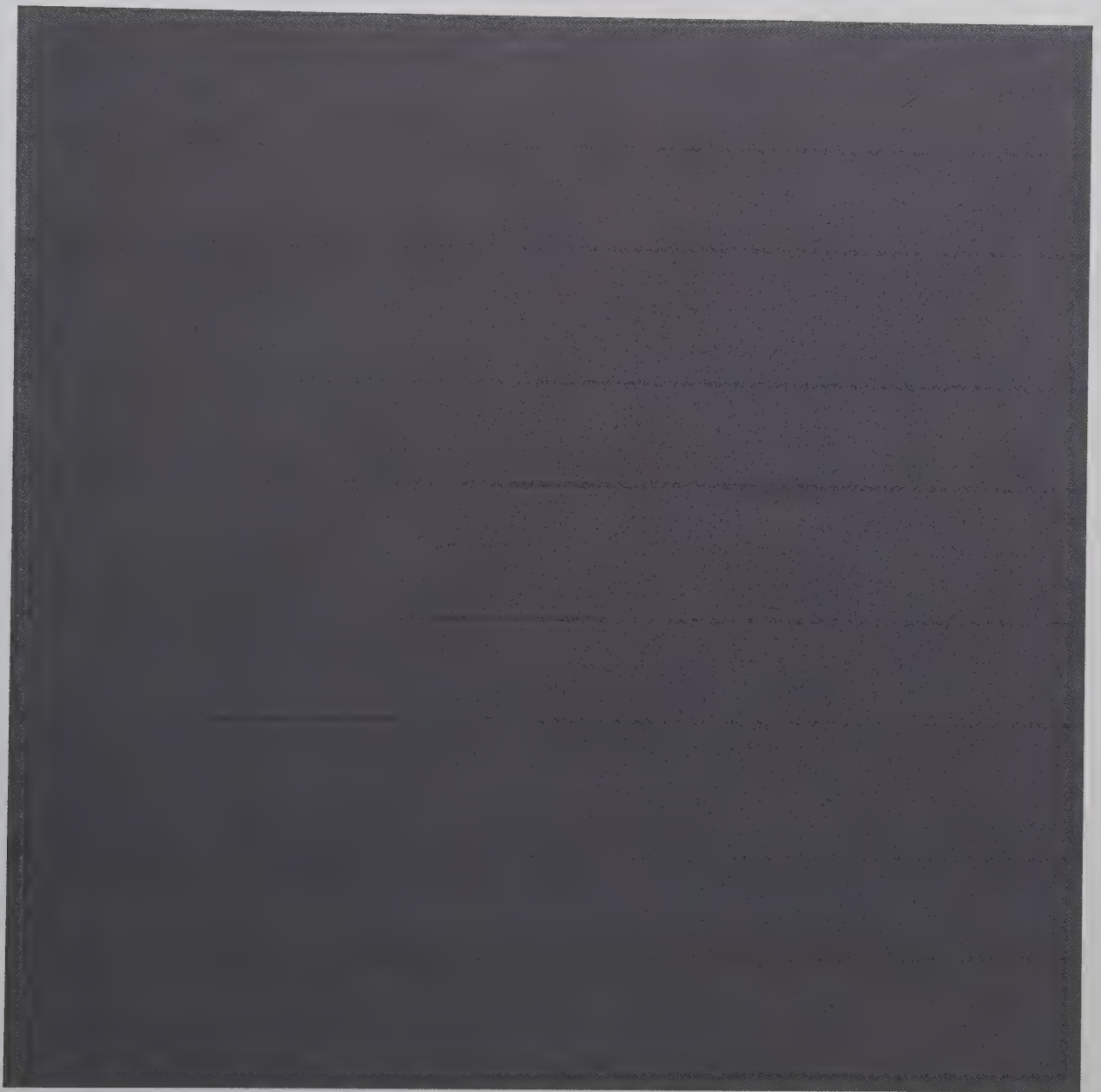




Untitled #8 1989

Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

182.9 × 182.9



Beauty is the Mystery of Life

— Agnes Martin, 1989

When I think of art I think of beauty. Beauty is the mystery of life. It is not in the eye it is in the mind. In our minds there is awareness of perfection.

We respond to beauty with emotion. Beauty speaks a message to us. We are confused about this message because of distractions. Sometimes we even think that it is in the mail. The message is about different kinds of happiness and joy. Joy is most successfully represented in Beethoven's ninth Symphony and by the Parthenon.

All art work is about beauty; all positive work represents it and celebrates it. All negative art protests the lack of beauty in our lives.

When a beautiful rose dies beauty does not die because it is not really in the rose. Beauty is an awareness in the mind. It is a mental and emotional response that we make. We respond to life as though it were perfect. When we go into a forest we do not see the fallen rotting trees. We are inspired by a multitude of uprising trees. We even hear a silence when it is not really silent. When we see a new born baby we say it is beautiful – perfect. The goal of life is happiness and to respond to life as though it were perfect is the way to happiness. It is also the way to positive art work.

It is not in the role of an artist to worry about life – to feel responsible for creating a better world. This is a very serious distraction. All of your conditioning has been directed toward intellectual living. This is useless in art work. All human knowledge is useless in art work. Concepts, relationships, categories, classifications, deductions are distractions of mind that we wish to hold free for inspiration.

There are two parts of the mind. The outer mind that records facts and the inner mind that says 'yes' and 'no'. When you think of something that you should do the inner mind says 'yes' and you feel elated. We call this inspiration.

For an artist this is the only way. There is no help anywhere. He must listen to his own mind.

The way of an artist is an entirely different way. It is a way of surrender. He must surrender to his own mind.

When you look in your mind you find it covered with a lot of rubbishy thoughts. You have to penetrate these and hear what your mind is telling you to do. Such work is original work. All other work made from ideas is not inspired and it is not art work.

Art work is responded to with happy emotions. Work about ideas is responded to with other ideas. There is so much written about art that it is mistaken for an intellectual pursuit.

It is quite commonly thought that the intellect is responsible for everything that is made and done. It is commonly thought that everything that is can be put into words. But there is a wide range of emotional response that we make that cannot be put into words. We are so used to making these emotional responses that we are not consciously aware of them till they are represented in art work.

Our emotional life is really dominant over our intellectual life but we do not realize it.

You must discover the art work that you like and realize the response that you make to it. You must especially know the response that you make to your own work. It is in this way that you discover your direction and the truth about yourself. If you do not discover your response to your own work you miss the reward. You must look at the work and know how it makes you feel.

If you are not an artist you can make discoveries about yourself by knowing your response to work that you like.

Ask yourself: *'What kind of happiness do I feel with this music or this picture.'*

There is happiness that we feel without any material stimulation. We may wake up in the

morning feeling happy for no reason. Abstract or non objective feelings are a very important part of our lives. Personal emotions and sentimentality are anti-art.

We make art work as something that we have to do not knowing how it will work out. When it is finished we have to see if it is effective. Even if we obey inspiration we cannot expect all the work to be successful. An artist is a person who can recognize failure.

If you were a composer you would not expect everything you played to be a composition. It is the same in the graphic arts. There are many failures.

Art work is the only work in the world that is unmaterialistic. All other work contributes to human welfare and comfort. You can see from this that human welfare and comfort are not the interests of the artist. He is irresponsible because his life goes in a different direction. His mind will be involved with beauty and happiness. It is possible to work at something other than art and maintain this state of mind and be moving ahead as an artist. The unmaterial interest is essential.

The newest trend and the art scene are unnecessary distractions for a serious artist. He will be much more rewarded responding to art of all times and places. Not as art history but considering each piece and its value to him.

You can't think *'My life is more important than the work'* and get the work. You have to think the work is paramount in your life. An artist's life is adventurous. One new thing after another. I have been talking directly to artists but it applies to all. Take advantage to the awareness of perfection in your mind. See perfection in every thing around you. See if you can discover your true feelings when listening to music. Make happiness your goal. The way to discover the truth about this life is to

discover yourself. Say to yourself: *'What do I like and what do I want.'* Find out exactly what you want in life. Ask your mind for inspiration about everything.

Beauty illustrates happiness; the wind in the grass, the glistening waves following each other, the flight of birds, all speak of happiness.

The clear blue sky illustrates a different kind of happiness and soft dark night a different kind. There are an infinite number of different kinds of happiness.

The response is the same for the observer as it is for the artist. The response to art is the real art field.

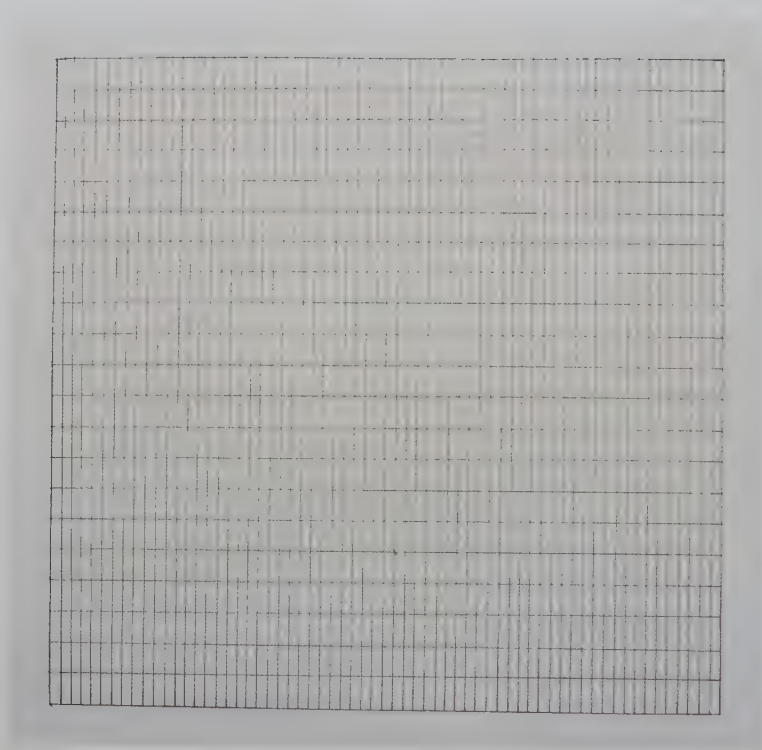
Composition is an absolute mystery. It is dictated by the mind. The artist searches for certain sounds or lines that are acceptable to the mind and finally an arrangement of them that is acceptable. The acceptable compositions arouse certain feelings of appreciation in the observer. Some compositions appeal to some and some to others.

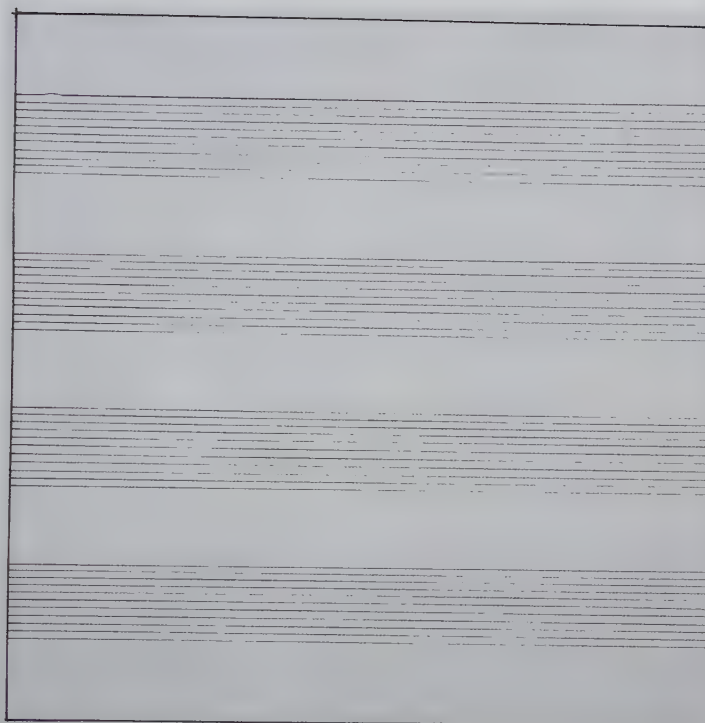
But if they are not accepted by the artist's mind they will not appeal to anyone. Composition and acceptance by mind are essential to art work. Commercial art is consciously made to appeal to the senses which is quite different. Art work is very valuable and it is also very scarce. It takes a great deal of application to make a composition that is totally acceptable. Beethoven's symphonies with every note composed represent a titanic human effort.

To progress in life you must give up the things that you do not like. Give up doing the things that you do not like to do. You must find the things that you do like. The things that are acceptable to your mind.

You can see that you will have to have time to yourself to find out what appeals to your mind. While you go along with others you are not really living your life. To rebel against others is just as futile. You must find your way.

Happiness is being on the beam with life – to feel the pull of life.





Untitled #11 1990
Acrylic paint on canvas
182.9 × 182.9





Untitled #5 1994
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.5 × 152.8





Dolphin Days
— Rosemarie Trockel

Her face is captivating
Her lines are profound
Her spirituality is endless
Her memory is painful
I want to see her in future



Even from a long way off, this painting by Agnes Martin magically attracts visitors of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf, where it is displayed: they almost instinctively gravitate towards it. It has an extraordinary radiance, as though it were transmitting rays of light out into the space around it. It holds its own with remarkable ease alongside examples of abstract expressionism and pop art, with their bold shapes, strong gestures and powerful, sometimes almost garish colours. Its format is modest, the motif is abstract and the colours are subtle, translucent and gentle.

As the viewer approaches this composition – with its broad, horizontal bands – it creates the effect of a pattern, a design derived from identical repetitions. It seems that the sequence of coloured bands could be infinitely repeated. The painting's inherent rhythms derive in part from the changing colours but above all from the fact that the three bands of faint blue, red and yellow are perceived as an entity.

Another reason for the immense presence of this painting – both on the wall and in the space – is the dynamism of its two-directional colour movement: vertical rhythms and a horizontal fluidity. At the same time, all its movement is drawn back again and brought to a complete halt – in the painting's horizon. Its centre is marked by a blue band; the horizontal line conveys a sense of passive tranquillity, which gives the composition a feeling of equilibrium and stability.

The closer one is to the painting, the clearer the lines of graphite that divide the colour fields. Agnes Martin drew them by hand across the uneven surface of the gesso ground – finely and cautiously. Other irregularities are visible in the

particular nature of the paint application. And it is precisely these touches of imperfection that give the work its singular spatial depth and its vitality.

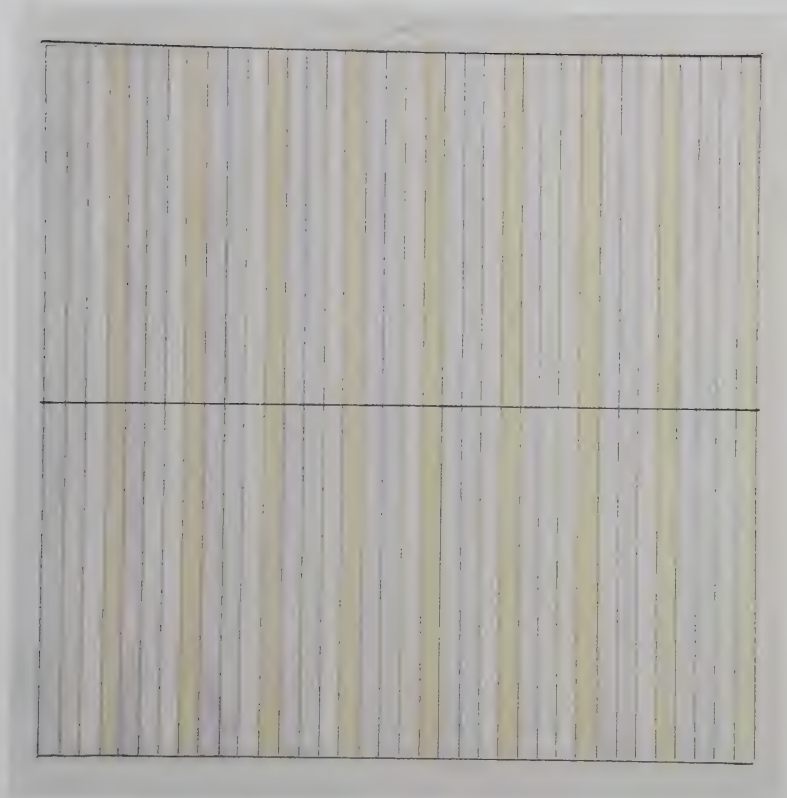
It is not easy to describe the colours: pale blue, pale yellow, and the reddish hue is in fact a pink with a tinge of warmer orange. Agnes Martin kept a close guard on the secret of this special paint technique, in which the gesso ground plays an important part. When the viewer is standing directly in front of the painting, the surface appears diaphanous, as though the light were shining out through it from behind.

The unusual combination of colours, which is reminiscent of neo-pointillism, is filled with *joie de vivre*. It has been said that particularly in her late works – which can be seen as a synthesis of all that had gone before – Agnes Martin wanted to express happiness, joy and beauty. And it seems this is the source of yet another powerful energy that almost takes physical hold of the viewer.



Untitled 1995
Ink and graphite on paper
27.9 × 27.9





Who's Afraid of Triangles?

Who's Afraid of Triangles?

The last exhibition of Agnes Martin's work during her lifetime was at PaceWildenstein in 2004. Surprisingly, it contained a small group of paintings containing mainly black geometric shapes that seemed entirely out of kilter with what had long been established as the classic format of her work. When she travelled to New York from her home in Taos, New Mexico to see the show, this small group of works seemed to surprise even the artist: in a conversation with Lynne Cooke, she called them 'scary'.¹

Not many artists are able to produce a startling new body of work at the age of over ninety, let alone scare themselves with it. 'Deemed too foreboding or disturbing', Cooke wrote of the late group of black paintings, 'they were pursued no further'.² As she put it, they were 'totally unanticipated' but not 'unprecedented': rather than invent a new vocabulary at this point, Martin was returning to the kinds of geometric shapes she had begun to deploy at the end of the 1950s on the threshold of her discovery of her classic format: the grid.

This small group of – what to call them? – 'new-old' paintings undertaken in the early 2000s seems to add a new twist to Martin's project, but does so by reverting to long-abandoned methods. Produced at the very end of her life, who is to say where they might have led? But looking back on the whole of Martin's vast body of work, they surely do articulate something about its shifts in logic, most dramatically in the way that the black geometric shapes seem to undermine almost thirty years of partitioning a square painting into vertical or horizontal bands or stripes of various widths and densities, the format she had basically kept to since resuming painting after a hiatus of several years in the early 1970s.

One might also wonder if it was merely idiosyncratic to reintroduce geometric shapes in the way that she did, when she did, at a moment when such figures seemed like throwbacks to a formal vocabulary that was obsolete by the end of the century. Was it a temporary aberration on Martin's part? The artist thought so, it seems, and so it may have been, but still the sheer oddness of this group of works should allow us to think again about the longer history of abstraction as it had unfolded over the course of the twentieth century and Martin's place within it. For alongside Ad Reinhardt, with whom she has often been productively compared, Martin was always the most relentless defender of abstraction's 'purity'. Both artists were committed to the most extreme form of abstraction and remained absolutely devoted to that project, in Martin's case for over forty years after she first came to her grid format around 1960. She worked productively to a great age, not only comparing with, but in number of years exceeding, Mondrian's example of long-term single-minded fixation on the grid.

Another way of saying this is that Martin exemplifies abstraction at its most uncompromising and farthest point; never expressionist, always extremist. Though her paintings are often seen as immensely

With My Back to the World 1997
Acrylic paint on canvas 152.4 × 152.4
Panel 5 of 6
Ovitz Family Collection, Los Angeles

fragile in their effects, there is something very stubborn indeed about their refusal of a middle way. Attempts to read them as landscapes, for example, which might allow us to talk more about references to the natural world, come up against not only the wishes of the artist but the determined abstractness of the work itself.

Martin called one series of works *With My Back to the World* (OPPOSITE LEFT), which seems to encapsulate her world-view; that is, that art is not only special and exempt from the cares and corruption of a material world, but in a state of withdrawal from it. Martin's interest in Eastern forms of mysticism (again comparable with Reinhardt's) has only been seen to confirm the sheer inwardness of her position. The artist certainly contributed to the mythological construct that surrounds her work: from her remarks, there is no doubt she believed in the innocence of the grid and had a classical sense of the purity of art.³ But it is worth insisting that for all its (only) apparent simplicity, her work has complex effects which do not necessarily fit an ideal or even a contemplative idea of it.

In terms of the larger questions at stake here, the fact that she developed such a hermetic version of abstraction, and stuck to it so relentlessly, poses the problem of abstraction's general predicament in culture particularly starkly. There are few such devotees of art's mythic autonomy or 'self-enclosedness'. Can art really be sealed off from the world in this way, and in what kind of world would that be desirable? Or does Martin's work, couched in terms of a kind of art-siege or modernist blockade, offer us an extreme case to think about: one that forces us to confront rather than evade the problem of art's abstractedness?

Before she began to reintroduce geometric shapes back into her work in around 2002, nothing had been quite so disruptive of her method. But that is not to say her work had developed seamlessly or even entirely smoothly. Often thought of as reductive and repetitive, Martin's project was on the contrary one of myopic yet sustained accumulation of the smallest differences. In this context, decisions to change tack can sound trivial but have large repercussions. And for sure, slow sustained looking is needed for such differences to unfold in a body of work that on first sight might appear to rely heavily on sameness and repetition. This is comparable to Mondrian's introduction of the double line into his grids in the early 1930s (LEFT). Only when immersed in the slight shifts in Mondrian's barely changing format, does that sudden appearance of two parallel black lines close together come to mark the beginning of the deconstruction of his entire system.⁴

Unlike Mondrian, however, it seems that Martin had not meant to destroy the equilibrium of her painting by bringing back geometric figures after they had been so long abandoned. The two identical black triangles in *Untitled #1* 2003 (P.189), placed precisely symmetrically along the horizontal axis and so tightly fixed to each edge, would not necessarily compromise a picture's contemplative

Piet Mondrian
Composition with Double Line and Yellow 1932
 Acrylic paint on canvas 45.3 × 45.3
 Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art



repose. Likewise, in *Homage to Life* (p.188), the title of the painting having also been the title of that 2004 exhibition, the trapezoid hovering dead centre over the lightly washed ground hardly threatens to rock any boats.

Rather than creating a deliberate rupture in the system, Martin began to make paintings from around 2002 that returned to some of her earlier formats, and the points of return are quite precise. *Untitled #1* recalls very directly a drawing that she had made in ink on paper in 1961 (p.108): a triangle delineated by two black lines, that contains horizontal lines, and leaves the tip empty. In the 2003 painting, she doubled it of course. And she painted the triangles solid black with vivid cadmium yellow tips, that recall, subliminally perhaps, the gold tips of her idiosyncratic sculpture *Burning Tree* from 1961 (p.80). *Homage to Life* would recall a similar drawing of a rather narrower and taller trapezoid called *Mountain* from 1960 (RIGHT).

In addition to those ink drawings of shapes, one could see *Untitled #1* invoking – much less directly now – her even earlier landscapes of the 1940s like *New Mexico Mountain Landscape*, *Taos* c.1947 (p.23) reimagined now abstractly; or, dating from about the same time, one of the biomorphic paintings that contains a highly schematic 'double mountain' motif: *Untitled* c.1949 (LEFT).⁵ In this sense, *Untitled #1* both turned away from what she had been doing over the last few decades and looked back at it retrospectively. In fact, according to Tony Abeyta, who occasionally helped her in the studio in her last years and with the making of *Homage to Life*, she saw the whole Pace show as a retrospective 'like a spectrum of all the work she'd done over her lifetime'.⁶

Other resonances are more general but perhaps even more significant. The reintroduction of geometric figures over an acrylic field that is horizontally banded, whether or not we see the actual lines, brings back a type of composition of figures on a ground that one would think Martin had long since rejected. And indeed she had: her first grids allowed an overall perceptual field to emerge at the necessary expense of contained and compositional shapes. It had tended to mean lightening her palette and no longer using the dark browns and blacks that had been so insistent in her work of the 1950s.

After all, the dissolution of shape had been her great achievement, allowing only the square support of the frame to remain as container of the grid. Between 1959 and 1960, she was working through a palette of achromatic contrasts – bleached-out whites, greys and neutrals on one side, dark browns and blacks on the other – blurring the edges of the forms to suggest a slightly hazy vision. Martin's shift to abstraction was clearly informed by the conventions of new American painting as it developed its own sophisticated vocabularies.⁷ But here, aside from the nod to Rothko's distinctively blurred and floating colour blocks, it had had little to do with the formal language of the

Untitled c.1949
Oil paint on canvas 45.4 x 61
203 FINE ART, Taos, New Mexico



abstract expressionists, even though Martin was of their generation and was much closer to them than to the minimalist generation who would later adopt her.

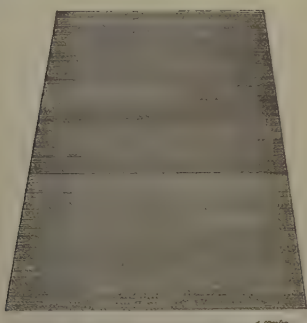
It is worth noting, however, that although the grid had enabled her to create a visual field that was emptied of compositional forms and gestures, it was not the grid to which she referred back in these late paintings. Rather their principal reference point was the work that coincided with its emergence: small paintings and drawings that experimented with different shapes like lozenges and triangles made on the threshold of her breakthrough and even continued for a short while after it; work that marked the halting transition between her earlier semi-abstract compositions and the grid paintings.⁸ A few factors may be relevant here: although the art historical imagination tends to favour continuities that make an artist's work coherent, it is worth acknowledging more frankly that line drawings configuring shapes were at the time irresolvable or just loose ends. It may even be that Martin herself wanted to tie those loose ends up, to make coherent what never had been. In so doing, she would make the contradictory aspects of her work more, rather than less evident.

None of this is to detract from the interest of the late paintings. On the contrary: they are very compelling, albeit in a radically different way from her other work. They are both simpler – the shapes are blocks of black and emphatic – and more complex – in that they are superimposed upon a typically differentiated ground which has been demarcated into more solid coloured bands in some, or left subtly nuanced with a dilute wash in others.

These paintings may look as though right at the end of her life Martin was embracing radical innovation, but in fact they are further testament to her resistance to change, at least in the conventional avant-garde sense of art continually seeking new frontiers. Throughout her life, Martin wanted to make her work whole, but did not like conventional categorisations of it. What 'wholeness' means in this context is very far from what conventional art historical narratives would deem coherent. The late paintings were part of this lifelong project to make her work hold together, whilst refusing the normal obsessions with chronological sequence and, most of all, linear progression.

Martin was always painting her way backwards to a fictional 'beginning', not by seeking out novelty or change but by creating effects of 'newness' that paradoxically could only reverberate in work that continually made self-differing versions of itself. But the way she chose to do this did undergo a fairly major shift. The decision to adopt a banded format, mainly horizontal but also sometimes vertical, especially after 1972, and her consistent approach to her painting, make her initial, experimental forays with the grid look wild by comparison.⁹ Now the format seems more formulaic and

Mountain 1960
Ink and graphite on paper 24 × 30.2
Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Ruth Vollmer Bequest



is relentlessly maintained. But 'formulaic' does not allow for the vicissitudes of making – for the (admittedly tightly controlled) process of making that we find ourselves looking at in a Martin painting: the gradual revelation of its material constituents of trace and surface that we watch slowly unfold in front of us.

The history of abstraction was, from the outset, preoccupied with the idea of origins, not least the mythic narratives of reducing art down to a *tabula rasa* or clean slate such as Mondrian's black-and-white grid and primary-coloured planes or Malevich's iconic black square. Compelling as these narratives of reduction are, it is worth remembering that the historical moment of abstraction's origins was as it actually happened intensely polymorphic, proliferating coloured shapes both geometric and otherwise. The 'single origin' story helped make sense of the vastly confusing variety of formal systems that were launched into the world, but does not explain them.

Martin's work has a fairly complex relation to abstraction's myths of origin. Her own prevarication between shape and dissolution, and her revisiting of that moment in her extreme old age, is reminiscent not only of Rothko's blurred edges but also reminds us that from the start abstraction had played on self-destruction. Less known than his famous *Black Square* 1915, Malevich developed an early series of dissolving coloured planes (LEFT), painted in the shadow of revolution but obeying the inexorable logic of the system he had already set in train. Enclosed shapes such as squares and circles and triangles in compositional relationships with one another would provide a ready lexicon but also a set of figures to fall away into a larger visual field.

Unlike Reinhardt, who clearly thought about Malevich, and thought his work engaged with his legacy, Martin was under no such illusion (nor did she think in such terms). Throughout twentieth-century art history, the monochrome attracted a rhetoric of the end or death of art – yet tended never to die. Reinhardt's black monochromes were part of that melodrama – his deliberate attempt to paint the 'last paintings' that could be painted; as he liked to say, with typical tongue in cheek, they were 'the most extreme, ultimate, climactic reaction to and negation of' a tradition of abstract art.¹⁰ In thrall to the rhetoric of painting's swansong, he nevertheless continued to make intensely temporal paintings that unravel in perception as out of the dense black a subtly differentiated cruciform shape emerges.

The late paintings were unexpected, then, not just because Martin had long since abandoned geometric figures, but because she had done so much more definitively than Reinhardt. Perhaps her afterthought was remembering why Reinhardt had been important (and black could also be a shorthand for that,

Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism 1917–18
Oil paint on canvas 106 × 70.5
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



even though she had used it episodically throughout her career). But the danger of making too much of the comparison is forgetting in the process how different her own project had always been.

The crucial point of this difference seems to me the simplest and most obvious one, yet the aspect of her work that has received least attention: paleness. Eschewing entirely more familiar patterns of modernist composition, she, like Reinhardt, turned to time as a medium. But unlike the melancholic swansong to painting in black, Martin used paleness to animate her visual field and to create a metaphor of newness – what I would call the ‘as new’ – from a system that depended on the repetition of the same.

To see a painting by Martin, as it is to look at a Mondrian, is to understand how repetition begets difference – that the one is simply the flipside of, and meaningless without, the other. We know that. My point is different: Martin’s paleness is her weapon of regeneration, just as Reinhardt’s weapon of negation was black. She may or may not have wanted the connotation of dawn in her later works, but those cultural cognates, like black and death, are also there to be complicated or even undone by art rather than simply reinforced. This is not so unlike mountain-shapes, which we may or may not recognise; but which are equally tangentially related. The point is surely that any of these symbolic connotations are not what make the paintings what they are, or what make them interesting. Martin seems to encourage us to resist such readings too. For example, it is hard to read a painting called *Homage to Life* as a symbol of death, even when it contains a large and brooding dark trapezoid.

As she worked with her banded format, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, she varied it rather than developed it. Certainly, the widths of the bands altered and there are endless infinitesimal and relational differences at work between the graphite and the painted areas. Yet it is the paleness – and variations in paleness – that make her work absorb light and make it so susceptible to light conditions. Rather than being iconic, the bands behave like indexical screens, picking up the light and making their own in the process. This is unlike Reinhardt who also made work that is intensely susceptible to light (what could be more so than a barely differentiated black painting?) but where an iconic shape – a cruciform – always gradually emerges.

Increasingly, Martin relied on colour as a highly effective yet subtle mode of variation. She used a very narrow range – the primaries red, yellow and blue, as well as black and grey acrylic, over a white gesso ground. Although in many works she applied black and grey fairly evenly, even densely, she tended to apply other acrylic colours much diluted. The basic colours she used were the arch-modernist palette of primaries (as favoured by artists from Mondrian to Newman), but in her hands, a ‘red’ painting, that is to say one that used red paint, would be so dilute that it would end

up the palest pink. Likewise a blue or a yellow one. In the end she even started to mix them, so would make green or orange paintings (several of which were also shown at that final show at Pace).

In 1966, Martin had said that her paintings were about 'light, lightness, about merging, about formlessness'.¹¹ The banded coloured works continued this project to create a purely pictorial luminosity. Paleness often suggests dimness or poor vision, but Martin characteristically used the palest colour, as she had done the blurred edge, to exacerbate vision and to exaggerate rather than diminish a visual field. Poor visibility opens onto a heightened visual alertness that takes time to reveal itself and which dramatises the coming-into-being of painting itself; that is to say, that each painting, as you look, seems as though it is being made new in perception. It is no surprise that this kind of ecstatic vision has been linked to mysticism, and I am certainly not the first to link her visionary quality to that of the eighteenth-century visionary artist William Blake.

I cannot pretend to have the answer to paintings like *Homage to Life* or *Untitled #1*. They are certainly odd, and oddly compelling, even though, as Lynne Cooke made clear, they were not by any means unprecedented.¹² It is plausible that the attempt to make of her work a coherent whole only served to lay bare how far Martin had removed abstraction from the defining modernist vocabularies of shape and form. Painting had become for her a temporal medium: they took a long time to make and they take a long time to see. On the other hand, two triangles or a trapezoid overlaid not only block off a very different kind of visual field and turn it back into a ground, they also create a simultaneous and immediate double action of seeing and not seeing rather than of a painting unfolding in time.

It may be fitting that her final works should reveal a sudden interruption, even a volte-face, within the system that had taken her so long to elaborate. However inward-looking, even the most hermetic system breaks down at intervals or exceeds itself in some way. *Homage to Life* is made of two blacks: the dense and thick black of the trapezoid laid over the altogether lighter and more fluid ground beneath. But the dense blackness of the trapezoid shape only emphasises how even the 'pale black' has a strange kind of luminosity. At least pale black – an impossible contradiction in language – finds itself not a contradiction in Martin's work, but part of the whole. Things that don't work in words can work in paintings. Just as she made manifest the equally impossible idea of ecstatic understatement.

Just as Martin began to take risks mixing colours, making greens and oranges rather than sticking to the pure bands of the palest reds, blues and yellows, so she took to mixing and combining

formats too, with unforeseeable results. The idea that the late work might act as a kind of hinge holding the old and the new together, holding together the halves of her working life, is reasonable but takes us only so far. The paintings end up doing rather more and pointing in a rather different direction, as if Martin's compass, for so long so firmly set, had unexpectedly veered off course. The work's always-precarious equilibrium became suddenly unsettled – oscillating now between a shape that is containing (the icon) on the one hand and a receptor surface of wide bands that is open and sensitised to light (the index) on the other. If these last works are epitaphs of a sort, they are final thoughts that draw our attention to that point of irresolution.

With hindsight, we can see now how Martin recalled moments of transition in her earlier work, drawn especially, it seems, to a time when she had been most experimental and varied, even to moments when the work prevaricated. Rather than orientate art towards its future, those insistent black shapes perhaps threatened to open up a rift by breaking her habit of consistency. They are not simply late work, but belated returns that would always remain incomplete. For an artist wishing always to hold the thread of her work together and to make her work whole, this might indeed have been scary.

Or at least that is my suggestion. And it is what makes them interesting not only in relation to Martin's work, but with regard to the history of abstraction more generally. What it shows us is how abstraction remakes itself in many different idioms – and that these do not simply follow according to a sequential logic, but may coexist with one another. Rather than relegate it to the past, Martin made geometric shape present again. At the same time shape became almost too much a hostage to fortune – where a triangle could become a mountain again, and vice versa. This allowed for an openness where a geometric shape could itself become a figure of prevarication; where everything in a picture was in transition and in danger of losing hold. And why not? we might ask now. From our own perspective, Martin's move seems to revitalise rather than sabotage the abstract project, to reaffirm its elasticity rather than its rigidity. There is nothing 'pure' about how this kind of painting behaves in practice.

It is not hard to see how Martin's intensely self-reflexive way of working produced a hermetic body of work. I don't think it is worth trying to argue the contrary in order to make Martin more attuned to how we might think art should 'be' in the world. It is art that is introverted, that turns its back on the world, as she herself insisted. And yet it turns out that having your back to the world does not preclude being *of* the world. Rather, it means having your front turned towards a painting, facing art, being open to its possibilities and the continual questions it asks of you.

I Love the Whole World 2000
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4





Happy Holiday 1999
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.5 × 152.5

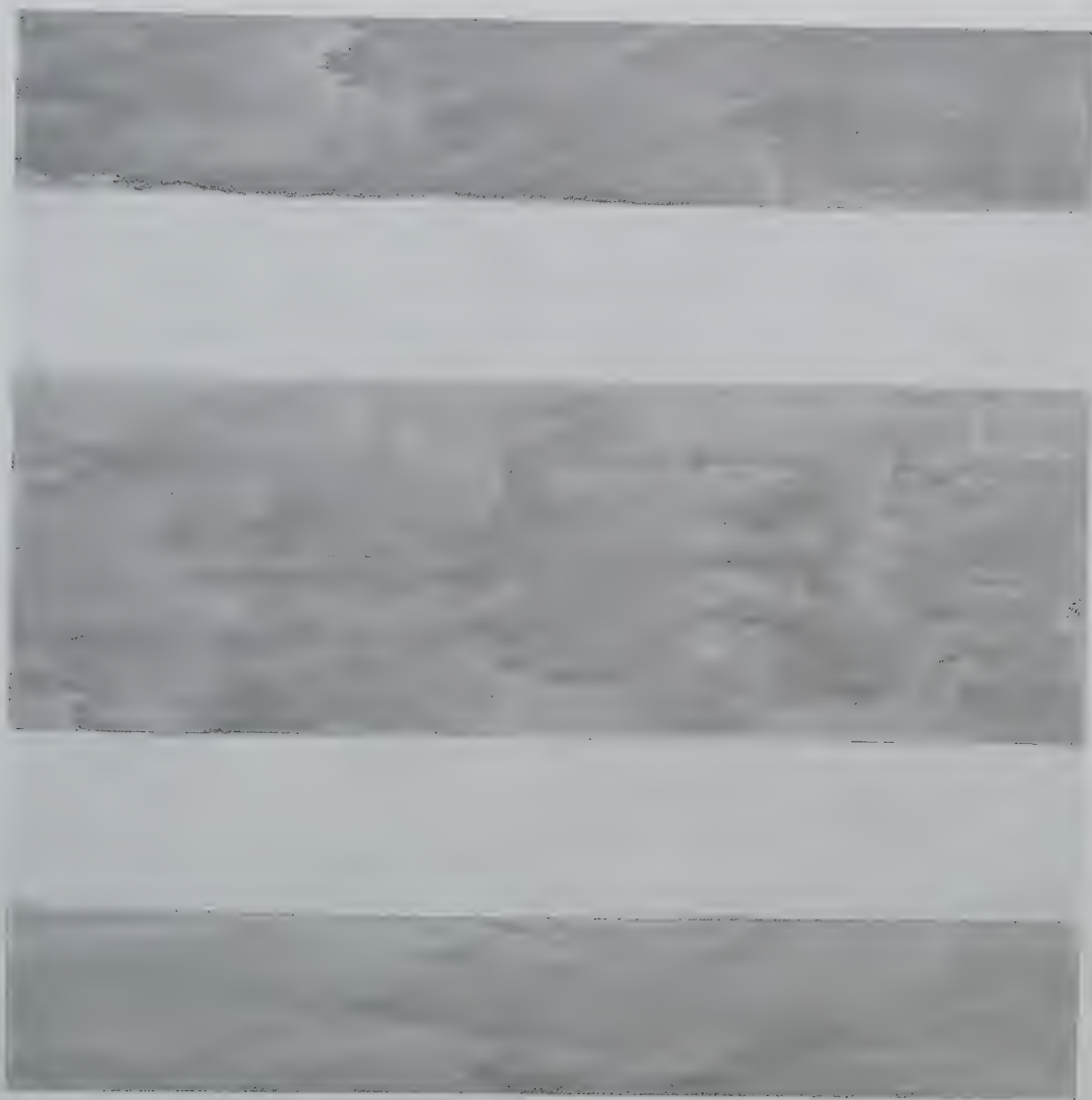




Untitled 2004

Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

152.4 × 152.4



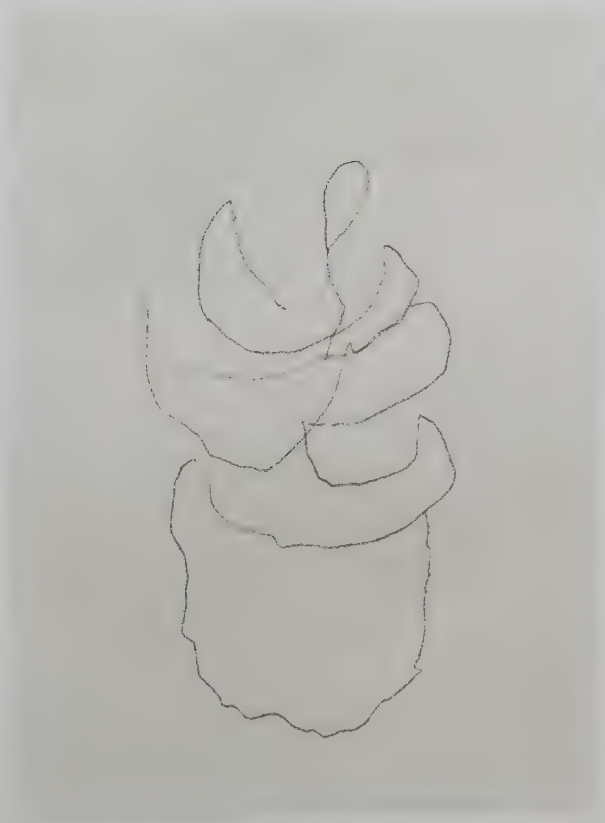
Homage to Life 2003
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4





Untitled 2004
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4





Maria Müller-Schareck

**‘Out into the World’:
How Agnes Martin’s
Paintings Reached Germany
and Western Europe**

*'My happiest moment painting [is] when they go out the door.
Go out into the world.'*¹ Agnes Martin

Any mention at an exhibition opening or in the company of artists that you are preparing a retrospective of the work of Agnes Martin almost always elicits an enthusiastic response. In most other circumstances it is generally met with little more than, 'Really, who's that again?' But the answer to that question is never easy. You might start with the painter herself, her secluded lifestyle, her remarkable writings. Well aware that this is not enough, you will start to describe her paintings. However, even people in the art world have rarely seen more than a handful. A few, with a special interest in her work, have travelled to New Mexico to visit Agnes Martin in person; others who have been to American museums and galleries may have a particularly strong impression of a body of work that has only very occasionally been on public display in Europe. Not because her paintings are lying unloved in museum repositories, but because there are so few of them. So it is hardly surprising that the prefaces in the catalogues for her various retrospectives all make the same point: it is high time that the wider public became much better acquainted with the work of this artist.

December 1958: Under the rubric 'New Names this Month', Edith Burckhardt, writing in *Art News*, reviewed the first public presentation of works by Agnes Martin at Betty Parsons's New York gallery. And this marked the beginning of the debate that unfolded around the extraordinary work of this painter, who was then already forty-six years old. By 1960 her drawings and paintings were being shown here and there in Europe. The first time they were seen by a much larger public was in 1972 at Documenta V in Kassel. Besides the gallerists who were promoting her work – Betty Parsons, Robert Elkön and above all Arne Glimcher in the United States; James Mayor, Yvon Lambert and Annemarie Verna in Europe – certain art historians and museum curators also notably championed her cause, with Lawrence Alloway, Dore Ashton, Douglas Crimp, Suzanne Delehanty, Barbara Haskell, Rosalind Krauss, Lynne Cooke and Samuel J. Wagstaff on one side of the Atlantic and Marja Bloem, Erich Franz, Hermann Kern, Heinz Liesbrock, Lynda Morris, Dieter Schwarz and Edy de Wilde on the other (to name but a few).

David 1958 (LEFT) was the first painting by Agnes Martin to be shown in Europe. This premiere took place in the summer of 1960 at the Helmhaus in Zurich, where the artist Max Bill, in his capacity as exhibition curator, traced the development of concrete art from Wassily Kandinsky to the Spanish group Equipo 57. Bill's intention was to take stock of concrete art, following the 'deluge' of art informel.² Johannes Gachnang later described this as one of the significant exhibitions, one of the 'stations of becoming' for the period 1958–74, and recalled that Bill had endeavoured 'to unite two tendencies:

David 1958
Oil paint on canvas 63.5 x 63.5
Private collection

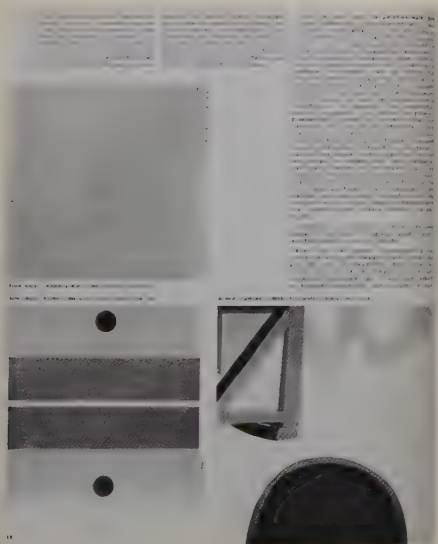


... his own, more constructive tendency and ... the other more expressive tendency, although both by definition programmatically advocated abstraction':³ constructivism, concrete painting and abstract expressionism united as a counterweight to figurative painting. Geometric forms also dominated the compositions of the *Six American Abstract Painters*, whose work – imported, so to speak, by Betty Parsons, who represented all six artists – was shown in London in 1961 at the gallery Arthur Tooth & Sons. Besides works by Ellsworth Kelly, Alexander Liberman, Ad Reinhardt, Leon Polk Smith and Sidney Wolfson there were three canvases by Agnes Martin. In the catalogue the art critic and curator Lawrence Alloway described the clear shapes in Agnes Martin's paintings, the rows of discs, rectangles and diamonds, the calmness and 'directness' of her style: 'An hypnotic tension is nurtured by her formality, which is far removed in spirit from the "impersonality" once hoped for from geometric form.'⁴ He described her art as direct, potent, magical – all qualities that have consistently been associated with Agnes Martin's work ever since.

The extreme urgency with which contemporary American painting had – in the shortest possible time – developed an astounding range and variety was described in the summer of 1962 by Rachel Jacobs, an American art critic and philosopher living in Paris. In an article for the French art magazine *Aujourd'hui: Art et Architecture* Jacobs identified the catalyst for these developments as the moment when artists realised that they could also paint without directly referring to the natural world.⁵ On the basis of representative works by such as Arshile Gorky, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly and Agnes Martin, which were all illustrated in her article (LEFT), Jacobs outlined the characteristics of new painting, albeit without discussing individual artistic positions in detail. She specifically made reference to the special role of the artist who lives outside society and takes exception to 'bourgeois indifference'.⁶ And among the members of what she called the 'cosy congregation of "hard men"',⁷ who devoted their entire attention to 'pure' art, she also included some women painters, namely Helen Frankenthaler, Shirley Goldfarb, Joan Mitchell, Miriam Shapiro and Agnes Martin.

This wide range of artistic attitudes and intentions provided plenty of reasons for exhibition curators to feature Agnes Martin's 'graph paper'⁸ paintings from the 1960s in seminal exhibitions exploring the development of contemporary art in the United States. These included: Samuel J. Wagstaff's *Black, White and Gray* at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut in 1964;⁹ *The Responsive Eye* curated by William C. Seitz at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1965; Lawrence Alloway's *Systemic Painting* at the Guggenheim Museum, New York in September 1966; and, just one month later, *10* curated by Robert Smithson at Virginia Dwan's New

Page from *Aujourd'hui*:
Art et Architecture, June 1962,
showing Martin's *Painting* 1959



York gallery. The focus in these shows was on the reduction of colours to just black, white and grey, the capacity of the grid 'to stimulate dynamic psychological responses',¹⁰ the shift from gestural painting to a new complexity¹¹ and, not least, the minimalist use of shapes and colours. And then there was also the matter of the 'real', which came under scrutiny at the end of the decade in another overview exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York – *The Art of the Real: USA 1948–1968* – that subsequently transferred to Paris, Zurich and London.¹² The guest curator E.C. Goossen revealed the untold riches of the new visual language that had emerged as a reaction to abstract expressionism and declared that this 'art of the real' had nothing to do with metaphor, symbolism or metaphysics. It was what it was: a 'simple, irreducible, irrefutable object'.¹³ At the same time, painters and sculptors were seeking to discover what was 'real' in their own mediums. Agnes Martin's rows and grid structures – like Donald Judd's stacks, Larry Poons's grid paintings and Sol LeWitt's spatial bodies – were all based on simple, regular patterns and systems, on grids and modules, on stacks and other non-hierarchical structures.¹⁴

However, the inclusion of Agnes Martin's work in presentations of 'systemic painting' and minimal art was roundly rejected by the American art historian Dore Ashton: 'Miss Martin is in essence a lyrical painter' and not a slave to regularity, as she put it in 1966 in *Quadrum*, an art magazine published in Belgium.¹⁵ In her view Martin's paintings were symbolic realisations of deep emotions, nurtured by her experience of the endless expanses of the landscape in New Mexico.¹⁶ And in February 1967, when Rolf-Gunther Dienst reviewed the exhibition *10* in *Das Kunstwerk. Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, which featured Martin's *Leaves* 1966 (RIGHT), he talked of 'individual structures' within a 'rigorous pictorial concept'.¹⁷ This was the first illustrated review of Agnes Martin's art by a German-speaking art critic in a German art magazine.

Agnes Martin was the only woman artist to have her work shown in all of these exhibitions: categories such as minimal art, op art, 'art of the real' and 'systemic art' created a superficial sense of order in these shows, but only partially did justice to the singularity of Martin's artistic approach. It was only when her work was seen in solo institutional exhibitions that the extraordinary richness of her art started to become apparent. The first of these was presented in 1971 by Douglas Crimp at the Visual Arts Gallery in New York, where he – with Agnes Martin's help – showed six paintings and twelve drawings. Crimp described it as 'a modest affair, staged in a one-room gallery space at the School of Visual Arts.'¹⁸ Nevertheless, the outstandingly precise and subtle description of these compositions and their effects that Kasha Linville published not long afterwards in *Artforum*¹⁹ shows that this exhibition clearly made an impact on those who saw it. A considerably larger exhibition of Martin's work was presented

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by the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in 1973. Suzanne Delehanty had prepared the exhibition in close collaboration with the artist, her gallerists and connoisseurs of her work such as Lawrence Alloway, Frank Kolbert, Douglas Crimp, Samuel J. Wagstaff and Richard Tuttle. It consisted of thirty-seven paintings from the period 1957–67 (more than half of these were large-format works), thirty-five drawings and watercolours, and three assemblages. By this time there were already three American museums among the lenders and numerous private collectors, including artists such as Tony Smith and Ruth Vollmer. In February 1973 Lawrence Alloway's informative catalogue essay was also published in London in the magazine *Studio International*. Alloway paid particular attention to Martin's use of grid structures, which he felt were treading a fine line between precision and illusion, between order and 'unpredictable physical variations'.²⁰ He also discussed the strikingly frequent use of grid structures by women artists, and aesthetic connections between grids, embroidery and certain textiles created by Native Americans. He concluded with a detailed discussion of the relations between the picture and the viewer, and cited a statement from Martin's own notes: 'Works of art are not purposely conceived. The response depends upon the conditions of the observer.'²¹ This catalogue was the first to publish excerpts from Agnes Martin's own writings. Since then there have been few publications on her work that do not cite some of her astute, plainly stated observations; often they are quoted in other writers' efforts 'to find words for the visual effects in her paintings and drawings that are so hard to describe'.²²

In retrospect it is hard to know what the 'condition' of the observers might have been when they first encountered these works described by Alloway at Documenta V, in Kassel in 1972, where there were four large paintings on show (made between 1964 and 1967): *Garden, Tundra, Lake and River*.²³ The director of Documenta V, Harald Szeemann,²⁴ had appointed the Düsseldorf gallerist Konrad Fischer and the art historian Klaus Honnef as curators for the section on minimal and conceptual art, and they placed Agnes Martin's works – along with others by Sol LeWitt, Daniel Buren and Robert Ryman – around a stone circle by Richard Long. Without doubt the considerable interest that surrounded every Documenta had a decisive impact on the growing awareness of the work of Agnes Martin on this side of the Atlantic.²⁵

The instigator of that first solo exhibition in Germany – which was similar in its format to the exhibition by Douglas Crimp – was the lawyer Hermann Kern. In the foreword to the catalogue he commented that the four works on display in Kassel by this 'still undervalued artist' had ensured that she 'became known to a much greater number of art connoisseurs'.²⁶ Together with some kindred spirits, Kern – almost

as a sideline – ran a private exhibition space (the Kunstraum München) in a three-roomed apartment in Munich's Schwabing district; Kern was responsible for the programme and also published the catalogues. The Kunstraum München opened in May 1973 with an exhibition of paintings by Richard Tuttle, a close friend of Agnes Martin. Tuttle probably encouraged the already keen interest Kern had in Martin's art, and the exhibition of her work took place that same year. Despite the short preparation time, Kern was able to present two large-format canvases, seventeen works on paper and the screenprint series *On a Clear Day* (published in an edition of 30 in 1973) (pp. 125–33). These loans came mainly from private collections in Munich and New York, as well as galleries in Paris and London. In the catalogue Kern provided a very detailed description of these compositions and their progress towards ever greater simplicity and clarity. He countered religious interpretations of her work with the argument that the intensity and ascetic nature of her art, her attitude and spiritual background in fact make it 'possible to conclude that her works want to be seen as messages... Messages, which come from such deep layers of the soul... that the question whether they are dealing with mysticism, art, applied science, philosophy etc. becomes irrelevant; because all these disciplines are only different aspects of one and the same undivided conception of the world.'²⁷ This led Kern to compare her work to 'a system of comprehensive knowledge'²⁸ of tantrism and he underlined this analogy by also exhibiting (and illustrating) a nineteenth-century yantra from Nepal: a network of horizontal and vertical lines drawn in ink on paper, which serves as an aid to meditation whereby the aim is that the individual's spirit will focus on him or herself.²⁹ Agnes Martin specifically thanked Kern for this observation.³⁰ Handwritten notes for Martin's lecture in February 1973 and other writings fill over thirty pages of the catalogue, which had a print run of 1,000 and was to remain the only German-language publication on her work for over twenty years. Kern, who himself owned some drawings by Martin,³¹ also succeeded in finding other venues for his small-scale exhibition, albeit without the paintings.³² It first went to Götz Adriani at the Kunsthalle Tübingen (he, too, had been impressed by Martin's paintings in Kassel),³³ where it ran concurrently with the first exhibition in Germany of the work of Piero Manzoni. On the invitation of Paul Wember the exhibition then went to the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld and ended its tour in Edinburgh, at the instigation of Lynda Morris.³⁴

The impulse for the first major museum exhibition of Agnes Martin's work in Europe came from Joanna Drew, the then director of exhibitions at the Arts Council of Great Britain. In 1977 the Hayward Gallery in London presented an exhibition of fifty-five works, which then travelled to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The main lenders were gallerists and private collectors in the United States, but, as in Munich, the list of lenders also included a number of European

collectors and the Stedelijk Museum. Tate, in London, and the Stedelijk were the only two public institutions in Europe to already own a painting by Martin.³⁵ On the invitation of the organisers the catalogue essay was written by the art critic Dore Ashton, who had been familiar with Martin's work since the late 1950s. Ashton placed Martin's paintings at the heart of a complex web of connections – to nature, to Chinese painting, to music, to Paul Klee (because of its forms and repetitions of forms) and lastly to Taoism and the Taoist search for the 'spaces between words and silence'.³⁶ And she again insisted that it was wrong to see Martin's work in the context of the art of the 1960s. On the contrary, she maintained that its place was in the 'tradition of analogy' that goes back to the nineteenth century and has since been refined in the work of artists such as Kandinsky, Mondrian and even Klee.³⁷

That concludes the short list of opportunities in the 1970s for art connoisseurs in Western Europe to gain a deeper insight into the work and ideas of Agnes Martin. Beyond this, individual works were only seen occasionally in a variety of contexts, such as exhibitions on the development of contemporary drawing and printmaking,³⁸ or in exhibitions – on the same lines as similar presentations ten years earlier in the United States – focusing on new attitudes to painting or on contemporary American art. These included, for instance, *Une exposition de peinture réunissant certains peintres qui mettraient la peinture en question*, by the French curators Michel Claura and René Denizot, which opened in May 1973 in a splendid venue at Place Vendôme in Paris.³⁹ In that presentation paintings by Agnes Martin (*The Cliff* 1966 and *Starlight* 1962, p.87) and one drawing (*Pool* 1964) encountered wall paintings and fabric compositions and objects by artists such as Daniel Buren, Alan Charlton, Brice Marden, Blinky Palermo, Robert Ryman, Niele Toroni and more. This 'exhibition of paintings by painters who would question painting' was subsequently presented by Johannes Cladders in Mönchengladbach. However, it expressly did not set out to answer questions or provide explanations, but rather to challenge the viewer's visual perception.⁴⁰ Whereas both the Royal College of Art Gallery in London (in 1974) and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (in 1975) presented works by Agnes Martin in the context of contemporary American art,⁴¹ the exhibition *Fundamental Painting* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1975 celebrated the rebirth of abstract painting on both sides of the Atlantic. The curators, led by Edy de Wilde, devoted a room each to Ryman, Marden, Mangold and Martin as pioneers of 'silent art'.⁴² But they also presented numerous other positions in the exhibition, including Alan Charlton, Raimund Girke, Gerhard Richter and Jerry Zeniuk. The organisers regarded all of these artists as being open to questions concerning the formal principles of painting: 'format, size, scale, colour, line, form, texture, material, and the manner in which they are employed'.⁴³

This sequence was continued in 1976 with a critical overview of contemporary American art in the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.⁴⁴ Two years later, in 1978, the motto for the Biennale was 'From nature to art, from art to nature', and now visitors discovered Agnes Martin's *Stone* 1960 in a very different context. In the section 'Great abstraction / Great realism', paintings by American artists were juxtaposed with works by early exponents of abstract art, that is to say, Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian. Affinities between compositions by Agnes Martin and the work of these artists – and Paul Klee, too – had variously been remarked upon by writers such as Alloway, Ashton and Hermann Kern. And in Düsseldorf in winter 1973, Hans Mayer had presented an exhibition in his gallery, with works by Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin, Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Frank Stella grouped around a Suprematist painting by Malevich.

In 1980 the main exhibition at the 39th Venice Biennale focused on a relatively recent era: the 1970s.⁴⁵ The curators told the story of an art that was above all shaped by its engagement with multifarious materials and was now 'more closely linked to the intense emotions of the individual and of that type of painting which rediscovers its value within its own processes'.⁴⁶ However, this prompted the then curator of the Tate, Michael Compton, to ask how visitors to the Biennale could be encouraged to contemplate these seemingly simple compositions with such intensity that they would truly experience the real strength of these works: 'At first sight, one can conceive exactly what the work is, but it may take a long period of consideration to work out only a few of the many detailed and precise characteristics of apparently simple objects.'⁴⁷ Compton thus touched on an issue that has become increasingly important since the early 1980s: how do viewers actually react to a work of art and how can any such encounter go deeper? This question initiated heated debate in the context of the retrospectives of the work of Agnes Martin shown in 1991 and 1992. In Venice viewers came face to face with six large-format canvases by Agnes Martin (*Untitled I–VI* 1980). Erich Franz, the then curator at the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, fell under their spell. That same year he succeeded in acquiring a painting by Martin, which remained the sole work by her in a German museum for several years. Aside from certain exceptions, the small number of works by Martin that are found in European museums today were only acquired or received as gifts from the late 1980s onwards.⁴⁸

In the 1970s European gallerists also started to work with Agnes Martin. In 1973 Yvon Lambert (at his Paris gallery, founded in 1966) presented the screenprint series *On a Clear Day*, which was subsequently shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and in Turin. In 1974 the Mayor Gallery featured work by Agnes Martin at Art Basel; this was followed by solo exhibitions in their London gallery in 1978 and 1984. The Pace Gallery has represented Martin

since 1974 and has presented a solo exhibition of her work almost every year since then. The director of the Pace Gallery, Arne Glimcher, became a close friend of Agnes Martin; he has an intimate knowledge of her art and is still a tireless champion of her work. His monograph on her life and work, published in 2012, memorably records moments from their many meetings and conversations. From 1986 Martin's work was also seen in solo exhibitions at the Waddington Galleries in London, at Annemarie Verna in Zurich and Yvon Lambert in Paris. She was not represented as such by any gallery in Germany, but since around 1970 various gallerists in Germany have successfully dealt in her paintings. Hans Mayer brokered the acquisition of *Friendship* 1963 (p.97) by a collector who later gifted it to the Museum of Modern Art, New York; he also facilitated the purchase of *Ages* 1962 and four drawings by the Rodenstock Collection and in 1994 placed *Garden* 1967 in the Weishaupt Collection. In 1980 Alfred Schmela facilitated the purchase of *The Field* 1965 (p.28) by the VEBA (now E.ON) Collection in Düsseldorf. The commitment of a number of gallerists to the work of Agnes Martin and the very high esteem in which it is held by collectors is reflected in the annual 'Kunstkompass' in *Manager Magazin*, which has published this review of the standing of 'artists in the art world' since 1970.⁴⁹ Agnes Martin was first listed in the 'Kunstkompass' in 1974, as number 79 out of 100. The lowest price for a representative piece by Martin is recorded there as 120,000 Deutschmarks and her works are categorised as 'very expensive'. Over the years she moved up the list and by 1977 she was at number 63, although the lowest price for a 'typical' painting by her had halved.⁵⁰

As to the reception of Agnes Martin's work and the mythical status she progressively achieved, these were significantly influenced by accounts by individuals who had personally met the artist in distant New Mexico. In 1980, for instance, the painter Marischa Burckhardt wrote in the Swiss 'cultural' magazine *DU* about her 'two-part' encounter with Agnes Martin. She described how the painting *Park* 1965 – which she had suddenly come upon at the first 'special exhibition' at Art Basel in 1973, where American contemporary art was presented – initially completely unsettled her, only for this feeling then 'gradually to turn into fascination'.⁵¹ In fact Burckhardt was so fascinated by it that she purchased this 'disconcertingly still' composition and travelled to New Mexico the following year, to spend some days with Agnes Martin.⁵² Her description of the artist, who was sixty-two at the time, reflects something of the fascination that others who met her also felt: 'That laughter was also in her face, a tanned face with pale lines, lively dark eyes below short, greying hair, a face in which everything was genuine and legible: her inwardness, her intelligence, her shrewdness, her *Schadenfreude*.'⁵³ Burckhardt, setting the tone for later accounts, presented a compelling description of this painter who had taken refuge in the solitude of the desert – a 'true

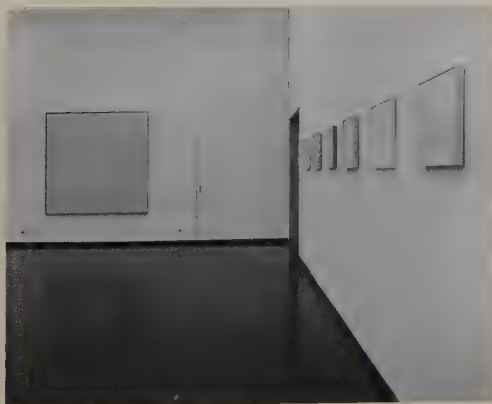
Installation view from the exhibition,
Westkunst: Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1939,
Museen der Stadt Köln, Rheinhallen der Kölner
Messe, Cologne, 30 May – 16 August 1981
Showing works by Martin (back), Richard Tuttle
(left); and Carl Andre (floor)



daughter of the wilderness'⁵⁴ – who had built her house and studio with her own hands, who drove an ancient jeep, who resolutely passed on the insights she had gained in her isolated existence. This image, like Martin's texts, has played into the reception of her work ever since.

Other comments have also lingered on with similar persistence. At the exhibition in Krefeld in 1974 Agnes Martin was presented as the mother of minimal art.⁵⁵ And in 1981 she was described in the exhibition *Westkunst*, curated by Kaspar König, as a 'forerunner of minimal art'.⁵⁶ Her paintings were shown alongside works by Tuttle, LeWitt, Carl Andre and John McCracken, as they had previously been (OPPOSITE LEFT). In 1989, in *Bilderstreit. Widerspruch, Einheit und Fragment in der Kunst seit 1960*⁵⁷ Siegfried Gohr and Johannes Gachnang presented an overview of minimalist, conceptual and other painterly positions since 1960, in which they included three early paintings by Agnes Martin. However, Donald Judd vehemently opposed the premise of the exhibition with its reference to 'Bilderstreit', in the sense of conflicting artistic positions, and wrote a highly critical text entitled 'Ausstellungseinstellung'. He took the view that the exhibition's curators were not really interested in opposing artistic positions – all they had their sights set on was the art market. And, in his opinion, there were not even any good paintings in the exhibition, with one exception: the works by Agnes Martin.⁵⁸ Many of Judd's fellow artists and a small circle of art professionals shared his appreciation of her 'quiet, inward ... almost ascetic'⁵⁹ work. Marianne Stockebrand suggested that the reason for there still being so few connoisseurs of Martin's work, even in 1990, was the lack of exhibitions of her art, not to mention literature on her work and examples of it in public collections.⁶⁰ But Stockebrand also expressed the hope that the planned retrospective and the fact that Agnes Martin was to receive the Jawlensky Prize might help 'to make good this deficit'.⁶¹ The city of Wiesbaden decided to award the Alexej von Jawlensky Prize to Agnes Martin in 1991 in recognition of the fact that 'in her work, in a similar way to that of Jawlensky, Western and Eastern philosophy and aesthetics connect with each other. And, like Jawlensky, she has worked for many years with the same, enduring forms.'⁶² The retrospective to mark the award was devised by the Stedelijk Museum and took up where the exhibition of 1977 had left off; it travelled from Amsterdam (LEFT) via Wiesbaden to the Westfälisches Landesmuseum in Münster and ultimately to the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The foreword, signed by all four museum directors – Wim Beeren, Volker Rattemeyer, Klaus Bußmann and Suzanne Pagé – makes special mention of the 'highly pictorial' nature of the art of Agnes Martin, although at the same time 'one recognizes the activity of a mind which aspires to purity, classical balance and universality'.⁶³ For the first time since Hermann Kern wrote his catalogue essay and passing references

Installation view from the exhibition,
Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings
1974–1990, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,
22 March – 12 May 1991



to Martin's work in reviews or catalogues for group exhibitions, two European art curators had devoted their full attention to her art, namely, Marja Bloem, who had been at the Stedelijk Museum since 1971, and Erich Franz, who had by now moved from Bielefeld to the Landesmuseum Münster. On reading the catalogue, one cannot help but be struck by the conviction with which the authors state that Martin's compositions require intense scrutiny on the part of the viewer to come fully into their own. 'The works achieve their effect only through concentration, time and submission',⁶⁴ wrote Marja Bloem, before citing Martin's own comments on looking at the ocean. The American art critic Mark Stevens remarked in his catalogue essay that 'no other contemporary painting makes so clean an escape from the desire to possess through explanation'.⁶⁵ He saw her work as a vehicle for 'a rarer sort of narrative, based simply upon the open-ended joy of awareness'.⁶⁶ And Erich Franz wrote that 'the unity of a painting by Agnes Martin does not lie in its form but develops only in the viewer's performance of the visual connections ... One experiences the growing together of one's perceptions as an interminable process in the procedure of the connecting seeing'.⁶⁷ Her compositions only come to fruition in the eyes of the beholder. In the case of Martin's art – more so than in any other case – viewers have to see it with their own eyes to understand it, to weigh it up and to appreciate it. This in itself may in part account for the long-standing reluctance of European writers and journalists to comment on her work: with so little of her work on view in Europe they simply lacked the opportunity to engage with it intensely enough. However, this retrospective at last prompted some very considered responses in art magazines and arts supplements.⁶⁸

That same year, the director of the Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Dieter Schwarz, published Agnes Martin's writings in a German translation and followed this with the first retrospective of her work in Switzerland in early 1992.⁶⁹ Many of the paintings and works on paper on display in Winterthur came from private collections in Switzerland, but Hermann Kern was also among the lenders, as was the Pace Gallery. The Staatsgalerie Stuttgart lent the series *On a Clear Day*, which it had just acquired. At the same time in Vienna there was an exhibition of fourteen of Agnes Martin's large-format paintings (done between 1974 and 1991) to celebrate her achievement as the latest recipient of the Oskar Kokoschka Prize, which is awarded by the Austrian government.⁷⁰ And at the end of that same year, her long-awaited, first retrospective in New York opened. Presented by Barbara Haskell at the Whitney Museum of American Art, following an intense period of preparation, the exhibition then travelled via Milwaukee, Miami and Houston to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, where the director, María Corral, used her time in office (1991–4) to show the work of a number of American artists. Besides Agnes Martin – whose work was seen

for the first time in Spain – these artists also included Franz Kline, Brice Marden, Robert Ryman and Clyfford Still.

However, following the retrospectives in 1991 and to mark Agnes Martin's eightieth birthday, there was not the same level of institutional interest in her work. Whereas in the United States there were still relatively frequent exhibitions generally looking at particular aspects of the work, several displays by Lynne Cooke at Dia Art Foundation, and regular presentations of new paintings at the Pace Gallery, there were far fewer exhibitions in Europe: in 1993, at the Serpentine Gallery in London (the first London retrospective of her work since 1977); in 1994 at the Konsthall in Stockholm; in 1997, when Agnes Martin was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale; in 1999 in Edinburgh; and in 2004 at the Josef Albers Museum Quadrat in Bottrop, where Heinz Liesbrock presented the twelve-part group of paintings *The Islands* 1979 (p. 148) in the context of the Albers Collection and thus united the work of two like-minded artists: 'Like Josef Albers she is seeking a definition of form which contains within it a potential for transition.'⁷¹

Agnes Martin 'never had to struggle for a dealer or for patrons; for the esteem of her peers; or for sensitive, considered critical responses to her art'.⁷² Soon after that first exhibition of her work in New York in 1958, the first paintings and drawings by Agnes Martin found their way to Zurich and Basel, Munich and Krefeld, London and Amsterdam. Even before the retrospective exhibitions in major institutions her work had connected with and moved fellow artists and collectors on both sides of the Atlantic. For a long time, only the voices of American art critics were heard in publications and catalogues of her work. Together with Martin's own artist-friends and gallerists they became the first nodes in a network that quickly established itself. All the various players maintained active connections: between New York and London, Amsterdam, Basel, Zurich, Munich and Düsseldorf; they championed the same artists and tendencies; the gallerists catered for the same clients and collectors. And it was the collectors – in Germany they started to acquire works by Agnes Martin around 1970 – who ultimately stabilised that network in the long term. Their loans ensured the success of the early exhibitions and are still of crucial importance today. Some collectors gifted their works to public museums. Yet, to this day, there are barely twenty large-format works by Agnes Martin in public collections in Western Europe, with the result that there are few opportunities to encounter them face to face. Agnes Martin's own desire that her paintings, which talk of perfection, happiness and beauty, would bring her friends – 'as many as Mozart'⁷³ – will only slowly be fulfilled, because those friendships can only grow when individuals have the chance to encounter and fully concentrate on one of her compositions in person.

Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott

**'Well, I Sit Here
And Wait To Be Inspired'
— Photographs
of Agnes Martin**

With a gentle smile on her lips, the young woman is gazing into the camera. She is sitting in a simple wooden armchair with her hands together in her lap. Clad in a roomy work-shirt, she has tied her long hair back. With a cigarette in her left hand, it seems that she is taking a short break from her work. This portrait by Mildred Tolbert shows Agnes Martin in her early forties, in her studio in Taos, New Mexico. What follows here is an exploration of this black-and-white photograph (OVERLEAF, LEFT), taken c.1954, and another five photographs of Agnes Martin. The main focus of this essay is on the manner in which she is presented as an artist in these photographs. As Pierre Bourdieu wrote in his sociological analysis, *The Rules of Art*, the modern artist who creates a work is also created ‘by the whole ensemble of those who help to “discover” him and to consecrate him as an artist who is “known” and recognized’.¹ The discourse surrounding works of art does more than merely aid their comprehension and appreciation – it is also ‘a moment which is part of the production of the work, of its meaning and its value’.² Like numerous texts in art magazines, exhibition catalogues and scholarly monographs on Martin’s work – naturally this exhibition catalogue and my essay are not the exceptions to this rule – Martin’s photographs are part of a process that, in the context of the ‘art business’,³ co-creates her art and her artistic persona. I will start by discussing three photographs that have often been published in articles and exhibition catalogues and that are the main source of Agnes Martin’s public image. Following this I will examine three less well-known photographs that have hitherto not been published in any exhibition catalogues: How does she appear in the photograph by Diane Arbus, taken in 1966? How did Gianfranco Gorgoni portray her in 1974? And what kind of artistic figure is seen in the photograph Annie Leibovitz took in 1999?

Having graduated with a Master of Arts in Education from Teachers College at Columbia University in New York, in the autumn of 1954 Martin moved to Taos, to concentrate exclusively on her artistic work.

Mildred Tolbert, who had been taking pictures of artists in New Mexico since the early 1950s, photographed Agnes Martin from a slightly raised perspective. Martin gazes steadily up at the photographer from her chair, with a slight smile. In the background numerous painted canvases are propped up against the wall. The light enters from the left. The brightly lit paintings, some of whose biomorphous-abstract forms are identifiable, take up around half of the photographic composition and play an important part in the shot. Tolbert’s photograph is reminiscent of traditional artists’ portraits in two ways. Firstly, Martin’s work-shirt and stacks of paintings in her studio clearly point to her artistic calling. Ever since the sixteenth century, portraits of European artists have shown them in their studios with easels and paintbrushes, surrounded by finished

Following spread, left to right
Martin in her studio in Taos,
New Mexico, c.1954
Photograph by Mildred Tolbert
Collection of the Harwood Museum
of Art, Taos. Courtesy the Mildred
Tolbert Archive

Martin on a roof in Coenties
Slip, Manhattan, with Jack
Youngerman, Robert Indiana,
Delphine Seyrig and her son,
and Ellsworth Kelly, mid-1950s.
Photograph by Hans Namuth

works of art. One need only call to mind self-portraits by artists such as Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt, Max Liebermann and Vincent van Gogh, to name but a few. The photographer Alexander Liberman made an intense study of artists in their studios, taking many shots of Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Agnes Martin. Secondly, the artists in these portraits typically gaze directly, even penetratingly, at the viewer.⁴ This is very evident in the works by the aforementioned artists and in the 1645 collection of prints, *Iconography*, by Anthony van Dyck, which includes numerous portraits of artists, including Rubens. This same concentrated, direct gaze is seen in paintings by Albrecht Dürer, Max Beckmann and Frida Kahlo, and something very similar is found in portraits of artists by photographers such as August Sander, Man Ray and Irving Penn. There are few photographs of Agnes Martin taken in Taos in the early years of her artistic career. Drawing on the traditional iconography of portraits of artists, Tolbert leaves the viewer in no doubt that the sitter in this photograph is a painter. It is thus hardly surprising that this photograph has often been reproduced in articles and exhibition catalogues, including the catalogue published in 1977 by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for the exhibition *Agnes Martin: Schilderijen en Tekeningen 1957–75* [*Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings 1957–75*], that for the display of her work at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York in 1992, and that for *Agnes Martin: Before the Grid*, published by the Harwood Museum of Art in 2012.

In 1957 the gallerist Betty Parsons became aware of Agnes Martin's work and persuaded her to return to New York. The shot of Martin taken in 1957 by Hans Namuth, which has also been widely published,⁵ is part of a series of portrait photographs by the German émigré in which he focussed on the artists who were living and working in lofts on Coenties Slip in south Manhattan in the mid-1950s. It shows Martin on a roof with other members of the artists' community there (OVERLEAF, RIGHT). In the centre of the photograph there is a small boy, looking into the camera. His father, Jack Youngerman, is to his left, and Robert Indiana is to his right, crouching down. The two men are holding beakers and looking towards the boy, rather than into the camera. The boy's mother, the actress Delphine Seyrig, is seated further to his right. Ellsworth Kelly is standing in the background, gazing downwards, pensively smoking a cigarette. Seated on the far right, a little higher than the others, is Agnes Martin – with her ankles crossed and her hands in the pockets of her wide coat, she is gazing amiably down at the others. The background of this photograph by Namuth is filled with the skyscrapers of Wall Street. These symbols of the world of finance are strikingly at odds with the artists' community on the rooftop. The members of this group are taking as little notice of the background as they are of the





photographer – away from the hectic buzz of the city the artists are living their own independent, free lives. The gallerist Arne Glimcher, who first met Martin in 1963 in Jack Youngerman's loft, remembers those days as being filled with 'a sense of humour, endless possibilities ... rampant freedom described the atmosphere'.⁶ Martin's position in the photograph in a sense corresponds to her role within the group: a good ten years older than her male colleagues, she plays her part in the photographic composition, but her raised position also reflects her special, slightly separate role.

Charles R. Rushton took several photographs of Agnes Martin. One of the most frequently reproduced is the gelatin silver print from 1992, which portrays Martin in her studio in Galisteo, New Mexico (**OVERLEAF**).⁷ This portrait shows Martin seated in an armchair; on the wall to her left is one of her large-format, striped paintings in pale pastel hues, taking up more than half of the photographic composition. Martin is facing the photographer with a serious expression. Her legs form two parallel lines, as do her arms on the chair. She is wearing dark grey trousers and a dark cardigan with a line of pale buttons running down the centre front. A strictly symmetrical, white collar stands out against the cardigan. The popularity of Rushton's portrait is above all due to the fact that he successfully quotes her artistic approach in this image: echoing Martin's own style, Rushton structured the photograph from clearly defined lines. Reinforcing the rectilinear shape of the painting, the upright, symmetrical pose of the sitter and the row of buttons on her cardigan mark clear horizontal and vertical lines. In addition to this, the left side of the photograph, with Martin in the armchair, is noticeably darker than the right side, with the pale painting – the left edge of the canvas forms a vertical that divides the photograph into two realms. This composition, built up from straight lines, conveys a sense of peace and harmony. It reflects the way in which Martin and her art have mainly been viewed since the 1970s. Art critics have consistently alluded to forms of tranquility in connection with Agnes Martin and her work, describing it as 'silent',⁸ 'tranquil',⁹ 'calm',¹⁰ 'quiet'¹¹ and so on. And there have been repeated references to her secluded lifestyle, which is described in terms of 'solitude' and 'solitary',¹² 'isolated'¹³ and 'isolation',¹⁴ while she is seen as a 'loner',¹⁵ 'alone',¹⁶ 'reclusive'¹⁷ and as a 'recluse'.¹⁸ This is partly due to statements by Martin herself, who often reflected on silence and a withdrawn, artistic lifestyle in her lectures and writings, as we see in 'The Untroubled Mind' (1972), 'Reflections' (1973), 'What is Real?' (1976) and 'Beauty is the Mystery of Life' (1989).¹⁹

As early as 1975 the critic Roberta Smith already described Martin as 'something of a legend'. She attributed this partly to the fact that Martin stopped painting for a full seven years and partly to her

Following spread:

Martin in her studio, New Mexico 1992

Photograph by Charles Rushton

decision to leave the New York art scene for a life in New Mexico, far off the beaten track.²⁰ The artist as outsider – leading a lonely life and enduring a degree of impoverishment but free from social constraints – has been a topos in art history ever since the Romantic era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This artistic type was memorably formulated in programmatic terms by Caspar David Friedrich in his self-portraits. Composure and seclusion came to be regarded as the prerequisites for artistic creation, and an ‘anti-bourgeois’ stance became the ‘hallmark of an artist’.²¹ Rushton’s quietly harmonious composition depicts Martin in New Mexico as a mature artist, at peace with herself. In conjunction with numerous texts written by and about Martin, this photograph certainly contributed to her mystification as a self-possessed, solitary artist.

Besides the references to tranquility and solitude that abound in the discourse regarding Agnes Martin and her art, there are also frequent allusions to the seemingly inexplicable nature of her life and work, which is variously described as ‘enigmatic’,²² ‘mysterious’,²³ ‘mystical’²⁴ and ‘mythical’.²⁵ In 1966 Diane Arbus made a powerful, full-length portrait of Martin (p. 216), which heightens her inscrutability to the extent that it almost becomes strangely morbid. It was first published in the July issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* in the context of Geri Trotta’s feature ‘Not to be Missed: The American Art Scene’. Other artists photographed by Arbus for the same feature included Frank Stella, James Rosenquist and Roy Lichtenstein.

Like Tolbert and Rushton, Arbus visited the artist in her studio and photographed her seated in an ordinary, wooden armchair. In the somewhat blurred background a canvas is leaning against the wall. Martin, her eyes wide open and smiling shyly and uncertainly, gazes straight at the photographer. Her clasped hands are lying in her lap. Her knees are touching and her feet are turned slightly inwards. She is wearing dark, crumpled painting overalls made from a synthetic fabric, with multiple spatters of white paint on the legs. Her shoes, in sharp focus, are also spattered with paint. As so often, Arbus’s camera angle is low and unusual in that it is off to one side. The lines of the floorboards create a sense of movement and seem to be fanning out towards the viewer. Unlike Rushton’s photograph, this composition is dominated by diagonals running in opposite directions, which create a darkly uneasy, surreal environment. Arbus, who is known for her photographs of outsiders, accentuated her subject’s troubled side. Martin’s turned-in feet and clasped hands indicate a certain nervousness; the expression in her eyes is wary. Martin suffered from schizophrenia. Arne Glimcher has reported that repeated schizophrenic episodes led to her being admitted to hospital. In New York in the 1960s these episodes became more frequent and Glimcher recalls one weekend when Martin, having lost any sense of her own identity and surroundings, was found









wandering in the streets of New York by the police.²⁶ There is no way of knowing whether Diane Arbus was aware of Martin’s schizophrenia. However, it is very clear that her photograph – more than any other – conveys a strange sense of dislocation that hints at irregularities in Martin’s perception of the world.

In spring 1974 the Italian photographer Gianfranco Gorgoni visited Agnes Martin at the small adobe house she had built herself on a mesa near Cuba in New Mexico. Gorgoni, who also took portrait photographs of Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois and Andy Warhol, has fond memories of the two days he spent with Agnes Martin, during which he taught her a method of chopping wood used in his own native region of Abruzzo.²⁷ He depicted Martin in the open air: outside her house, next to her jeep, or chopping wood. Some of the photographs from this series were published in 1985 by Gorgoni in his book *Beyond the Canvas: Artists of the Seventies and Eighties*.

In the photograph reproduced here (PREVIOUS PAGE), Martin is seen at close quarters, facing the camera. This head-and-shoulders portrait is shot from a slightly elevated angle. Martin is wearing a pale-coloured hat, which hides most of her short, dark hair, and a practical windcheater over a woollen sweater. She occupies centre stage in the composition. Her adobe house is visible in the left background, and not far away from it to the right is a large tree. The dry, loamy path leading to the house is partially blocked by some stones and dry vegetation. Martin’s large jeep is visible behind her to the right. The sun is beating down on the vehicle and on the subject of the portrait, but her hat casts a protective shadow over most of her face. Martin is slightly screwing up her eyes and smiling a little at Gorgoni. This photograph presents the viewer with a woman who has built her own house, drives a jeep and leads a simple life out in the country. Gorgoni’s portrait is not of an artist as such, it is of a strong woman living on the land, in seclusion and in harmony with nature. However, the photographs in this series were not to Martin’s liking. In March 1977, in a letter to Edy de Wilde, who was director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam from 1963 to 1985, she wrote: ‘with regard to the photographs, I did not like G. Gorgonis [sic] photographs. The easiest and quickest way is for me to send you immediately (tomorrow) air mail a number of photographs.’²⁸ Accordingly, the catalogue for the exhibition *Agnes Martin: Schilderijen en Tekeningen 1957–75* does not include any of Gorgoni’s photographs and instead has reproductions of the portraits by Tolbert and Namuth, which unequivocally present Martin as an artist.

Previous spread, left to right:
Martin in her studio, 1966
Photograph by Diane Arbus

Head and shoulders portrait
of Martin at her house near Cuba,
New Mexico, 1974
Photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni

When Annie Leibovitz went to visit Martin in 1999, the artist was eighty-seven years old. She was living in sheltered housing in Taos, but still drove out to her nearby studio every day, where she would

work for several hours. The coloured photograph reproduced here (OVERLEAF) was published in Leibovitz's book of photographs of *Women* (1999), along with other images of famous and non-famous females. The only factor all the women have in common is that they lived in the USA at the time – Leibovitz was celebrating 'the woman' in all her endless variety. Among the other sitters are Marilyn Leibovitz (the photographer's mother), the United States Senator Barbara Boxer and a number of artists, including Louise Bourgeois, Cindy Sherman and Yoko Ono.

Leibovitz's photograph shows Martin slightly left of centre in her small, modestly furnished studio. We see an imposing, elderly woman in a striped T-shirt with splashes of pale paint on it. With her hands loosely in her lap, Martin is sitting still and upright on the narrow bed. The edges of the figure, the bed, a small armchair and a dresser with paintbrushes and two pictures standing on it are all softly depicted. Sunlight enters the room through the Venetian blind behind Martin (which occupies around a third of the composition), bathing the space in a muted yellowish glow. Martin's face and figure are thus in comparative darkness and a large beam of light extends outwards behind her upper body. Her calm aspect, the soft outlines and the muted, warm light combine to create a harmonious, meditative atmosphere. The light above and behind Martin's head and shoulders seems almost like a large halo. Ever since Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (first published in 1550), there has been a tendency to present artists as human beings with extraordinary, even divine gifts. During the Renaissance the artist was revered as an auratic creator: he or she was seen as a 'second God' (*alter deus*) or divine artist (*divino artista*). Similarly, in discussions concerning Agnes Martin, who engaged not only with Christian thinking but also with Zen-Buddhist and Taoist philosophies,²⁹ there are numerous allusions to religion. Critics have variously described her work as 'almost prayer',³⁰ 'sacred',³¹ 'sublime',³² 'meditative'³³ and 'contemplative'.³⁴ Others have described Martin as an 'art nun',³⁵ an 'apostle of retreat',³⁶ even as a 'high priestess'.³⁷ In her book *At Work* (2008) Leibovitz described Martin as shy and thoughtful, 'a serious student of Taoist and Buddhist teachings' who regarded art as a 'path to the sublime'.³⁸ This portrait of the painter in her old age, as an artist bathed in mystical light, reflects Leibovitz's own perception of Agnes Martin.

Martin's pared-back lifestyle – without newspapers, television or elaborate furnishings – has been described as 'ascetic',³⁹ 'monastic'⁴⁰ and 'monkish'.⁴¹ The minimalist room and the simplicity of the photographic composition reflect Martin's uncomplicated approach to daily life and her refreshingly straightforward view of the world. In response to Leibovitz's question as to what she did first when she arrived at her studio each morning, Martin simply said: 'Well, I sit here and wait to be inspired.'⁴²

The photographs by Tolbert, Namuth and Rushton, which have so often been reproduced in articles and exhibition catalogues, show Agnes Martin at three different stages in her artistic career and are very much in keeping with the current discourse concerning her life and work. Tolbert presents her as a highly motivated artist, having recently started work in her studio in Taos. Namuth portrays her in 1957 as a slightly marginal member of the artists' community at Coenties Slip in New York. Rushton's portrait, taken in 1992, reflects the process of 'consecration', which saw Martin – following her return to New Mexico – increasingly being romanticised as a tranquil, mystical, solitary artist. Leibovitz's portrait also alludes to notions of the isolated, spiritual artist and presents Martin as a visionary ascetic.

By contrast, Arbus and Gorgoni present two very different faces of Agnes Martin. Arbus's shot is remarkable for the way that it conveys a puzzling, disturbing element that relates to Martin's sensory disorder. There were times when Martin was not at peace, due to her schizophrenia. Meanwhile Gorgoni presents Martin not as an artist but as a strong woman living independently in the countryside, who has built her own house. Although Martin herself was not pleased with that image, it reveals another important side to her. For, like all of us, Agnes Martin had several different faces.

Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott



Jacquelynn Baas

Agnes Martin: Readings for Writings

'Order cannot but be admirable in a world constantly threatened with disorder ... Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony. With the realization, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning.' John Dewey, *Art As Experience*¹

'Whatever we see is changing, losing its balance. The reason everything looks beautiful is because it is out of balance, but its background is always in perfect harmony ... So if you see things without realizing the background of Buddha nature, everything appears to be in the form of suffering. But if you understand the background of existence, you realize that suffering itself is how we live, and how we extend our life.' Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*²

'Suffering in life being a part of life is also positive, since all of life is positive.' Agnes Martin, *Writings*³

Writings/Schriften is a collection of texts and notes by Agnes Martin published in 1991, when the artist was almost eighty years old. The late-blooming Martin's reputation would still be ascendant when she died at the age of ninety-two; there is little question her writings served as a catalyst for that process by helping to make her beautiful but rarefied (one might even say esoteric) work more accessible. Martin's pithy homilies about art and life are like catnip for artists, art historians and art lovers. From 1966 when her first notes were published,⁴ Martin's austere paintings acquired for the informed viewer a new dimension: *hsin*, 'heart-mind' in Chinese.⁵ The formal analysis to which Martin's art had pretty much been confined did not disappear, but a door had opened into the lived world of contingency and connection.

Martin's writings themselves, however, are far from accessible to readers unaccustomed to a mind honed by decades of study and self-examination. Over the course of her long life Martin explored and absorbed a range of life-views, including Old Testament Calvinism, expressions of visionary Christianity, Platonism, transcendentalism, Vedanta, Zen Buddhism and, last but not least, Taoism.⁶ Although most scholars acknowledge these sources, few who have written about Martin and her art understand them to the degree she did, and even fewer appreciate the complexities of sorting out evidence in her writings of so-called 'Western' and Asian philosophical systems that have been influencing one another from before recorded history. This essay aims to address the process by which these perspectives may have formed Martin's life-view and thus her art.

Reared in a Calvinist religious environment, Martin rejected religion, including the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which holds that God has chosen some for salvation by His grace while damning the rest for their sins. No deed can earn salvation for those not chosen, while nothing can prevent it for those who are.⁷ Martin, in her text 'The Untroubled Mind' dictated in 1972, insisted to the contrary: 'Everyone is chosen and everyone knows it.' And in a lecture at Yale University in 1976 she urged: 'We must give up the idea of salvation. You cannot be saved and the rest left.'⁸

While sending her on a lifelong quest for a more inclusive perspective, Calvinism nevertheless formed Martin's habits of mind in two important ways. First, as a highly intellectual version of Christianity, Calvinism emphasises reading, especially the Bible. Martin's family was Scottish Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) Presbyterian, which regards the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the only true guide to action and belief. By the time she left home at the age of nineteen Martin would have read or heard the entire Bible including the foundational Old Testament, or 'Jewish Bible', countless times. Many of her key themes – humility, obedience, praise – are demands of the Old Testament God and had their roots in Martin's bone-deep knowledge of scripture.

The Bible is too full of apparent contradictions to serve as a simple guide for life, however: it wants interpreting. A second important formative influence of Calvinism on Agnes Martin was its position that spiritual truth presupposes a persistent quest from one sect and even one religious system to another, while steering clear of external religious trappings and relying on God's irresistible grace. Martin's maternal grandfather, with whom the family went to live for several years after her father died when she was two years old and to whom she remained close, seems to have been the personification of irresistible grace. 'I think he believed in Love more than he believed in God,' Martin told an interviewer in 1999. 'I certainly do too.'⁹

Her loving grandfather introduced Martin to a book that would be important throughout her life: *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by the rebellious English religious allegorist John Bunyan (1628–1688). Bunyan, like Martin, experienced visions and heard inner voices.¹⁰ Jailed for twelve years for preaching without a state licence, he began writing part one of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in prison. His run-ins with authority may account for anti-legalistic passages like the false promise of Mr Worldly Wiseman that Christian could be relieved of his burden of sin by Mr Legality in the village of Morality. Christian never makes it to the village of Morality. His guide, Evangelist, warns him to heed the words of God, not the laws of man: 'the just shall live by faith' – comforting words for a social outlier like Martin.¹¹

Other personally meaningful passages would have been Bunyan's Slough of Despond and especially the Man in the Iron Cage, once

a 'fair and flourishing professor', now caged by despair resulting from 'the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world; in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight; but now everyone of those things also bite me, and gnaw me like a burning worm'¹². From 1967 to 1972, in a career move reminiscent of the transcendentalist author and practical philosopher Henry David Thoreau's 1840s experiment in simple living, Martin abandoned her successful art career for travelling through the western wilderness, building a cabin on a New Mexico mesa, reading and writing.¹³ She entitled one of her last paintings before leaving New York *Trumpet* (RIGHT). The title recalls an episode directly following Bunyan's account of the Man in the Iron Cage: Christian encounters a trembling man who has just awakened from a dream in which he heard 'a great sound of a trumpet' heralding the Last Judgement. When Christian enquires about the cause of the man's fear, he responds: 'I thought that the day of judgment was come, and that I was not ready for it.' Christian's Interpreter instructs him, 'keep all things so in thy mind ... The Comforter be always with thee, good Christian, to guide thee in the way.'¹⁴ In 1982 Agnes Martin wrote in an artist's statement, 'This feeling of devotion literally carries us through life, past all distractions and pitfalls to a perfect awareness of life, to measureless happiness and perfection.'¹⁵

Martin also admired the artist-poet William Blake (1757–1827), an even more rebellious visionary than Bunyan. Blake experienced light-infused angelic visions as a child that persisted well into adulthood. Towards the end of his life he created twenty-eight watercolour illustrations for *The Pilgrim's Progress*, begun in 1824 but never finished (LEFT). These drawings came into the Frick Collection in New York, where they were exhibited several times while Martin was living in the city.¹⁶ Blake's figural style was modelled on classical and Renaissance art. When Martin spoke of her own art as being 'in the classic tradition',¹⁷ Blake's art may have been one of the things she had in mind.

The work by Blake most commonly cited as influencing Martin is his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794). At least as important, however, would have been *All Religions are One / The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness* (1788), a series of philosophical aphorisms very like Martin's own *Writings* that constituted a virtual manifesto for the power of poetic inspiration as the source of all philosophy and religion. 'Principle VII' reads:

*As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various) So all Religions
& as all similars have one source. The true Man is the source,
he being the Poetic Genius [vital, creative vision, i.e. Inspiration].*¹⁸

One of the philosophical systems Blake incorporated into his idiosyncratic political/spiritual ideology was Vedanta ('the Hindoo Scriptures', as he called them).¹⁹ Martin, who travelled to India

William Blake
The Man in the Iron Cage c.1824
Illustration for John Bunyan's
The Pilgrim's Progress, New York Limited
Editions Club, 1941



in the mid-1960s, would have been aware of this source from Thomas Merton, a close friend of her friend Ad Reinhardt who had written his master's thesis at Columbia on Blake. According to Merton, 'We know that Blake knew the *Bhagavad Gita*, because he did a picture of Sir Charles Wilkins translating it.'²⁰ The transformational focal point of the *Bhagavad Gita* is a revelatory vision of Absolute reality; its themes are the insignificance of individual action within larger cycles of existence and the need to ignore fame and blame in order to carry out one's duty – lessons that surfaced regularly in Martin's writings. And the *Gita*'s ideal of *Bhakti* (devotion) – dedicating one's life to one's highest self²¹ – may have helpfully reframed the Old Testament God's demands for obedience to His laws.

In addition to Blake, Martin was fond of quoting William Wordsworth.²² Both poets were key figures in the Romantic movement, and each wrote a great deal about nature and about childhood, but they were very different thinkers. As G.K. Chesterton wrote in his biography of Blake,

It is common to connect Blake and Wordsworth because of their ballads about babies and sheep. They were utterly opposite. If Wordsworth was the Poet of Nature, Blake was specially the Poet of Anti Nature. Against Nature he set a certain entity which he called Imagination ... By imagination ... he meant images; the eternal images of things.

Chesterton followed this with a passage that suggests Martin had read not just Blake, but also Chesterton's biography of Blake:

*Blake's philosophy, in brief, was primarily the assertion that the ideal is more actual than the real: just as in Euclid the good triangle in the mind is more actual (and more practical) than the bad triangle on the blackboard.*²³

Martin paraphrased Chesterton's example in a 1979 lecture:

*The Greeks made a great discovery. They discovered that in Nature there are no perfect circles or straight lines or equal spaces. Yet ... in their minds they could see them and ... they were then able to make them.*²⁴

Behind Blake's and Martin's concept of ideal geometry was Plato, whose thinking, as both would have known, was based on that of the legendary late sixth-century BC philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras, said to have been taught geometry by the Egyptians. This may partly account for Martin's elaboration on classicism: 'I would like my work to be recognised as being in the classic tradition (Coptic, Egyptian, Greek, Chinese), as representing the Ideal in the

Trumpet 1967
Acrylic and graphite on canvas 182.9 × 182.9
Private collection



mind.’²⁵ That the classic tradition originated in Asia was an idea shared by Thomas Merton, who wrote:

*The great intellectual ferment in Egypt, Greece, and Asia Minor in the earlier centuries of the Christian era owed no little of its character to influences from the East. And, long before this, it is possible to trace Oriental influences in Pythagoras ... The idea of metempsychosis and karma reappear in Plato ... Eusebius even records that Indian sages visited Socrates at Athens.*²⁶

According to Merton, Pythagoras believed in reincarnation – a concept also present in the *Bhagavad Gita* and shared by Martin, who told her long-time dealer and friend Arne Glimcher: ‘I don’t believe in religion at all, but I do believe ... that our consciousness continues, we don’t die. It’s like taking a train from Grand Central to Connecticut, we get off in Connecticut and it’s something else.’²⁷

In ‘The Untroubled Mind’, Martin wrote:

*I don’t believe in the eclectic
I believe in the recurrence
That this is a return to classicism
Classicism is not about people
And this work is not about the world
We called Greek classicism Idealism
Idealism sounds like something you can strive for
They didn’t strive for idealism at all
Just follow what Plato has to say
Classicists are people that look out with their back to the world.*²⁸

She was referring to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave from Book 1 of *The Republic*. The shadows we perceive as reality are what usually gets emphasised in Socrates’s allegory as related by Plato, but Martin was equally interested in what follows: those who manage to turn away from the shadow ‘world’ and ascend towards the light are at first too dazzled to see the forms that generate the shadows, much less the sun itself; but as their eyes adjust, they first see reflections, then objects, then the paler light of moon and stars. Finally they are able to see and contemplate the source of the light, the sun. Should these enlightened ones return to the cave, they will again be unable to see, though for a different reason. People still in the cave would say that ‘up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending’. This is what the word ‘classicist’ meant for Agnes Martin – a person who has chosen to ‘look out with their back to the world’ towards the light: an artist like William Blake, considered mad by his contemporaries; an artist like her. About her paintings, she teased Arne Glimcher: ‘If you keep looking at them they’ll make you blind.’²⁹

A teacher at heart, Martin would also have been interested in Plato's conclusion: 'If I am right,' Plato has Socrates say,

certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes ... Our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being ... the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

And she certainly would have been interested in Socrates's subsequent question:

*must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?*³⁰

In the course of her education as a teacher, Martin would have read Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's *Record of a School* (1835), the first book of transcendentalist ideas published in America. *Record of a School* constituted a real-world application of Socrates's 'maieutic' approach to education, based on the Greek word for 'obstetric': a process of assisting a person in bringing into consciousness his or her own latent conceptions in the same way a midwife assists in the birth of a baby. Peabody (1804–1894) worked as assistant teacher to Amos Bronson Alcott at his experimental Temple School in Boston. Alcott emphasised self-instruction based on the Socratic method of conversation and questioning rather than the lecturing and drill common at the time. Puritan Calvinism taught that children are born sinners, according to the doctrine of original sin. Alcott and Peabody believed, to the contrary, that their 'little pupils possessed ... all truth, in philosophy and morals', and that it was their business 'to help the outward life to conform to the inner light',³¹ a philosophy that would have helped form Martin's attitude towards her role as an artist as well as teacher.

Peabody, who in 1860 would found the first English-language kindergarten in the United States, in 1844 published 'The Preaching of the Buddha' in Ralph Waldo Emerson's journal *The Dial*. She had translated these passages from the Lotus Sutra from Eugène Burnouf's *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, which had just appeared in Paris. Asian philosophy was formative both to transcendentalism and to Peabody's educational theory. 'The theoretical philosophy of Anaxagoras was the reassertion in Greece of the religious philosophy of the east,' Peabody wrote in *Record of a School*:

*Mind is god, said the great teacher of Pericles and Socrates. And hence sprang up in Athens, the practical philosophy of know thyself... To go inward, and become fully conscious of what goes on there, and to verify it in action, is therefore the Alpha and Omega of a true life.*³²

Another thinker important to Agnes Martin would have been John Dewey (1859–1952). Martin’s pedagogical career began in 1934 when she enrolled at Western Washington College of Education and continued in the early 1940s and 1950s at Teachers College, Columbia University, where Dewey had played an important role.³³ Dewey may have been one of the reasons Martin went to Columbia: his book *Art as Experience* was published in 1934, the same year Martin enrolled in college. As far as we humans are concerned, Dewey believed, the world is not comprised of things, or objects, but of happenings, or experience:

*In common conception, the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience. Since the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience, the result [of this misconception] is not favorable to understanding.*³⁴

Or as Agnes Martin pithily put it: ‘the response to art is the real art field.’³⁵ The ‘work’ of art is not an object or event but the experience engendered within the mind of the artist and viewer.

John Dewey’s ‘instrumentalist’ philosophy derived from a combination of German idealism, American transcendentalism, American pragmatism and Asian philosophy, which he encountered in the 1890s in Chicago, where Paul Carus was his publisher and where he first met D.T. Suzuki, and in Japan and China during his travels there in 1919–20.³⁶ While not as visionary as Bunyan or Blake (or Martin for that matter), according to one biographer Dewey had a ‘mystic experience’ at age nineteen:

*There was no vision, not even a definable emotion – just a supremely blissful feeling that his worries were over. Mystic experiences in general, Dewey explains, are purely emotional and cannot be conveyed in words. But when he tries to convey his in words, it comes out like this: ‘What the hell are you worrying about, anyway? Everything that’s here is here, and you can just lie back on it. I’ve never had any doubts since then,’ he adds, ‘– nor any beliefs. To me faith means not worrying.’*³⁷

This modest enlightenment experience, which Dewey compared with Walt Whitman’s ‘sense of oneness with the universe’,³⁸ is reflected in a passage from *Art as Experience* that follows directly on my first epigraph, above:

Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total.

Here's what Martin had to say about the relationship between suffering – what Dewey described as 'moments of resistance and tension' – and enlightenment:

*No suffering is unnecessary
All of it is only enlightening, this is life
Asceticism is a mistake
Sought out suffering is a mistake
But what comes to you free is enlightening*³⁹

And enlightenment, Martin implies, is freeing.

Dewey goes on to contrast the work of the scientist and the artist, concluding, 'The artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in, and the terms lie so close to the object ... that they merge directly into it.'⁴⁰ His formulation helps clarify Martin's puzzling statement, 'I don't believe in influence / unless it's you, yourself following your own track.'⁴¹ Dewey may not have influenced Martin, but he definitely reinforced what she already knew: understanding emerges from within, in the process of engaging with the world. The artist's role, like the teacher's, is to provide a safe place for engagement.

Information about Asian philosophies and practices, especially Japanese Zen, was increasingly available in the United States after the Second World War. Art, according to Leonardo, is a mental thing,⁴² which may be why artists, writers and musicians comprised a disproportionately large part of the American audience for Asian perspectives focussing on what Martin called 'The Untroubled Mind' – an open, unconditioned mind-state conducive to creativity.⁴³ Agnes Martin's receptive attitude towards these perspectives would have been formed during her earlier years in the Pacific Rim city of Vancouver, with its vibrant Asian culture. Her strongest motivation, however, may well have been her own problematical mental condition – Martin was afflicted with schizoaffective disorder, in which a person experiences a combination of schizophrenia symptoms such as visual and auditory hallucinations, and mood disorder symptoms like depression or mania. Religion hadn't worked for her; therapy and drugs do not seem to have been entirely effective during the early years. After seeking solitude in 1967, study and meditation finally helped.

In 1983 Martin responded to a scholar's query about which spiritual texts had been important to her:

*My greatest spiritual inspiration came from the Chinese spiritual teachers, especially Lao Tzu ... My next strongest influence is the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng. My copy is translated by A.F. Price, The Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Hui Neng, Shambala Publications. I have also read and been inspired by the sutras of the other ... Buddhist masters, and Chuang Tzu ... who was very wise and very amusing.*⁴⁴

Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* (traditionally sixth century BC) and *Chuang Tzu* (third century BC) are two core texts of Taoism, a complex of traditions that developed in China over several millennia. (*Tao* is the Wade-Giles system of romanisation, *Dao* the more recent Pinyin.⁴⁵) The Taoist world encompasses a tripartite division of Heaven, Earth, and the 'many things' in between (i.e., nature and humanity), morphing and interacting through a web of symbolic correlations. An intensely nature-based philosophy, Taoism emphasises both the transcendence of nature and the world, and their value as the ground of transpersonal development. The goal of the Taoist sage is complete integration of body, mind and awareness in a state of experiential emptiness or oneness. The return of the mind to its original, preconditioned state – the mind of a newborn child – is the goal of Taoist practice in general, and Taoist meditation practice in particular.

Taoism developed as a strategy to help people live in a chaotic world during a period of widespread warfare and social upheaval.⁴⁶ Taoism's sexually charged view of the cosmos as a continuously self-balancing system, its emphasis on perception and perspective, and perhaps most important, its assumption of the self-transforming power of the individual and rejection of social conventions and definitions (this last especially emphasised by *Chuang Tzu*), would have resonated with Agnes Martin. 'Nature is like parting a curtain, you go into it,' Martin told Ann Wilson in the early 1960s. 'I want to draw a certain response ... Not a specific response but that quality of response from people when they leave themselves behind, often experienced in nature, an experience of simple joy.'⁴⁷

Hui Neng (638–713), mentioned by Martin as her next strongest Asian spiritual influence after Lao Tzu, is traditionally considered the Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an ('Zen' in Japanese) Buddhism. Ch'an/Zen, which developed in sixth-century China and was exported to Japan in the twelfth century, was strongly influenced by the Taoist practice of 'sitting in oblivion'.⁴⁸ ('Ch'an' is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit word *dhyana*, meaning a mind absorbed in meditation.) In Ch'an/Zen the mind is trained through meditation to dismantle habitual patterns of thought until the self is experienced as continuous with the world and thus 'empty' of inherent [self] existence. Hui Neng taught that 'all is void',⁴⁹ activity of any kind can be meditation, and enlightenment can be instantaneous

(for a prepared mind). In marked contrast to Calvinism's original sin, all humans are understood as having the capacity to attain enlightenment because everyone has inherent Buddha-nature. 'Everyone is chosen and everyone knows it,' as Martin wrote in 'The Untroubled Mind'.

It is not known where Martin first seriously encountered Taoist and Zen philosophy and practice. In New York? In New Mexico, a crossroads for American modernist artists and writers? John Dewey's friend D.T. Suzuki, who had translated the *Tao Te Ching* for Paul Carus,⁵⁰ wrote the best-known books in English about Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism. Suzuki conducted a lecture tour of American universities in 1950–51 and taught his first course at Columbia University in spring 1952, lecturing there until his retirement in June 1957. Martin was at Columbia for her second stint of graduate study from autumn 1951 to June 1952, and was back in New York to take a class at Teachers College from winter to summer 1954, so it is possible she sat in on one or more of Suzuki's lectures. Her New York friend Ad Reinhardt, whom she probably met in Taos in the early 1950s (there is a painting by Reinhardt entitled *Homage to Taos*, dated 11/53), was one of a number of artists who heard Suzuki lecture.⁵¹ An historian of Asian art as well as a serious student of Zen, Reinhardt was often described as monk-like; indeed, the critic Harold Rosenberg dubbed him the 'black monk' of abstract expressionism.⁵² Austere and moralistic intellectually as well as artistically, Reinhardt like Martin was no mystic. He adapted Zen practice and Zen language to art practice and art language, eventually producing dramatically reductionist but somehow eventful paintings that came closer than anyone's to the mature work of Agnes Martin.

Reinhardt's friend Thomas Merton (they met as students at Columbia in 1935) became a real monk, and a writer. He published *The Way of Chuang Tzu* in 1965 and, two years later, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, where he wrote about Hui Neng:

*He refused to separate meditation as a means (dhyana) from enlightenment as an end (prajna). For him, the two were really inseparable, and the Zen discipline consisted in seeking to realize this wholeness ... in all one's acts ... however commonplace, however trivial. For Hui Neng, all life was Zen.*⁵³

Merton's description recalls John Dewey's conflation of artistic ends with means. Merton had no doubt read *Art as Experience*. Both he and Dewey knew D.T. Suzuki, who in turn had based his version of Zen for Americans on Henry James and American pragmatism.⁵⁴ That Martin probably read them all helps account for the challenge of trying to sort out the 'Western' from the 'Asian' strands in her thinking.

Martin mentions reading and being inspired by sutras of 'other' Buddhist masters. One of these was Huang Po, a ninth-century

dharma descendent of the Sixth Patriarch. One of Martin's notes is a summary taken from *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po, On the Transmission of Mind*, translated by John Blofeld:

The Buddha has three bodies
The Dharmakāya – the void-pure mind, freedom
The Sambhogakāya – the underlying purity (the classic)
The Nirmānakāya – ritualistic
*The last two are not real teachers of the true Dharma*⁵⁵

The layered thinking behind Martin's personal clarification of Blofeld's translation of Huang Po is not particularly relevant here, but the passage does underline the extent of her research into Zen and other Asian philosophies of consciousness, which can be formidably intellectual. As Blofeld relates in his introduction, however, the legendary origin of Zen Buddhism was not intellectual but experiential – what might today be described as performance art. At the end of one of his sermons, the Buddha 'picked a flower and held it up for the assembled monks to see. Māhākāśyapa, who alone understood the profound meaning of this gesture, responded with a smile.'⁵⁶ Martin provided her own rendition of the Buddha's so-called 'Flower Sermon' in a letter to Arne Glimcher:

Dear Arnold. This koan (a Zen puzzle the answer to which brings enlightenment) explains why I cannot have a catalogue.

When Budda was in Gridharakuta mountain he turned a flower in his fingers and held it before his listeners. Everyone was silent. Only Maha-Kashapa smiled at this revelation, although he tried to control the lines of his face. Budda said 'I have the eye of the true teaching, the heart of Nirvana, the true aspect of non form and the ineffable stride of Dharma. It is not expressed by words but especially transmitted beyond teaching. This teaching I have given to Maha-Kashapa.'

*It sometimes takes years to get the answer to koans but it is always rewarding. When you get the answer there is no doubt. Agnes.*⁵⁷

Glimcher related the following story in his book on Martin, published after her death:

*My granddaughter Isabelle visited Agnes in New Mexico in the early 1990s. During that visit, Agnes took a rose from a vase and holding it out towards Isabelle asked if the rose was beautiful. 'Yes,' Isabelle replied. Agnes then put the rose behind her back and asked if the rose was still beautiful. Again Isabelle said yes to the rose now hidden behind Agnes. She demonstrated to a child that the concept of beauty was only in the mind not in the object.*⁵⁸

Words 1961
 Ink on paper mounted on canvas 61 × 61
 Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich



Martin, a teacher like the Buddha, knew that a child is more open to this kind of lesson than an adult, whose mind is cluttered with preconceptions about beauty, along with everything else.⁵⁹ Like the Buddha's 'transmission of mind' (to quote the title of Blofeld's book), Agnes Martin aspired to make art that teaches wordlessly, going so far as to title a 1961 painting *Words* (LEFT).

In his introduction to *Huang Po*, Blofeld wrote:

*The Absolute, or Reality, is regarded as having for sentient beings two aspects. The only aspect perceptible to the unenlightened is the one in which individual phenomena have a separate though purely transitory existence within the limits of space-time. The other aspect is spaceless and timeless; moreover all opposites, all distinctions and 'entities' of every kind, are here seen to be the One ... it is only when both aspects are perceived and reconciled that the beholder may be regarded as truly Enlightened.*⁶⁰

On the same topic, Martin wrote: 'It is from our awareness of transcendent reality and our response to concrete reality that our minds command us on our way – not really on a path or to a gate – but to full response.' Thus, 'The function of art work is the stimulation of sensibilities, the renewal of memories of moments of perfection.'⁶¹

Martin's 'moments of perfection', like the experiences described by John Dewey and Shunryu Suzuki in the epigraphs, involve simultaneous awareness of manifest chaos – 'concrete reality,' 'purely transitory existence within the limits of space-time' – and unmanifest order, 'transcendent reality', which is 'spaceless and timeless'. When Martin insisted that suffering is part of life and thus positive, 'since all of life is positive', she was talking about this unified sensibility: an enlightened moment of perfection experienced through the 'work' of art.



Chronology

— Lena Fritsch

1912 Agnes Bernice Martin is born on 22 March in Macklin, Saskatchewan, Canada to Malcolm Ian and Margaret Kinnon Martin. Her parents are Scottish Presbyterians and her father works as a wheat farmer. She is the third of four children.

1914 Martin's father dies of injuries sustained in the Second Boer War. The family moves to the farm of her maternal grandfather, Robert Kinnon. Kinnon is a religious man who later introduces his granddaughter to the Bible and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

1919 The family moves to Vancouver, British Columbia. Martin's mother establishes a real-estate business, renovating and selling old properties.

1928 Martin is a strong swimmer and qualifies for the Canadian Olympic swimming team.

1931 Moves to the USA to take care of her pregnant sister Mirabell in Bellingham, Washington. She attends Whatcom High School.

1933–34 Graduates from Whatcom High School. According to Martin, she receives a swimming scholarship at the University of Southern California. She soon decides to drop out of university and returns to Bellingham, where she enrolls in the Education Program at Western Washington College of Education.

1937 Graduates and receives a three-year teaching certificate. She begins teaching in different public schools in Washington.

1941–42 Studies Fine Arts and Arts Education at the Teachers College at Columbia University, New York, earning a Bachelor's degree.

1943–46 Paints whilst doing various jobs to make a living, including teaching art at a high school. She is thirty years old when she realises that she wants to become an artist.

1946–48 Matriculates at the art department of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Her early student works are mostly naturalistic portraits, still lifes and landscapes. She then also teaches art at the university, and writing and art at the Albuquerque school. In 1947, she attends the University of New Mexico Summer Field School of Art in Taos, New Mexico.

1949 Completes a correspondence course on teaching reading in primary school through the University of New Mexico.

1950 In April, Martin becomes a US citizen.

1951–53 Returning to New York, Martin enrolls in the Master of Arts programme of the Teachers College, Columbia University. Jiddu Krishnamurti and Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki lecture at the university. Martin becomes interested in philosophy and East Asian thought – not as a religious discipline, but as a code of ethics. She works as a teacher in Harlem. After receiving a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University, Martin moves back west, spending time in Taos and also in La Grande, Oregon, where she teaches art at Eastern Oregon College. Her paintings become more abstract and biomorphic, reflecting cubist, surrealist and abstract expressionist influences.

1954 Re-enters Columbia University for a seminar in social living, connected with the New York City public schools programme. In autumn, she returns to Taos.

1955 Is awarded a monthly stipend of \$40 from the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico. She is the first artist to receive a grant from the foundation.

1957–58 The art dealer Betty Parsons sees Martin's paintings in Taos. Parsons offers to represent her work at Betty Parsons Gallery and convinces her to return to New York. Martin moves to a sailmaker's loft in Coenties Slip in lower Manhattan close to Wall Street. Coenties Slip is an affordable home to a number of young emerging artists and her neighbours include Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Indiana, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Ann Wilson and Jack Youngerman. Barnett Newman, with whose art Martin feels a particular affinity, also has a studio nearby. Martin becomes part of the lively art scene. In March 1958, Faye Hammel publishes an article about the Coenties Slip artists, entitled *Bohemia on the Waterfront*, in the weekly magazine *Cue*. She cites Martin: 'Painters must live together because other social contacts are barred to them. When you paint, you don't have time to get involved with people, everything must fall before work. That's what's so wonderful about the Slip – we all respect each other's need to work.'¹ Martin adopts a more geometric painting style using the motifs of squares, rectangles, circles and repetitive linear marks, and experiments with different material, including nails, wood and small found objects. In September, Martin's work is shown in the exhibition *4 Man Show* at Betty Parsons Gallery, Section Eleven, alongside works by David Budd, Judith Godwin and Sidney Wolfson. In October she signs a two-year contract with Betty Parsons Gallery. In December, the gallery presents Martin's work in a solo exhibition, attracting notice from the art world in New York. Dore Ashton reviews the exhibition in the *New York Times* and Edith Burkhardt features it in *Art News*.²

Agnes Martin (background left),
Robert Indiana and Ellsworth Kelly
in lower Manhattan, 1958
Photograph by Hans Namuth
Center for Creative Photography, Tucson



1961 Moves to a loft on South Street, overlooking New York Harbour and the East River. In January her work is featured in the exhibition *American Abstract Painters* at Arthur Tooth & Sons gallery in London. It is presented alongside works by other artists represented by Betty Parsons: Ellsworth Kelly, Alexander Liberman, Ad Reinhardt, Leon Polk Smith and Sidney Wolfson. Martin's works begin to feature square grids with fine lines, presenting what will later be seen as Martin's signature style. They are exhibited at Betty Parsons Gallery in September and October. In November, Martin writes a short appreciation text for Lenore Tawney's exhibition at the Staten Island Museum. It remains Martin's only text about another artist's work. In December, her association with Betty Parsons ends. Leo Castelli introduces Martin to the art dealer Robert Elkon.

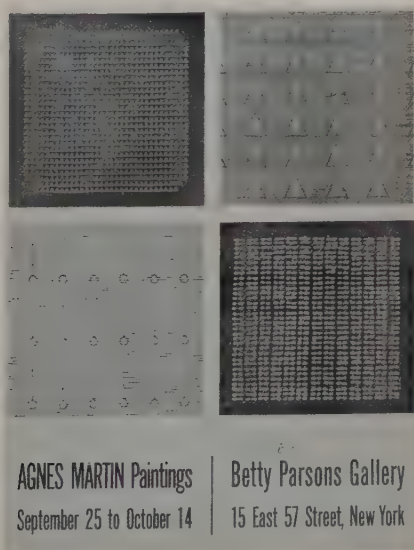
1962 Suffers from schizophrenic episodes and is hospitalised repeatedly. She is treated by Dr Arthur C. Carr, expert in clinical psychology and an early collector of Robert Indiana and Agnes Martin. The Robert Elkon Gallery presents its first Agnes Martin exhibition. Martin's association with the gallery will continue until 1974.

1963 For the exhibition *Toys By Artists* at the Betty Parsons Gallery, Martin creates the sculptural work *The Wave*, made of wood, beads and plexiglass. The exhibition is for children, accompanied by their parents. In November, she has a solo exhibition at the Robert Elkon Gallery.

1965 William Seitz's exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York shows a great variety of abstract paintings, including works by Ad Reinhardt, Bridget Riley, Victor Vasarely and Martin's *The Tree* 1964. Martin travels to India and Pakistan on a freighter. In a letter to Lenore Tawney in July she writes that she is 'absolutely overwhelmed by this trip ... With every glance it is more than I can take in. I would particularly like to describe the beggar boys in Karachi – so clean – hopeful and persistent. They seemed like Angels to me.'³ However, she is hospitalised after suffering from a schizophrenic episode and soon returns. In April, the Robert Elkon Gallery presents her work in a solo exhibition.

1966 Participates in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's exhibition, *Systemic Painting*, curated by Lawrence Alloway. Her art is also shown in Robert Smithson's exhibition of minimalist art, *10* at the Dwan Gallery, alongside works by Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and Ad Reinhardt. She receives a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Robert Elkon Gallery exhibits Martin's drawings in May and her paintings in October and November.

Poster for Agnes Martin: Paintings,
Betty Parsons Gallery, 1961
Betty Parsons Gallery records and
personal papers, Archives of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution



1967 Martin decides to leave New York and stops painting. The reasons for this have caused much speculation. In a letter to Lenore Tawney, she writes: 'I must give independence a trial. I will have to have more time.'⁴ To the art curator and collector Samuel J. Wagstaff, she writes: 'I am staying unsettled and trying not to talk for three years. I want to do it very much.'⁵ She sells her possessions and seeks solitude, embarking upon an eighteen-month journey around the United States and Canada in a pickup truck and camper.

1968–69 Resettles in New Mexico and starts building an adobe and log house in a remote mesa outside Cuba. From now on Martin will live a simple life by herself – without a radio, television or newspaper. She writes poetic prose texts about art and life. The Museum of Modern Art New York presents the exhibition, *The Art of the Real: An Aspect of American Painting and Sculpture 1948–1968*, which features Martin's work alongside works by Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and others. It travels to Grand Palais, Paris and Kunsthau Zurich, and, in collaboration with the Arts Council of Great Britain, to the Tate Gallery in London.

1971 In December, Martin's painting *Adventure 1967* is shown alongside works by Kasimir Malevich, Piero Manzoni, Robert Rauschenberg and other artists in the exhibition *White on White: The White Monochrome in the Twentieth Century* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

1972 Documenta V, Kassel, curated by Harald Szeemann, features Martin's work. Martin travels to the Domberger print workshop in Stuttgart and completes a portfolio of screen prints, *On a Clear Day*.

1973 The Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and the Kunstraum München, Munich present major solo exhibitions of Martin's work. At the University of Pennsylvania, Martin gives a lecture 'On the Perfection Underlying Life'. In March, Parasol Press publishes Martin's set of screen prints, *On a Clear Day*. The portfolio of thirty prints is shown at Galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1974 Together with the architect Bill Katz, Martin begins building a log cabin in Cuba, New Mexico, which she then uses as her studio. She resumes painting again. The works differ from Martin's earlier paintings insofar as they feature horizontal or vertical lines in pastel colours, such as light pink and light blue. She works in two primary scales: 12 by 12 inches for small paintings and 72 by 72 inches for large paintings. In January and February, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York presents the exhibition *Nine Artists/*

Installation view of *The Art of the Real: An Aspect of American Painting and Sculpture 1948–1968*, Tate Gallery, 1969



Coenties Slip, featuring Martin's work alongside works by Charles Hinman, Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Fred Mitchell, James Rosenquist, Lenore Tawney, Ann Wilson and Jack Youngerman. In February and March, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh shows the exhibition, *On a Clear Day: Screenprints and Drawings by Agnes Martin*. The New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe presents her work in an exhibition titled *Agnes Martin: On a Clear Day*.

1975 Pace Gallery, New York begins representing Agnes Martin. Chairman Arne Glimcher organises her first exhibition at the gallery, *Agnes Martin: New Paintings*.

1976 Participates in the 37th Venice Biennale. She also produces a feature-length art film, *Gabriel*, in which she slowly follows a ten-year-old boy walking through the rural landscape of New Mexico. Following *Gabriel*, she works on a second film project; it is about the Mongolian ruler Genghis Khan. Martin travels to Japan, hires Kabuki actors and brings them to New Mexico, where she also hires Native Americans to play the Mongols. The film will never be made available to the public. The Robert Elkon Gallery presents an exhibition with Martin's paintings from 1961 to 1967 whilst a solo show at Pace Gallery features her recent paintings.

1977 Martin leaves Cuba and settles in Galisteo. She begins to work on grey striped paintings, varying the tonal range between white and black. The Arts Council of Great Britain presents an Agnes Martin solo exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London, which travels to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Martin also participates in the Biennial exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

1978 Is awarded a medal for painting from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Her work is exhibited at the Pace Gallery and Robert Elkon Gallery in New York, the Mayor Gallery in London, and the Galerie Rudolf Zwirner in Cologne.

1979 Creates *The Islands*, a group of twelve white paintings in acrylic and graphite which demand concentrated looking to see fine lines and patterns in faint colours. They are considered a single piece of art.

1980 In November, Tom Armstrong, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, offers Martin a retrospective of her work. However, Martin does not like the idea of an exhibition catalogue with commissioned essays. When Armstrong insists on the catalogue, Martin cancels the exhibition.

Martin during the filming of *Gabriel*,
New Mexico, 1976
Photograph by Bill Katz



1982 The Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts, Montreal presents the first Agnes Martin solo exhibition in Canada.

1987 Works as an artist-in-residence at the Skowhegan School for Painting and Sculpture in Maine.

1989 Becomes an elected member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York.

1991–92 The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam organises a retrospective, *Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings 1974–1990*, which travels to Museum Wiesbaden and Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster in Germany and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in France. Martin is awarded the Alexej von Jawlensky Prize from the city of Wiesbaden and the Oskar Kokoschka Prize from the government of Austria. The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York presents an Agnes Martin retrospective which travels throughout the United States and to Madrid. A book of Martin's writings, *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften*, appears in conjunction with the exhibition *Agnes Martin: Gemälde und Zeichnungen, 1960–1989* [*Paintings and Work on Paper*] at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland.

1993 The Serpentine Gallery in London presents a solo exhibition, *Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings 1977–1991*. Martin reduces the size of her large canvases to 60 by 60 inches. She moves into a retirement residence in Taos. She will drive to her small studio nearby every morning and continue to create works until 2004. She usually has lunch at the Trading Post Café in Ranchos de Taos.

1995 The Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art features Martin's work for the second time.

1997 Martin completes the multi-panelled work *With My Back to The World*. The Harwood Museum in Taos opens a specially built octagonal Agnes Martin Gallery, designed according to Martin's wishes. It accommodates her gift of seven large pastel-coloured paintings. Four yellow Donald Judd benches are placed directly under the oculus. The Venice Biennale awards Martin the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement to honour her contribution to contemporary art.

1998 The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth presents an exhibition with Agnes Martin's paintings alongside works by her friend Richard Tuttle. The Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico dedicates an exhibition to Martin's works on paper. Martin receives the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement from the

Martin in her studio, 1992
Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark



College Art Association as well as a National Medal of Arts from the Office of President Bill Clinton and the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition, she is presented with New Mexico's 25th Annual Governor's Award for Excellence and Achievement in the Arts in Santa Fe.

2000 The Whitney Museum of American Art presents a solo exhibition, *Lovely Life: The Recent Work of Agnes Martin*.

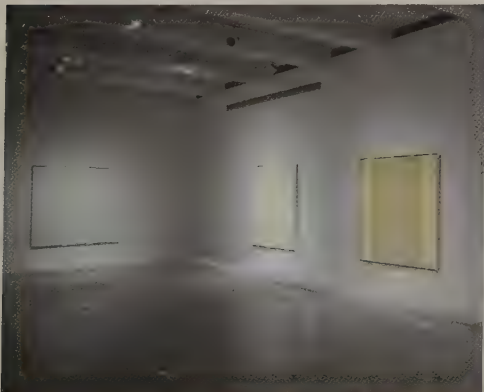
2001 In March and April, the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London shows a solo exhibition of Martin's recent works.

2002 On the occasion of Martin's ninetieth birthday, the Harwood Museum of Art, University of New Mexico, Taos organises a symposium dedicated to Martin's art. Martin still paints almost every day – some works now feature opaque geometric forms, including squares and triangles, reminiscent of her work of the 1950s. The Menil Collection shows her recent work in a display titled *Agnes Martin: The Nineties and Beyond*.

2003 PaceWildenstein in New York shows Martin's work in an exhibition entitled *Agnes Martin: Recent Paintings*.

2004 From March to May, *The Islands I–XII* are shown at the Josef Albers Museum Quadrat in Bottrop, Germany. In New York, Dia:Beacon presents an exhibition of Martin's early paintings while PaceWildenstein displays her most recent paintings in an exhibition titled *Agnes Martin: Homage to Life*. Martin dies on 16 December in Taos at the age of ninety-two. Her art dealer and friend Arne Glimcher announces her death and will represent her estate.

Installation view from the exhibition,
Agnes Martin: Recent Paintings, Pace Gallery,
New York, 2003. From left: *Untitled #12*
2002, *Untitled #5* 2002; *Untitled #14* 2002;
Untitled #9 2002







MARTIN

01. See Anna Chave, 'Agnes Martin: "Humility, the Beautiful Daughter ... All of Her Ways Are Empty"', in Barbara Haskell (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1992, p.136; and Lynda Morris in *On a Clear Day: Screenprints and Drawings by Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh 1974, unpag.
02. To name a few, the composers John Zorn and Matthias Pintscher and the poets Edward Hirsch and Susan Howe have made works in homage to Agnes Martin.
03. Martin received mention by Stuart Preston, 'Art: Collector's Choice', *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 1957, p.27 for her first exhibited work at Betty Parsons Gallery in a Christmas show. Her work continued to be extensively reviewed from that time onwards by many critics.
04. Though Martin herself did not embrace feminism, in an interesting response to a question posed to a number of women artists about 'female sensibility' she wrote: 'The female sensibility is a conditioned response, a learned response. We can all remember the suggestions we accepted and the examples we followed. We struggled to be finer grained, more delicate, more sensitive. We limited our thoughts and actions. The result was an appearance of insecurity and defenselessness – an absolutely sure dependence. *Independence* is the most necessary trait in an artist. The concept of a feminine sensibility is our greatest burden as women artists.' In 'Un-Skirting the Issue', *Art-Rite*, no.5, Spring 1974, pp.6–7.
05. Chave, 'Agnes Martin: "Humility, the Beautiful Daughter ... All of Her Ways Are Empty"', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.134.
06. It was also the year that both Jackson Pollock and John Cage were born. Martin's reference to the Titanic was reported by Marc Glimcher in conversation with the author, 12 March 2013.
07. Barbara Haskell, 'The Awareness of Perfection', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.96.
08. Marc Glimcher in conversation with the author, 12 March 2013.
09. Martin told Joan Simon: 'So I went to New York, and I saw all the paintings in the museums. I thought if I could make a living painting, that's what I would like to do.' See 'Perfection is in the Mind: An Interview with Agnes Martin', *Art in America*, vol.84, no.5, May 1996, p.87.
10. Martin's career exemplifies to some extent Rosalind Krauss's argument that the use of the grid by modern artists generated resistance to stylistic development. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October*, vol.9, Summer 1979, pp.50–64.
11. Martin met O'Keeffe while living in New Mexico in the late 1940s. Even at the end of her life, she kept a poster of an O'Keeffe painting on her wall.
12. She received American citizenship in Santa Fe in April 1950, indicating she was in the area at that time.
13. The show was held from 9 April to 27 July 1952 and also included Edwin Dickinson, Herbert Ferber, Joseph Glasco, Herbert Katzman,

- Frederick Kiesler, Irving Kriesberg, Richard Lippold, Herman Rose, Bradley Walker Tomlin and Thomas Wilfred.
14. Agnes Martin, letter to Wurlitzer Committee, dated 8 Nov. 1954, in Wurlitzer Foundation archive.
 15. Martin, letter to Helene Wurlitzer, dated 15 Feb. 1958 on accompanying envelope, in Wurlitzer Foundation archive.
 16. Both of these paintings are represented in photographs taken by Mildred Tolbert c.1955 in the archives of the Harwood Museum of Art, Taos, New Mexico.
 17. Several of the artists in this group were gay, including Agnes Martin (and Betty Parsons), perhaps adding to their feeling of being outsiders but strengthening the bond they felt among each other. For discussions of how Martin's sexuality might have affected her work, see Anna Chave, *Agnes Martin: On and Off the Grid*, exh. cat., University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, MI 2004, and Jonathan D. Katz, 'Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction', in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder (eds.), *Agnes Martin*, New York, New Haven and London 2011.
 18. For example, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko, as well as a less well-known but accomplished artist, the Japanese-American Kenzo Okada, who was represented by Parsons, and said by some to have encouraged Parsons's interest in Martin's work and accompanied the dealer on the visit to Martin's studio in Taos in 1957.
 19. Haskell, 'The Awareness of Perfection', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.104. Briony Fer also discusses Martin's use of ephemera and her substitution of drawing for the readymade in 'Infinity' (chapter 3) in Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art After Modernism*, New Haven and London 2004, p.51.
 20. In 1965, Martin was again hospitalised, this time in India after falling ill during a planned trip around the world on a freighter. She had several other episodes requiring hospitalisation in the 1980s and early 1990s, though in the last ten years in Taos she found some equanimity, helped by medication.
 21. Agnes Martin, interview conducted 15 May 1989 by Suzan Campbell, transcript in Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
 22. Barbara Haskell suggests an association with the fibre art of Martin's friend Lenore Tawney: Haskell, 'The Awareness of Perfection', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.105.
 23. I borrow this phrase from Briony Fer. For further discussion see Fer, 'Infinity', in Fer 2004, p.56.
 24. Kasha Linville, 'Agnes Martin: An Appreciation', *Artforum*, vol.9, no.10, June 1971, p.72.
 25. Danny Lyons in the preface of his collection of photographs published in *The Destruction of Lower Manhattan* (New York 2005) states that in 1967 over sixty acres of building were demolished in lower Manhattan.
 26. See Lynne Cooke, '... in the classic tradition ...' in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011, p.16.
 27. Arne Glimcher in conversation with the author, Oct. 2010. See also Maurice Poirier and Jane Necol, 'The '60s in Abstract: 13 Statements and an Essay', *Art in America*, vol.71, no.9, Oct. 1983, p.132 in which Martin states: 'I left New

York in 1967 because every day I suddenly felt I wanted to die and it was connected with painting. It took me several years to find out that the cause was an overdeveloped sense of responsibility.'

28. On this topic, Martin said: 'when I exhibited with the minimal artists ... I was much affected by my association with them ... They prefer being absolutely pure, which is a very valid expression of involvement with reality ... I rather regretted that I wasn't really a minimalist. It's possible to regret that you're not something else. You see, my paintings are not cool.' John Gruen, 'Agnes Martin: "Everything, everything is about feeling ... feeling and recognition"', *Art News*, vol.75, no.7, Sept. 1976, p.94.

29. Published in Dieter Schwarz (ed.), *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1991.

30. Martin made an adobe house with friends in Albuquerque in 1949 and was to make a studio and other structures in Galisteo, NM in the late 1970s.

31. Kathan Brown, 'Overview: Pat Steir and Agnes Martin: No Pretensions', *Crown Point Press Newsletter*, April 2012, <http://www.crownpoint.com/files/newsletters/Steir%202012%20Overview.pdf>.

32. Both artists showed serial work in New York prior to Martin's departure. Newman's *Stations of the Cross* 1958–66 were first exhibited at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1966, and Reinhardt's 'black' paintings were shown at the Jewish Museum in early 1967.

33. See Martin, in Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, 'Agnes Martin', *Profile* (Video Data Bank, School / Art Institute of Chicago), vol.1, no.2, 1981, p.18.

34. See Fer, 'Infinity', in Fer 2004, p.47.

35. With regard to clouds, Martin once said: 'I used to pay attention to the clouds in the sky ... I paid close attention for a month to see if they ever repeated. They don't repeat. And I don't think life does either. It's continually various. That's the truth about life.' Quoted in Denise Spranger, 'Center of Attention', *Taos News/Tempo Magazine*, 21–27 March 2002, p.22. And about the ocean and waterfalls, she said: 'When people go to the ocean they like to see it all day. They don't expect to see, to find that response in painting ... There's nobody living who couldn't stand all afternoon in front of a waterfall. It's a simple experience, you become lighter and lighter in weight ... Anyone who can sit on a stone in a field awhile can see my paintings': as quoted in Ann Wilson, 'Linear Webs: Agnes Martin', *Art and Artists*, vol.1, no.7, Oct. 1966, p.48.

36. Donald Woodman in conversation with the author, 7 March 2014.

37. David MacIntosh in conversation with the author, 29 March 2011.

38. In 2006, PaceWildenstein made an exhibition of Martin's work entitled *Closing the Circle: Early and Late* that posited this idea.

39. See Jill Johnston, 'Agnes Martin, 1912–2004', *Art in America*, vol.93, no.3, March 2005, p.41 and Holland Cotter, 'Agnes Martin, Abstract Painter, Is Dead at 92', *New York Times*, 17 Dec. 2004, p.C9.

40. Agnes Martin, quoted in Holland Cotter, 'Like Her Paintings, Quiet, Unchanging and Revered', *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 1997, p.H45.

Agnes Martin: Innocence and Experience

— Frances Morris

01. Agnes Martin, interview conducted 15 May 1989 by Suzan Campbell, transcript in Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

02. Jill Johnston, 'Agnes Martin: Surrender & Solitude' in *Admission Accomplished: The Lesbian Nation Years* (1970–75), London 1998, p.292.

03. Tiffany Bell in this volume, pp.18–31.

04. Jacquelynn Baas in this volume, pp.222–35.

05. The best recent account of Martin's early years is by Richard Tobin, 'Agnes Martin: Before the Grid', in *Agnes Martin: Before the Grid*, exh. cat., Harwood Museum of Art, Taos 2012, pp.13–33.

06. Dore Ashton, *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 1958, p.26.

07. Barbara Rose, 'New York Letter', *Art International*, vol.7, no.10, Jan. 1964, p.53.

08. Jack Youngerman remembers that they were all regular visitors to the handful of local galleries as well as to the public galleries in Manhattan. Conversation with the author, 24 July 2014.

09. See Lena Fritsch's description in this volume, pp.209–12.

10. 'When you paint, you don't have time to get involved with people, everything must fall before work. That's what's so wonderful about the Slip – we all respect each other's need to work', in Faye Hammel, 'Bohemia on the Waterfront: Serious Writers and Painters are Creating New Shangri-la at the East River's Edge near the Tip of Manhattan', *Cue*, 22 March 1958, pp.16–17.

11. Jack Youngerman in conversation with the author, 24 July 2014.

12. Ellsworth Kelly, correspondence with the author, 21 Aug. 2014.

13. Susan Elizabeth Ryan, *Robert Indiana: Figures of Speech*, London 2000, p.103.

14. A major survey of this trend was undertaken by William C. Seitz in his exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 4 Oct. – 12 Nov. 1961.

15. Susan Sharp, the niece of Mildred Kane, an early girlfriend of Agnes Martin, visited the artist in Coenties Slip in 1966: Susan Sharp in conversation with the author, 27 July 2014.

16. Ellsworth Kelly, correspondence with the author, 21 Aug. 2014.

17. Ryan 2000, p.33.

18. Robert Indiana, in *ibid.*, p.48.

19. Benita Eisler, 'Profile: Life Lines', *The New Yorker*, 25 Jan. 1993, p.77.

20. Ann Wilson, 'Linear Webs: Agnes Martin', *Art and Artists*, vol.1, no.7, Oct. 1966, p.47.

21. Kathleen Nugent Mangan, former assistant to Lenore Tawney and currently Executive Director of the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation, in conversation with the author, 23 July 2014.

22. Agnes Martin in *Lenore Tawney*, exh.cat., Staten Island Museum 1961, p.32.

23. Barbara Haskell, 'The Awareness of Perfection', in Barbara Haskell (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh.cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1992 p.105.

24. Natalie Edgar, 'Reviews and Previews: Agnes Martin (Parsons, to October 14)',

Art News, vo.60, no.6, Oct. 1961, pp.11–12.

Donald Judd described the appearance in her work of a 'tightly quilted surface': 'Agnes Martin, New York Exhibitions: In the Galleries', *Arts Magazine*, Feb. 1963, p.48; Lawrence Alloway wrote of 'resemblances to sewn or stitched objects': 'Agnes Martin', *Artforum*, vol.11, no.8, April 1973, p.33.

25. Mel Bochner in conversation with Pia Gottschaller, whose publication on the subject of masking tape is in preparation, kindly shared with author.

26. Barbara Rose, 'New York Letter', *Art International*, vol.7, no.10, Jan. 1964, p.53.

27. Donald Judd, 'New York Exhibitions: In the Galleries – Agnes Martin (Elkon)', *Arts Magazine*, vol.37, no.4, Jan. 1964, p.4.

28. For reasons explained by Tiffany Bell in this volume, pp.27–8.

29. Christina Rosenberger, 'Ad and Artists: Good Painters', *The Brooklyn Rail*, 16 Jan. 2014, www.brooklynrail.org/special/AD_Reinhardt/ad-and-artists/good-painters.

30. Curated by Kynaston McShine, *Primary Structures* took place at New York's Jewish Museum, 27 April–2 June 1966, and is generally regarded as identifying the tendency that came to be known as minimalism.

31. Lawrence Alloway, *Systemic Painting*, exh.cat., Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 1966, p.19.

32. Agnes Martin, 'The Untroubled Mind', in Susan Delehanty (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh.cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 1973, pp.17–24.

33. Newman referred to 'intuition': 'The fact is, I am an intuitive painter, a direct painter. I have never worked from sketches, never planned a painting, never "thought out" a painting. I start each painting as if I had never painted before': Barnett Newman interview with Dorothy Seckler, *Art in America*, vol.50, no.2, 1962. Tawney stated in 1973: 'my work comes out of the unknown and remains a mystery' – *Nine Artists/Coenties Slip*, exh. brochure, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1974, p.4.

34. Kristina Wilson in conversation with the author, 29 July 2014.

35. The surprising detour in her late painting is discussed in this volume by Briony Fer, pp.172–91.

36. The 'already made' is a term used, with a rather different meaning, by Ellsworth Kelly in 'Notes from 1969', cited by Catherine de Zegher in *Ellsworth Kelly: Tablet 1958–1973*, exh. cat., Drawing Centre, New York 2002, p.4, and discussed by Yve-Alain Bois in *Ellsworth Kelly: The Years in France 1948–54*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington 1992, pp.187–8.

Islands No.4 c.1961

— Christina Bryan Rosenberger

01. Stephanie Barron, 'Giving Art History the Slip', *Art in America*, vol.62, no.2, March–April 1974, p.84.

02. Joan Simon, 'Perfection is in the Mind: An Interview with Agnes Martin', *Art in America*, vol.84, no.5, May 1996, p.124.

The Islands 1961

— Richard Tobin

01. Agnes Martin, quoted in Lucy R. Lippard, 'Homage to the Square', *Art in America*, vol.55, no.4, July–Aug. 1967, p.55.
02. Agnes Martin, quoted in Ann Wilson, 'Linear Webs: Agnes Martin', *Art and Artists*, vol.1, no.7, Oct. 1966, p.48. Martin restated this conceit more explicitly in reference to her painting in 1993 when she described her 6-by-6-foot canvas dimensions of this earlier period as 'a size you can walk into' (quoted in Benita Eisler, 'Profile: Life Lines', *New Yorker*, 25 Jan. 1993, p.81).
03. Harold Rosenberg, *Arshile Gorky*, New York 1962, p.64.
04. Agnes Martin, interview conducted 15 May 1989 by Suzan Campbell, transcript in Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., pp.10–11.
05. Donald Judd, *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975*, Halifax, Nova Scotia and New York 2005, p.73.
06. Ibid. p.112.
07. Quoted in Eisler 1993, p.78.
08. Ibid.
09. Lawrence Alloway, 'Agnes Martin', *Artforum*, vol.11, no.8, April 1973, p.33. Alloway refers to Martin's unique approach to the grid, involving hand-ruled horizontal and vertical lines, variously spaced, drawn on, over, under, or scored into pale-toned oil (later acrylic) cotton or linen canvas grounds (rough or smooth), by means of which a rigid structure is imbued with sensuous material. Small wonder the postminimal sculptor Eva Hesse held Martin's work in high regard.
10. Lucy Lippard, 'Top to Bottom, Left to Right', in *Grids grids grids grids grids grids grids grids*, exh. cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1972, unpag.
11. Betty Parsons, quoted in Eisler 1993, p.78.
12. Agnes Martin correspondence in Samuel J. Wagstaff Papers, Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
13. Judd 2005, p.112. In his review the previous year (1963) Donald Judd singled out one small grid painting from 1962 in which Martin's rubbing to a medium grey of the horizontal spaces embedded slightly the rows of dashes, 'giving a tightly quilted surface' (ibid. p.74).

Morning 1965

— Rachel Barker

01. A 'turnbuckle' tensioner involves a metal link that holds together a screw on each end. The screw has an eyelet at the end so that it may be fastened to a surface. The screws have opposite threading so that when the link is turned the screws are pulled together, tensioning or loosening a join.
02. Tate Scientific Analysis Report for Martin T01170 compiled by Ormsby 2010, Townsend 2009 and Thomas 2007.
03. Ibid. p.2. Notes for model samples: 'Of the contemporary acrylic emulsion-based titanium

- white paints tested at Tate, the Martin samples best match the Talens Rembrandt paint, which is an ea/mma copolymer and contains chalk. However ... the quantity of chalk present in the Martin samples suggests the use of a gesso/priming formulation. Therefore, of the gesso formulations tested at Tate, the copolymer type (ea/mma) best matches the Talens gesso (which also contains chalk and tio2).'
04. Martin switched from oil to acrylic in 1964. From 1966 she was using it almost exclusively. Christina Bryan Rosenberger, 'A Sophisticated Economy of Means: Agnes Martin's Materiality', in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder (eds.), *Agnes Martin*, New York, New Haven and London 2011, p.111.
05. Barbara Haskell, 'The Awareness of Perfection', in Barbara Haskell (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh.cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1992, p.93.
06. Dieter Schwarz (ed.), *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1991, p.29.
07. Tate Scientific Analysis Report for Martin T01866, p.4: section entitled 'Surface Examination' describes the order in which the pencil lines were applied.
08. In the 1950s Martin became interested in eastern religions, mainly for their philosophy and code of ethics. The Zen Buddhist idea that all things are impermanent, imperfect and incomplete influenced a particular Japanese aesthetic, that of wabi-sabi, an aesthetic centred on the acceptance of transience and imperfection, a concept derived from the Buddhist teaching of the three marks of existence (*sanbōin*), specifically impermanence (*mujō*), suffering (*ku*) and emptiness or absence of self-nature (*kū*). Wabi-sabi is the material representation of Zen Buddhism.
09. Tate Scientific Analysis Report for Martin T01866, p.6, section entitled 'Conclusions to date'.
10. Email correspondence between the author and Ellsworth Kelly studio administrator Sandi Knakal, 22 November 2011.
11. Email correspondence between the author and Jim Coddington, Agnes Gund Senior Painting Conservator, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 14 August 2006. Coddington writes of their painting *Red Bird* 1964: 'It is noted to have a slightly discoloured coating. It appears to be artist-applied as there is no record elsewhere in the file of it being applied during a treatment. Interestingly, in one of the questionnaires the artist notes specifically that this painting could get a spray varnish of "Blair" acrylic spray if necessary.'
12. Quoted on the website of Nancy Doyle Fine Art, www.ndoylefineart.com/martin.html (accessed 4 November 2014).

In Pursuit of the Neutral:**Agnes Martin's Shimmering Line**

— Anna Lovatt

01. Agnes Martin, manuscript for 'The Still and Silent in Art', first published in Dieter Schwarz (ed.), *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1992, footnotes, p.163.

02. *On a Clear Day* was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 14 May – 28 Aug. 1973 and published by Parasol Press, New York in 1973. In her detailed account of the series, Suzanne Hudson explains that Martin was approached by Robert Feldman of Parasol Press who invited her to produce a series of etchings. Martin's preference for screenprints led her to a print shop in Germany, where she spent two months drafting the drawings for *On a Clear Day*. Suzanne Hudson, 'Agnes Martin, On a Clear Day', in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder (eds.), *Agnes Martin*, New York, New Haven and London 2011, p.126.
03. Martin, 'The Still and Silent in Art', in Schwarz 1992, p.89.
04. Here I am referring to Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay 'Grids' (1979), reprinted in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA 1986, pp.8–22.
05. See Susan Delehanty (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 1973.
06. See Elke M. Solomon (ed.), *American Drawings 1963–1973*, exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1973. Martin's work was shown alongside the work of one or more of these artists in *Group Drawing Show*, Bykert Gallery, 1972; Documenta V, Kassel, Germany, 1972; *Functions of Drawing*, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, The Netherlands, 1975; and *Drawing Now*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1976.
07. Rudi Fuchs, 'Functions of Drawing', in *Funktionsvanteekenen/Functions of Drawing*, exh. cat., Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo 1975, unpag.
08. Bernice Rose, *Drawing Now*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York 1976, p.9.
09. Martin, 'Journal Extracts', in Barbara Haskell (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1992, p. 25.
10. Carter Ratcliff, 'Agnes Martin and the "Artificial Infinite"', *Art News*, vol.72, no.5, May 1973, p.27.
11. Jonathan Katz, 'Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction', in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011, p.184. In his groundbreaking account of Martin's practice as 'a form of queer self-realisation, wrought (paradoxically) through an anti-identitarian, Zen-informed idiom', Katz argues convincingly that Martin was the author of subsequent, anti-authorial readings of her work. Yet despite the radicality of Katz's account, his reading of Martin's pencil line as 'the guarantor of the artist's presence' indicates a conservative, almost connoisseurial approach to the practice of drawing.
12. Douglas Crimp, 'New York Letter', *Art International*, vol.17, no.4, April 1973, p.57. Looking back recently on his early writings on Martin, Crimp noted that his critical stance against the 'drawing cliché' saw him fired from *Art International*: Crimp, 'Back to the Turmoil', in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011, p.60.
13. Crimp 1973, p.57.
14. Ibid.

15. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* [*Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, 1953], trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, New York 1977, p.75.

16. Ibid. p.77.

17. Ibid.

18. Agnes Martin, interview conducted 15 May 1989 by Suzan Campbell, transcript in Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C pp.10–11. In an interview with Joan Simon, she described the grid, the experience of climbing a mountain, and the boy in her 1976 film *Gabriel* as 'innocent': Joan Simon, 'Perfection is in the Mind: An Interview with Agnes Martin', *Art in America*, vol.84, no.5, May 1996, p.124.

19. Barthes [1953] 1977, p.76; Roland Barthes, *The Neutral* [*Le Neutre*, 1977–8], trans. Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier, New York 2005, p.7.

20. Barthes [1977–8] 2005, p.49.

21. Ibid. p.51.

22. Ibid.

23. Jacquelynn Baas has proposed that such works indicate a familiarity with the Zen 'ox-herding' images discussed in D.T. Suzuki's *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, where a circle within a square represents the disappearance of the ox and man from the field of vision, a metaphor for the enlightened mind freed from ego: Baas cited in Katz, 'Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction', in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011, p.188.

24. Agnes Martin/Ann Wilson, 'The Untroubled Mind', in Delehanthy (ed.) 1973, p.20.

25. Simon 1996, p.124.

26. Kasha Linville, 'Agnes Martin: An Appreciation', *Artforum*, vol.9, no.10, June 1971, p.73; Lucy Lippard, 'Top to Bottom, Left to Right', in *Grids grids grids grids grids grids grids grids*, exh. cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1972, unpag.; Rosalind Krauss and Marcia Tucker, 'Perceptual Field', in *Critical Perspectives in American Art*, exh. cat., Fine Arts Center Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst 1976, p.15.

27. Barthes [1977–8] 2005, Translator's Preface, p.xiii.

28. Barthes described the pursuit of the neutral as 'an ardent, burning activity', more akin to longing than to indifference. Barthes [1977–8] 2005, p.7.

29. Agnes Martin/Ann Wilson, 'The Untroubled Mind', in Delehanthy (ed.) 1973, p.19.

30. Jill Johnston, 'Agnes Martin: Surrender and Solitude', in Johnston, *Admission Accomplished: The Lesbian Nation Years (1970–75)*, New York 1998, p.300.

31. See Katz, 'Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction' and Zoe Leonard, 'A Wild Patience', both in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011. Reflecting on her own relationship with Martin's work, Leonard writes: 'I suppose in a way, I'm also tired of talking about feminism. I'd like, somehow, to be over that. It comes up so often for me, in the work I make, in how my work is described in the world. Sometimes, I get tired and bored of being asked: How does being a woman affect your artistic practice? Do you consider yourself a gay artist? Sometimes, it makes me want to run for the hills, just to

get to a place of peace and quiet. To just work, as I work. Without explanation, without identity. To just work, as I work.' Leonard in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011, p.98.

32. Dorothea Rockburne in conversation with the author, Jan. 2010.

33. Michael Auping, 'On Relationships', in Auping (ed.), *Agnes Martin, Richard Tuttle*, exh. cat., Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth 1998, p.82.

34. Richard Tuttle cited in Richard Schiff, 'It Shows', in Madeline Grynstejn (ed.), *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, exh. cat., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2005, p.265.

Who's Afraid of Triangles? — Briony Fer

01. Lynne Cooke, who had curated her work at Dia:Beacon, related the conversation they had while looking at Martin's show at PaceWildenstein in: 'Distant Light', *Artforum*, vol.43, no.6, Feb. 2005, p.27.

02. Ibid.

03. See Lynne Cooke's argument for Martin's classicism in '...in the classic tradition...', in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder (eds.), *Agnes Martin*, New York, New Haven and London 2011, pp.11–24.

04. For a discussion of Mondrian's destructive element, 'whereby the ontological premises of neo-plasticism are devastated at breakneck speed', see Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Iconoclast', in Angelica Rudenstine (ed.), *Piet Mondrian*, exh. cat., Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague 1994, p.357.

05. On Martin's destruction of her early work, see Tiffany Bell's discussion in this volume, p.20.

06. Tony Abeyta in conversation with Frances Morris. Tony Abeyta had helped her with *Homage to Life*, filling in the solid black shape and painting its bottom edge using masking tape. When looking with him at *Untitled #1* (the two triangles) from 2003, Agnes Martin apparently also remarked: 'That's for my niece. She got married to a nice boy.' My thanks to Frances Morris for generously sharing her research with me on this.

07. See Richard Tobin's discussion of the formation of her abstract painting and relation to the modernist tradition in Arne Glimcher, Richard Tuttle and Richard Tobin, *Agnes Martin: Before the Grid*, exh. cat., Harwood Museum of Art, Taos 2012, pp.14–19.

08. For Tiffany Bell's discussion of the anomalous moves Martin made at this critical point 1960–62, see pp.25–6 of this volume.

09. Tiffany Bell discusses the major shift in Martin's work, and her refusal of stylistic change after 1972, on pp.28–31 of this volume. Bell makes the important point that there are several distinct groups of work that use the same basic language, but which vary in the way that they are made, resulting in widely different effects.

10. Ad Reinhardt, 'On the Black Paintings', in *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose, Berkeley, CA 1991, p.85.

11. Agnes Martin cited in Ann Wilson, 'Linear Webs', *Art and Artists*, vol.1, no.7, Oct. 1966, p.49.

12. Cooke 2005, p.27.

'Out into the World': How Agnes Martin's Paintings Reached Germany and Western Europe — Maria Müller-Schareck

01. With grateful thanks for invaluable information and advice from Götz Adriani, Kunsthalle Tübingen; Corinna Höper, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart – Graphische Sammlung; Magdalena Holzhey, Kunstmuseum Krefeld; Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf; Susanne Rübsam, Documenta Archive, Kassel; Mona Schieren, Bremen; Daniela Stöppel, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; and Armin Zweite, Munich. Agnes Martin, in *Agnes Martin: With My Back to the World*, directed by Mary Lance, 2003, as quoted in Christina Bryan Rosenberger, 'A Sophisticated Economy of Means: Agnes Martin's Materiality', in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder (eds.), *Agnes Martin*, New York, New Haven and London 2011, p.104.

02. *Konkrete Kunst: 50 Jahre Entwicklung*, exh. cat., Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, Verwaltungsabteilung des Stadtpräsidenten, Helmhaus Zürich 1960, unpag.

03. Johannes Gachnang, 'Haltestellen des Werdens: Eine biographische Ausstellungschronologie (1958–1974)', in *Bilderstreit: Widerspruch, Einheit und Fragment in der Kunst seit 1960*, exh. cat. Museum Ludwig, Cologne 1989, p.345.

04. Lawrence Alloway, 'Introduction', in *Six American Abstract Painters*, exh. cat., Arthur Tooth & Sons, London 1961, unpag. The only work illustrated in the catalogue was Agnes Martin's *Reflections* 1960. Alloway had recently moved from London to New York and, at Betty Parsons's request, was researching the glittering history of the gallery and the New York art scene. Not long afterwards he became a curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. See Courtney J. Martin, 'Art World, Network and Other Alloway Keywords', in *Tate Papers Issue 16*, 1 October 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/art-world-network-and-other-alloway-keywords> (accessed 16 August 2014).

05. Rachel Jacobs, 'L'idéologie de la peinture américaine', in *Aujourd'hui, Art et Architecture*, June 1962, pp.7f.

06. Ibid. p.18.

07. Ibid.

08. Donald Judd, 'Black, White and Gray', *Arts Magazine*, March 1964, p.119.

09. From 1961 to 1968 Wagstaff was the Wadsworth Atheneum's curator for contemporary art. In addition to this, he was a keen collector. Having first concentrated on modern painting (including several works by Agnes Martin, which he repeatedly loaned to exhibitions), he later concentrated on photography.

10. William C. Seitz in *The Responsive Eye*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York 1965, p.41: 'Is this new modus operandi a means only or is it an end as well?'

11. Lawrence Alloway, 'Introduction', in *Systemic Painting*, exh. cat., Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 1966, p.19. In the October issue of *Art News* ('Background to Systemic', *Art News*, vol.65, no.6, Oct. 1966,

- pp.30–33) Alloway once more explained the backdrop to his new category of 'systemic' and again reproduced Agnes Martin's painting *The City*, which was shown in the exhibition: 'the end-state of the painting is known prior to completion (unlike the theory of Abstract Expressionism). This does not exclude empirical modifications of a work in progress, but it does focus them within a system. A system is a unified whole, the parts of which demonstrate some regularities.'
12. *Der Raum in der amerikanischen Kunst 1948–1968*, Kunsthau Zürich, 18 January–23 February 1969. The slim Zürich catalogue also included a foreword by the Director of the Kunsthau, Felix Baumann. Goossen's text is published in the English version. The Arts Council presented *The Art of the Real* from 24 April to 1 June 1969 at the Tate Gallery, with yet another catalogue.
13. E.C. Goossen, in *The Art of the Real*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York 1968, p.7. The selected artists ranged from Barnett Newman via Jackson Pollock to Carl Andre and Donald Judd, most of whom, like Agnes Martin, were only represented with one work. The exceptions were Ellsworth Kelly and Tony Smith, with six and four works respectively.
14. Ibid. p.11.
15. Dore Ashton, 'Agnes Martin', *Quadrum*, no.20, 1966, p.148, with three illustrations: *Reflection* 1959, *The City* 1966 and *Play II* 1966.
16. Ibid.
17. Rolf Gunther Dienst, 'Ten (Dwan Gallery)', in *Das Kunstwerk: Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, vol.20, no.5–6, February 1967, p.28. In his review Dienst already cited Alloway's concept of 'systemic painting', although he translated it as 'systematic painting'.
18. Douglas Crimp, 'Back to the Turmoil', in Cooke, Kelly and Schröder (eds.) 2011, p.60.
19. Kasha Linville, 'Agnes Martin: An Appreciation', *Artforum*, vol.9, no.10, June 1971, pp.71–2.
20. Lawrence Alloway, 'Agnes Martin', in *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1973, pp.9–12, and Lawrence Alloway, 'Formlessness Breaking Down Form: The Paintings of Agnes Martin', *Studio International*, vol.158, no.952, Feb. 1973, p.62. This was followed by a longer article in *Artforum* in April 1973.
21. Ibid. pp.12, 62.
22. Mona Schieren, 'Lines in Writings and Drawings: Agnes Martins Schriften', *Setup4 Online Magazin*, <http://www.setup4.de/ausgabe-1/themen-und-beitraege/mona-schierenlines-in-writings-and-drawings> (accessed 1 August 2014).
23. Agnes Martin thanked the lender Samuel J. Wagstaff in writing for his willingness to support the exhibition. See the Samuel J. Wagstaff Papers, c.1932–1985, Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution: 'It is very generous of you to send your painting to Germany. I particularly like the ones you have. Wish you would send the early "River" on unsized linen out of storage.'
24. See the contract signed by Harald Szeeman on 18 October 1971, Konrad Fischer Archive.
25. See John Anthony Thwaites, 'Kassel – in the air?', *Art and Artists*, vol.7, no.6, Sept. 1972, p.29. Laszlo Glozer, 'Künstler in der Quarantäne: Die Documenta 5 in Kassel', in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15–16 July 1972, © documenta Archive.
26. See Hermann Kern, 'Vorwort / Preface', in *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Kunstraum München, Munich 1973, p.4.
27. Hermann Kern, 'Notizen zu den Zeichnungen von Agnes Martin / Some notes on the drawings of Agnes Martin', in *ibid.* p.8.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid. fig.11, p.33. See also Barbara Haskell, 'Agnes Martin: The Awareness of Perfection', in *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1992, p.105.
30. Mona Schieren has confirmed this in her as yet unpublished doctoral research.
31. In a letter written on 26 July 1979 to Werner Schmalenbach, director of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, he listed three drawings by Agnes Martin that he was prepared to sell, besides other works by Arnulf Rainer, Hermann Nitsch, Brice Marden, Carl Andre, Franz Erhard Walther, Richard Tuttle and others. Archive of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.
32. The few reviews in the local press concentrated on points made by Kern in his essays or by Martin herself in her writings: see *Pantheon*, vol.32, no.2, April 1974, p.180; Doris Schmidt, 'Absagen an die Perfektion: Neue Ausstellungen von Agnes Martin, Ed Moses und Raimund Girke', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 Dec. 1973; Ingrid Rein, 'Agnes Martin im Kunstraum', *Die Kunst und das Schöne Heim*, part 1, January 1974; 'Netze und Gitterwerke: Zeichnungen von Agnes Martin im Kaiser-Wilhelm-Museum', *Rheinische Post*, 16 March 1974.
33. In telephone conversation with the author, 18 July 2014. The exhibition shown in January and February 1974 also fitted perfectly into a new series of presentations of drawings by Claes Oldenburg and Robert Rauschenberg.
34. See eastsideprojects.org/exhibitions/dear-lynda (accessed 25 July 2014). Twenty-five years later, in 1999, an exhibition of new works by Martin was shown in the same venue (Inverleith House), along with the first public screening in the United Kingdom of the 1976 film *Gabriel*.
35. In 1974 the Stedelijk Museum (under its director Edy de Wilde) acquired *Grass* 1967, and Tate (where Norman Reid was the director) acquired the painting *Morning* 1965.
36. Dore Ashton, 'Agnes Martin and ...', in *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Hayward Gallery, London 1977, p.13.
37. Ibid. p.14.
38. *Dritte Internationale der Zeichnung* was presented in Darmstadt in 1970, with three drawings by Agnes Martin, one each from 1961, 1963 and 1965; Agnes Martin is not mentioned in the catalogue text. *Functions of Drawing*, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo 1975: of the two drawings in the Collection of Mia and Martin Visser, *This Milkweed Is More With Light* 1960 was illustrated, no.83, unpag. *Minimal Art: Druckgraphik*, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover 1976.
39. Hôtel Moufle, 16 Place Vendôme, Paris, 29 May – 23 June 1973.
40. René Denizot, supplement to the German catalogue, Aug. 1973. The curator thanks not only Johannes Cladders but also the Düsseldorf gallerists Konrad Fischer and Hans Mayer. The exhibition was subsequently also shown in Antwerp.
41. *An exhibition called Strata: with paintings, drawings and prints by Marden, Martin, Ryman, Twombly, and Kelly*, Royal College of Art Gallery, London, 14 Jan. – 1 Feb. 1974, organised by Lynda Morris. See also Morris's report in *Studio International*, February 1974, pp.90–91. *Tendances actuelles de la nouvelle peinture américaine*, ARC 2 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 25 June – 31 Aug. 1975.
42. In 1967, in response to the New York retrospectives of the work of Ad Reinhardt and Yves Klein, Lucy R. Lippard introduced the term 'silent art' with reference to monotonal painting in 'The Silent Art', *Art in America*, vol.55, no.1, Jan.–Feb. 1967, pp.58–63. Later she only described the painting of Robert Ryman as 'silent art'.
43. Rini Dippel, 'Some Aspects of Recent International Developments in Abstract Painting', in *Fundamental Painting*, exh. cat., Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 1975, p.10.
44. 'Critical Perspectives in American Art', Pavilion of the United States of America, 18 June–10 Oct. 1976. The exhibition was developed by the Art Department of the University of Massachusetts, led by Hugh M. Davies, who was supported by Sam Hunter, Marcia Tucker and Rosalind Krauss. It was first shown at the University's Fine Arts Center Gallery in Amherst before travelling to Venice in a slightly modified form.
45. The exhibition, *L'arte degli Anni '70*, was curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, Michael Compton, Martin Kunz and Harald Szeemann. See *Kunstforum* 40, 1980, p.45.
46. Achille Bonito Oliva, 'Art in the Seventies', in *La Biennale di Venezia: Section of Visual Arts. General Catalogue*, Milan 1980, p.12.
47. Michael Compton, 'It is what it is – it says what it says', in *ibid.* p.13.
48. Tate: *Morning* 1965, acquired in 1974; *Untitled #5* 1994, *Untitled #10* 1995, *Faraway Love* 1999, *Happy Holiday* 1999 and *I Love the Whole World* 1999, ARTIST ROOMS 2008; *Untitled #5* 1991, gift of the American Fund, courtesy Milly and Arne Glimcher in honour of Anthony d'Offay and ARTIST ROOMS, 2012. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam: *Grass* 1967, acquired in 1974; *Untitled #8* 1981, gift of the American Art Foundation, 1981. Kunsthalle Bielefeld: *Untitled #17* 1980, acquired in 1980 with the help of the Land Northrhine-Westphalia. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris: three drawings, anonymous gift via the Société des Amis, 1987; *Untitled #1* 1984, gift of the American Art Foundation, 1987; *Untitled* 2002, gift of Milly and Arne Glimcher to the Centre Pompidou Foundation, 2006. Museum Wiesbaden and Staatsgalerie Stuttgart: *On a Clear Day* screenprints, acquired in 1991. Kunstmuseum Winterthur: *Untitled #8* 1988, permanent loan from the Volkart Stiftung in 1990. Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna: *Untitled #1* 1977, on loan since 1991 from the Austrian Ludwig Foundation for Art and Science.

Sprengel Museum, Hanover: *Love* 1999, on loan since 2004 from a private collection in Hong Kong. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf: *Untitled #5* 1998, acquired in 2011. Kunstmuseum Basel: *Park* 1965, gift of Marischa Burckhardt, 2008.

49. <http://www.manager-magazin.de/thema/kunstkompass> (accessed 4 August 2014).

50. See Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967–77 – Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections*, ed. Lynda Morris, London 2009, pp.346–61.

51. Marischa Burckhardt, 'Begegnung mit Agnes Martin', *DU: Die Zeitschrift der Kultur*, vol.40, no.1, 1980, p.7.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid. p.10.

54. Ashton 1977, p.7.

55. 'Pressenotiz' from the publicity office of the city of Krefeld, 12 March 1974: 'Man hat Agnes Martin Mutter der Minimal Art genannt' ['Agnes Martin has been called the mother of minimal art']. See also the introduction to the exhibition by the curator Gisela Fiedler, 17 March 1974. Archive of the Kunstmuseum Krefeld.

56. *Westkunst*, exh. cat., Cologne 1981, p.464. The paintings shown in the exhibition were *Morning Bird* 1964, *On a Clear Day* 1964 and *Grass* 1967.

57. Museum Ludwig Köln in the Rheinhallen at the Cologne Fair, 8 April–28 June 1989, curated by Siegfried Gohr and Johannes Gachnang. The exhibits by Agnes Martin were *Stone* 1960, *Night Sea* 1963 and *Untitled VIII* 1965.

58. Donald Judd, 'Ausstellungsleitungstreit', special supplement in *Kunstforum*, vol.100, April–May 1989, p.498.

59. Marianne Stockebrand, 'Agnes Martin', in *Künstlerinnen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, exh. cat. Museum Wiesbaden, 1990, p.219. The exhibition included the twelve-part group *The Islands* (pp.148–51).

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid. p.214.

62. Flyer for the exhibition *Agnes Martin: Gemälde und Zeichnungen – Jawlensky-Preisträgerin* 1990, Museum Wiesbaden 1991.

63. Wim Beeren et al., 'Foreword', in *Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings*, exh. cat., Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam et al., 1991, p.10. The catalogue, in four languages, was designed with the greatest care. Delicately coloured text pages are illustrated with portraits of the artist, views from her studio, views of the landscape of New Mexico and of exhibition installations. The fact that these images do not lend themselves to reproduction was compensated for by the inclusion of ten specially made 'drawings' by Agnes Martin, which were inserted into the catalogue. These drawings contain 'all the elements found in her work': Marja Bloem, 'An Awareness of Perfection', in *ibid.* p.37.

64. Ibid. p.40.

65. Mark Stevens, 'An Art of Balance, Purity and Serenity', in *ibid.* p.49.

66. Ibid. p.51.

67. Erich Franz, 'The Forming of the Seen During Seeing', in *ibid.* p.53.

68. See, for instance, Eva Schmidt, 'Agnes

Martin', in *Kunstforum* vol.114, July–Aug. 1991, pp.316–25. See also Doris von Drathen, 'Malerin der Nebelwände: Die amerikanische Künstlerin in der ersten europäischen Retrospektive', 20 Dec. 1991 (<http://www.zeit.de/1991/52/malerin-der-nebelwaende>, accessed 10 October 2014).

69. *Agnes Martin: Gemälde und Zeichnungen 1960–1989*, Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 19 January–15 March 1992.

70. Hochschule für Angewandte Künste, Vienna, 6 Feb. – 7 March 1992. All the exhibits were on loan from the Pace Gallery. The catalogue contains two illustrations and a short, enigmatic text by Oswald Oberhuber, sculptor and the then Director of the Hochschule für Angewandte Künste.

71. Heinz Liesbrock, 'Figure and Emptiness: Agnes Martin's *The Islands* at the Josef Albers Museum', in *Agnes Martin, The Islands*, exh. cat., Josef Albers Museum Quadrat, Bottrop, 2004, p.40.

72. Anna Chave, 'Agnes Martin "Humility, the Beautiful Daughter . . . All of her Ways are Empty"', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.132.

73. Agnes Martin, 'A Personal Statement', in *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Kunstraum München, Munich 1973, p.78.

'Well, I Sit Here and Wait to be Inspired': Photographs of Agnes Martin
— Lena Fritsch

01. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field [Les Règles de l'art, 1992]*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford, CA 1996, p.167.

02. Ibid. p.171.

03. The term 'art business' ('Betriebssystem Kunst') is used here in the sense defined by Anne-Marie Bonnet, that is to say, as an umbrella term for the constitutive conditions affecting works of art within the processes of their social distribution and mediation. See Anne-Marie Bonnet, *Kunst der Moderne, Kunst der Gegenwart: Herausforderung und Chance*, Cologne 2006, pp.88–9.

04. See also Hans-Joachim Raupp, 'Selbstbildnisse und Künstlerporträts – ihre Funktion und Bedeutung', in Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum (ed.), *Selbstbildnisse und Künstlerporträts von Lucas von Leyden bis Anton Raphael Mengs*, Braunschweig 1980, pp.7–35.

05. For instance in *Agnes Martin: Schilderijen en Tekeningen 1957–75*, exh. cat., Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, May–June 1977; Barbara Haskell (ed.), *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1992; 'Taos: Agnes Martin gallery for renovated Harwood Museum', *Art News*, vol.96, no.9, Oct. 1997, <http://www.artnews.com/issue/october-1997/>; and Karen Moss (ed.), *Illumination: The Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, Agnes Pelton, Agnes Martin, and Florence Miller Pierce*, exh. cat., Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA 2009.

06. Arne Glimcher, *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, New York 2012, p.7.

07. This photograph appears, for instance,

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08. See, for instance, Robert C. Morgan, 'Agnes Martin, PaceWildenstein, New York Reviews', *Art News*, vol.102, no.5, May 2003, p.153; Richard Schiff, 'Agnes Martin: The Nineties and Beyond', *Artforum International*, vol.40, no.8, April 2002, p.131; Holland Cotter, 'Agnes Martin: New Drawings and Watercolors', *New York Times*, 19 April 1996, p.C21; Olivier Berggruen, *The Writing of Art*, London 2011, p.139.

09. See, for instance, Lilian Ross, 'Taos Postcard Lunch with Agnes', *New Yorker*, 14 July 2003, p.34; Laura Cumming, review of Agnes Martin and John McLaughlin at Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, *Guardian*, 22 Aug. 1999.

10. See, for instance, Rachel Cohen, 'Beyond the Grid', *Art Review*, vol.2, no.9, Dec. 2004/Jan. 2005, pp.74–7; Jonathan Jones, 'Agnes Martin, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London', *Guardian*, 14 March 2001; Anna Chave, 'Agnes Martin: Humility, the Beautiful Daughter . . . All of her Ways are Empty', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, pp.131–53.

11. Holland Cotter, 'Like her Paintings, Quiet, Unchanging and Revered', *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 1997, p.H45.

12. See, for instance, Jill Johnston, 'Agnes Martin: Surrender & Solitude', *Village Voice*, 13 Sept. 1973, p.30; Donald Kuspit, 'Reviews, Agnes Martin, Pace Gallery', *Artforum*, vol.27, no.8, April 1989, p.159; Stewart Attwood, 'United in the quest for perfection', *Herald*, 27 Aug. 1999; Richard Schiff, 'Agnes Martin: The Nineties and Beyond', *Artforum*, vol.40, no.8, April 2002, p.131; Bohnacker 2011; Berggruen 2011, p.139; Maria Popova, 'Agnes Martin on Art, Happiness, Pride, and Failure: A Rare Vintage Interview with the Reclusive Artist', in *Brain Pickings*, 31 March 2014, <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2014/03/31/agnes-martin-john-gruen-interview/>.

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14. Mary Krienke, 'Agnes Martin, Thomas Ammann Fine Art', *Art News*, vol.107, no.11, Dec. 2008, p.132; Charles Darwent, 'Slight of Hand: Agnes Martin's Hermetic Paintings', *Modern Painters*, vol.18, no.8, July–Aug. 2005, p.92.

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 17. See, for instance, Popova 2014; Ross 2003; David Hayes, *Lines in the Desert*, Dec. 1997, <http://davidhayes.ca/1997/12/lines-in-the-desert> (accessed August 2014).
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 20. Roberta Smith, 'Pace Gallery, New York, Exhibition', *Artforum*, vol.13, no.10, Summer 1975, pp.72–3.
 21. Verena Krieger, *Was ist ein Künstler? Genie, Heilsbringer, Antikünstler*, Cologne 2007, p.47.
 22. See, for instance, Ann Landi, 'Saved from the Artist's Fire', *Wall Street Journal*, 14 March 2012; Holland Cotter, 'Review of Exhibitions: Agnes Martin at Pace', *Art in America*, vol.77, no.4, April 1989, p.257.
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 25. 'Taos: Agnes Martin gallery for renovated Harwood Museum', *Art News*, vol.96, no.9, Oct. 1997, p.55.
 26. Glimcher 2012, pp.8–9.
 27. Email from the photographer to the author, 2 Dec. 2013.
 28. This letter is in the archives of the Stedelijk Museum library in Amsterdam, inv. 49758, 1.852.16. With thanks to Tiffany Bell for alerting me to this.
 29. For more on this see the essay by Jacquelynn Baas in the present catalogue.
 30. Kramer 1976.
 31. Hayes 1997.
 32. Ibid.; Barbara Haskell, 'Agnes Martin: The Awareness of Perfection', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, pp.93–117; Rosalind Krauss, 'The /Cloud/', in *ibid.* pp.155–65.
 33. Krienke 2008; Obituaries, *Art Monthly*, vol.283, no.2, Feb. 2005, p.283; Schjeldahl 2004; Van Deren Coke, 'Moderns in the Mountains', *Art News*, vol.73, no.5, May 1974, p.50; Michael Andre, 'Agnes Martin, Museum of Modern Art, New York', *Art News*, vol.72, no.8, Oct. 1973, p.92.
 34. Cumming 1999; 'Taos: Agnes Martin gallery for renovated Harwood Museum', *Art News*, vol.96, no.9, Oct. 1997, p.55; Krienke 2008, p.132; Berggruen 2011, p.139; Gerrit Henry, 'New York Reviews, Agnes Martin', *Art News*, vol.82, no.3, March 1983, p.159; Anna Chave, 'Agnes Martin: Humility, the Beautiful Daughter ... All of her Ways are Empty', in Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.136.
 35. Belcove 2003.
 36. Kay Larson, 'Solitary Refinement', *New York*, 23 Nov. 1992, p.74.
 37. John Gruen, *The Artist Observed: 28 Interviews with Contemporary Artists*, Pennington, NJ 1991, p.77.
 38. Annie Leibovitz, *At Work*, London 2008, pp.163–4.
 39. In 1972, in 'The Untroubled Mind', Agnes Martin distanced herself from this, with the comment that 'Asceticism is a mistake': Haskell (ed.) 1992, p.14. See, for instance, Jackie Wullschlager, 'Driven to Abstraction', *Financial Times*, London, 1 May 2010, p.14; Obituaries, *Art Monthly*, vol.283, no.2, Feb. 2005, p.283; Marion Naves, 'An Ongoing Viability: Painting Exhibitions', *New Criterion*, vol.16, no. 9, 1 May 1998, p.40; Laura Garrard, *Minimal Art and Artists in the 1960s and After*, Maidstone 2005, p.82.
 40. Deborah Garwood, 'Agnes Martin', *artcritical.com*, 1 June 2004, <http://www.artcritical.com/2004/06/01/agnes-martin/> (accessed July 2013); Belcove 2003.
 41. See Benjamin Genocchio, 'Inspired by Nature And Her Own Voice', *New York Times*, 18 July 2004, p.WE8.
 42. Ibid. p.164.
- Agnes Martin: Readings for Writings**
— Jacquelynn Baas
01. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York 1934, pp.14–15.
 02. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* [1970], ed. Trudy Dixon, New York and Tokyo 1999, pp.31–2.
 03. Dieter Schwarz (ed.), *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1991, p.140.
 04. As part of a perceptible essay by her artist-friend Ann Wilson: 'Linear Webs', *Art and Artists*, vol.1, no.7, Oct. 1966, pp.46–9.
 05. Heart and mind are a single character in both Chinese and Japanese.
 06. Martin cited as her greatest Asian 'spiritual inspiration' the legendary Taoist sage Lao Tzu (see note 44 below). Nevertheless the Asian philosophy most often associated with her, in part because it is the version Americans are most familiar with, is Taoist-influenced Zen (Chinese: Ch'an) Buddhism. Regarding Martin's Asian influences, see especially Thomas McEvilly, "'Grey Geese Descending": The Art of Agnes Martin', *Artforum*, vol.25, no.10, Summer 1987, pp.94–9; Jacquelynn Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today*, Berkeley, CA 2005, pp.207–19; and Jonathan D. Katz, 'Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction', in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder (eds.), *Agnes Martin*, New York, New Haven and London 2011, pp.170–97.
 07. The foundations of Calvinism are summarised by the acronym TULIP: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.
 08. Martin 1991, pp.44, 96.
 09. Tom Collins, 'Agnes Martin Reflects on Art & Life', in *Geronimo*, Jan. 1999, p.13. Thanks to Tiffany Bell for drawing this and other sources to my attention.
 10. That Agnes Martin was schizophrenic is now widely accepted. For examples of its effects on her, see Arne Glimcher, *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, London 2012, p.12 and *passim*.
 11. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That which is to Come, Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream* [1678], New York 1942, pp.22–6.
 12. Bunyan [1678] 1942, pp.40–41.
 13. Her decision to abandon New York coincided with the sudden death from heart attack of her painter-friend Ad Reinhardt (who was one year younger than she) in 1967. Thoreau's decision to seclude himself and build a cabin by Walden Pond came after the death of his brother John, who had helped him open his own school after he was dismissed from his teaching job. Thoreau lived there for two years, writing a series of lectures that would eventually become *Walden*.
 14. Bunyan [1678] 1942, pp.42–3.
 15. Glimcher 2012, p.141.
 16. Blake's illustrations were exhibited at the Frick Collection when they were acquired in 1942, 15 Dec. – 31 Jan. 1960, and 28 April – 24 May 1964. Editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* with Blake's illustrations were published in New York for the members of the Limited Editions Club in 1941, and with fewer illustrations by the Heritage Press in 1942. (The Frick deaccessioned Blake's drawings in 1996. They were bought in at Sotheby's and ended up in a private British collection. My thanks to Sally Brazil, Chief, Archives and Records Management, and Shannon Yule Morelli, Associate Archivist, The Frick Collection and Frick Art Reference Library, for their kind assistance.)
 17. Martin 1991, p.19.
 18. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, Berkeley, CA 2008, p.2.
 19. David Weir, *Brahma in the West: William Blake and the Oriental Renaissance*, Albany, NY 2003, pp.3–4, 91; *The Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, vol.III, London 1925, p.117.
 20. Thomas Merton, 'Nature and Art in William Blake: An Essay in Interpretation' [1939 Master's Thesis, Columbia University], Appendix I in *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart, New York 1981, p.415; listed in Blake's 'Descriptive Catalogue' of his work as '*The Bramins*. – A Drawing. The subject is, Mr. Wilkin translating the Geeta; an ideal design, suggested by the first publication of that part of the Hindoo Scriptures translated by Mr. Wilkin' (*The Writings of William Blake*, 1925, p.117). For more on Blake's Asian philosophical sources, see Weir 2003, especially pp.10–12 and 90–104; and Marsha Keith Schuchard, *William Blake's Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision*, Rochester, VT 2008.
 21. Angelika Malinar, 'Yoga Practices in the *Bhagavadgītā*', in David Gordon White (ed.), *Yoga in Practice*, Princeton, NJ 2012, p.59.
 22. Martin 1991, p.95.
 23. G.K. Chesterton, *William Blake*, London 1910, pp.159–60.

24. Martin 1991, p.117.
25. Ibid. p.19.
26. *Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 1981, p.419.
27. Glimcher 2012, p.71.
28. Martin 1991, p.37.
29. Glimcher 2012, p.71.
30. Plato, *The Republic* [360 BC], trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York 1991, pp.258–9.
31. English journalist Harriet Martineau writing in 1837 as quoted by Megan Marshall in her introduction to Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* [1835], Bedford, MA 2005, p.vii.
32. Peabody [1835] 2005, pp.189–90.
33. From 1904 until his retirement in 1930 Dewey taught philosophy of education at Teachers College, where his impact on theory and practice was profound. Martin surely would have read Dewey's writings in connection with her undergraduate courses in Washington in 1934–7, her BS at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1941–2, and her MA in 1951–2. (My thanks to Mary Jane Jacob for her help with John Dewey.)
34. Dewey 1934, p.3.
35. Martin 1991, p.155.
36. Carus was the author of *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894), which the young D.T. Suzuki translated into Japanese. Suzuki would help guide and translate for Dewey in Japan twenty years later; see Baas 2005, pp.57–8.
37. Max Eastman, *Heroes I Have Known*, New York 1942, p.283.
38. Ibid. p.284. Regarding Whitman's 'sense of oneness', Eastman added: 'To forestall your own remark, he reminds you that it is very likely a sublimation of sex, and points out that this doesn't make it any less normal or important' – a subtle dig at Sigmund Freud on Dewey's part.
39. Martin 1991, p.36.
40. Dewey 1934, p.16.
41. Martin 1991, p.37.
42. 'Words are less noble than deeds; and you, writer on sciences, do you not copy with your hand, rendering what is in your mind, just like the painter?': *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Martin Kemp, New Haven 1989, p.35.
43. See Baas 2005, pp.107–11.
44. David J. Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, New York and London 1988, p.231.
45. Wade–Giles is the romanisation system for Mandarin Chinese developed by Thomas Wade in mid-nineteenth-century England, further developed and published by Herbert Giles in his *Chinese–English Dictionary* (1892). Pinyin is the phonetic system developed in the People's Republic of China for transcribing Mandarin pronunciation of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet.
46. Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*, Magdalena, NM 2001, pp.11–12.
47. Wilson 1966, pp.48–9.
48. Livia Kohn, *Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation*, Dunedin, FL 2010.
49. The stanza that won Hui Neng his Patriarchy concludes: 'Since all is void, / Where can the dust alight?' (*The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui Neng*, trans. A.F. Price and Wong Mou-Lam, Berkeley, CA 1969, p.18).
50. Paul Carus, *Lao-Tze's Tao-Teh-King*, Chicago 1898.
51. For a personal account of Suzuki's lectures, see Arthur Danto, 'Upper West Side Buddhism', in Jacquelyn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob (eds.), *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Berkeley, CA 2004, pp.54–5.
52. Thomas B. Hess, 'Editorial: Ad (Adolph Dietrich Friedrich) Reinhardt', *Art News*, vol.66, no.6, Oct. 1967, p.23. For more on Reinhardt, see Baas 2005, pp.124–31.
53. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, New York 1967, p.21.
54. See Robert H. Scharf, 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', in Donald S. Lopez, Jr (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha*, Chicago 1995, pp.107–60.
55. Martin 1991, p.16; she specifically cited *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind* [ninth century], trans. and intr. John Blofeld, New York 1958, p.50.
56. Blofeld, Introduction to *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, 1958, p.10. Kay Larson compares the Buddha's teaching method with performance art in 'Shaping the Unbounded: One Life, One Art', Baas and Jacob (eds.) 2004, p.64.
57. Martin's undated facsimile letter is published in Glimcher 2012, pp.124–5 (Martin's spelling sometimes needs interpreting). She simplified the concept of the koan, whether for Glimcher's benefit or to make a point.
58. Glimcher 2012, p.13.
59. This is the lesson of Martin's 1976 film, *Gabriel*. 'Children make a perfect response to life. They see everything as beautiful and perfect' (Martin 1991, p.119).
60. Blofeld, Introduction to *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, pp.16–17.
61. Martin 1991, pp.95, 69. Her wording in the first quote may refer to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, where the path to salvation is through a 'wicket gate' – a personal gate in a larger door or wall.

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— Lena Fritsch

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02. Dore Ashton, 'Premiere Exhibition for Agnes Martin', *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 1958, p.26; Edith Burckhardt, 'Reviews and Previews: New Names this Month – Agnes Martin', *Art News*, vol.57, no.8, Dec. 1958, p.17.
03. See archive of the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation, New York.
04. See archive of the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation, New York.
05. See Samuel J. Wagstaff papers, Box 2, folder 11 in the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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1959

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List of Works

The following works are exhibited at Tate Modern. Within date, works in mixed media are followed by works on canvas/board, followed by works on paper.

Untitled 1952

Ink on paper

38.1 × 27.6

Private collection

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Mid-Winter c.1954

Oil paint on canvas

83.8 × 121.9

Taos Municipal Schools Historic

Art Collection, New Mexico

Untitled c.1954

Oil and graphite on gypsum board

121.9 × 182.9

Private collection

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Untitled c.1955

Oil paint on canvas

118.1 × 168.3

Private collection

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Untitled c.1955

Oil paint on canvas

83.8 × 134.6

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Harbor No.1 1957

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Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of Agnes Gund and Committee of Painting

and Sculpture Funds, 1996 (446 1996)

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Untitled c.1957

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Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous Gift

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Untitled c.1957

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132 × 97

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134.6 × 25.4 × 5.1

Des Moines Art Center's Louise Noun

Collection of Art by Women, 2001.29

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The Laws 1958

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Water 1958

Painted wire and bottle caps mounted on wood

99.1 × 99.1

Joan W. Harris

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Beach 1958

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121.9 × 96.5

Private collection, San Francisco

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Heather 1958

Oil paint on canvas

177.8 × 177.8

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63.5 × 63.5

The Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill,

New York. Gift of Robert Elkon, 1979.26

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Private collection

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Untitled 1958

Oil paint on canvas

60 × 60

Collection Sylvio Perlstein, Antwerp

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Oil paint on paper mounted on canvas

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The Menil Collection, Houston

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Untitled 1959

Oil paint on canvas

60.3 × 61

Collection of John and Mary Pappajohn

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Maxine and Stuart Frankel Private Collection

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Untitled 1959

Oil paint on canvas

30.5 × 30.5

Courtesy Pace Gallery

Buds c.1959

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Titze Collection

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Beach, Florida. Gift of The Betty Parsons
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Horizon 1960
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Katherine Kaim Kitchen
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of Design, Providence. Gift of the Bayard
and Harriet K. Ewing Collection 1993.105.1
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Collection of Marguerite and Robert Hoffman
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Sarah-Ann and Werner H. Kramarsky
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Untitled 1960
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Ink on paper
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Courtesy The Elkon Gallery, New York
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Untitled 1960
Ink on paper
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Untitled 1960
Ink and graphite on paper
21.6 × 21.6
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Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland
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Wood and metal
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Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper
20.3 × 20.3
Courtesy The Elkon Gallery, New York

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Ink and wash on paper
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61 × 61
Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich
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37.8 × 37.8
Yale University Art Gallery,
Gift of the Woodward Foundation
Department: Modern and Contemporary Art
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Ink on paper
21 × 21
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York; Promised gift of Emily Fisher
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Spreckels Fuller Collection, 1999. 2000.40
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Private collection, New York
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Starlight 1962
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Untitled 1962
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Balconies 1962
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The Egg 1963
Ink on paper
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Untitled 1963
Ink and wash on paper
21 × 21
Emily Fisher Landau/Amart Investments LLC
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Ink and watercolour on paper
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The Tree 1964
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Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund, 1965 (5.1965)
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Grey Bird 1964
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Private collection, London
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Graphite and ink on paper mounted on board
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The Rose 1965
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Ink and watercolour on paper
20.3 × 20.3
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White Stone 1965
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Des Moines Art Center, 1992.12 Purchased
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and partial gift of Arnold and Mildred
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Wien, On loan from the Austrian Ludwig
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Watercolour and graphite on paper
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Watercolour and ink on paper
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Untitled 1978
Watercolour and ink on paper
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Private collection, London
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Untitled 1978
Watercolour and ink on paper
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Private collection, London
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Untitled 1978
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Maxine and Stuart Frankel Private Collection
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Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
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Untitled IX 1982
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Lent by Denver Art Museum
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Private collection, courtesy Pace Gallery
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Untitled #11 1990
Acrylic paint on canvas
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and Arne Glimcher in honour of Anthony
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Untitled #5 1994
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Tate. ARTIST ROOMS.
Acquired jointly with the National Galleries
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Tate. ARTIST ROOMS.
Tate and National Galleries of Scotland.
Lent by Anthony d'Offay 2010
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Düsseldorf. Acquired with assistance
from the Gesellschaft der Freunde,
numerous artists and art dealers and
with special support from the guests
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Tate. ARTIST ROOMS.
Acquired jointly with the National Galleries
of Scotland through The d'Offay Donation
with assistance from the National Heritage
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I Love the Whole World 2000
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152.4 × 152.4
Courtesy of The Artworkers Retirement Society
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Gratitude 2001
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2006 (Don de Milly et Arne Glimcher
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Untitled #4 2002
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Private collection

Untitled #12 2002
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Private collection, courtesy Pace Gallery

Homage to Life 2003
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Leonard and Louise Riggio
P.188

The Sea 2003
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Private collection

Untitled #1 2003
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris
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Untitled 2004
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Collection of Mitzi and Warren Eisenberg
P.190

Untitled 2004
Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas
152.4 × 152.4
Frances F. Bowes
P.187

Untitled 2004
Ink on paper
8.9 × 7
Private collection
P.191

*The following works are illustrated as plates
but are not exhibited at Tate Modern*

This Rain 1958
Oil paint on canvas
177.8 × 177.8
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York; Promised gift of the Fisher
Landau Center for Art
P.36

White Flower 1960
Oil paint on canvas
182.6 × 182.9
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Anonymous gift, 1963
P.84

Eight Fish Under Water 1963
Ink on paper
25.4 × 25.4
Private collection, Munich
P.119

Falling Blue 1963
Oil paint on canvas
182.9 × 182.9
San Francisco Museum of Art.
Gift of Mr and Mrs Moses Lasky
P.85

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Jacquelynn Baas is an art historian, curator and director emeritus of the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

Tiffany Bell is editor of the digital catalogue raisonné of Agnes Martin's paintings and drawings (Artifex Press)

Briony Fer is Professor of Art History, University College London

Lena Fritsch is Assistant Curator, Collections International Art, Tate Modern

Anna Lovatt is an art historian and scholar in residence in the Department of Art History, Southern Methodist University, Texas

Frances Morris is Head of Collections, International Art, Tate Modern

Maria Müller-Schareck is curator at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

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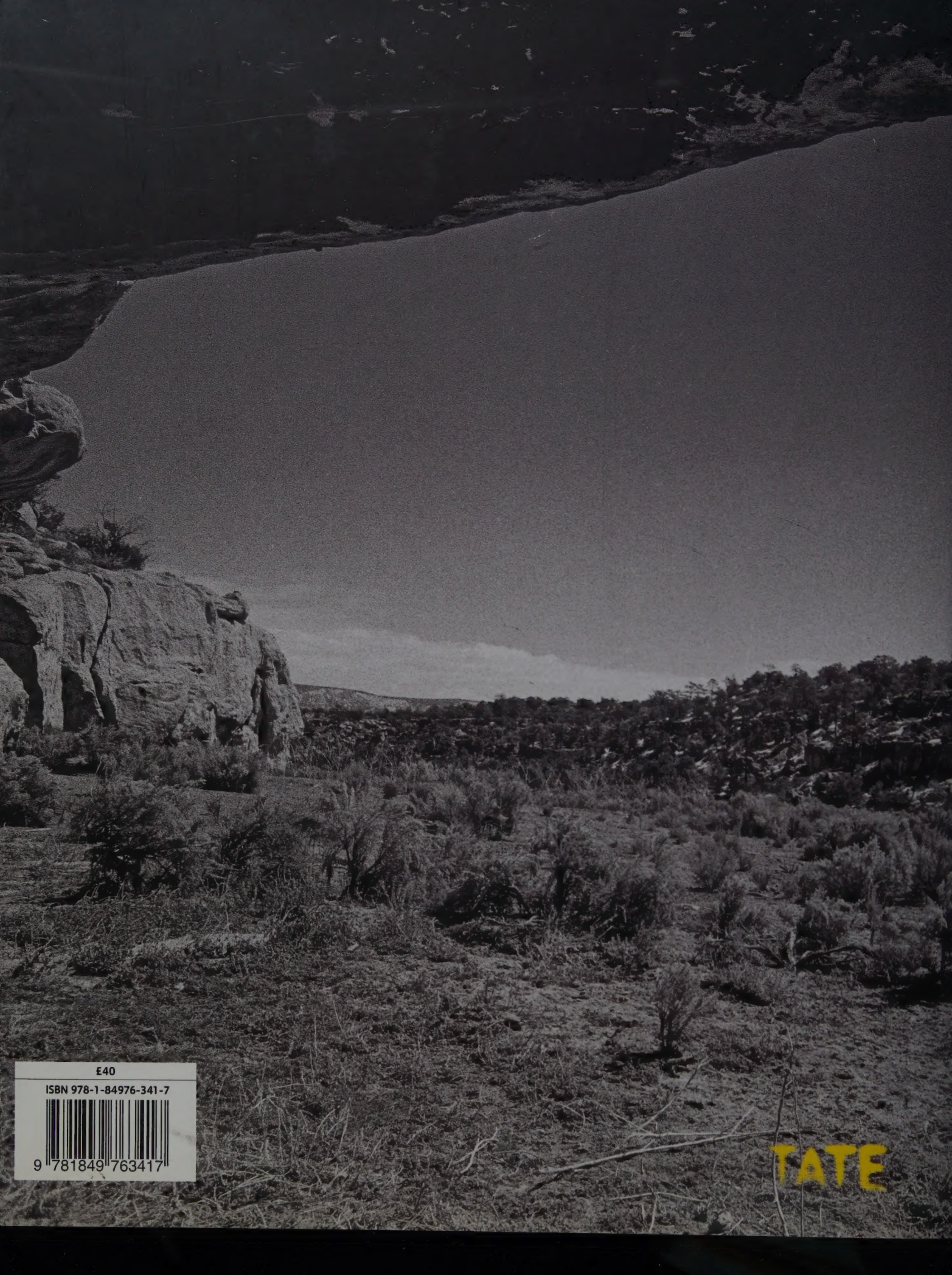
is an art historian and scholar in residence
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