

Agnes Martin

Agnes Martin was born in Macklin, a town in Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1912. She grew up in Vancouver, then moved to Bellingham, Washington, in 1932. Martin gained a bachelor of science degree in 1942 and a master of arts degree in 1952 from Teachers College at Columbia University, while living intermittently in New Mexico. In 1957 she relocated to Coenties Slip in Lower Manhattan. She had her first one-person exhibition in 1958 at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York. Surveys of her work have been presented at venues including the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (1973), the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1991), and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1992). She was awarded a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennial in 1997 and a National Endowment for the Arts National Medal of Arts in 1998, among other honors. From the late sixties until her death on December 16, 2004, Martin lived and worked in rural New Mexico.

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Trajectories

December 1, 2007—December 8, 2008

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|--|---|--|
| 1. Untitled, c. 1959
Oil and graphite on canvas
47½ x 23¾ inches (120.7 x 60.3 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | 9. The Beach, 1964
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
75 x 75 inches (190.5 x 190.5 cm)
Lannan Foundation; Long-term loan | 16. Benevolence, 2001
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist |
| 2. Untitled, c. 1959
Oil and graphite on canvas
47½ x 23¾ inches (120.7 x 60.3 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | 10. Untitled, 1960
Oil on canvas
12 x 12 inches (30.5 x 30.5 cm)
Museum of Art, Rhode Island
School of Design
Gift of the Bayard and Harriet K. Ewing Collection | 17. Untitled, 1959
Oil on canvas
70 x 70 inches (177.8 x 177.8 cm)
Courtesy Arne and Milly Glimcher |
| 3. Window, 1957
Oil on canvas
38 x 38 inches (96.5 x 96.5 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | 11. Untitled #12, 1984
Acrylic, gesso, and graphite on canvas
72 x 72 inches (182.9 x 182.9 cm)
Courtesy Arne and Milly Glimcher | 18. Untitled, 1959
Oil on canvas
70 x 70 (177.8 x 177.8 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift |
| 4. The Spring, 1958
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 inches (127 x 127 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | 12. Untitled, c. 1959
Oil on canvas
47½ x 23¾ inches (120.7 x 60.3 cm)
Courtesy Arne and Milly Glimcher | 19–26. Innocent Love series, 1999
Acrylic and graphite on canvas each:
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
clockwise:
Love
Contentment
Innocent Living
Happiness
Innocent Happiness
Perfect Happiness
Innocent Love
Where Babies Come From
Lannan Foundation; Long-term loan |
| 5. Untitled, c. 1959
Oil on canvas
25 x 25 inches (63.5 x 63.5 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | 13. Untitled #20, 2002
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist | |
| 6. Untitled, c. 1957
Oil on canvas
34 x 34 inches (86.4 x 86.4 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | 14. Untitled, 1960
Oil on canvas
70 x 70 inches (177.8 x 177.8 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift | |
| 7. Untitled #17, 2002
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist | 15. Untitled #16, 2002
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist | |
| 8. Earth, 1959
Oil on canvas
49¾ x 49¾ inches (126.4 x 126.4 cm)
Dia Art Foundation; Anonymous gift
in memory of Kirk Varnedoe | | |

Agnes Martin

In the mid-1960s, Agnes Martin was lauded as a herald of the cool geometric Minimalism that was emerging in the aftermath of Abstract Expressionism, but she herself declined that claim, for she saw the Minimalist approach as impersonal and dispassionate. Her disarmingly reticent abstractions use a combination of ideal geometry and the lightest touch of the artist's hand to achieve an unexpected pitch of emotion and feeling.

Martin, who grew up in the Pacific Northwest, as a student in the 1940s was drawn to the arid, open landscape of New Mexico. The vast Southwestern desert became a defining experience for her, "I used to paint mountains here in New Mexico and I thought/my mountains looked like ant hills/I saw the plains driving out of New Mexico and I thought/the plain had it/just the plane," as she later described. In her mature work, from the early sixties onwards, Martin dematerializes the canvas into a transparent, nonhierarchical field of vision, perhaps suggesting the experience (rather than the image) of this desert landscape.

By the end of the 1950s Martin's signature mode had emerged, a spare, muted palette and geometric vocabulary deployed across a square format (for example, *Window*, 1957). The repetitive marks and lines of the continuous all-over grid paintings that Martin began in the early 1960s earned her the reputation of being an inspiration for the Minimalists. Yet the grid that underlies these paintings is, as the artist says, never mechanical and never rigid. Through simple geometry, she found she could pursue a classical perfection that she described as removed from nature, held only in the mind—drawn rectangles, squares, and grids in pencil dispensed with traditional notions of composition. Tightly echoing the weave of her square canvases, paintings such as *The Beach* (1963), seem to merge Platonic geometry with an egoless Taoist meditation.

Finding New York City too distracting, Martin moved permanently to the Southwest in 1967. While giving up painting for close to a decade, she built

an adobe house on a deserted mesa, where she pursued isolation as a means of seeking inspiration.

Employing the subtlest of hues, both delicate pastels and light grey washes, Martin's late paintings seem to emanate light rather than reflect it. In her 1999 *Innocent Love* series, gently insistent horizontal lines, bounding the color washes, suggest an infinite space beyond the frames of the five-foot-square canvases. The theme of innocent love may be related to the artist's descriptions of the "untroubled state of mind" (often referred to in her journals) that allows for "moments of inspiration," which "added together make what we call sensibility." Innocent and untroubled, young children, in Martin's view, have many more inspirations than adults: such notions perhaps also contribute to the ethereal tone of these elusive yet effulgent works.

Nonetheless, the works at the end of a fertile career spanning more than forty years often contain elements first explored at the time of her formation, the late 1950s. Such unanticipated parallels include a brief return to an ominous black that now conceals more than it reveals: compare, for example, *Untitled #17*, 2002 with *Untitled*, c. 1957, which is hanging to its left, and *Earth*, 1959, on its right flank. By means of such juxtapositions, "Trajectories" (December 1, 2007–September 1, 2008) highlights the unexpected but rich dialogue that links these crucial periods in her art and life.