

Exhibition: *Agnes Martin*
On View: April 24–September 11, 2016
Location: BCAM, Level 3

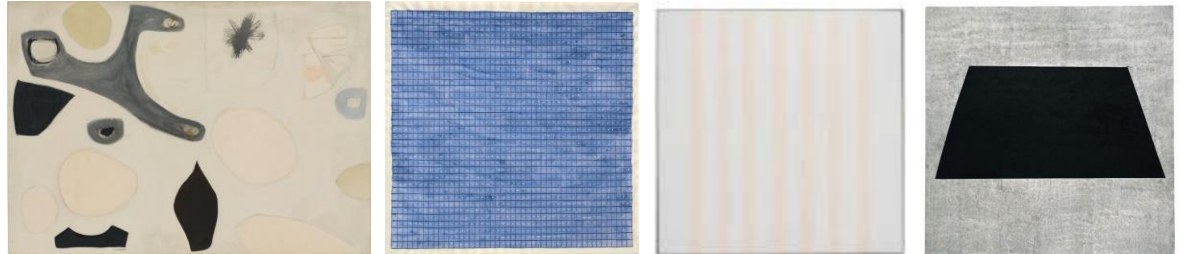


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(Los Angeles—March 8, 2016) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Agnes Martin*, the first and most comprehensive retrospective of the artist's work in the U.S. since 1992. This extensive exhibition covers the full breadth of Martin's practice, revealing her early and little-known experiments with different media, and tracing the development of her work from biomorphic abstraction to the mesmerizing grids and striped canvases that became her hallmark.

A seminal artist of the 20th century and a pioneer of abstraction, Martin viewed her work as a pursuit of perfection, striving to instill every painting with "beauty, innocence, and happiness." Her style, though restrained, underscored her deep conviction in the emotive and expressive power of art. Martin's development of the grid marked a crossroads in the history of abstract painting. The artist established a geometric and spatial language often by gently inscribing penciled lines over subtle fields of wash and color—a practice that she would persist in refining and reinterpreting over ensuing decades. A contemporary of the abstract expressionists, Martin was one of the few prominent female artists in the prevailingly masculine art world of the late 1950s and 1960s.

LACMA's presentation of *Agnes Martin* is curated by Michael Govan, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director of LACMA, with Jennifer King, associate curator, director's office, and features nearly 100 artworks including oil and acrylic paintings, multimedia pieces, watercolors and drawings, a print portfolio, and two sculptural works. The retrospective originated at Tate Modern, London (June 3–October 11, 2015), where it was co-curated by Frances Morris, Director, Tate Modern and Tiffany Bell, Artifax Press Editor, *Agnes Martin Catalogue Raisonné*, before traveling to Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (November 7, 2015–March 6, 2016). Following

LACMA's presentation (April 24–September 11, 2016), *Agnes Martin* concludes at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (October 7, 2016–January 11, 2017).

“As the only West Coast venue in the United States, LACMA is pleased to present the work of an artist who was so fundamentally inspired and influenced by the landscape of the American Southwest,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director.

Jennifer King, associate curator, adds, “To appreciate Agnes Martin’s subtle aesthetic, one has to view her artwork in person. This exhibition offers an unparalleled opportunity to see so many works from throughout her career in dialogue with one another.”

About the Exhibition

Agnes Martin is organized chronologically and presents the artist’s work in two sections, which span her artistic career.

Up to 1967

The first section of the exhibition follows Martin as she moves from the biomorphic forms of the late 1950s to the groundbreaking grid paintings of the 1960s.

Born in the Canadian prairies, Martin moved to the United States in 1931. She trained as a teacher and later studied art in New Mexico and New York, painting naturalistic landscapes, still lifes, and portraits. In the 1950s she moved to the remote town of Taos, New Mexico, where she began exploring abstraction. The pale compositions of organic shapes she made during this period show the influence of Cubism and Abstract Expressionism, while also reflecting her encounters with the expansive desert landscape and Native American textiles.

In 1957, Martin was offered representation by vanguard art dealer Betty Parsons, whose list of artists included Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt. At Parsons’s insistence, Martin relocated to New York, where she joined the artistic community living in the Coenties Slip area of Lower Manhattan. Then age 45, she worked alongside emerging artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Jasper Johns, Lenore Tawney, and Robert Rauschenberg, gradually developing a vocabulary of simple geometric shapes—squares, rectangles, circles, dots—that she often repeated across delicate earth-colored backgrounds. In New York, Martin increasingly worked in formats of two sizes: intimate canvases of roughly a square foot, and larger ones of six square feet. During the early 1960s her geometric compositions evolved into all-over grids penciled onto monochromatic

surfaces. From a farther distance, the grids seem to blend into single tones. This is regarded as Martin's signature style: a faint hand-drawn line forever in dialogue with a square canvas.

In 1967, Martin abruptly left the New York art scene just as her work was gaining considerable acclaim. In search of solitude and silence, she travelled across the US and Canada for almost two years before finally settling on a remote mesa in New Mexico. During this period, she began to write about beauty and the creative process, drawing on her familiarity with Taoist, Buddhist, and Zen thought.

Martin emerged from her artistic hiatus in 1973 with the publication of the portfolio *On a Clear Day*, featuring 30 screenprints of permutations on the grid from. These works demonstrate the great range of her imagination: while each print can be seen as a distinct image, Martin builds layers of meaning across the complete body of work.

After 1974

The second section of the exhibition encompasses the latter period of Martin's career. In 1974, at age 62, Martin returned to painting. The vast desert landscape shaped Martin's art, as did her solitude and simple lifestyle. She established an aesthetic that she would continue to refine over the next three decades: six-foot-square canvases marked with faint bands or stripes of acrylic wash finely outlined in graphite. Through the 1970s Martin used these self-imposed constraints to make radiant compositions in shades of pale blue and pink. Her works from 1977 to 1992 are mostly rendered in tones of gray, conveying a space she saw as "infinite, dimensionless, without form and void." Slight irregularities reveal the handmade nature of these paintings and accentuate their textured surfaces.

Over time, Martin began to draw connections between her works by introducing recurring compositional principles. While she saw each painting as a discrete object, she used subtle repetition to link it with other works. Her interest in seriality culminated in the production of *With My Back to the World* (1997) and several other multipart series each conceived as single works of art.

As Martin aged and found it more difficult to handle large canvases, she reduced the size of her works to five square feet. Her paintings of the 1990s evoke universal sentiments such as love, innocence, and happiness through luminous, colorful palettes and descriptive titles. The paintings she produced near the end of her life have a more foreboding presence: returning to geometric forms and palettes of gray and black in her late works, Martin seemed to acknowledge the impending end of her singular career.

About Agnes Martin

Born in the Canadian prairies, Agnes Martin (1912–2004) moved to the United States in 1931 and lived in Washington and Oregon until 1940. Martin studied at Western Washington State College, Bellingham, and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. She received her BS and MA from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, and taught at public schools in Washington, Delaware, and New Mexico during the late 1930s and the 1940s, at the University of New Mexico in the late 1940s, and at Eastern Oregon College, La Grande, in 1952–53.

Martin lived and taught periodically in New York in the 1940s and early 1950s. In 1957 she settled in Coenties Slip in Lower Manhattan, where her friends and neighbors included Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, and Jack Youngerman. In 1958, her first solo show took place at Section Eleven of the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, and her work was included in the 1966 exhibition *Systemic Painting* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Major traveling exhibitions of Martin's work have been organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Philadelphia (1973), Hayward Gallery in London (1977), Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1991), Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (1993), and Dia:Beacon in New York (2004). Her writings were published in 1992 in conjunction with her exhibition at Kunstmuseum Winterthur in Switzerland and again in 2005 by Hatje Cantz Publishers. Martin has been honored with, among other awards, the Skowhegan Medal of Painting and Sculpture (1987), Oskar Kokoschka Prize (1992), Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale (1997), National Medal of Arts from the Office of the President, and Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art (2005). Martin died in Taos, New Mexico, in 2004. Her visionary aesthetic continues to influence artists across many disciplines today.

Exhibition Catalogue

Agnes Martin is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, produced in both a hardcover and softcover (exclusively at LACMA) edition. The 272-page book includes over 162 illustrations and is edited by Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell, with text by Marion Ackermann, Rachel Barker, Jacquelynn Baas, Tiffany Bell, Christina Bryan Rosenberger, Briony Fer, Lena Fritsch, Anna Lovatt, Frances Morris, Maria Müller-Schareck, Richard Tobin, and Rosemarie Trockel. The Agnes Martin catalogue is available at the LACMA Store and [online](#).

Credit: Exhibition organized by Tate Modern in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

This exhibition is made possible by the Lenore S. and Bernard A. Greenberg Fund and is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Generous support is also provided by the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation.

All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by Kitzia and Richard Goodman, with generous annual funding from Janet Chann and Michael Irwin in memory of George Chann, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Emily and Teddy Greenspan, Jenna and Jason Grosfeld, Lenore and Richard Wayne, and The Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes nearly 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions:

(Left) Agnes Martin, *Untitled*, c. 1955, oil on canvas, 46 ½ x 66 ¼ inches, Private collection, © 2016 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo courtesy Pace Gallery

(Center, left) Agnes Martin, *Summer*, 1964, watercolor, ink, gouache on paper, 9 ¼ x 9 ¼ inches, Collection Patricia L Lewy Gidwitz, © 2016 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo courtesy Pace Gallery

(Center, right) Agnes Martin, *Untitled #4*, 1975, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 72 × 72 inches, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Milly and Arne Glimcher, in honor of Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, M.2015.241, © 2016 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo courtesy Pace Gallery

(Right) Agnes Martin, *Homage to Life*, 2003, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 60 × 60 inches, Leonard and Louise Riggio, © 2016 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo courtesy Pace Gallery

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