

Aspen Art Museum
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Educator Notes



Installation view: Agnes Martin, 2014. © 2014 Agnes Martin and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Tony Prikryl

Agnes Martin

November 26, 2014–March 8, 2015

About the artist

Agnes Martin (1912–2004) was born in Saskatchewan, Canada, and came to the United States when she was twenty years old. She lived and worked in New York City alongside many important Abstract-Expressionist and Minimalist painters before moving to Taos, New Mexico, where she spent more time focusing on her writing.

The exhibition at the Aspen Art Museum, spanning over forty years of her career, demonstrates her light, minimalist use of color, line, and shape. Her works explore truth, beauty, and knowledge, and have influenced generations of artists that followed her.



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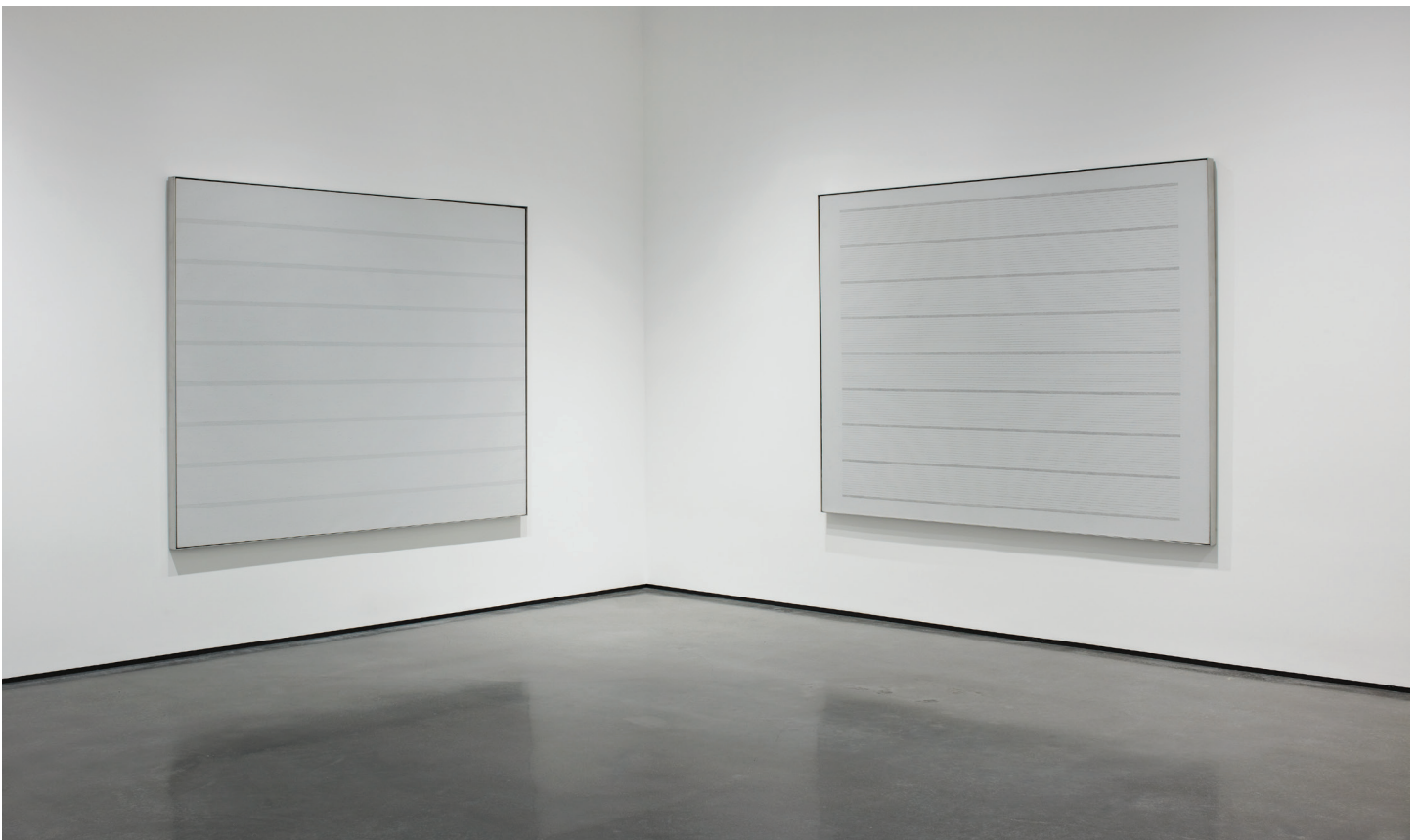
About the exhibition

Showcasing various aspects of an artistic practice that extended over four decades, Agnes Martin's Aspen Art Museum exhibition features a selected survey of artworks that span her career between 1960 and 2003. Subtle in composition, Martin's drawings and paintings use pale washes and delicate pencil marks to create patterns. Present in these drawings is the consistent use of hand-drawn horizontal and vertical lines and short, geometric shapes such as semicircles and rectangles. Constructed on a grid system, these graphite lines and uniform bands of color encourage what the artist called "meditations on innocence, beauty, happiness and love."

Martin considered her grid-based works as concrete representations of our most subtle emotional experiences. She drew from Taoist and Buddhist teachings on heightened perception and awareness. Her spiritual quest for something more alongside the visibility of the mark of

her own hand, distinguished her from her contemporaries.

In 1967, Martin left New York and moved to New Mexico, taking a seven-year break from painting to concentrate on her writing. When she returned to painting in 1974, she refined the meditative, geometric language that she had established a decade earlier. Through her vocabulary of simple planes and grids, Martin continued to pursue ideals of classical beauty and perfection, pushing beyond the mark of the individual. "My paintings have neither object, nor space, nor line, nor anything—nor forms. They are... about formlessness, breaking down form. You wouldn't think of form by the ocean." And like the ocean—a seemingly infinite body of subtle color, great power, and constant change—Martin's works remove us from our everyday, offering the possibility to transport us to a place of heightened awareness.



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Questions for discussion

- I Agnes Martin considered her artwork to be concerned with experiencing deeper feelings and abstract emotions. What happens to you when you look at her artworks?
- I For example, does your mind wander? Can you imagine sounds, smells, or textures? What does the artwork make you think about, if anything?
- I Many of these artworks are monochromatic, meaning the artist only used one color in the work. What else do you notice about how the artist used color to make these artworks?

Suggested activities

Take a Line for a Walk

- I Have students create continuous line drawings on similar sizes of white paper, using either pencil or pen.
- I See how many emotions can be expressed through these simple line drawings. Reading a story or playing various types of music while students draw might also stimulate emotions.
- I Have students pick a drawing that they are particularly proud of, and repeat this form in different media, such as pastel, paint, or even clay sculpture.

Untitled Watercolor

Most of the artworks in this exhibition are untitled. This gives us the freedom to contemplate the forms and colors for their own sake, and to make our own personal associations.

- I Invite students to create a watercolor painting without a title, focusing on geometric shapes and lines. What forms and colors will students explore if they are free from trying to depict a known subject?
- I Limit material use to paper, ink, pencil, and watercolor so that students focus their awareness on what they experience through these materials.
- I When finished, ask students whether they choose to title their painting or keep it untitled.

For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email education@aspenartmuseum.org.

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