

# The depth in agnes martin



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Simple, subdued, serene – will be the adventurous description of the various insights on the totality of what Agnes Martin shared with the world of art. Simple, subdued, serene – will also be the summarized description of what Agnes Martin’s many critics say of her work. And, simple, subdued, serene – will be the captive element of what the reviews said of the Agnes Martin documentary “ With My Back to the World”.

Treading from abstract expressionism to minimalism, all of Agnes Martin’s life, works and story – as captured in “ With My Back to the World; and, as per the perspective of its director, Mary Lance; and, as per all the insights, critiques, reviews and commentaries – are but a symphony of illustrations and expressions as to how the delightful artist treated, educated and revealed to the world the mystique of life.

Unanimously acknowledging the preferred solitude and reclusion of the great artist, they recognized Agnes Martin to have nevertheless proven the presence of soulfulness and intensity in her chosen art form, despite of living in silence.

The interesting fact though is that in the profundity of her silence vis-à-vis the silence of her profundity, Agnes Martin allowed Mary Lance to interview her and shoot the documentary film while Agnes Martin is working and right there in her New Mexico studio.

Together with the documentary “ With My Back to the World”; together with all her works; together with the designation of ARTnews Magazine in 2002 as one of the world’s top ten living artists – the lines and hues of Agnes Martin therefore became the canopy from where we view the spirit of Taosim that inspired her as she reveal her creativity and philosophy.

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**AGNES MARTIN – HER LIFE TO THE BEHOLDER:**

Born on March 22, 1912 in Makin, Saskatchewan, Canada – Agnes Martin nevertheless grew up in Vancouver, British Columbia. They were four siblings in the family, but her father died when she was only 2 years old. From then on, Agnes' mother steadfastly stood by her resolve to raise her brood by her self. Such aura of strength and independence etched in the mind of the growing Agnes.

In 1931 she moved to the United States and attended The Western Washington College of Education in Bellingham; the Teachers College of the Columbia University in New York and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She has earned her Bachelors degree in 1942 and her Masters Degree in 1952. She acquired her American citizenship in 1950.

She was an art teacher in University of New Mexico and other public schools in Washington and Delaware from 1947 to 1948 and in Eastern Oregon College in 1952 to 1953. With the paintings Agnes Martin accumulated, Betty Parsons Gallery offered to handle her work if she moves to New York City.

It was in 1958 that Agnes Martin was given her first solo exhibition in the said gallery. It was a period when abstract expressionism is at its height as an art form and likewise the seeming dawn of minimalism is soon going to be witnessed.

In the Coenties Slip in Lower Manhattan where she lived, Agnes Martin huddled with artists like Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Indiana, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Jack Youngerman.

Agnes Martin, took a break from painting from 1967 to 1974 as she ventured into filmmaking. It was in 1976 that she produced the film “ Gabriel”. The subject of the film is a boy who incessantly went to explore the world in his own quiet ways.

Thereafter she resumed her painting wherein her exhibitions were held various museums in the succeeding years, like - in the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Pace Gallery, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam;

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Harwood Museum of Art at the University of New Mexico. There are also other international art galleries that have invited and showcased the works of Agnes Martin.

Agnes Martin was inducted in 1989 as a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in New York. She received the Gold Lion Award at the Venice Biennale in 1997 for her lifetime achievement and contribution in contemporary art. The National Endowment for Arts granted in 1998 to Agnes Martin the National Medal of Arts.

In 1997, the highlight of her achievement was the establishment of the Agnes Martin Gallery in New Mexico, where her work is showcased. Otherwise, Sotheby and other auction houses do trade in great value the works of this great, enigmatic artist.

**AGNES MARTIN – HER WORKS TO THE CONNOISSEUR:**

Among buyers, users, collectors, critiques – all connoisseurs discern and judge in a balanced mix of subjectivity, relativity, objectivity and economics.

Value for value there is thin line in visual arts that does not only rest on what is seen – there must be something “beyond”.

The utter simplicity and directness of the creation of Agnes Martin, within the perfection of horizontal and vertical lines in her grids and as per the hues she applied with her own brand of discernment, have all been acknowledged as very expressive and moving.

“The Taos artist’s grids, some of them traced in lines of graphite, so faint they seem to be emerging from or disappearing into a mist..... Martin’s....[is] an art of invisibility. It’s tempting to ready a ‘beyond’ into them.....” (Lee, 1998)

You therefore view the work with great challenge and enthusiasm. You have to really get close to the painting. You dissect every pattern and color. You try to find the hints and clues. You feel mystified. You search for the meaning.

It is because Agnes Martin invites a “relationship” with the viewer of her art. She wants a direct and distinctive communication between her art and her viewer. Then, you will see the beauty, the finesse, the simplicity of just the perfect, varied lines. “..... what they give back in their simplicity and richness, is indescribably moving.” (Lee, 1998)

Agnes Martin’s painting convinces that there is a palpable person and a palpable thought that is put into the work. Subtly, there are little and misty wobbles and breaks in the hues and lines – they tease and try to see if you are paying attention to details.

The purpose of imperfection is to achieve perfection. It challenges perception of what is between and/or the difference between real and ideal.

Indeed her works produced in a p of 60 odd years is visionary and timeless. Despite the temperament of her artistic times that traversed between minimalism to abstract expressionism, Agnes Martin humbly demurs from being classified as a spearhead, neither the bridge between the two art forms.

The transition in the art form of Agnes Martin is akin to her transition in learning and knowing and realizing everything about her and her surroundings and the society she lived with.

Even in the eventual solitude she chose, Agnes Martin is still conscious of what being in a community of man is all about. Her earlier ventures were in still life and portrait painting. Therefore, she went along the tide of the prevailing abstract expressionism in the 1940's to the early 1950's.