

# Timothy Taylor Gallery

**Agnes Martin**  
**21 April – 21 May 2010**

Timothy Taylor Gallery is delighted to present an exhibition of works by Agnes Martin (1912-2004), one of America's foremost abstract painters. The exhibition features significant paintings and works on paper, and traces a singular career that spanned over five decades.

Although frequently labelled as a Minimalist and closely affiliated with artists such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre, Martin always described herself as an Abstract Expressionist. As a young artist in New York during the 1950s, the influences of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman proved particularly important to Martin. She similarly rejected recognisable forms, and strived to represent infinite space in a quest for the sublime.

Also proving vital to Martin's practice were the concepts of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, which she had studied while at Columbia University in the early 1940s. Her concern for conveying emotional content rather than ideas, and belief in the truth of unfettered inspiration over intellectualism set Martin apart from her contemporaries. The qualities of beauty and perfection evident in Martin's paintings bear testimony to the artist's spiritualism and disciplined approach to life.

*Drift of Summer*, 1964, the earliest drawing included in the exhibition, represents a breakthrough moment in Martin's development. It was while meditating on the notion of innocence that the grid motif first came to the artist. This pattern freed Martin from previous representational and centralising impulses, which she believed to be derived from the dominance of The Ego. Where the Minimalists used squares in their grids in their compositions Martin chose rectangles, preferring their comparatively relaxed, non-aggressive, human characteristics.

Famously claiming that she 'painted with her back to world', Martin refused to acknowledge the impact of any given environment upon her work. Nonetheless, the landscape of New Mexico is effectively conjured in the shimmering horizontal bands of ochres, pinks and myriad blues Martin began using following her move South in the 1970s.

Martin considered music to be the purest form of abstract art and in paintings such as *Desert Flower*, 1985 and *Untitled No.12*, 1997 the carefully repeated arrangements of various bands are themselves suggestive of musical phrasing and evoke a contemplative mood. Coupled with the ruled graphite lines that demarcate the different translucent washes of acrylic paint, Martins compositions frequently recall the staff lines of sheet music itself.

*Untitled*, 2001 consists of narrow bands of navy blue alternating with thicker bands of a paler sky- blue wash. Characteristic of her late period, the brushwork here is more free than ever before, and communicates what was for the artist a time of optimism, peace, and contentment.

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Agnes Martin was born in Maklin, Saskatchewan, Canada in 1912. She studied at Western Washington College of Education, Bellingham, WA, prior to receiving her B.S. in 1942 from Teachers College, Columbia University. Following graduation, Martin attended the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, where she also taught art courses, before returning to Columbia University to earn her M.A. in 1952.

Since her first solo exhibition in 1958, Martin has been the subject of over 80 exhibitions, including in recent years *Agnes Martin: The Nineties and Beyond*, The Menil Collection, Houston (2002); *Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings 1974-1990*, organised by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, with subsequent venues in France and Germany (1991-92); *Agnes Martin*, organised by Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, travelling to Milwaukee, Miami, Houston and Madrid (1992-94). In June 2002, The Harwood Museum of Art at the University of New Mexico, Taos, organised *Agnes Martin Paintings from 2001*, honouring Martin on the occasion of her 90th birthday. Previous group exhibitions include Documenta, Kassel, Germany (1972), the Venice Biennale (1976, 1980, 1997), and the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial (1977, 1995). Agnes Martin died in Taos, New Mexico in 2004.