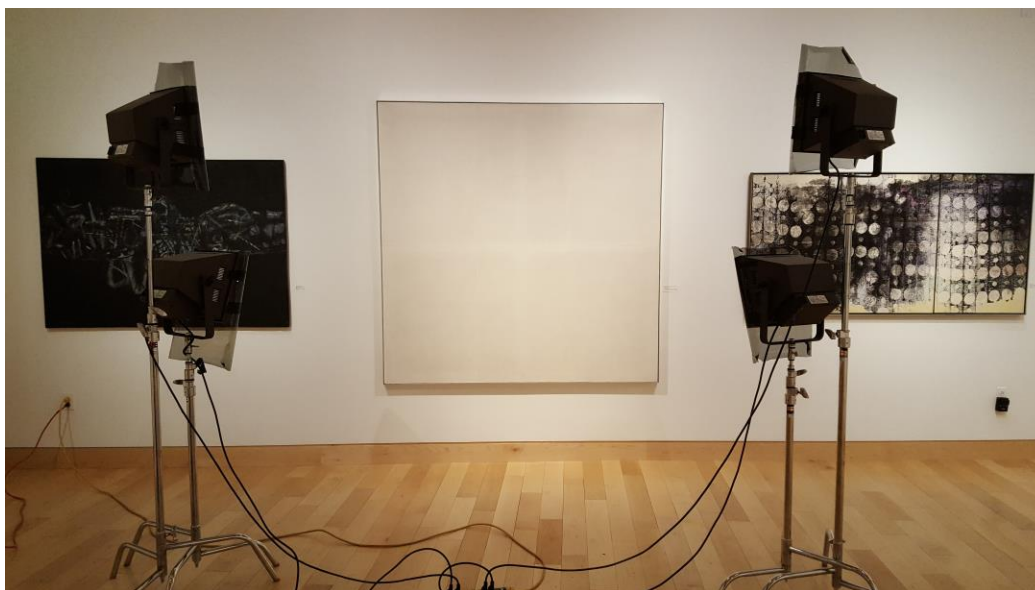


## *Tundra*, by Agnes Martin



The Harwood Museum of Art is pleased to announce that the Daniel W. Dietrich II Foundation has made a gift to the Museum of a major painting by Agnes Martin titled *Tundra* (72" x 72", acrylic and graphite on canvas, 1967) for accession into its permanent collection for permanent display. Conveyed through a grant to the University of New Mexico Foundation, Incorporated for the benefit of the Museum, *Tundra* was delivered to the Museum on April 26th. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Tundra*, the last painting done by Agnes Martin before she left New York in 1967 and returned to New Mexico. The late Daniel W. Dietrich II, of Chester County, Pennsylvania, was a philanthropist whose charitable donations reflected his lifelong involvement in the arts and longtime support of many cultural institutions, such as the University of Pennsylvania Institute of Contemporary Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A well-known collector of modern and contemporary art, Mr. Dietrich was a personal friend and early patron of Agnes Martin.

*Tundra* has a history with the Museum which dates back to the Museum's groundbreaking centennial exhibition in 2012, *Agnes Martin: Before the Grid*, organized by Museum curator Jina Brenneman, cocurator Tiffany Bell, and registrar Betsy Bowen. The *Before the Grid* catalogue features an essay by current Museum Director Dr. Richard Tobin titled "The Last Painting," which is a reference to both *Tundra*, the last painting Agnes Martin did at Coenties Slip before leaving New York in 1967, and to the *Black Painting* series by Ad Reinhardt, a mentor and friend of Agnes Martin. The essay features a

discussion which notes the striking congruence in means and effect between Reinhardt's black paintings and Martin's classic grid canvases of the Coenties Slip years, from ca. 1961 to 1967:

[Martin's] grid paintings..., especially from 1964 to 1967, ... argue for a far more complex, contested, uneasy peace when viewed against the accounts of her by colleagues at Coenties Slip from this period as well as against her own account in *The Untroubled Mind*, reflecting a personal and spiritual struggle that would come to a head in 1967 with her abandonment of her career and self-imposed exile within a week of Reinhardt's death. A case in point is *Tundra*, Martin's last painting before she left Coenties Slip and New York at that time. Its 'theme' and its visual impact, as described by Linville, would support the accounts of the artist's bouts with anguish. (*Agnes Martin: Before the Grid* Catalogue, pp.32-33)

*Tundra's* import as a testament to Martin's self-described "outer darkness" during this period was confirmed by Dr. Tobin's research of Martin's correspondence with collector and friend Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr., located in the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, likely written in 1968 during her travels while "staying unsettled." Among the correspondence available, Dr. Tobin discovered a handwritten note that referred to her last painting:

"Dear Sam: So you now have *Tundra* and *The Lake*. I am very glad. I think my paintings will be around quite a while as I perceive now that they were all conceived in purest melancholy." (Agnes Martin, Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr. correspondence, c. 1968-1973).

Efforts to locate *Tundra* in the months following the exhibition proved fruitless. Now, five years after *Agnes Martin: Before the Grid*, the search for *Tundra* has ended with the Foundation's gift which was accompanied by a note that Mr. Dietrich was believed to have acquired *Tundra* in or around 1973 from Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr.

The Museum is enormously enriched by accepting *Tundra* into its permanent collection. This major work by Agnes Martin assures the Museum's place as a premier art destination. Viewers will experience firsthand the effects described so movingly by Kasha Linville in 1971:

"[*Tundra's*] surface is divided by three lines into six tall rectangles...the surface is closed. It suggests the heavy, white-laden blankness of a snow sky. The lines that divide it are dominant at close range, but something very peculiar happens as you move back.... Because the horizontally brushed grayish wash on the surface stops near but not [flush] against the lines, they seem to have halos around them. These halos actually swallow the lines at middle distance, leaving only their white ghosts. Even the ghosts disappear eventually. (*Artforum* 9, June 1971).

*Tundra* will complement the series of Agnes Martin's seven acrylic paintings from 1992-1993 donated to the Museum by the artist in 1995 and now on permanent display in the octagonal Agnes Martin Gallery built in 1997 to house them and whose design evokes the Mark Rothko Chapel in Houston.

*Tundra* now becomes a poignant testament to the peace that Agnes Martin found with her return after 1967 to northern New Mexico and eventually back to Taos, a fragile peace in which she "untroubled her mind at last and attained the imperfect grace of redemption."

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