

IN PRAISE OF DARKNESS

I WAS SOAKED IN DARKNESS IN THE LANDSCAPES/SEASCAPES OF USA, AND I AM STILL TOUCHED BY ITS WARM SHADOW.

To spend a year with our legacy of Agnes Martin I moved to New Mexico as a resident of Forde Visser Archive Southwest, then I moved back to Tokyo just before the pandemic.

MOVING THROUGH DARKNESS

My familiarity with Linda (a.k.a. Forde) and Agnes began to grow when I noticed common elements among each of our families and artworks: trajectories of 'moving' across sheets of paper, canvas, continents, islands, oceans and generations over modernization, colonization, wars, globalization and 'oceanization'. I observe: a line is drawn as motion of space-time is concentrated, in the midst of 'moving' its motion cannot be identified with a fixed point, and what it provokes in me is rather e-motional. To be in motion can mean to remain untranslatable: free. Martin's resistance to 'being given fixed identity'—whether it is about her gender or art—is not only evident in her words and artworks but also in her love of driving, sailing and climbing. I really felt so, by tracing her paths in US where I moved through darkness of a night—its beauty was wordless and unforgettable.

I, whose mother tongue is Japanese, always remain external/foreign, to some degree, to the globalized art and academic world. I often think of the idea of 'external', expressed as *hoka* in Japanese, which originally indicates spirit/god/unknown information that drifts and temporarily transfers into *hoka-hi* (an empty container) or *hokahi-bito* (someone who is socially marginal, such as a bard or an orphan)*. Importantly this temporal embodiment is considered a birth of art in the ancient Japan. And, *hoka*, also meaning 'foreign' today, includes a body like mine in these objects (*hoka-hi*, *hokahi-bito*). Joining Linda in 'dead man's float' last November in Venice presented me an image of a floating empty boat, like *hoka-hi*, which resonates with a survival mode discussed by the architect, Arata Isozaki**: not to ride on the waves of the globalization but float in-between the waves. Closing my eyes, putting my face in the water—the ocean was, then, dark—, I was held between being panicked and calm, as if being in mid-creativity, where I struggle to articulate something non-articulative or translatable. But there was also a luminous sense, like the possibility of transforming it into a poetic expression, through which 'I' is emptied and let go with the current, as though being metamorphosed.

Can our motivation of 'moving' not be capitalistic, touristic, nationalistic but... sympathetic? What we share in this time is a grief... because of our love for someone. It could be just a prayer to picture that love is universal, abstract emotion (as Agnes did) yet..., May it pervade the world! Love shall be 'motion' expressed to move life forward: e-motion that enable us to remain alive. In her *Untitled (LOVE)* at the Harwood, the series of various shades of blue and the successive lines of concentrated motion together draw an opening path, which is not for any transaction but purely directional, pointing to the open air. Like the Great North Road in Chaco Canyon—its night was the darkest, as I was told—, which had no use except indicating where they/we are from. *Religion of Love*, Agnes' statement written in her late years, begins: "In the beginning, there was only love and it filled the world. That's how it was in the beginning".***

*Trans. the author, Seigo Matsuoka, "Ma= shu to kyaku no kouzou [Ma=the structure of object and subject]," in *Ma - 20 years on*, Tokyo; Tokyo University of Arts, 2000
**ISOZAKI Arata: SOLARIS, Talk session: "Computer-Aided City," 2014 January 25, Inter Communication Center, Tokyo
***Agnes Martin & Richard Tuttle (Illustration), *Religion of Love*, Köln; Slp edition, Walther König, 2016

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IMAGE at right: *Night Sight #5*, 2019
Arroyo Seco, NM

PG. 1

MOVING: As we are now discouraged to 'move', there has been a shared concern with people becoming withering and closed.

PG. 2

TOUCHING : While 'touch' is regulated clinically, I think of Linda's saying "Drawing is Touch", which simultaneously associates with an intimate 'touch' of my grandmother.

GROWING: It has been, in a sense, a rescue process to spend time with my grandmother, Agnes and Linda, as more nuanced understandings of darkness and love have grown in me.



my copy of *Untitled (Love)* by Agnes Martin (acrylic on linen, 60"×60", 1993-1994), pencil, color pencil, pastel on paper, 2020



Gesture of Shadows, video still, 2016

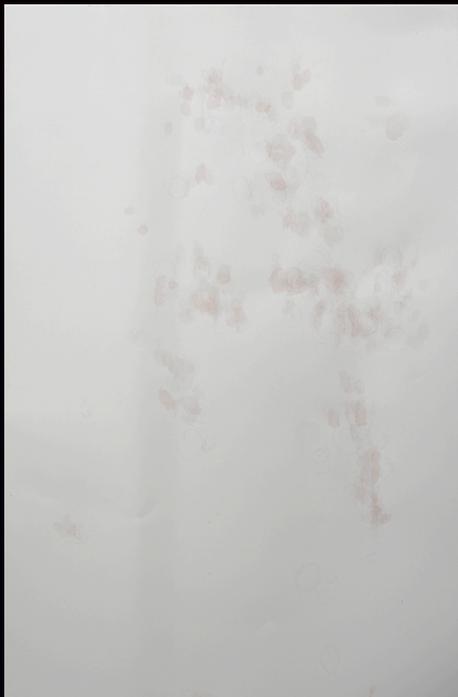
TOUCHING IN DARKNESS

On the day before my grandmother passed away in 2018, her hand subtly held back mine. We were alone together in a nursing home, with our hands under the blanket and her eyes closed, so this 'touch' was memorized warmly in darkness. I was to depart overseas next day. I sensed her going, so I wanted *to spend time with* her. Her last touch was as though her letting me go on my path, Australia, then to US (where her father worked for the Pan Pacific Expo 1915 before his untimely death). Later I realized that the date of her death is the Agnes's birthday and they were also of the same generation.

In Santa Fe, I felt Agnes' 'touch' a few times, softly guiding my path. I had so many 'coincidental' encounters with events, objects and people, through which I felt her closer and closer. Towards the end of my stay in NM, the artist who knew her told me, "You have met Aggie, haven't you?". I nodded in agreement with her *touching* me, which made me ask, why did she? What does she like me to tell?... perhaps not mine but our story, our legacy. Dark and Love are both beautiful and challenging; the two biggest emotions that touched and moved me in USA. They encourage me to cultivate a *poetic* place, which resists being swallowed up by the mere economical exchanges of meanings or means, instead filled with fertile silence and nuanced shadows, from which art engenders.

"Space is essentially darkness... absolute blackness is the background essential to the manifestation of all phenomena".* In the reflection of Junichiro Tanizaki's classic essay, *In praise of shadows*, Isozaki observes 'light flashes' in what Tanizaki designates as 'darkness' in the Japanese traditional architecture (brightened in the process of modernization; westernization that bleaches everything white). These flashes could be "fantastic extremes"*** that Agnes anticipated in the dark, leaving us with 'shadows', not as the projected but "everything left over when light cuts through darkness".* The recent tragedy has drawn my attention to black painting (*Abstract painting*) by Ad Reinhardt (Agnes' mentor/friend in her NY years, not to mention): how subtle tints of other colors enrich darkness and give depth—space. Tanizaki, when he writes his fascination to colored skins, similarly articulates their depth being given by tints of colors such as yellow (to which I consider black included).

GROWING IN DARKNESS



Before the dawn, watercolor, color pencil, pencil, pastel on paper, 41x26 inch, 2019

Linda expresses in the video interview***, "One of the things I think of as rescue or knowing something is about time, about spending time, with something". And this drawing seems to embody my time spent with darkness by moving, touching and 'growing'. *Before the Dawn*, I drew luminous shadow-light in darkness of the night, whose light source travelled from the distant street and through the plum tree at the back porch of FVA Southwest, reaching the studio wall. Its ephemeral trajectory took my breath away. And I wanted to draw this moving shadow-light in darkness with the night breeze, as though touching someone whom I love.

The orchard in FVA is another element that nurtures my familiarity with Linda and Agnes. The house where I grew up in Tokyo had an old apricot tree which signaled seasonal changes and bridged generational interactions for our family. Agnes wished her ashes to be buried under the apricot tree at the Harwood. And some of Linda's mother's ashes are, too, put under the apple tree just outside the front window of FVA. One of our neighbors (they all appreciate the orchard!) kept the seeds out of the fruits for my farewell present. She told me to place them first in a dark and cool place, like the soil underground. Seemingly boring objects soon metamorphosed to be roots then sprouts. 'Darkness is the foundation of all phenomena', which is neither metaphorical nor conceptual, I realized. It is true of our life that starts to grow in darkness.

I observe the strong sense of division and exclusion in the human world today, 'contributed' by those subjects who are so doubtful and fearful of changes: transformation of the world and metamorphosis of themselves. It does require our patience to spend time with something that may recall our traumatic past, but when the moment comes, like a sprout coming out, it shall gift us with surprise, beauty, wonder and joy. While we wait for it, we can also cultivate sensitivities that will engender 'boredom'—a neutral space or empty space that allows for things to enter—without doubt and fear.

Now, my 'mundane' dream is growing, to make my home somewhere open so these saplings can grow and fruit. I will wait for that to happen, patiently and lovingly—with deep gratitude for everyone's support and inspiration to my life in New Mexico, US.



*Arata Isozaki, "Yami no Kukan [Space of Darkness: spiritual structure of illusion]," trans. Hiroshi Watanabe, *Arata Isozaki*, eds. Ken Tadashi Oshima and Arata Isozaki, London: Phaidon, 2008 ** Agnes Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life," *Writings / Schriften*, ed. Dieter Schwarz, Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje-Cantz Verlag, 1992 ***as part of *Seat of Learning* exhibition by Jane Lackey and Thomas Lehn, 2020, UCCS Galleries of Contemporary Art (<https://vimeo.com/398393756/9cf2e24679>)