

SUBTLE SHADES DRAW AN OPENING PATH: THE POETIC WORK OF AGNES MARTIN'S ART

BY UTAKO SHINDO

[Script: To be read as Public lecture at St. Francis Auditorium, New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, on February 5, 2020.]

Utako Shindo Ph.D. is a Tokyo Artist, whose studio and research pursuits are the untranslatability of art and nuanced shadow-light as poetic medium. Her year-long project based in New Mexico traced Martin's artistic path – scholarly and experientially. She is seeking a deeper understanding of how Martin's abstractions embody ineffable life and express universal emotions. In turn, Shindo's own art now reflects her understanding of Martin's path. She was a Japanese government creative fellow and a resident at Forde Visser Archive Southwest, Santa Fe in 2019.



Study work on paper in studio (detail), Utako Shindo, 2019

1) The Untranslatable

As an artist and an audience member, I notice something in an artwork that resists translation into everyday (prosaic) language. I experience it as a shift, oscillation, drift or movement between the sensible (sensation) and the intelligible (cognition). It is like nuanced shadow-light or light-shadow that draws our attention without giving us a clue of who it is/where it is from. My attention is held by this 'in-between' spatiality. Then, for a brief moment, it touches me lovingly and truthfully.

I call it 'the untranslatable', as I am inspired by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida's discussion on the Greek concept of *khora* and the Japanese concept of *ma* (間) . *Khora* and *ma* commonly indicate negative (in-between) spatiality, such as the void, blank, interval, gap and so forth, which Derrida recognises to be both untranslatable and a place for translation, transference and movement in both a semantic and material sense¹.

To be touched by the untranslatable, lovingly and truthfully, has a significant impact on me, as it transforms how I experience and reflect on the world. And it can possibly metamorphose who I am.

It is the ineffable life that transfers from one body to another. It is the source of our life: the life force. It is the transcendental in the Western metaphysics, and the external in the Eastern thoughts. It is expressed as 'motion', coming externally from outside our realm of the intelligible or the sensible. It is, hence, highly abstract, yet, this 'e-motion' can be remembered universally as we perceive beauty.

In other words, it is that which makes us 'respond to an artwork'² as Agnes Martin would say.

In her writing, 'The Still and Silent in Art', she expresses:

My interest is in experience that is wordless and silent, and in the fact that this experience can be expressed for me in art work which is also wordless and silent. It is really wonderful to contemplate the experience and the works. I am sure there will always be some who make this response who will want to try to express it graphically. But with regard to the inner life of each of us it may be of great significance. If we can perceive ourselves in the work- not the work but ourselves when viewing the work then the work is important. If we can *know our response*, see in ourselves *what we have received* from a work, that is the way to the understanding of truth and all beauty³.

'Beauty', according to Agnes, "illustrates happiness"⁴. Among all sorts of happinesses, I understand this 'happiness' as that of being touched by love, which brings us to this world and keeps us alive. 'Beauty is the Mystery of Life', was the title of the talk that Agnes gave to 'her New Mexican neighbor' at this St. Francis auditorium in 1989. It began with her saying:

When I think of art, I think of beauty. Beauty is the Mystery of Life. It's not in the eye but it is in the mind. In our mind there is an awareness of perfection. We respond to beauty with emotions. Beauty speaks a message to us...⁵

¹ "Discussion A-1", *Anyone*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson,, (New York: Rizzoli International Publishing 1991), 90.

² Agnes Martin, "We perceive. We see...", *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, ed. Arne Glimcher, London: Phaidon, 2012, 144.

³ Writings/Agnes Martin = Schriften/Agnes Martin, ed. Dieter Schwarz, Winterthur : Kunstmuseum Winterthur/Edition Cantz, 1992, 89.

⁴ Agnes Martin, "Beauty is the Mystery of Life," *Agnes Martin*, eds. Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell, London: Tate publishing, 2015, 159.

⁵ Agnes Martin, *Beauty is the Mystery of Life*, Public lecture on April 14, 1989, (Santa Fe: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), Cassette.

This awareness of perfection, or 'ideal' in the Greek philosophical sense: the transcendental, resonates with my perception of the untranslatable (or ineffable) that touches me lovingly and truthfully. And that could be, then the message of Beauty: truth and love.

2_1) Beauty_ Light

I, then, ask, how can her artwork embody this untranslatable: the ineffable life? (That which we remember through 'beauty' as an expression of happiness of our being loved in this world.) In asking so, my long term pursuit of the untranslatable has been furthered by this my one-year fellowship project in New Mexico.

Khora is the Platonic, and *Ma* (間) is the Zen concept for space and time: *Khora* is where-when order is made of chaos, *ma* is where-when form/image/sound is born out of void. In this 'untranslatable' space-time, the very transference takes place (occurs), from 'the negative' to 'the positive'.

As well known, Agnes Martin was highly informed by these two streams of thought: the 'classics' of the West and the East. And it is evident in her works: in the negative space/time the positive is immanent, and the movement draws form/image/sound from formlessness/nothingness/silence. They are reminiscent of *Khora* or *Ma* space-time.

Artistically, these qualities lie in the subtlety of shade and light as in *Noh-tan* (濃淡), and in the line where motion of three dimensional space is concentrated/frozen [Figure 1]. (Each is a classic technique or aesthetic system of the Eastern and the Western art). And together they can be experienced as 'waves' (or human wavering) that embrace the (negative) space/time between their own waves [Figure 2]. As though in the breaks of imperfect nature (wave can be that of ocean, river, light, heat, wind or sound) the perfection is exposed in an instant.

The work, *The Tree*, is understood as the very first work of hers that presents her established 'grid' language

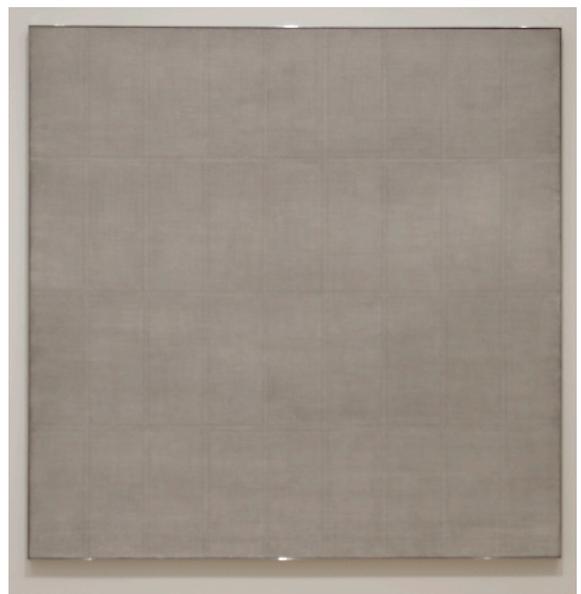


Fig. 1-2. Agnes Martin, *Untitled #5*, 1977, ink, graphite and gesso on canvas, 72x72inch, SFMOMA, San Francisco, Photo by the author, 2019

[Figure 3-4]. According to her fellow artist Richard Tuttle, Agnes invented this as a new 'language', since it, for the first time in the history of art, expresses 'LIGHT' through the grid.

His articulation enabled me to see this image of the grid, resonating with the image of the 'sieve', used by the Greek *Demiourgos* (Demiurge), the architect and creator, who gives order to the chaos of *khora*. And does so with the image of *Ma* (間), written hieroglyphically in Chinese

character: 間, the sunlight coming through the gate which is built with both vertical and horizontal lines.

In relation to the image of the 'sieve' used to give order to the chaos, fascinatingly, the Art Historian, Suzanne Hudson recognizes 'square' that Martin employs as "a classical device of ideal proportion"⁶. Furthermore, she points out that it is generational to employ such a device, as that had been discussed by the writer Lucy Lippard on Jo Baer and Robert:

...The square cannot be exaggerated; it remains stationary, enduring, unalterable, and provides a universal standard that is as attractive in its precision and neutrality to the space age as it was to early philosophers and theologians. The square and the cube still offers the perfect vehicle by which to impose order on chaos, the ideal form to express both multiplicity and unity.⁷

And the image of the external (sunlight) coming into the empty space framed, resonates with Martin's description, "...I wait for the inspiration. The painting comes into my mind... You have to wait if you're going to be inspired. You have to clear out your mind, to have a quiet and empty mind"⁸.

Hudson recognizes such Martin's saying again as generational, as evident in her reference to "(O)thers in her circle in NY" who "lent heavily on intuition, including her close friend Lenore Tawny". While Tawny was knowledgeable in world religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism, Hudson observes

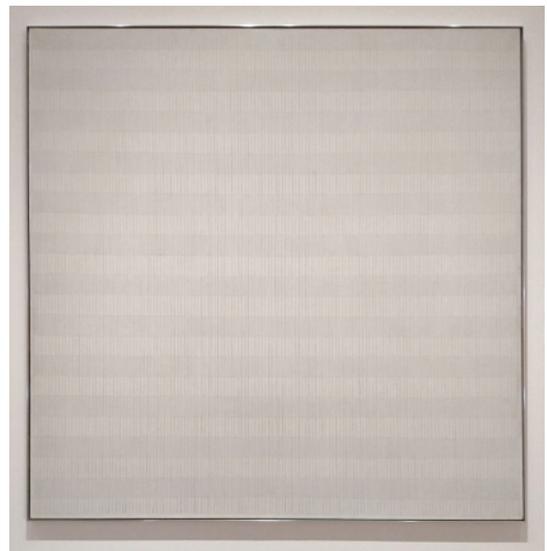
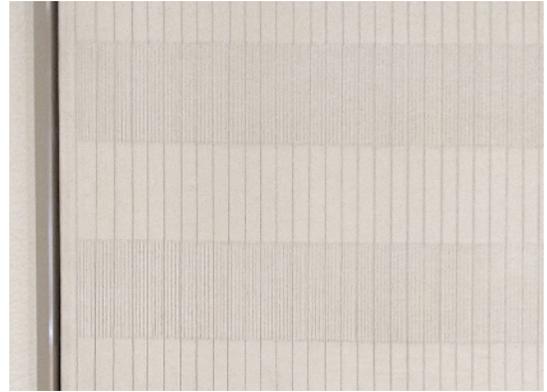


Fig. 3-4. Agnes Martin, *The Tree*, 1964, oil and pencil on canvas, 60 x 60 inch, MOMA, New York, Photo by the author, 2019

⁶ Suzanne Hudson, *Agnes Martin: Night Sea*, London: Afterall Books, 2017, 44.

⁷ Quoted in Hudson, *Agnes Martin: Night Sea* (Lucy Lippard, 'Homage to the Square', *Art in America*, vol.55, no.4 July-August 1967, 50.)

⁸ Quoted in Holland Cotter, 'Agnes Martin', *Art Journal*, vol.57, no.3, 1998, 77. Collage of Art Association

that "Martin posed an understanding of herself as transitive; she was a sort of conduit, receiving directions for creation from afar"⁹.

It is the negative space-time between the lines that structures the ineffable (chaos) or enables the external (light) to come through and into it. Why do I find it beautiful, her work, expressing the light in this manner? To me, the beauty of her 'Light' is felt because of the lingering darkness into/from which it travels.

2_2) Beauty_ Darkness

Art historically, the work, *Night Sea*, is considered 'her last processed work' or the last work before the grid, since her struggles are still visible [Figure 5], according to Suzanne Hudson, who dedicated a book on this work, 'Night Sea'. She observes that the work is "far from her aspirational logic of her professed 'classicism' - a perfection that is, of course, unattainable"¹⁰.

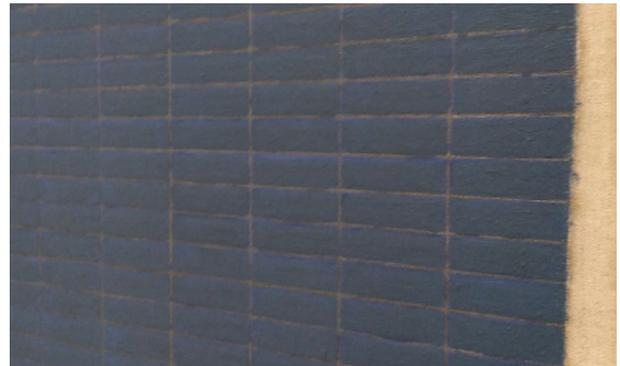


Fig. 5. Agnes Martin, *Night Sea (detail)*, 1963, oil, crayon and gold leaf on linen, 72 x 72inch, SFMOMA, San Francisco, Photo by the author, 2019

Metaphorically the work speaks of the Night Sea Journey, "the dark night of the soul"¹¹ [Figure 6]. Hudson counts 'dark' as one of the 'abstract emotions' Martin offers, which Martin elaborates on in her writing:

As in the night. To penetrate the night is one thing. But to be penetrated by the night. That is to be overtaken. Defeated, exhausted, and helpless you will perhaps go a little bit further... Moments of helplessness are moments of blindness...The panic of complete helplessness drives us to fantastic extremes.¹²

This was written for artists and students on an approach to the challenges in studio work, which includes "pitfalls in our paths"; "tremendous delays and wandering off tracks". She considered them not as false but "next" steps. In her view, a way/path of artists' expressing her/himself is "inevitable"¹³, and furthermore it can guide her/him 'to fantastic extremes'.

⁹ Hudson, *Agnes Martin: Night Sea*, 44.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹¹ Ibid., 77.

¹² Agnes Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life", *Writings / Schriften*, ed. Dieter Schwarz, Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje-Cantz Verlag, 1992

¹³ Ibid.

Here, Martin intuits the inevitability of Darkness, whether it is the actual experience or the metaphorical condition. Speaking of 'Darkness', I understand it not as oppositional to 'Light', nor secondary to it, unlike the Platonic conception of shadow, still dominant today, which positions shadow (as well as art and poetry) against light, truth and knowledge. My understanding is underpinned by other voices that maintain Darkness as the foundation of all phenomena that includes the light we perceive.

The contemporary Italian philosopher, Roberto Casati, in seeking a concept of shadow that differs from the Platonic shadow, expresses, "I have learnt light can become shadow and shadow light"¹⁴. This 'shadow light' is both a visual and *spatial* concept, underpinned by his recognition of shadows as "(dark) areas" where "space comes into it subtly"¹⁵.

Similarly, (the Japanese architect) Arata Isozaki claims that "space is essentially darkness" and "[A]bsolute blackness is the background essential to the manifestation of all phenomena"¹⁶. In the reflection of Junichiro Tanizaki's classic essay, *In praise of shadows*, young Isozaki observes 'light flashes' in what Tanizaki designates as 'darkness' in the Japanese traditional architecture. It might be these flashes that Agnes experienced as 'fantastic extremes', leaving us with 'shadows', not as the projected but "everything left over when light cuts through darkness"¹⁷.

The artist Richard Tuttle defines a shadow as "between dark and light; we speak of a shade of a color". His definition is intended to break the canon of drawing shadow, which is trapped in being (reduced to) "only a question of light and dark" as demonstrated in cross-hatching¹⁸.

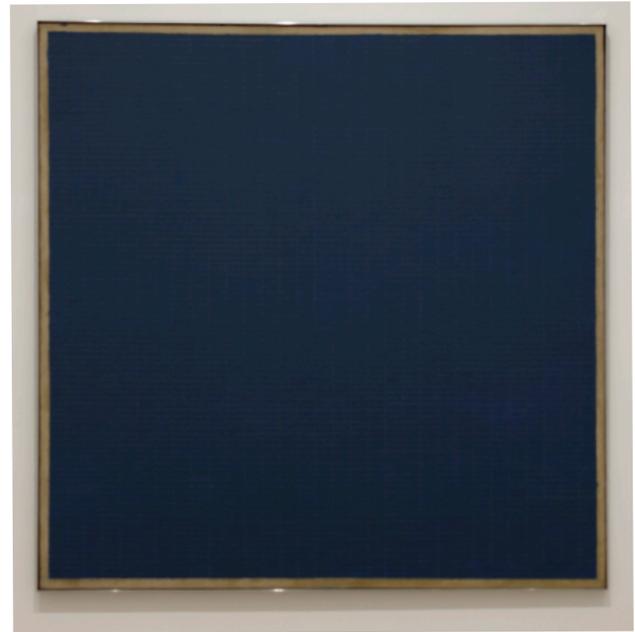


Fig. 6. Agnes Martin, *Night Sea*, 1963, oil, crayon and gold leaf on linen, 72 x 72inch, SFMOMA, San Francisco, Photo by the author, 2019

2-3) Beauty_ Shadow-light / Noh-Tan / Shade-Light

¹⁴ Roberto Casati, "Shadow Tales of Knowledge and Power", *Shadow Play*, ed. Kunsthallen Brands Klaedefabrik (Denmark: Kunsthallen Brands Klaedefabrik, 2005), 47.

¹⁵ Roberto Casali, *Shadows* (the original Italian edition is entitled, *The Shadow Clubs*), N.Y.: Vintage Books, 2004, 205

¹⁶ Isozaki, "Yami no Kukan [Space of Darkness: spiritual structure of illusion]," 153.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Richard Tuttle, "Manifesto", *Drawing Papers* 49, NY: The Drawing Center, 2004

The series of my drawing, entitled, *Daybreak*, attempts to capture how the first light in the morning coming through the trees, leaves the shadows that shine and shift across the architectural surfaces of my studio/residence in Santa Fe. 'A shade of color' is 'black', confined by shading strokes of pigmented charcoal [Figure 7 -8].

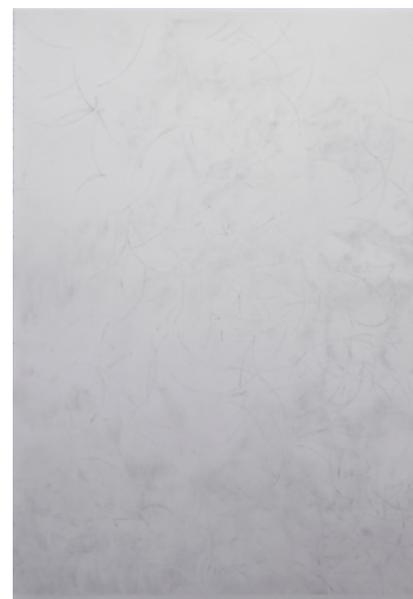
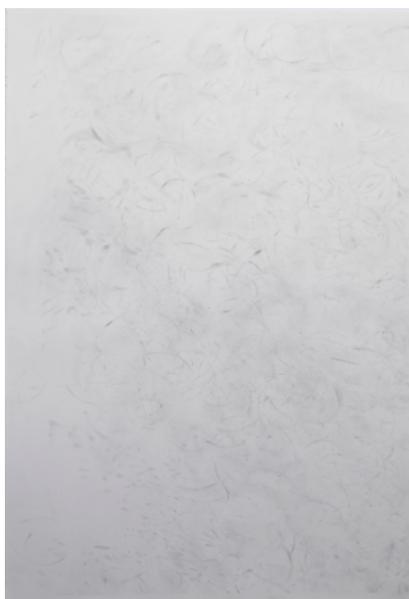


Fig. 7-8. Utako Shindo, *Daybreak#2-3*, 2020, pigmented charcoal on paper, 44 x 30inch

These works also presented itself to my eyes as abstraction, expressing something greater than its obvious reference: nature.

In fact, I have come to learn that Mondrian's early abstract compositions [Figure 9] were explored through his close studies of trees as well as seascapes, and also that Agnes was most likely aware of his studies. The art historian, Richard Tobbin, points out, Agnes was most likely informed by her close friendship with her NY Counties Slip neighbor Elsworth Kelly whose "path to pure abstraction"¹⁹ was highly influenced by Mondrian's early grid paintings. In referring to Robert Hughes, Tobbin elaborates on Mondrian's both spiritual and 'Theosophical' motivation to "reveal spiritual continuity throughout nature", and on his achievement to unite "solid and void, positive and negative and horizontal and vertical"²⁰, which was distilled from many hours of walking and gazing on the coast.

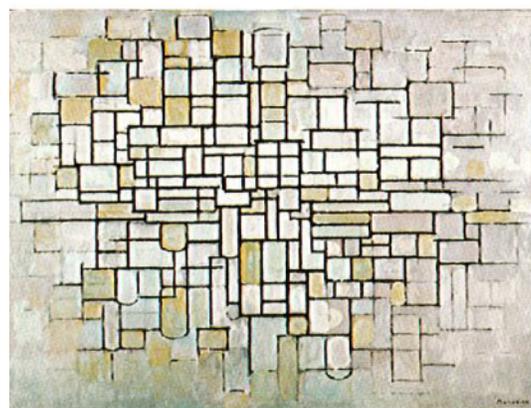


Fig. 9. Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. II*, 1913, oil on canvas, 88 x 115cm

His discussion suggests the commonality between Mondrian and Agnes: not only their abstract compositions but in their walking. The walking (as well as driving) were Agnes' ways to 'rest' from actual making, but also to deepen her thinking about painting. It is most evident in her film *Gabriel*, which captures the perspectives of a boy, who walks and gazes at the ocean and the mountain. It repeatedly shows 'linear motifs' such as the branches of the trees, the contours of the mountains and the horizontal lines, and 'shifting lights and shadows' such as the dappled sunlight, the sunny and the shady hillsides and glittering water, appearing around these linear motifs.

¹⁹ Richard Tobin, "Agnes Martin: Before the Grid," *Agnes Martin: Before the Grid*, Taos: The Harwood Museum of Art of the University of New Mexico, 2012, 17.

²⁰ Quoted in Tobin, "Agnes Martin: Before the Grid" (Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, New York, 1981, 203)



Figure 10-12. Photo by the author, 2019

Outside of my studio, I have also spent many hours of walking along Santa Fe River trail [Figure 10], driving through the endless roads of the Southwest [Figure 11] and the desert West, and wandering on the beach in California where Agnes shot her footage for *Gabriel* [Figure 12].

What was I was gazing on then? Perhaps the Abstract space felt not with but through Nature.

In her discussion of Agnes Pelton—who precedes Martin in a broad sense as an artist working on abstraction in the desert regions (differently through underscored by Theosophical belief) [Figure 13], the art historian Sharyn Udall articulates, “The unfenced expanses of the West invited contemplation of a nearly infinite space in which the mind and eyes wander endlessly”²¹. By seeing the land whose shape/ form is defined by the sky (usually it is opposite in Tokyo where the land shapes the sky), I was allowed to be immersed in equilibrium, or what the heart sutra teaches us, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form”²².



Fig. 13. Agnes Pelton, *Departure* (detail), 1952, oil on canvas, photo taken by the author during the Agnes Pelton exhibition at New Mexico Museum of Art, November, 2019

This space of the near infinite is fertile. To me, it is filled with nuanced shadows, in other words, subtle Shades and Light: *Nohtan* (濃淡). Therefore it makes sense that this Japanese principal of *Nohtan*, which is the base of Arthur Dow’s teaching of abstraction, shaped the foundation of Pelton's as well as O’Keeffe’s artistic languages [Figure 14].



Fig.14. O’Keeffe’s sketchbooks on display, dating from 1901-1918, photo by the author, Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, March 2019

And I speculate that Martin (in thinking her passionate letters to O’Keeffe²³) was aware of the effectiveness of *Nohtan* in her predecessors’ works produced in this particular part of the US

²¹ Sharyn R. Udall, "Releasing the Imagination's Natural and Mystical Impulses," *Illumination: The Paintings of Georgia O'keeffe, Agnes Pelton, Agnes Martin and Florence Pierce*, London - New York: Merrell Pub Ltd, 2009, 60.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation Correspondence Photocopies, File (Box) number:12, Martin, Agnes 1950-1953

[Figure 15-16].

I respond to the subtle Nohtan felt in the air of the Northern New Mexico, as what is reminiscent of the rich shades of blue in the water [Figure 17]. In fact it was an inland sea billions of years ago. And there are 'waves of mountains' that the locals adore. Especially walking into the liquid light hours at dusk, it feels like being under the water. I have found these hours (of floating) overwhelmingly beautiful [Figure 18].

Though I have absolutely steeped myself in the grand nature here in this way, I am aware that Martin actively refuted claims that her paintings referred to nature. And as I discussed earlier on, I respect this understanding that her paintings, after the grid, are "not landscapes at all but rather aesthetic systems", according to Hudson. For Martin, nature was rather "a way to register the triggers for an occasion of awareness that perfection might exist"²⁴. As Martin confessed, "(M)y response to nature is really a response to beauty... We may be looking at the ocean when we are aware of beauty but it is not the ocean"²⁵.



Fig. 15-16. Agnes Martin, *Untitled #6 (detail)*, 1980, acrylic, graphite and gesso on canvas, 72 x 72inch, New Mexico Museum of Art Collection, Photo by the author, July 2019

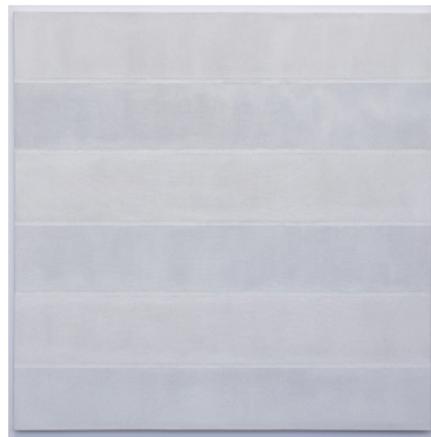


Fig. 17-18. Utako Shindo, *Untitled (Dawn)*, 2019, natural pigment gesso on canvas, 32 x 32inch

2-4) Beauty_ in-between the waves

When I took 'the inevitable path (pitfall)' in my studio work, I surrendered myself to the darkness of the forest in Taos. At two am I found myself utterly sinking in the perfect beauty, 'fantastic extremes', of the deep shadows as the flashes of star and moonlight cut through 'dark' forest, stream and emotion [Figure 19-21]. As a matter of fact, the night is when the earth is in its own shade. And it is

²⁴ Hudson, *Agnes Martin: Night Sea*, 43.

²⁵ Agnes Martin "The current of the river of life moves us", *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, 164

the time when we are reminded of where we originated: the source of our life; perhaps the perfect love of the motherhood.



Fig. 19-21. Utako Shindo, Night Sight # 1-3 (work in progress), digital image, 2019

I was simply shocked by the fact that we are blind under the sunlight to this intense beauty. And even at night, most of my life, which has been in the suburban setting, has missed it.

After coming back to my studio/residence (Forde Visser Archive, Southwest) [Figure 22-23], I learnt that the building was designed to bring (waves of) 'atmosphere' (light and heat hence darkness and coldness) into its interior. So I guided myself to dwell in the kind of darkness in which Tanizaki and Isozaki found beauty.



(And, with water color, pencil and white sheets of paper, I tried to capture the subtle light in the darkness; the street light coming through the trees and the window, appearing on the studio wall very subtly [Figure 24].)

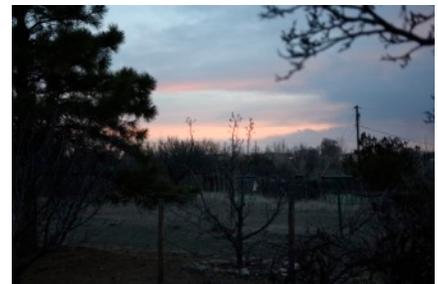


Fig. 22-23. Linda Swanson's Forde Visser Archive Southwest (exterior and outdoor views) , Photo by the author, March 2019

Noticing this beauty getting lost in the process of modernization, Tanizaki was motivated to write 'In Praise of Shadows', so that he could advocate Pre-modern Japanese aesthetics. It values shadow more than the actual objects or structures of architecture, where the shadow is oriented towards beauty and people are expected to differentiate subtle degrees of shades in order to "complete" the beauty. (Each room has a slightly different colored wall in these architecture.)

His voice is certainly not far from a stream of Eastern thought known as Zen Articulation. The Japanese philosopher Izutsu Toshihiko, describes that Zen Articulation comes as a flash that emerges from the depth of, what he calls, *ba*/field, which is filled by 'fertile silence', which I would like to paraphrase as 'nuanced shadow-light'.



Fig. 24. Utako Shindo, Studio shot with studies and *Before the dawn* (center), Photo by the author, January 2020

'Empty mind', of which Agnes speaks, should not be entirely empty but rather filled with subtle degrees of shades, grounded on such a foundational field, from which her artwork shimmers [Figure 25].

The title of the work [Figure 26] is one word: 'grass'. It is not used instrumentally to articulate 'grass' semantically or figuratively, but to articulate something non-articulative about the experience of 'grass', in other words 'suchness of the grass'. In the sense of Zen Articulation, this demonstrates a poetic use of language as it fuses what is both said and not said, like how we are meant to read between the lines of verse. As a form of visual language, the lines are drawn utterly as motion is concentrated. It is the waving motions of the grass as such. And in between these motions or lines, the space is opened, as pure abstraction.

Having discussed my experience and contemplation with variant waves, as that of ocean, air, mountains or grasses, let me elaborate on the term, 'Zäsur', meaning the 'pure word', "a counter-rhythmical interruption"²⁶ (the closest is caesura in English). It is expressed by the 17th century German poet and translator, Friedrich Hölderlin, in his discussion on philosophy of art, based on his translation of the Greek tragedy, *Oedipus*. Zäsur (the pure word) is both a temporal and spatial term as it indicates silence (the gap) between sounds (words) in a poem. When Hölderlin's German concept, Zäsur, is paraphrased by the Japanese translator and scholar, Michio Mitzuki, it is called, "ma positioned after a unit of rhyme". This expression is based on the common knowledge that *ma* "refers to the blank part, such as the distance between two points or the pause between two sounds". As Mitsuki articulates, "a language with no meaning and no content can be a 'creative word'"²⁷.

The attitude or state of mind towards such creativity can be found in the Japanese expression of 'Nami no ma ni ma ni Tadayou' (波の間に間に漂う), which (literally) means 'to drift in between the breaking of waves' (in turn, 'to drift in the mercy of waves').



Fig. 25. Agnes Martin, Untitled #5, 2002, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 60x60 inch, installation view at Kayane Griffin Corcoran, LA, Photo by the author, October, 2019

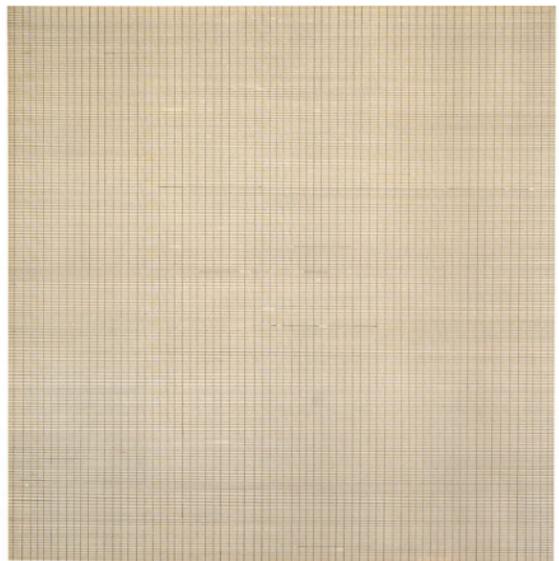


Fig. 26. Agnes Martin, Grass, 1963, black ink on paper, 9 x 9 inch

²⁶ Hölderlin's *Sophocles - Oedipus & Antigone*, trans. David Constantine, (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2001), 63.

²⁷ Trans. the author, Michio Mitsugi, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Translation", *Interpretation and Translation Studies* no.9 (2009): 189.

This image of 'Nami no ma ni ma ni Tadayou' (波の間に間に漂う) is derived from the lines in a famous ancient *waka* (by Michizane Sugawara): 'Momiji no nishiki Kami no Ma ni Ma ni', meaning 'a brocade of crimson leaves, here along with the gods'. By taking into account the fact that Hölderlin's notion, *Zäsur*, was born out of his translation of the Greek tragedy, *Oedipus*, and the gods (which is plural) in Japan include the spirits of deceased people, the remainder of someone or some life emerges in-between the successive waves of ocean or leaves, but only instantaneously. It is like a shadow of someone whom you love, momentary comes into your mind and escapes. Indeed, Tanizaki recognizes shadows also as 'a nuance of love', as expressed in the word, *omo-kage* (面影) (*kage* meaning shadow, *omo* meaning face, together as 'shadow of a face', indicating an image that reminds one of someone else that is similar but different.)

3) LOVE

This brief moment of love excites and disappoints us. In between, we learn to long for love, patiently, and to appreciate how beauty presents the possibility or the memory of being touched by love. My dear friend Linda Swanson, artist and host of my project, practices 'dead man' s float' every day in Venice LA [Figure 27], as her act of touching her father who crossed the very Pacific Ocean during WW2 and practiced this survival technique in the navy. I have once joined her in floating. I closed my eyes, put my face in the water, held my breath and released all the tension. The ocean was, then, dark. I was held between being panicked and calm. It is like being in mid-creativity, where I struggle to articulate something non-articulative or translatable. But I was also sensing the light, like the possibility of transforming it into a poetic expression, through which I overcome myself, as though being metamorphosed. In Agnes' words, it is our memory of perfection, where we are from: which is to me, love, that processes every life on the earth through its tremendous suffering to give it birth.

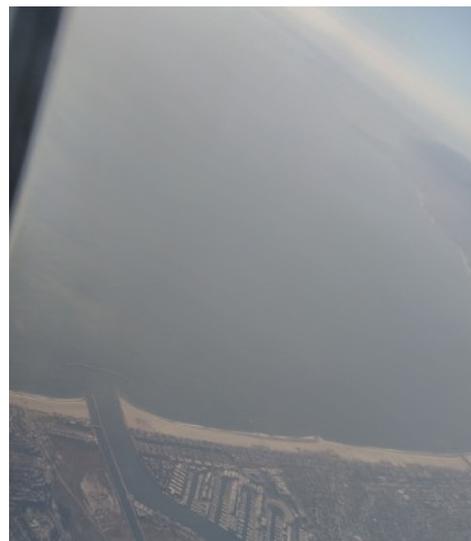


Fig. 27. Venice Beach, LA, aerial view, Photo by the author, November 2019

Love is 'motion' expressed to move life forward. It is the universal e-motion that enable us to remain alive.

Her work, in our neighborhood town Taos, 'Untitled (LOVE)' [Figure 28], permanently shows us the path from where we come and where we should be going.

The series of various shades of blue and the successive lines of concentrated motion [Figure 29] together draw an opening path, which is not for any transaction, purely directional, pointing to the open air. Like the Great North Road in Chaco Canyon [Figure 30], which had no use except indicating where Chaco people (they) are from, which is the truth of our life (too). It is not instrumental but poetic, in a rigorous sense that it resists being swallowed up by the mere economical exchanges of meanings or means. It is such a work that art can accomplish on behalf of everyone's right to be reminded of love.



Towards the end of her life, Martin made a book about her belief, entitled, *The Religion of Love* :

In the beginning, there was only love and it filled the world. That's how it was in the beginning....Love makes us want to do all the good things. Get up in the morning and work for life....Love is all around us like air; pressing in on us, making us more like love. Making us love the people and want to treat them well, making us help the people if they want help.²⁸

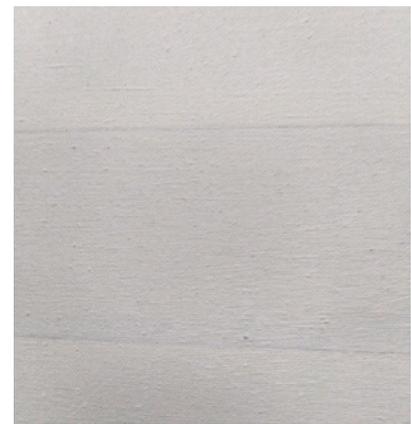


Fig. 28-29. Agnes Martin, *Untitled (Love)*, 1993-1994, Acrylic on linen, 60 1/16" x 60 1/16" inch, Agnes Martin Gallery, Harwood Museum of Art, Photo by the author, September 2019

In discussing this, Agnes answers in the interview, "it (Love) makes us good. That's my origin"²⁹.

The origin of her own or her artistic path is real. Love penetrates all her works, which is characterized as 'tendering', by Richard Tuttle who collaborated with Agnes on *The Religion of Love*. In fact, I can prove from my experiences that all the people who admire her works are perpetuating her love and distributing it through their way of loving art, people and all living things. Throughout my year-long project in New Mexico, everything I have done, discovered or experienced was enabled because of the truly loving support (help) that I received from these people. I knew no one intimately before I came here. But now I am filled with the feeling of love towards every one of you. And of course towards Agnes Martin, who was so aware of the



Fig. 30. Looking towards the direction of The Great North Road from Pueblo Alto, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico, Photo by the author, November 2019

²⁸ Agnes Martin & Richard Tuttle (Illustration), *Religion of Love*, Köln; Slp edi8on, Walther König, 2016

²⁹ Agnes Martin: *Between the Lines*, Directed by Leon d'Avigdor, Munich: Leon d'Avigdor Films, Inc. 2016, DVD

hardship of life, hence, worked so hard to gently guide us to open our minds. She writes³⁰:

The process of life [love] is hidden from us.

The meaning of suffering [transformation/metamorphosis] is held from us.

And we are blind to life. [Art touches us, to let us open our heart to see it]³¹

It is now my turn to work as a fine artist to open (mine then) our heart in the name of love.

Her legacy is planted in the world (New Mexico, US and beyond), that is what I felt strongly about through my project. And it is we who continue to work for opening our hearts and others, each in our own way. I will work to remain truly creative in my pursuit to embody the untranslatable [Figure 31]. Then, in the current world where our blindness keeps us on a wrong path, our work shall be more meaningful than ever.

Thank you for your listening (reading).

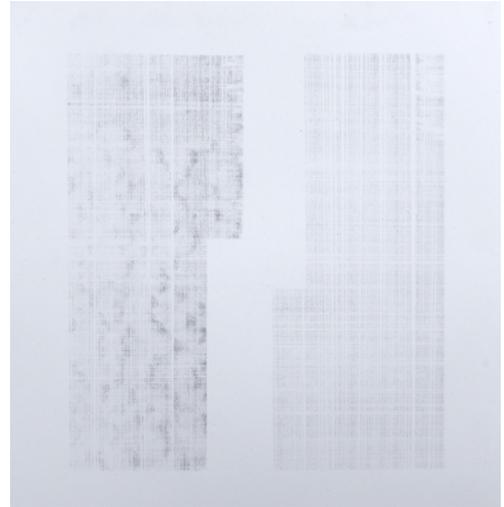


Fig. 31. Utako Shindo, *opening path* (detail), 2019, carbon transfer on vellum 11x9 inch

³⁰ Agnes Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life"

³¹ Words in bracket and gray font are inserted by the author as memoranda. They were not read out to the audiences during the talk.