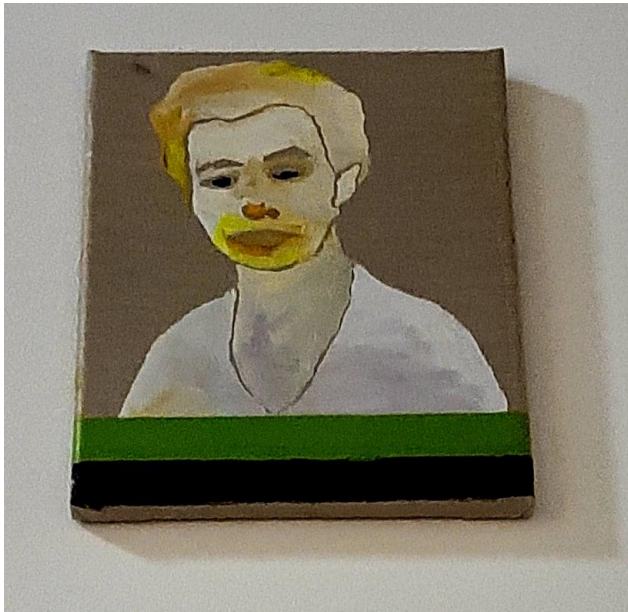


Agnes Martin, 1912 – 2004



I chose this portrait for two reasons, one I didn't recognise who it was from the portrait, and secondly it didn't have a name unlike all the other portraits. I was also somehow convinced it would be a male artist, but later discovered her name was Agnes Martin, an artist I had never heard of before.

Martin said that she always painted with a vacant mind, sitting, and waiting for the inspiration to strike her, that the painting told her every mark, every brushstroke. She also said she spent 20 years experimenting before she found the grid that has become so closely identifiable as her work.

In an interview with Martin, it was said that the finished painting appeared in her mind which she would paint very small. Then she would do complicated mathematics to scale that miniature work of art up to fit the confines of her predetermined canvas. I found this particularly interesting as during my master's degree I too created some smaller chance works of art then used mathematics to increase their size and redo the work at a much larger scale.

Martin commented that she paints with her back to the world, which I take to mean she paints what she feels rather than what she hears or sees, refusing to allow the outside world to influence or corrupt her works. Martin commented that with music people expect emotion, but with art people demand an explanation. When asked about her work, she said each brushstroke is like a sound, a repeating sound. Each painting is like a map to your inner responses.

Martin was considered a great editor of her work. She could paint one work of art ten times over and destroy nine of the copies she didn't like with a knife. I find it interesting that she didn't choose to paint over the top. Did she feel the layer beneath might influence the conversation of the uppermost layer of paint, so it would for her have been impossible to paint over it? Martin was considered a great editor of her own work.

My favourite work of all that I could find, was Friendship, 1963, on display at MOMA. This painting, which is one of three is different to the rest of her work as she uses different mediums, gold leaf. The grid is still present, but the scale of the work is huge, over 6ft on one side. Martin applies gold

leaf to the entire canvas which at the time in the 1960s must have been quite expensive, then once the size underneath is dry, she uses the technique of sgraffito on the surface, revealing a red beneath which was suspected to be bole a traditional base layer beneath gold leaf. The conservation department at the Museum of Modern Art did some testing of the painting much later and found that the red was red oil paint. So, it is possible that Martin used this colour to emulate the appearance of bole present in works by say Renaissance painters. The grid on the surface of the painting is to all appearances perfect, however the hand of Martin can be clearly seen in the irregularity of the lines, the hops and skips of her scalpel as she cuts her way across the canvas and through the gold leaf. This is not a simple canvas covered in gold leaf and then a grid, there is so much more going on. The canvas pushes and pulls the viewer into its surface, offering the perfection of the grid, but on closer inspection allows you to see that the grid is anything but perfect. The hand of Martin is very present, this precision grid is clearly very hand made. It has a meditative quality, that demands your time and attention.

Beverley Purdy is an artist based in Lincolnshire. Having been told throughout her life that academic study was not something she was suitable for, Beverley took a risk and proved them wrong. Beverley studied for an undergraduate degree in photography at the age of 55, following on after that with a master's degree in fine art just before her 60th birthday. her particular interest is the use of colour and how artists use that to convey meaning in their work, which manifests in writing and multimedia artworks.