



Agnes Martin: Pioneer, Painter, Icon

Henry Martin

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Agnes Martin got a late start in her art career, struggled with relationships at a time when she couldn't live openly, dealt with mental illness, and still became an important figure in the art world where her work was a bridge between abstract expressionist and minimalist styles. In *Agnes Martin: Pioneer, Painter, Icon*, Irish arts writer Henry Martin tells her story from the beginning. His is work that remains interesting regardless of the reader's familiarity with Agnes Martin and her art.

The book begins with the artist's childhood in Canada, including some of her own descriptions of its challenges. After graduating college, she began a series of lesbian relationships in which she lived with her partners, and her geographic and career moves usually aligned with those relationships. The book covers Martin's time in Taos, New Mexico, where she honed her craft before trying her hand in the New York art world.

The book also places Martin and her grid-based paintings in the context of an American art scene still defining itself, when names like Pollock and Rothko were becoming big. While she was making a name in art, Martin was also dealing with schizophrenia; she endured painful treatments like electroshock therapy at the famous Bellevue Hospital. Those experiences, combined with her decision to walk away from art for a few years in the prime of her career, make her later success in galleries and the posthumous influence she achieved particularly hard won.

Along with the story of her life, the book includes thumbnails of quite a few of Martin's paintings and a list of which museums house them. In the afterword and notes section, the author also gives some detail about how he was able to profile such a famously private artist. This is a well-researched book about an intriguing and influential figure.

JEFF FLEISCHER (March/April 2018)

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