



KAREN YANK AND AGNES MARTIN



Agnes Martin and Karen Yank, Taos, NM, 2004. Photo: Rodney Hamon

KAREN YANK AND AGNES MARTIN: STUDENT AND MENTOR

This exhibition is extremely significant and highly personal. Concurrent with an upcoming book project on Agnes Martin's artistic and life philosophy titled *Travels with Agnes: An Artist's Handbook* Turner Carroll presents an exhibition that reveals visual relationships between one of the United States' most well-known contemporary artists—Agnes Martin—and the student she mentored for the last 17 years of her life, New Mexico sculptor Karen Yank.

Agnes Martin ended up in New Mexico after driving all over the United States in search of a home, as in John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*. The year was 1967, and just as her paintings were drawing artworld acclaim in New York similar to that of her male counterparts like Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Ellsworth Kelly, Martin made herself disappear.

Agnes Martin and Karen Yank met in 1987 at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine during a critical time in both of their lives. After spending time in New Mexico, as well, Yank was at the beginning of her artistic career having just graduated with an MFA. Martin was at the end of her teaching career. She chose Yank as the recipient of her wisdom and insights about art and life, regarding Yank as her "true student" on a profound philosophical level. Amazingly, both artists left Skowhegan at the same time to return to New Mexico. Martin and Yank remained close friends, maintaining their student-mentor relationship for the remainder of Martin's life. Because Martin loved to travel both literally and metaphorically, Yank compares her friendship with Martin to a long road trip, like the one depicted in Steinbeck's book. Via their weekly visits and talks, Yank and Martin traveled together for 17 remarkable years—learning, teaching, and creating.

Throughout these 17 years, Martin unabashedly advised Yank on her sculptural works. She encouraged Yank to adopt a meditation practice like Martin had, to connect with her "inner eye" and thus receive inspiration. The inspiration Martin found was the pure line, reminiscent of the horizon line reduced from the New Mexico landscape. Martin's famously minimal square format, barely-hued lines and grids represented her distillation of pure beauty and happiness. Martin amazed both Yank and herself in the 1990s, declaring the circular shapes Yank often created as "Yank's vision and her mature voice" in her art. Martin said the circle was an obviously good choice for Yank and not for her, because Yank's use of metal made the circular works more object-oriented than illusory. The expansiveness of the circular shaped sculptures enables the viewer to enter into the various planes and contemplative fields of the works.

Toward the end of Martin's life, she asked Yank to keep her purist artistic philosophies alive by embodying them in her own artwork. "We are unfolding flowers," said Martin. "We need to listen to life and let life tell us what is next, relinquishing control and opening ourselves to true inspiration." Martin's mantra of simplicity giving way to inspiration and striving for perfection with the goal of happiness continues to filter through Yank's work to this day. While visual riffs on the circular form continue in Yank's art, the line is increasingly visible-- a subconscious ode to Martin, her teacher.

Tonya Turner Carroll



KAREN YANK
Us, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
31.5 x 31 x 2 IN.

Every Wednesday, I visited Agnes Martin. Sometimes we had tea, but we always spoke about art, every single time we got together.



AGNES MARTIN
SUITE OF TEN LITHOGRAPHS, 1990
LITHOGRAPH ON VELLUM
12 X 12 IN. EACH

Agnes said, "every one of us has the capacity to access inspiration and truly original thought." But to do that, we "must clear our minds and enable ourselves to 'see through our inner eye.' When we enliven our inner eye, we have the ability to experience original thought or inspiration that is completely unique—unlike any inspiration or thought another human being before us has ever found."



KAREN YANK
STRENGTH, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
54 x 54 x 2 IN.

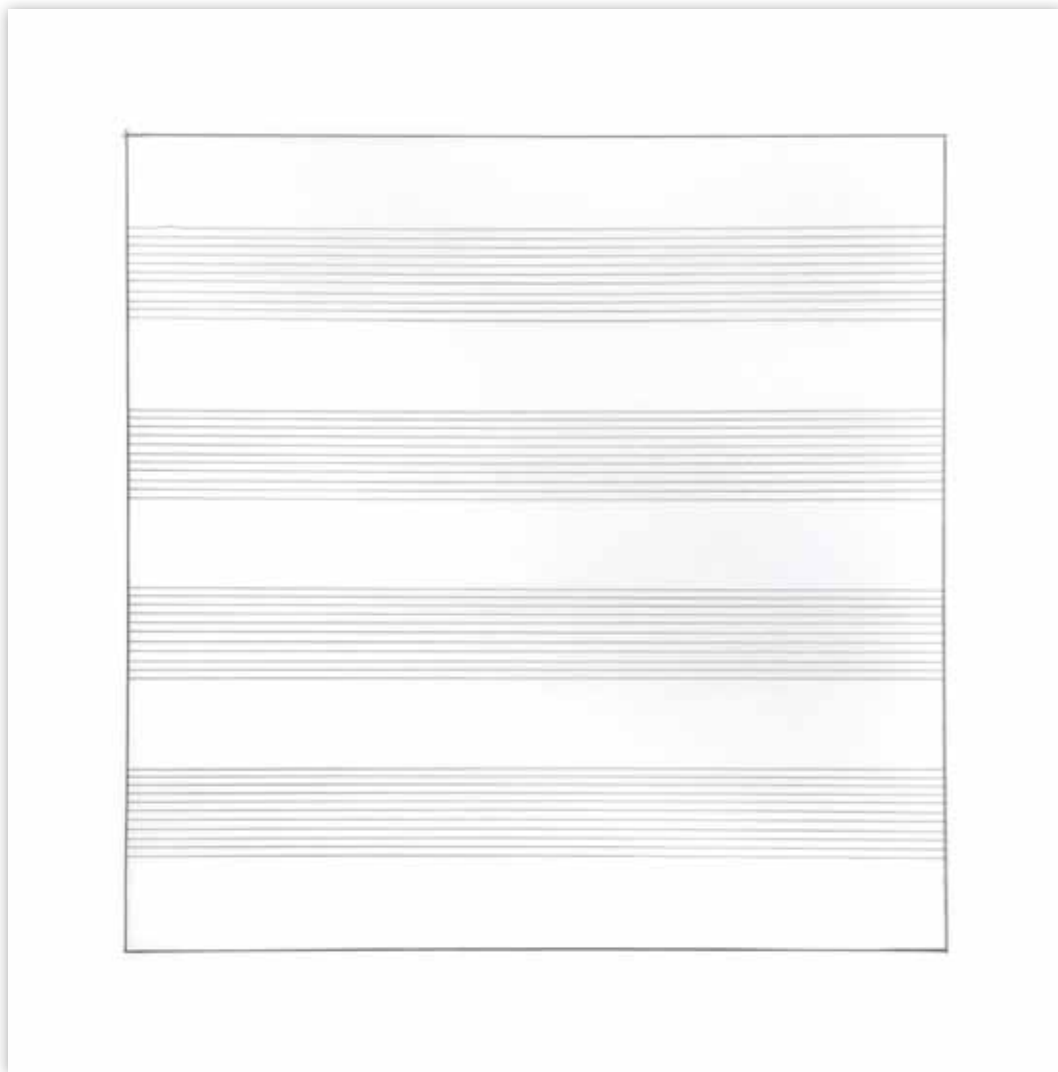


KAREN YANK
#24, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
24 x 24 x 2 IN.

She advised me to avoid letting impulses come in and wreck my original inspiration. If that happened, I would stop my work and meditate until I found my original inspiration with my inner eye.



KAREN YANK
TRES
COR-TEN, STEEL
61 x 63 x 1.5 IN.



AGNES MARTIN
UNTITLED, 1990
LITHOGRAPH
12 X 12 IN.

Agnes believed that art was the embodiment of beauty—not the typical beauty that most people describe, but a somatic quality of beauty as emotion, as the deepest feelings in one's life. Agnes talked about beauty as a 'positive response to life,' often using 'beauty,' 'happiness,' and 'love' synonymously when referring to art. She believed when the artist's mind was quiet, open, and still, the artist could engage with the emotional state of celebration, which she called 'inspiration.'

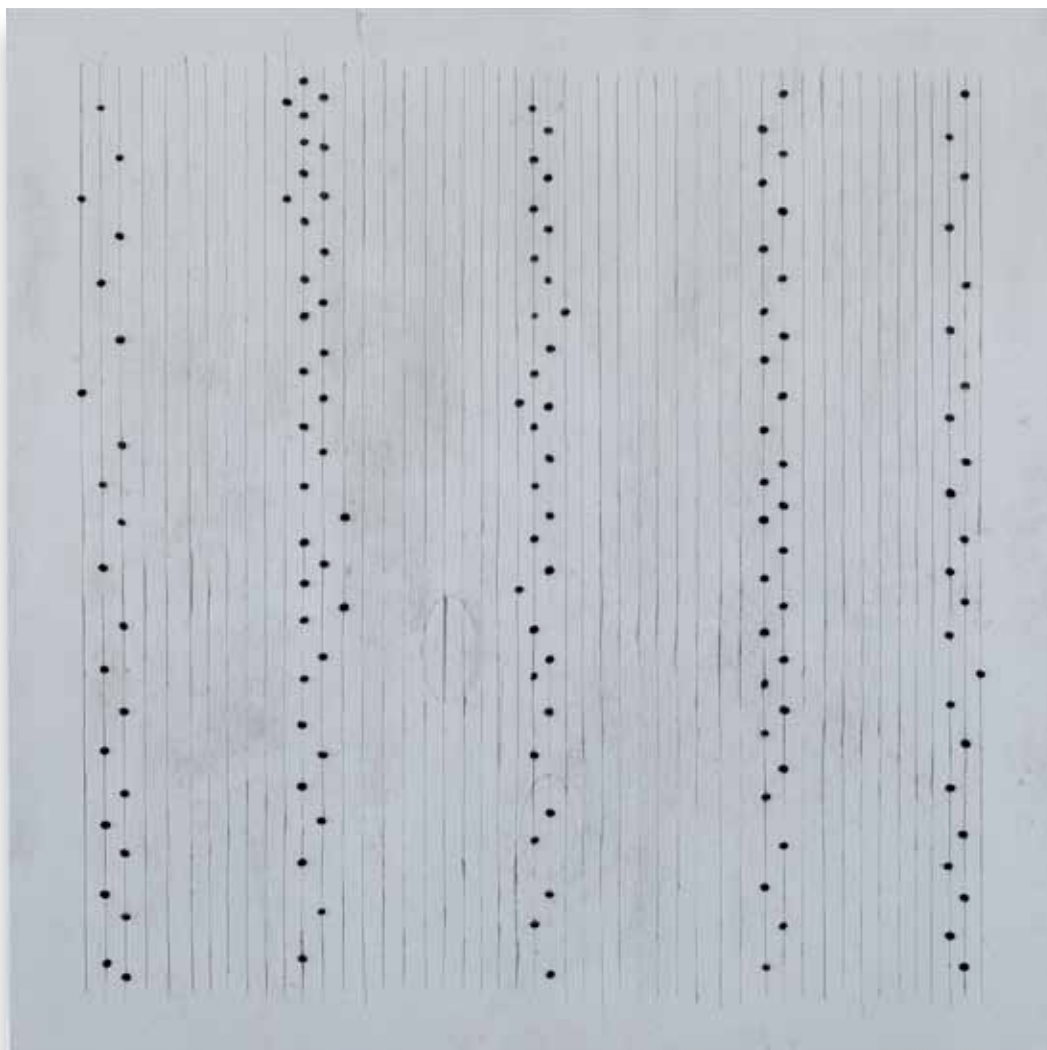


KAREN YANK
#20, 2018
ALUMINUM, WOOD, NAILS, PAINT
60 x 20 x 2 IN.



KAREN YANK
YIELDING, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
60 x 24 x 2 IN.

Agnes said it is only when you're in meditation that you can clear your mind for your inner eye to recognize inspiration as it comes to you gradually. She constantly reiterated, "what you're waiting for is for your inspiration to become so clear in your mind's eye, that you can see it and feel it." She made me promise to never create a work of art without that kind of clear understanding of my inspiration. She told me, "true inspiration has the deepest feelings you have about life in it—it is your positive response to all that is good and beautiful in life itself."



KAREN YANK
#9, 2018
WOOD, NAILS, PAINT
24 x 24 x 2 IN.



KAREN YANK
FAVOR, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
24 X 24 X 2 IN.

Martin described the mental journey to meditation as “getting rid of the garbage in your head.” She meant one had to rid the mind of everything related to intellect, spirituality, or culture, so these societal constructs didn’t taint inspiration. “The artist must learn to ignore impulse and intellect while they are waiting for inspiration,” she said, adding, “a thought fleeting through your mind can trick you into thinking it’s inspiration, but it’s really just an impulse interrupting you on your way to seeing your true inspiration with your inner eye.” Without the discipline of a meditative state, impulsive or intellectual thoughts can wreck the harmony an artist can produce by waiting, listening, quieting the mind, and accessing the inner eye.

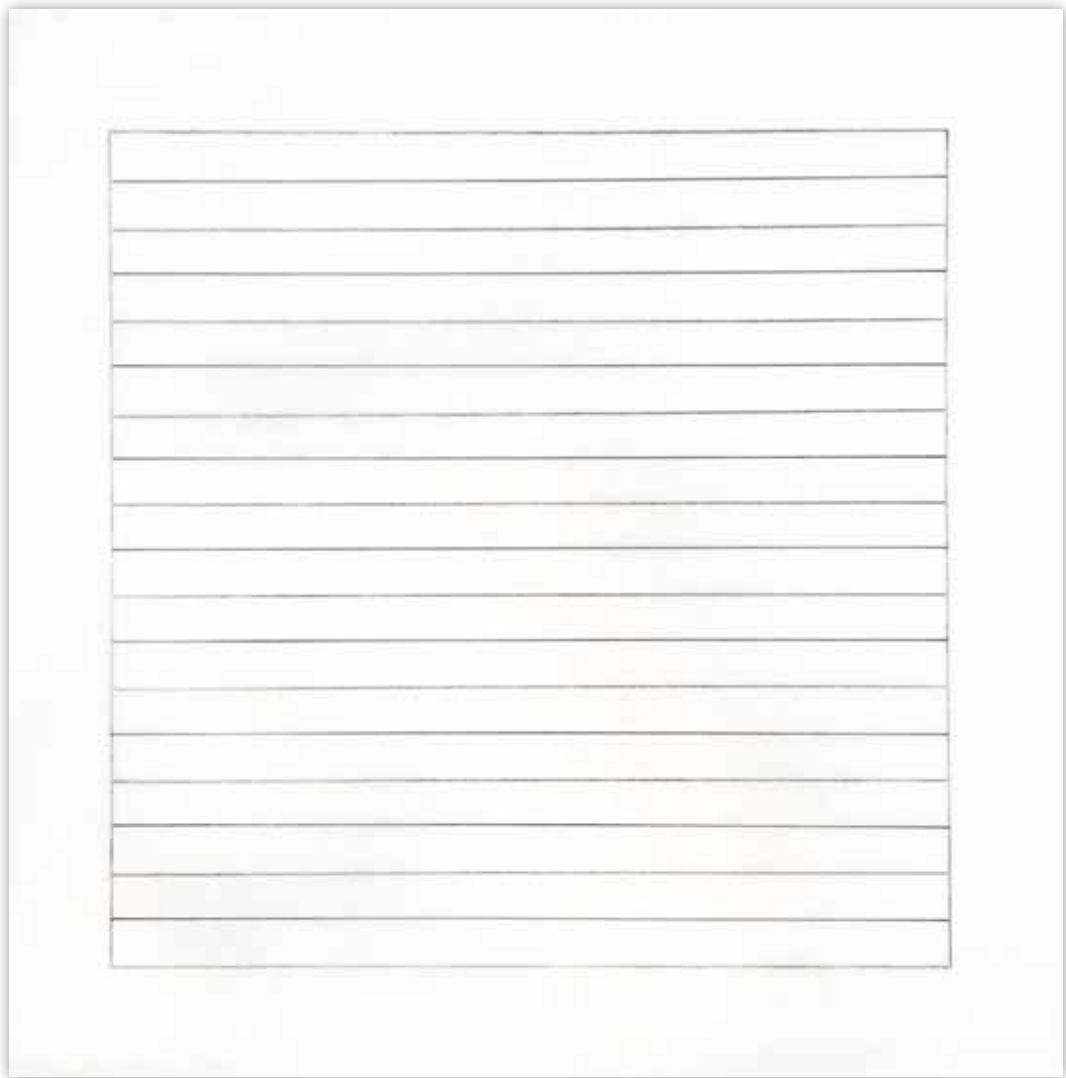


KAREN YANK
REGARD, 2018
STEEL, WOOD, NAILS, PAINT
48 x 48 x 2 IN.



KAREN YANK
#18
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
36 x 36 x 2 IN.

You should only go about constructing your inspiration as a work of art in the physical world after your inspiration from your inner eye is crystal clear. You have to see it and feel it with you inner eye first. Once you can do that, you will be able to create a work of art that enables another person to feel the same positive response to life when they view your artwork—perhaps described as love or joy or beauty—that you felt when you created it.



AGNES MARTIN
UNTITLED, 1990
LITHOGRAPH
12 X 12 IN.



KAREN YANK
SELF, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
36 x 36 x 2 IN.

Martin started me on five minutes a day of meditation before I started my work. I would quiet my mind, get rid of the 'garbage,' as she called it, and allow my inner eye to see inspiration. As I became a better meditator, Agnes had me add time to meditation each time I practiced, and my meditation practice became a much more effective tool in my artistic practice.

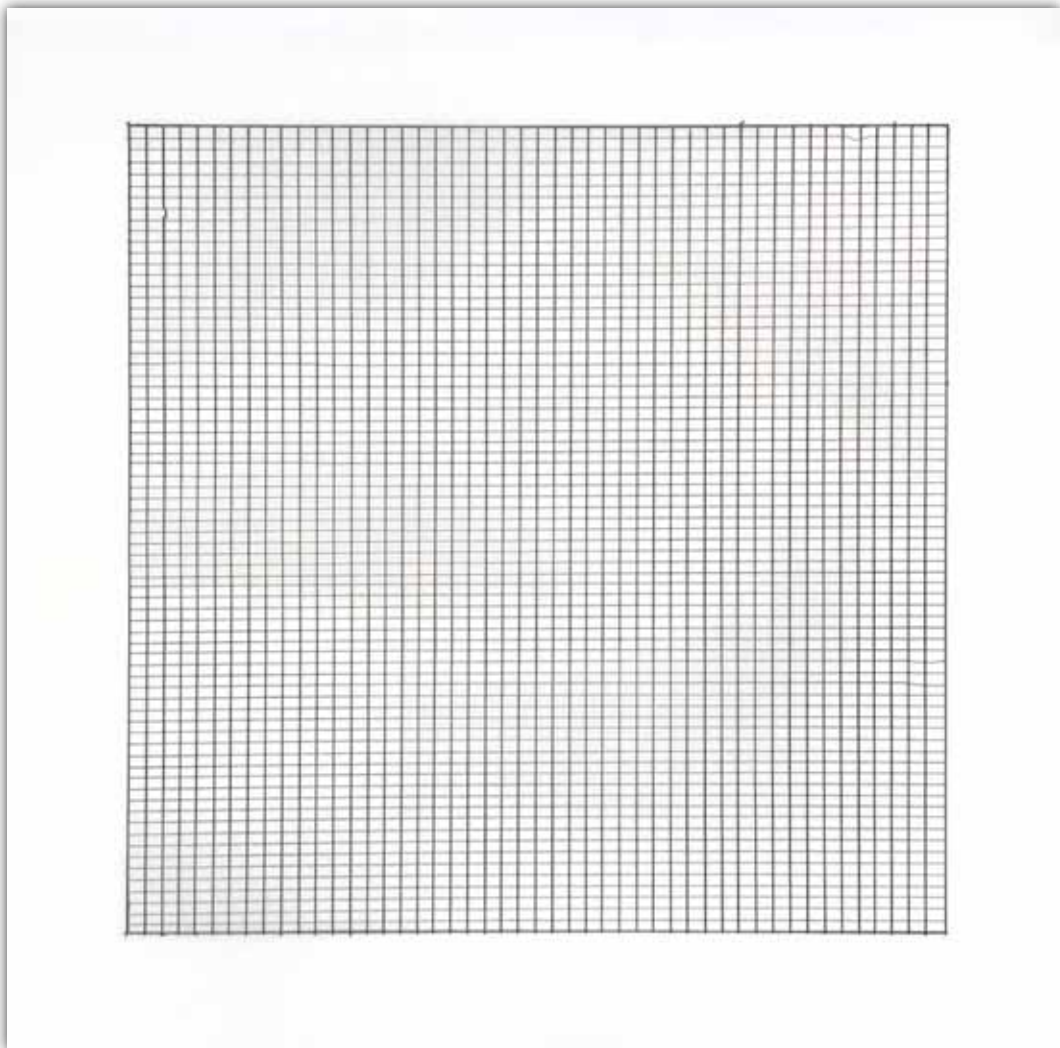


KAREN YANK
WINTER, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
23 x 23 x 1 IN.



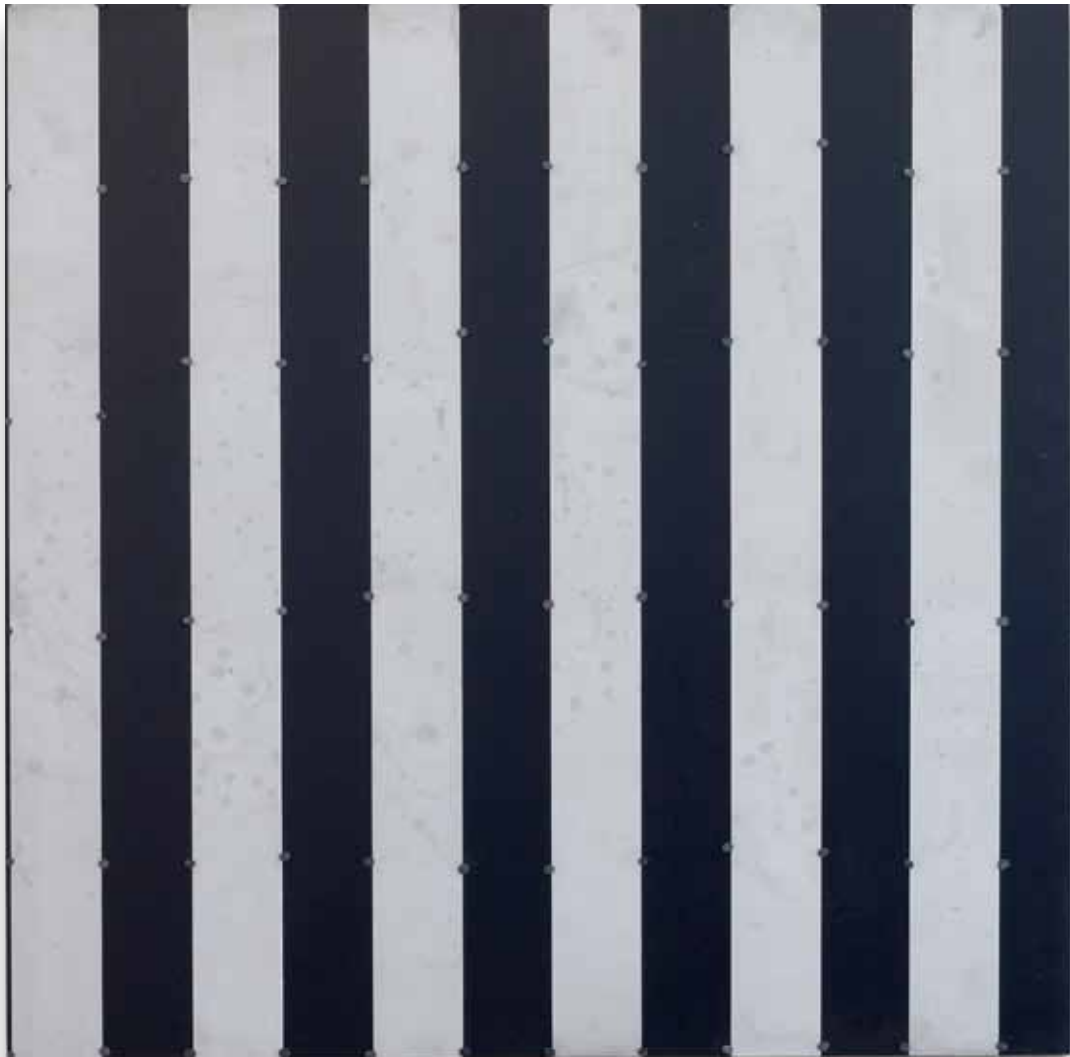
KAREN YANK
#15, 2018
STEEL, STAINLESS STEEL
23 x 23 x 1 IN.

Agnes said to me, "the inner eye is always working; it's on the job. You don't have to worry about it; it's there and it's working. Just listen to it. Don't interfere. Put the distractions out of your mind and let the inner eye do its work."

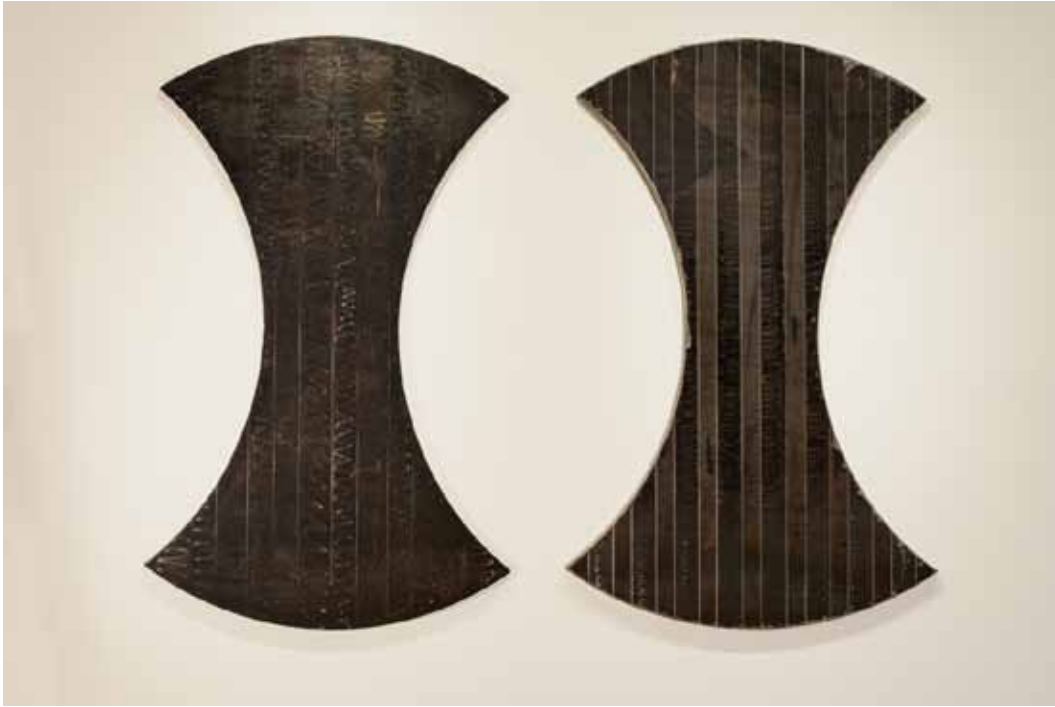


AGNES MARTIN
UNTITLED, 1990
LITHOGRAPH
12 X 12 IN.

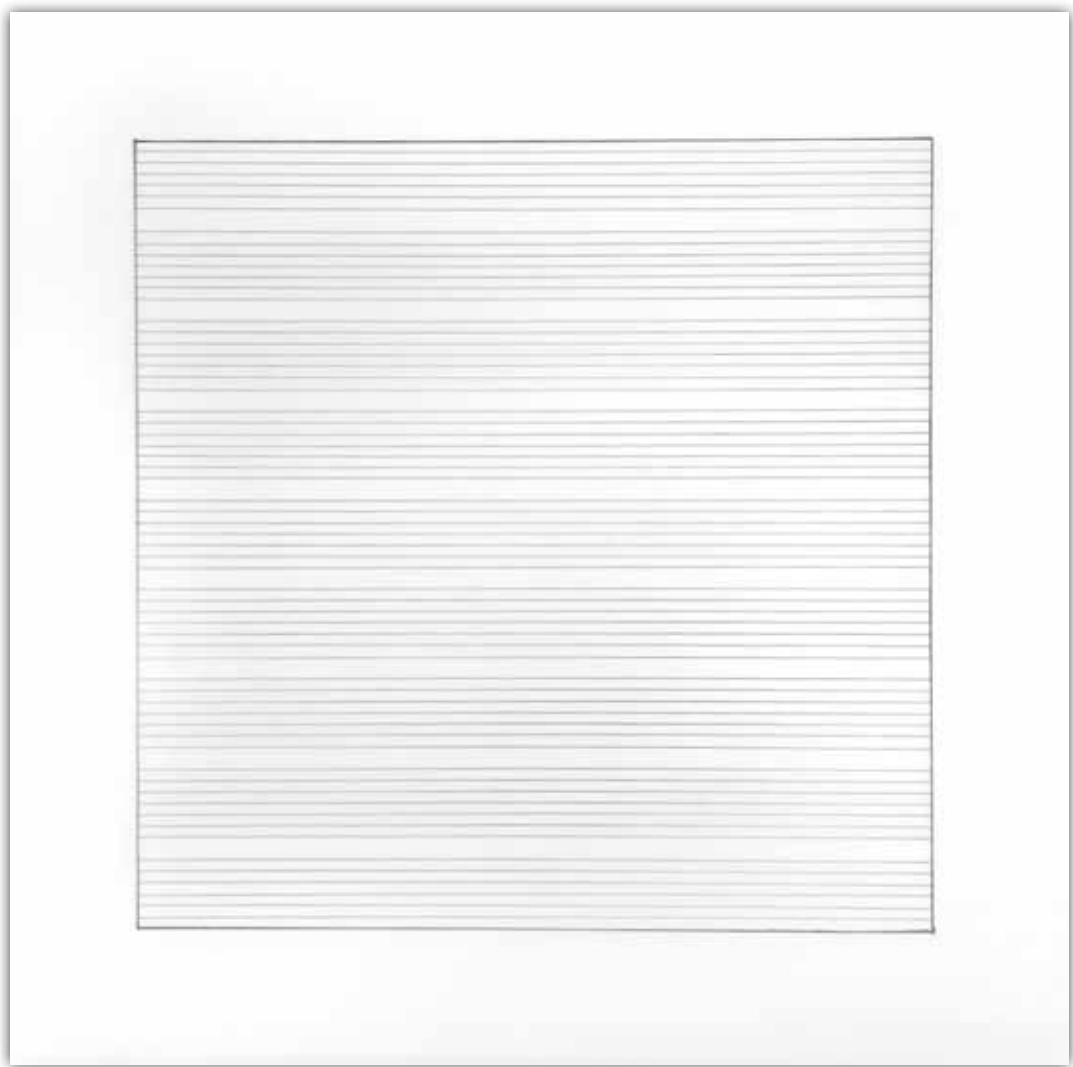
Agnes would just sit and meditate for a big part of each day. She would meditate and wait, and then all of a sudden, she'd say, "I've got my inspiration! I'm going to be working now."



KAREN YANK
#12, 2018
ALUMINUM, WOOD, NAILS, PAINT
24 x 24 x 1.5 IN.



KAREN YANK
THE SPACE BETWEEN US, 2012
STEEL
42 X 61 IN.



AGNES MARTIN
UNTITLED, 1990
LITHOGRAPH
12 X 12 IN.



AGNES MARTIN

Agnes Martin is one of the most enigmatic characters in this history of art. Just when her career was reaching what seemed to be its apex in New York in the 1960s, she made herself disappear. Martin read John Steinbeck's book *Travels with Charley*, and took off in her truck, driving all over the United States until she ultimately chose New Mexico as her home. In New Mexico, Martin could live a life of solitude and immerse herself in the natural beauty of the land and the sky. She was well

known for the simple life she chose, almost like the two constant elements in her work—the horizontal and the vertical line. Martin possessed two cups and two table settings, just to keep things simple and structured. As in her works, when she would sometimes introduce a tiny hint of color, she would branch out a bit on her social interactions, though very gently, as well.

Martin is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1997 and the National Medal of Arts in 1998. She has been the subject of one-artist exhibitions worldwide, including a five-part retrospective at Dia:Beacon, New York, in 2017, and, most recently, a 2015 retrospective at Tate Modern, London, which travelled Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Agnes Martin's paintings sell in the current art market in the millions of dollars, and they are highly sought-after by top museums throughout the world. Turner Carroll Gallery is so pleased to offer these lithographs by one of the most important female contemporary artists of all time.

Selected Museum Exhibitions and Collections

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX

Dia Art Foudation, Beacon, NY

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden

The Menil Collection, Houston, TX

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO

New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, NM

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

Tate Modern, London, UK

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY



KAREN YANK

My life and work are synonymous. My work is a direct expression of my life and inspirations. I create art because it is the closest expression of life that I have found. My inspirations are often informed by the idyllic landscape. This is not to say that my sculptures represent nature, but rather that they represent the emotional impact one feels when in the natural setting. The primary focus of my work is on non-verbal communication and emotional nuances that are unspoken. I strive to stimulate the

viewers' response by activating emotions associated with past experiences, creating a more meaningful insight. My work can be understood in a moment, but has layers that can be seen for those who pause. I try to reveal an organic nature with a sense of history, using a material that is usually cold and industrial. Every weld and grind mark is an intentional decision. I attempt to reflect a beauty that can only be found in the organic.

I like to incorporate circular images with intersecting lines into my sculptural works, because of their rich thematic relevance found throughout history. The circle and cross are two of the earliest symbols seen in human cultural development, dating back to the Stone Age. Circles reference all that is natural; such as the sun, moon, earth, cycles of life, time, and repetition. I often use the circle to represent the notion of unity. The "X" reflects transit themes of crossing, intersecting, joining, and marking a point in time or space. Also, I use the two symbols combined as a show of affection for the world as a whole.

-Karen Yank

Selected Public Commissions / Collections

Growing Strength, Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque, NM

XO Trio, Western New Mexico University, Silver City, NM

Albuquerque Museum of Art and History, interior collection and sculpture garden, Albuquerque, NM

Mountain Reflection, New Mexico Expo, Albuquerque, NM

Four-story high mobile, New Mexico State Library, Santa Fe, NM

10 site specific wall reliefs and 6 freestanding sculptures, Junction Place Bridge at Goose Creek, Boulder, CO

Four sculptures installed throughout the ballet, Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, New York, NY

Gateway Sculpture, Jewish Federation of Greater Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM

New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM

Rutgers University, large-scale outdoor installation, New Brunswick, NJ

New Mexico State Capital Art Collection, sculpture on permanent public display, Santa Fe, NM

Five hundred feet of sculpture installed on two pedestrian bridges for the GRIP I-40/Coors Freeway Interchange Project, Albuquerque, NM

TURNER CARROLL

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Essay: Tonya Turner Carroll
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Photography: Steven & Mary Elkins
With excerpts from Karen Yank's upcoming book, *Travels with Agnes: An Artist's Handbook*

Front Cover:
Karen Yank
Fall, 2018
steel, stainless steel
22 x 22 x 1.5 in.

Agnes Martin
Untitled, 1990
lithograph
12 x 12 in.

Inside Front Cover:
Agnes Martin and Karen Yank
photograph courtesy of Karen Yank

Back Cover:
Agnes Martin
Untitled Suite of Ten Lithographs
lithograph on vellum
12 x 12 in.



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