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# Liminality on the Slip: Agnes Martin in New York

Andrew Robert Ward\* 

A group of artists socialise on the rooftop of an old industrial building in Lower Manhattan. One of them, an artist by the name of Agnes Martin, sits on the side of the rooftop, apparently unfazed by the fragile state of the building.<sup>1</sup> It is the late 1950s – Abstract Expressionist culture is well-established further north on Tenth Street, Eisenhower has commenced his second term in office, and bustling Wall Street is just a couple of blocks away. And even insofar as these artists would come to define a major historical shift of their own, in this moment, their precarious situation on the very edge of the City is only reinforced by the jumble of skyscrapers that rise up behind their old rooftop.

Hans Namuth immortalised moments such as this in his now well-known photographs of the artists of Coenties Slip. A triangular piece of land on the Southern tip of Manhattan, Coenties Slip presented an opportunity in the 1950s–1960s for cheap and spacious lofts in its old sail-making warehouses. Among the artists to take advantage of this opportunity and set up their studios here were Fred Mitchell, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Indiana, Ann Wilson, Lenore Tawney, James Rosenquist, Jack Youngerman and the subject of this paper, Agnes Martin.<sup>2</sup> While living and working at the Slip, many of these artists would develop their mature practices and define a critical, yet often overlooked, turning point in post-war American art history, laying the groundwork for later movements as numerous and as separate in approach and production as Minimalism, Pop, Craft, Feminist art, Fluxus and Conceptualism.

What can be said to have united this eclectic array of artistic practices was the sense in which the rich cultural and industrial history of Coenties Slip punctuated the area, and also the sense in which it was, at that stage, considered as a place apart from the city, as well as the Abstract Expressionist culture of Tenth Street. As Jack Youngerman characterised the place of the Slip: 'It was completely apart from the New York art scene. Down there, one of the things that we were very conscious of, without talking that much about it, was the fact that we all knew

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that we weren't part of the deKooning/Pollock legacy in art which was centered around Tenth Street [*sic*].<sup>3</sup> Fred Mitchell, who was the first of the artists to move to the Slip in 1951, characterised its atmosphere in the following terms: 'The visual drama and the sense of historical drama are joined down there.'<sup>4</sup>

Today, the Slip is home to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and, on the face of it, discloses relatively little of its long and varied history. The few historic buildings that stand today are now well and truly surrounded by the skyscrapers extending north toward Wall Street and the hustle and bustle of the nearby Staten Island Ferry Terminal. The place still retains something of its visual and historical atmosphere, which is indelibly inscribed upon the surviving architecture and enforced through its proximity to the East River, with its views of the Brooklyn Bridge and Governors Island.

Tracing back to the end of the seventeenth century, the Slip was used as a boat landing extending a couple of blocks inland to Front Street.<sup>5</sup> By the 1880s, the Slip had been land-filled, extending the land's edge out to South Street.<sup>6</sup> The warehouses that were subsequently built on the land-filled Slip commenced life as ship chandleries and sail-making factories. Throughout the nineteenth century more broadly, the area underwent rapid industrial growth, with the elevated railroad snaking its way through the area, and the proliferation of warehouses, gas works and marine supply shops.<sup>7</sup> During this time, the area also became a literary centre of sorts, with the establishment of New York's first publishing houses in the area, and writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville drawing inspiration from the seaport culture.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1950s, this richly charged historical atmosphere would help to inspire a pivotal moment in post-war American art. Central to this narrative was Agnes Martin, who developed her mature abstract vision while she was living on the Slip from 1957 until 1967. While Martin is best known for her six-by-six-foot grids, she was not to begin these paintings until the early 1960s. Yet historically, the literature on Martin has largely ignored the work that she created prior to the grid.<sup>9</sup> There are complex reasons for this gap, not least of which is the fact that Martin herself considered her earlier work unsatisfactory. It is important to remember that by the time that Martin painted what she considered to be her first grid she was 52 years old, and by that stage she had already been painting for around 20 years. 'I painted all kinds of things in those twenty years,' Martin later stated, 'but I never felt really satisfied with my work until after I went to New York and started the grid, which was absolutely abstract.'<sup>10</sup>

Martin framed her discovery of the grid in terms of a discrete, inspired vision, stating: 'I was thinking about the innocence of trees, and ... it's a pretty innocuous subject as anybody knows a tree is innocent. And anyway, I got in my mind the inspiration for a grid, up and down and across.'<sup>11</sup> The notion of the 'innocence of trees' would become important to Martin's conceptualisation of the grid, and would become a motif to which she would return, as in the early example of *The Tree* (1964, [Figure 1\[s\]](#)). Martin's characterisation of her discovery of the grid in terms of an isolated – almost divine – vision has often been taken up with

enthusiasm by her commentators in the literature. Historically, this has in part worked to mythologise Martin by situating her practice in a void divorced from the socio-cultural experiences that have informed it.

An important way of redressing this tendency is to investigate how Martin gradually developed the structure of the grid, with reference to those around her and the place in which she worked. Essential to this discussion is a group of paintings and sculptural assemblages that Martin created between 1957 and 1960 at Coenties Slip. While, on the face of it, these works may seem somewhat removed from her later well-known grids, many employ a modular structure that utilises the format of the grid, thus prefiguring the structure of her linear grid in important ways. This alternative narrative strives to mingle Martin's socio-cultural experiences during her time at the Slip with the formal development of her practice at what was a critical juncture in her career. In doing so, I demonstrate how Martin's development of the grid was not merely confined to a discrete vision but represents a hard-won process toward an increasingly pure abstraction. In charting this process, this paper also seeks to historically place the neglected, though influential, artistic context of the Slip, and to assert its importance as indicative of a monumental shift toward new forms and ideas in post-war American art.

### A Perspectival Shift

Prior to moving to the Slip in 1957, Martin had spent a decade in Taos, New Mexico, with stints at Columbia University in the early 1940s and early 1950s. By the time that Martin arrived in New York in the late 1950s, she can be said to have already developed an artistic voice of her own; albeit one that she considered unsatisfactory. Perhaps Martin's dissatisfaction with her work of this time was seeded in what can be seen as its reliance on a breed of biomorphic abstraction, to which she was exposed in Taos.

Though it is here, with a late work from Martin's time in Taos, that I wish to commence. For Martin's *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)* (c. 1956) can be thought to cross the so-called divide between her Taos work and the work that she created immediately upon her arrival in New York in the late 1950s. Christina Bryan Rosenberger has theorised that while *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)* was started in Taos, it is likely that Martin completed the painting in New York in 1957, based on its formal structure ('especially with regard to the four circles at the upper right corner').<sup>12</sup> Further evidence for this conclusion can be found in the title, with the initials 'L.T.' possibly referring to Lenore Tawney, who Martin first met in New York in 1957.<sup>13</sup>

In *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)*, the composition of the four forms within a grid signals the beginning of Martin's engagement with the structure of the gridded circle. This is significant, for this structure would appear regularly in her work from 1957 until the early 1960s, and constitutes a bridge between her work in Taos and her early work in New York, which, as I will show, leads directly into what might be called her classic grid paintings.

As Rosenberger has also pointed out, Martin's *Drift of Summer* (1957, [Figure 2](#)), created shortly after her arrival at the Slip, can almost be seen as a cropped detail

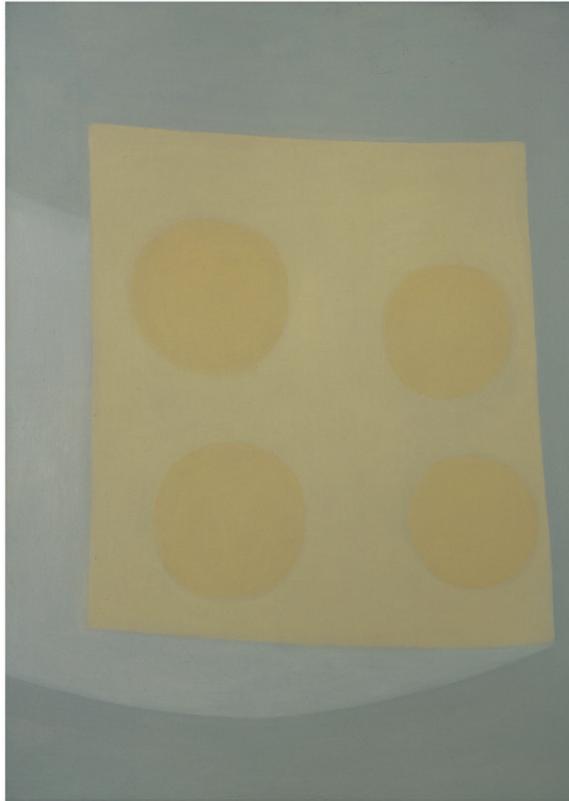


Figure 2. Agnes Martin, *Drift of Summer*, 1957, oil on canvas, 127 × 91.4 cm, private collection. © Agnes Martin/ARS, licensed by Viscopy. Image courtesy Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

of *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)*.<sup>14</sup> In *Drift of Summer*, Martin demonstrates an interest in the potential of purely abstract form to a greater degree than in any previous work. In comparison to *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)*, *Drift of Summer* does away, to a great extent, with the relationship between separate or disparate forms, and instead places a greater emphasis on a holistic *unity* of form. While Martin would continue to experiment with abstract composition throughout 1957, it was not until 1958 that she would turn more adamantly to the circular form as structured by the format of the grid. I will return to the significance of these two early works below.<sup>15</sup> But first, it is important to ask, in what ways might Martin's move to the Slip have contributed to her work of this time?

In *Harbor Number 1* (1957, [Figure 3](#)), Martin continues to refine an increasingly abstract vision, using a muted palette, to impart prominence to the composition of the forms on the picture plane. These darker forms of the composition ultimately



Figure 3. Agnes Martin, *Harbor Number 1*, 1957, oil on canvas, 126.3 × 101.6 cm, Gift of Agnes Gund and Committee on Painting and Sculpture Funds, Museum of Modern Art, 469.1996. © Agnes Martin/ARS, licensed by Viscopy. Digital image courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

work to ground the lighter background on which they sit, thus opening up the even lighter grey channel within the centre of the composition to its comprehension as a negative space extending or expanding beyond the picture plane.<sup>16</sup>

In relation to the perspective of the lofts at the Slip, Martin later recalled: 'The best thing about the slip was that it was a triangle, so it slanted so all the lofts looked across the triangle to the river. So we were all on the river, even though we were up on the triangle.'<sup>17</sup> Given Martin's characterisation of the perspective of the Slip as triangular, her composition of *Harbor Number 1* – with its three forms that each realise their apex in the centre – becomes a compelling example in terms of demonstrating a connection between Martin's abstraction and the geography of the place in which she lived and worked.<sup>18</sup> This is supported further by the fact that the triangular perspective of the Slip afforded views of the East River, the Hudson River, and the wider channel extending away from the island of Manhattan into the Upper Bay of the Atlantic Ocean, constituting a simultaneous view of three connected channels extending beyond sight.



Figure 4. Ellsworth Kelly, *Tablet #213 [Seven Sketches]*, 1950s, ink, graphite, and oil on paper, 39.4 × 53.3 cm, The Menil Collection, Houston, anonymous gift in honour of James A. Elkins, Jr. 2003-005.183. © and courtesy Ellsworth Kelly.

### Channels of Influence

Among the artists who lived on the Slip there was a collective interest in the potential of the natural world as an inspiration for the production of abstract art. This interest was perhaps no less pronounced than in the practice of Ellsworth Kelly, who became a close friend and interlocutor of Martin's while they were both living on the Slip. Every day for a year and a half, Kelly would come to Martin's loft for breakfast.<sup>19</sup>

It was during one of these breakfasts that Kelly would develop the maquettes for what would become his first freestanding sculptures, *Pony* and *Gate* (both 1959).<sup>20</sup> The maquette for *Gate* is actually an envelope from Martin's studio, with her name and address stamped on one of the sides, as we can see in the bottom right corner of Kelly's *Tablet #213* (Figure 4).<sup>21</sup> What is interesting here is the resemblance between the forms of the maquette and sketches for *Gate*, and the central negative space that channels through Martin's *Harbor Number 1*.

Kelly is usually remembered as the most established of the Coenties Slip artists at the time. As James Rosenquist has recalled: 'Kelly had a career, but the rest of us didn't. He owned a Volkswagen, and to us that was wealth.'<sup>22</sup> Traditionally, the reverence of Kelly has worked to sustain the idea that he was highly influential to the formative practices of the artists around him, which he no doubt was.<sup>23</sup> But was the influence of Kelly a one-way street? The resemblance between Kelly's

form in his study for *Gate* and Martin's earlier form in *Harbor Number 1* is striking, especially given that Kelly came up with this structure in conversation with Martin. Support for the idea that Martin influenced Kelly's formative work on a structural level can be found in his regard for her. 'Agnes was the earth mother, a kind of sage,' he recalled. 'You'd go to talk to her and she'd soothe things. Sometimes she would correct us because of our follies, like a parent would in a way.'<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that Robert Indiana also regarded Martin as a senior artist on the Slip. Several months into his series of circular grid works in 1959, Indiana saw some of Martin's gridded circles and noted in his journal: 'This begins to make it rather hard ... [that] we should be using [the] same motif ... Unfortunate for me, not for her.'<sup>25</sup> Further, in another journal entry, dated March 1960, Indiana completed a study for his painting *Agadir* (1960), later renamed *The American Dream, I* (1961, Figure 5[s]). In this study, Indiana utilised the gridded circular format that Martin began to develop around 1956 in *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)*. The later work that would result from Indiana's sketch would transform the circles into forms reminiscent of casino chips through the use of textural and numerical symbols. This represents one of Indiana's first text-based paintings, and perhaps represents his working toward what he considered a more singular motif not indebted so heavily to Martin.

In addition to the gridded circular format, what is especially compelling about Indiana's study (and the subsequent painting) is the negative space that channels through the centre of the picture plane. It has been said that the angles of this channel resemble those of Kelly's hard-edge abstraction.<sup>26</sup> While this is true, a connection can be drawn further back to the central negative space of Martin's *Harbor Number 1*, which I have shown to prefigure the angles in Kelly's studies for his early sculptural work.

This narrative begins to reveal the high regard in which Martin was held by her peers at the Slip and the influential power of her early work on their formative practices. But it also reveals a common source – conceived as the inspiration of place, the dialogue among peers, or a combination of these factors – from which each of these artists would make divergent contributions (whereby, for instance, Martin would soon develop her linear grid, Kelly would move more adamantly into hard-edge abstraction and Indiana would inject his work with Pop and literary references). In fact, as we have seen above, the varied nature of their practices was already pronounced. With regard to Martin and Indiana, this was soon to become more marked in their first foray into sculpture.<sup>27</sup>

### **Assembling the Universal**

Like many of the artists who moved to the Slip in the late 1950s, Martin was by no means wealthy, and so the Abstract Expressionist supposition that artists paint large (and thus expensive) canvases was ultimately one that Martin and others, such as Indiana, would challenge, partly out of necessity and partly out of choice. The Slip and the surrounding seaport area offered the perfect setting for young

and emerging artists looking for material with which to work. The sculptural assemblages that Martin created from the materials of the Slip not only signal an increasing refinement of her abstract vision, but also a refinement of the philosophical, spiritual and intellectual values that her later work came to define.

In pieces such as *The Garden* (1958) and *The Laws* (1958, [Figure 6\[s\]](#)), Martin continued to develop an abstract idiom based on the format of the grid. However, in comparison to the work that she had created previously, Martin took advantage of the readily available material abandoned on the Slip. As Barbara Haskell has described Martin's assemblage practice: 'These scavenged nails, bolts, and knobs gave her modular, pre-existing images that avoided issues of personal handwriting.'<sup>28</sup> Martin's use of these found materials thus goes some way toward separating her practice from Abstract Expressionist ideals, in the sense of removing an explicit subjectivity from the work.<sup>29</sup> Her sculptural assemblages on the Slip also extend her practice beyond the comparatively semi-biomorphic, or at least semi-painterly work – especially, for instance, *Dancer No. 1 (L.T.)* – and toward an idiom that prefigures some of the central concerns of Minimalism. This is in line with Kelly's observation that both he and Martin wanted to avoid including their personalities in their work.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, Martin was not the only artist around the Slip experimenting with found materials. To appreciate how versatile the found materials from the Slip and surrounding seaport could be, one only has to look toward Robert Indiana's sculptural assemblages, or Robert Rauschenberg's combines of the time.<sup>31</sup> In Indiana's work, there is a direct engagement and re-invigoration of the history of these found materials. As he later noted: 'It was no. 25, its entire façade emblazoned with words, that daily confronted me with the format my work would assume. Not only that, but every ship that passed on the river ... carried those marks and legends that set the style of my painting.'<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, Rauschenberg's combines embody an approach that favours history and culture, incorporating a plethora of cultural codes and symbols that tie the work to the historical meanings and functions of its materials. That is to say, Rauschenberg's combines usher the real-world 'objectness' of their materials into the so-called realm of art in such a way as to retain their original meaning to some degree, thus blurring the distinction between art and life, as is often said about his work.

In contrast, Martin's approach can be understood in terms of her use of the found materials of the seaport as a springboard to the universal or the ideal, whilst retaining an expressive element. On the face of it, this may seem to align her work with that of the Abstract Expressionists. However, one critical difference regarding Martin's pursuit of the universal or the ideal was that she conceived it as just that – a *pursuit*. In contrast to the Abstract Expressionist artists up on Tenth Street, Martin aligned herself with a kind of classicism, stating: 'Classicists are people that look out with their back to the world ... It represents something that isn't possible in the world.'<sup>33</sup> Holland Cotter has also observed that Martin's pencil lines form, 'paradoxically, a signature without an ego'.<sup>34</sup>

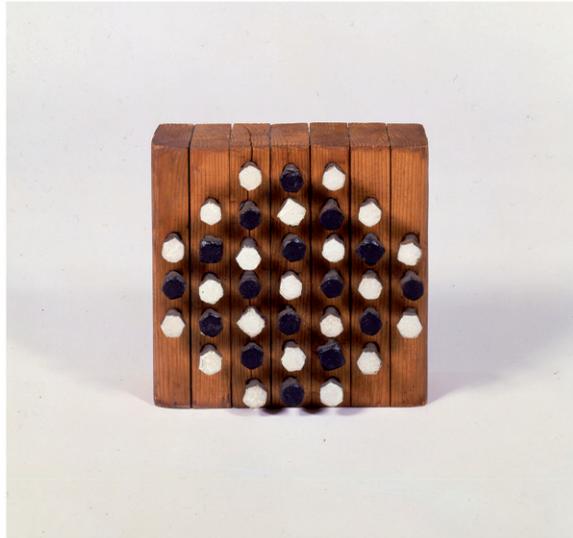


Figure 7. Agnes Martin, *Kali*, 1958, boat spikes and oil on wood, 27.9 × 27.9 × 10 cm, private collection. © Agnes Martin/ARS, licensed by Viscopy. Photo courtesy Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

Further, Martin's use of the found materials in these assemblages is part of a canny strategy that she employed throughout her career, which ultimately worked as a shield or counter against gendered stereotypes of biography, particularly in the context of 1950s and 1960s America. Perhaps realising the impossibility of shutting off or separating subjectivity from the work completely, Martin also retained an expressive or hand-made element in these assemblages, evidenced by the subtle variations in the construction of the forms. The combination of the industrial, weathered nature of the seaport materials and Martin's autographic hand in their assemblage is representative of the tension that many scholars see in her later grids, as well as the tension that has worked to situate her practice somewhere between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism.<sup>35</sup> In these assemblages, Martin utilised the materials of the masculinist seaport history of the Slip, re-purposing these materials in such a way as to unite seemingly opposed categories, such as the hand-made and the industrially produced, as well as the personal and the universal. Along similar lines, Anna C. Chave has characterised Martin as: 'a woman who played against type in articulating her vision by finding ways of using an orthodox language for some unorthodox purposes, or to counter-orthodox effect'.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps Martin's most overt utilisation of this strategy is embodied by her assemblage, *Kali* (1958, Figure 7). In *Kali*, much like *The Laws*, Martin used boat spikes to form the structure of a grid. Here, she has painted the head of each spike black or white, before alternating and nailing them into seven vertical rows of timber in a gridded octagonal formation. The work unites tension or opposition very

literally through the alternation of the black and white heads of the boat spikes. However, what I want to focus on here is the title of the assemblage, which has not been discussed in the literature, but is essential to a fuller understanding of the work.

In the earliest depictions of Kali in the ancient scriptures of Hinduism, she is portrayed as a fierce Goddess, her name literally translating to 'dark-coloured'. In the Vamana Purana (900–1100 CE), Kali is portrayed as the dark side of Parvati, who sheds Kali from herself, thus generating Kali as a separate entity.<sup>37</sup> From then on, Kali can be thought to embody the opposite role of Parvati.

When Martin produced *Kali*, she was in a relationship with fellow Coenties Slip fibre artist Lenore Tawney. For a queer artist working in the socio-political climate of late 1950s America, the metaphors of Eastern philosophies that unite division, and thus transcend Western binaries, would have proven highly relevant to Martin. This is exemplified by the title, as well as the formal composition, of this assemblage.<sup>38</sup> *Kali* also represents one of Martin's most overt or explicit affirmations of the tensions of her practice, which are later embodied in a more subtle manner through the union of the horizontal and the vertical axes of the hand-drawn grid.

During the late 1950s, Martin and Tawney formed a book club among themselves, reading a wide range of philosophical, poetic, and spiritual material, including William Blake, Saint Teresa, Gertrude Stein and Lao-Tzu.<sup>39</sup> It is likely that Martin and Tawney also read more widely at this time, especially Eastern philosophies such as Zen Buddhism, given that Martin had attended Columbia University during the early 1950s, when a series of highly influential lectures were given by Zen master D.T. Suzuki.<sup>40</sup>

In a photograph of Lenore Tawney in her studio, taken in the year of Martin's departure from New York, *Kali* hangs on the wall to the right of Tawney's desk. The work appears at home here, hanging comfortably next to the weaving equipment above her desk – almost as though the boat spikes could be seen as the usually unmaterialised coordinates of a weaver's loom. This is a reading that Martin would have strongly denied. When asked in an interview if her grid works were related to the practice of weaving, she replied, 'Oh, don't give me that.'<sup>41</sup> While such a reading may have appeared reductive in the past, it can make sense, in a specific manner, when we take into account Martin's remark regarding her work *Homage to Greece* (1959, [Figure 8\[s\]](#)), pictured in the same photograph directly below *Kali*. As Martin stated in relation to that work: 'The lines began as points in space.'<sup>42</sup> Tawney later recalled that Martin's development of the line-work of her grids grew out of the method of tracing graphite along a thread pinned to opposite sides of the stretcher.<sup>43</sup> This ultimately allowed Martin to adhere to a tightly controlled method of mark-making, whilst retaining the subtle trace of her hand.

## Conclusion

Taken collectively, the artistic developments at Coenties Slip in the 1950s and 1960s represent a turning point on the limina of a changing era in post-war

American art history. Yet, largely due to the eclectic nature of art-making on the Slip, questions of artistic dialogue and collective experience have rarely been elaborated in relation to the practices of these artists. As we have seen in the case of Martin and some of those with whom she was closest on the Slip, this was in part due to the fact that the artists of the Slip did not produce work that could be unified in any conventional or easily classifiable manner. Instead, they were a group who shared in common their pursuit for new artistic forms, ideas, and ways of living; often in opposition to the prevailing climate of the time.

Historically, the modernist drive toward individuality and originality has played a role in veiling the importance of creative dialogue. As Martin remarked in relation to the community of the Slip, 'we all did the same thing, but we did it alone.'<sup>44</sup> This remark is more widely indicative of attitudes commonly held among artists at the time. As we have seen, this kind of cautious rhetoric was one to which others, such as Kelly and Indiana, also adhered. However, when we look more closely at the formal innovations of these artists, coupled with their social interactions (daily breakfasts in the studio, or a wide-ranging book club), we can begin to revise a more robust historical account of late modern artistic production.

Specifically, in the case of Martin, the work that she produced throughout the late 1950s at the Slip demonstrates how the development of what she considered to be her mature abstract structure of the grid was not merely 'discovered' in isolation, but was intricately informed by the geography of the Slip, as well as the dialogues she shared with those around her. Place and artistic dialogue were also themselves intertwined at this point in Martin's practice, whereby the intersection of nature and culture at the Slip would allow Martin to define an abstract vision nevertheless untethered to these categories. Throughout her career, Martin often looked back to the experiences of her past. In 1965, when she named one of her grids *Drift of Summer*, perhaps it was her subtle gesture to that early work of the same name, and thus her nod to the start of a journey at Coenties Slip toward what she would consider a suitably pure abstraction.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Supplemental data**

Supplemental Figure [s] for this article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2018.1516492>

## Notes

1. Martin later recalled: 'I just happened to sit on the side of the roof. It was an old building, I just thought it was going to fall down, honestly.' See Douglas Dreishpoon, 'Agnes Martin: The New York-Taos Connection (1947-1957)', *The Mandelman-Ribak Foundation*, June 24, 2000, audio-visual excerpt, 3:35, <https://vimeo.com/58162124>.
2. This is not an exhaustive list. Others, including Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Barnett Newman, lived close by to Coenties Slip.
3. Mildred Glimcher, ed., *Coenties Slip* (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1993), 12.
4. Jerry Handte, 'Artist Mitchell at home here and in Manhattan', *Press & Sun-Bulletin*, 26 December 1976, 55.
5. Stephanie Barron, 'Giving Art History the Slip', *Art in America* 62, no. 2 (March 1974): 80.
6. 'The Filling In of Coenties-Slip', *New York Times*, May 9, 1878, <http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/93746676?accountid=14757>.
7. Barron, 'Giving Art History the Slip', 80.
8. Of these writers, Melville in particular left his mark on the area, writing in the opening chapter of *Moby Dick*: 'Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, Northward.' See Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The whale* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 3-4. Melville also directly influenced the work of Coenties Slip artists Fred Mitchell and Robert Indiana. While Mitchell subsumed the poetry of Melville into his gestural compositions on an abstract basis, Indiana was inspired not only by the imaginative or metaphorical potential of Melville's writing, but also by the form of the writing itself. This is exemplified by his use of text from *Moby Dick* in his artworks: *Melville* (1961), *The Melville Triptych* (1961), and *Alab* (1962).
9. Recently, there has been a shift in this regard, the exemplar of which is Christina Bryan Rosenberger's research on Martin's early work. See Christina Bryan Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line: The Early Work of Agnes Martin* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016). This is also indicative of wider movement in the discourse surrounding Martin's work in recent years, which has begun to historicise and contextualise her life and work in broader terms than previous scholarship. In part, this shift, following Martin's death in 2004, can be understood in terms of her ability to shape the discourse surrounding her work throughout her lifetime. As Suzanne Hudson recently argued in a lecture on Martin's work: 'To frame her experience as Martin did, was her right. To set it into a larger context is our responsibility.' See Suzanne Hudson, 'Artists, Community, and the Coenties Slip' (paper presented at The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas, May 11, 2017).
10. Suzan Campbell, 'Oral history interview with Agnes Martin, 1989 May 15', *Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.*, 15 May 1989, audio, tape 1, side A. Further, Martin later claimed: 'At Taos I wasn't satisfied with my paintings and at the end of the year I'd have a big fire and burn them all.' See Mary Lance, producer and director, *Agnes Martin: With My Back to the World* (Corrales, New Mexico: New Deal Films, 2003). Fortunately, some work from this period survives.
11. Dreishpoon, 'Agnes Martin: The New York-Taos Connection (1947-1957)', 10:00.
12. Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line*, 90, 95, 195.
13. *Ibid.*, 93, 195.
14. *Ibid.*, 96.
15. It is important to note that I am in no way suggesting that Martin's early practice followed a strictly linear progression. Instead, in demonstrating that there is a connection between Martin's work of different periods, I am arguing that the development of her practice was one of continual refinement of expression, form and vision, informed in part by the place in which she lived, and the artistic dialogues of which she was a part.
16. Interestingly, while this early work of Martin's can be considered expansive, the modernist grid, broadly construed, has often been considered in terms of the tension between its expansive and its contractive qualities. Rosalind Krauss has discussed this point in terms of the centrifugal and the centripetal forces of the grid. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50-64. See also John Elderfield, 'Grids', *Artforum* 10 (May 1972): 52-9.
17. Dreishpoon, 'Agnes Martin: The New York-Taos Connection (1947-1957)', as cited in Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line*, 119.
18. Martin's notion of the triangular perspective of the Slip (i.e., the view from the lofts as if from the vantage point of the apex of a triangle), also recalls the operations of the perspectival eye, which have been elaborated in considerable detail in relation to Martin's later grids. This notion of conical perspective is summarised particularly well by Michael Newman's recollection of his experience of Martin's grid, describing 'their convexity toward the center'. See Michael Newman, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Agnes Martin', in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly, and Barbara Schröder (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2011), 201. See also Rosalind Krauss, 'The /Cloud/', in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Barbara Haskell (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 155-65.
19. Nancy Princenthal, *Agnes Martin: Her Life and Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 71.
20. *Ibid.*
21. In Kelly's words: 'I happened to be having breakfast with Agnes Martin in her studio. I made a model for the piece called *Pony* from the top of a coffee container we used at breakfast ... Another piece was a sketch from an envelope. It still has her name on it. It's called *Gate*.' See Barron, 'Giving Art History the Slip', 84.

22. David Dalton and James Rosenquist, *Painting below Zero: Notes on a Life in Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 84.
23. For instance, in her catalogue essay for the *Coenties Slip* exhibition at Pace Gallery in 1993, Mildred Glimcher noted: 'Although intensely private while making his work, Kelly's presence on the Slip was important for many other artists there.' See Glimcher, *Coenties Slip*, 10. Additionally, Indiana expressed his gratitude in the following terms: 'Before Coenties Slip, I was aesthetically at sea. With Ellsworth, my whole life perspective changed. All of a sudden I was in the twentieth century'. See Barbara Haskell, 'Robert Indiana: The American Dream', in *Robert Indiana: Beyond Love*, ed. Barbara Haskell (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013), 18. Kelly decided to return to the United States from Paris in 1956, after Betty Parsons had begun to show the work of Ad Reinhardt (perhaps seen by Kelly as an indication that his own work would be accepted). See Ann Wilson, 'Meeting of Streams, Agnes Martin: A Background History of the Coenties Slip Years, 1955 to 1967', unpublished manuscript, Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, 17. See also Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line*, 103–5.
24. David Hayes, 'Agnes Martin: Lines in the Desert', *Saturday Night*, December 1997, 83.
25. Haskell, 'Robert Indiana: The American Dream', 23. This admission is striking for the time, and represents more broadly the cultural differences between the artists of Coenties Slip and the Abstract Expressionists up on Tenth Street. That is to say, one cannot imagine the influence and pre-eminence of a female artist being so freely admitted amidst the Abstract Expressionist milieu. As Rosenberger has highlighted in relation to this point: 'Indiana's observations demonstrate that by 1959, Martin had developed a strong enough aesthetic voice that her "motif" was recognised as her own, an apt indicator that her days as a student ... were over.' See Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line*, 144.
26. Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line*, 144.
27. Ultimately, Martin would produce only a handful of assemblages throughout her career, all during her time at the Slip, with the exception of one little-known assemblage, *Untitled* (1980) – consisting of what appear to be 15 drill bits aligned and affixed vertically on a square timber board. Of course, it is possible that Martin produced other assemblages that have been lost or destroyed.
28. Barbara Haskell, 'Agnes Martin: The Awareness of Perfection', in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Barbara Haskell, 103.
29. The use of assemblage at this time as a strategy to counter Abstract Expressionist ideals of medium and expression was not merely confined to the artists of the Slip. For instance, in 1960 Claus Oldenburg staged his installation *The Street* at the Judson Gallery in Greenwich Village, utilising the detritus of the streets surrounding Washington Square Park as a strategy against local political overreach, as well as one of separating his practice from Abstract Expressionism through his literal use of banal materials. See Joshua A. Shannon, 'Claes Oldenburg's The Street and Urban Renewal in Greenwich Village, 1960', *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 1 (March 2004): 136–61.
30. Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line*, 134.
31. Rauschenberg was living just a couple of blocks away from the Slip at this time.
32. Glimcher, *Coenties Slip*, 10.
33. Agnes Martin, 'The Untroubled Mind', in *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, ed. Arne Glimcher (New York: Phaidon, 2012), 217.
34. Holland Cotter, 'Agnes Martin at Pace', *Art in America* 77 (April 1989): 257.
35. When asked how her work is different from that of the Minimalists, Martin stated: 'Well mine is more expressive ... I don't know exactly what the expression is, but it's more like human expression, that's why I ... say I am an expressionist.' See Campbell, 'Oral history interview with Agnes Martin, 1989 May 15', audio, tape 1, side B.
36. Anna C. Chave, 'Agnes Martin: Humility, the Beautiful Daughter ... All of Her Ways Are Empty', in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Barbara Haskell, 134.
37. See Anand Swarup Gupta, ed., *The Vamana Purana: With English Translation* (Varanasi: All India Kashiraj Trust, 1968).
38. Martin's interest in and engagement with Zen is also made explicit in work such as *Untitled* (1958) and *Cow* (1960). As Jonathan D. Katz has argued: 'No wonder closeted homosexuals like Martin chose a Zen ethos in a violently repressive era: it proffered salve.' See Jonathan D. Katz, 'Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction', in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Cooke, Kelly and Schröder, 179. Betty Parsons, Martin's dealer at the time, who had encouraged Martin to move to New York, was also deeply interested in Eastern philosophies, particularly Subud meditation. See Wilson, 'Meeting of Streams, Agnes Martin: A Background History of the Coenties Slip Years, 1955 to 1967', 15.
39. Holland Cotter, 'The Joy of Reading Between Agnes Martin's Lines', *New York Times*, October 6, 2016, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/1826321431/fulltext/5DA38C5A3C294DEDPQ/1?accountid=14757>.
40. Holland Cotter claims that around this time Martin also heard lectures by Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. See Holland Cotter, 'Agnes Martin', *Art Journal* 57, no. 3, (Autumn 1998): 78–79. In addition, the writings of Taoist sage Chuang-Tzu would become extremely important to Martin, exemplified in her later writing.
41. Joan Simon, 'Perfection Is in the Mind: An Interview with Agnes Martin', *Art in America* 84, no. 5 (May 1996): 88.
42. Ann Wilson, 'Linear Webs: Agnes Martin', *Art and Artists* 1, no. 7 (October 1966): 47.

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43. Frances Morris, 'Agnes Martin: Innocence and Experience', in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell (London: Tate Publishing, 2015), 61.

44. Campbell, 'Oral history interview with Agnes Martin, 1989 May 15', audio, tape 1, side B.

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