

LÉVY GORVY

LÉVY GORVY'S FOCUS SERIES PRESENTS AGNES MARTIN'S 'PORTRAIT OF JOY'

FOCUS: Agnes Martin

22 February – 13 April 2019

Lévy Gorvy
22 Old Bond Street
London W1S 4PY

Opening Reception: Thursday 21 February 2019, 6–8 PM



Agnes Martin. *Gabriel*, 1976. Contemporary stills from original film by Bill Jacobson. © Agnes Martin / DACS 2019. Courtesy Pace Gallery.

London, UK—Lévy Gorvy is pleased to present *FOCUS: Agnes Martin*, an exhibition that will place the artist's sole completed film, *Gabriel* (1976), in conversation with an intimate selection of her abstract paintings. At 22 Old Bond Street, a screening room and adjoining gallery of paintings will create an immersive, meditative environment that will highlight the relationship between Martin's work and her conception of joy. "I thought my movie was going to be about happiness," Martin commented on the production of the film, "but when I saw it finished, it turned out to be about joy—the same thing my paintings are about." The exhibition will mark the second of the FOCUS series, which encourages sustained contemplation of landmark artworks by artists rooted in the gallery's programme, alongside related selections from their oeuvres.

Innocent vision

Shot in colour and without a script, *Gabriel* loosely follows its titular subject, a fourteen-year-old boy, as he wanders through rural landscapes of New Mexico, California, and Colorado; Martin herself lived and worked in New Mexico during this period. Rejecting a linear storyline, the film presents a portrait of joy through fragmented visions of the landscape interspersed with detailed shots of wildflowers billowing in the wind and a foaming stream in perpetual movement. Early on, it depicts the boy contemplating the ocean, his back facing the camera as if turned quietly away from what Martin called “the turmoil”: a scene to which its final shot returns. In doing so, it highlights both the cyclical experience of joy and the imponderable vastness of nature. Shot on a second-hand 35mm camera with the assistance of her friend Bill Katz, *Gabriel* consciously opposes the destruction and violence popular in commercial cinema and instead embraces feelings of bliss and delight intimated by the boy’s communion with nature. Martin’s ambition was not to deconstruct the art-house film as such, but rather to express a state of mind. Her choice of protagonist reflects her interest in the unmediated, uncorrupted experience of a boy responding to the beauty of his surroundings. Although Martin had no children of her own, she admired the young for what she described as their “untroubled mind” and their openness to the world. Her pursuit of innocence emerges through the pure emotion that suffuses her radiant abstract paintings and the light that flickers through grainy images of sky, stream, and mountain in *Gabriel*. The film will be accompanied by a display of rarely-seen, original photographs taken by Katz during the filming process, offering insight into this unique moment in Martin’s creative process.

Unmediated joy

This exhibition seeks to draw out the parallels between the unadulterated joy expressed in *Gabriel* and the sublime serenity of Martin’s classic geometric paintings from the mid to late 1960s. When making the film, Martin recalled that she never struggled to carry the heavy camera equipment, yet when she began to shoot the wildflowers up close, her hands started to shake, “trembling for joy because of the beautiful flowers,” as she later reflected. Such delicate, intimate moments are further evoked by Martin’s use of music. J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* run intermittently throughout the film, interspersed with the sounds of wind and water. As Martin observed: “From music, people accept pure emotion and from art they demand explanation.” *Gabriel* plays on this idea that music readily produces states of heightened affect but allows imagery to dominate, underscoring the power of the visual to produce intense feeling. By placing Martin’s paintings alongside her film and its understated score, this exhibition will recontextualise her pictorial practice and reaffirm its emotive potency. In doing so, *FOCUS: Agnes Martin* promises to prompt not only an immersive experience of joy but also a ranging, and deeply personal, exploration of the syntax of sensation, allowing the viewer to linger in the pensive calm that Martin’s art, regardless of its medium, so exquisitely conveys.

About Lévy Gorvy

Lévy Gorvy cultivates a programme devoted to innovation and connoisseurship in the fields of modern, postwar, and contemporary art. Founded by Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, Lévy Gorvy maintains gallery spaces at 909 Madison Avenue in New York and in Mayfair, London. In 2017, Lévy Gorvy opened an office in Shanghai, and in March 2019 the gallery will open a new exhibition space in Hong Kong. The gallery fosters continued dedication to the living artists and artists’ estates that it represents and pursues a robust programme of exhibitions and multidisciplinary events. Lévy Gorvy also produces ongoing art historical research and original scholarship, publishing exhibition catalogues, monographs, and other key publications.

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