



Simplicity is never simple.

AGNES MARTIN

Agnes Martin

***Leaf*, 1965**

Acrylic and graphite on canvas

72 1/16 x 72 1/8 inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

Museum purchase, Sid W. Richardson Foundation Endowment Fund

Acquired in 1993

Agnes Martin's delicate pencil drawing is at once painfully precise and utterly fragile. Her work has sought the simplest expression of perfection, nature, and balance for years, and for this she has employed the grid. The structure and stability of the grid are tempered by the way she draws the line. It is drawn with a ruler and pencil, but the texture of the canvas ultimately makes the lines slightly uneven, and even quivering. Martin arrived at the grid as the expression of "the most simple, powerful things" in the mid-1960s. The Modern's *Leaf* is an example of this early breakthrough. Initially, the thought of a tree, as the title suggests, led her to draw the grid. "When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees and then this grid came into my mind and I thought it represented innocence, and I still do, and so I painted it and then I was satisfied. I thought, this is my vision." Martin's grids also call to mind the veins of a leaf or the weave of the branches or roots of a tree. It is this play of power and stability that Martin aims for, stating, "My formats are square, but the grids never are absolutely square, they are rectangles a little bit off the square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance, though I didn't set out to do it that way. When I cover a square surface with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power." Along with the texture of the penciled lines, the background in Martin's pieces are never pristine. As in *Leaf*, there is often a hazy, uneven field, which offers us a hint of the artist's hand in making the piece, and tells us that though there is a regular structure, it is not machine-made, but man-made. With her subtle and beautiful pieces, Martin may be creating the most powerful metaphor for human life – works that contain a balance of strength and fragility.