

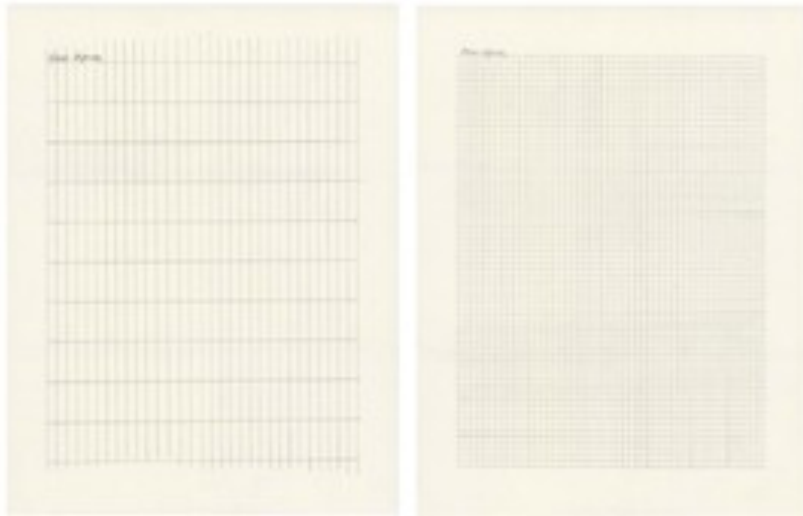
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Dedication to the Grid: Tammi Campbell's love letter to modernism

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Tammi Campbell's Dear Agnes is the July web commission for the RemailModern.org.

It feels like a long time until 2017 — or at least the 2017 when the Remail Modern has been promised to open. Despite this, the Remail curatorial team has found ways to show work to its patient future patrons.

The latest in the pre-launch programming are commissioned works for their website. The gallery has posted one every month since June.

The first effort was Ryan Gander's Twitter project called My Validation through my Association. Tanya Lukin Linklater's video Slay All Day held down the August time slot.

For July, a drawing from Tammi Campbell's Dear Agnes project was posted on a daily basis. The 30 grid drawings on the site vary. All bear the words Dear Agnes at top left. Each is a letter to Agnes Martin, a daily meditation.

Each morning since 2010 when Campbell arrives at her studio she draws a work in the style of Martin, the Macklin-born modernist painter. Each drawing is a grid, Martin's subject of choice, but each is different.

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If it takes 10,000 hours to master something, Campbell should be right there. This may sound like I'm making fun, but consider that Dagmara Genda referred to Campbell's chosen medium in a recent issue of Border Crossings magazine, not as drawing or painting, but as modernism itself.

Dear Agnes' meaning is informed by Campbell's work, that of using modernism as a framework to explore medium, form and content, as much as in Martin's. And to better understand the project you must look to Martin's work.

Agnes Martin created abstract modernist works using a grid for the majority of her career. Tiffany Bell writes in her essay Happiness is the Goal, that for Martin repetition "spread meaning over the perception of the body of work rather than locating it in a single image." The dedication to the subject matter is as important as each individual line. Campbell's work then adds a layer of meaning as her dedication are not just to the line and the repetition but also to Martin and modernism.

In this way Dear Agnes is a sincere love letter written with the grid. The Saskatoon artist is paying homage to Martin and her work both in subject matter and in duration of the body of work over an extended period of time.

My favourite explanation of Martin's work is from the artist herself. Bell writes that Martin once compared her work "to watching clouds and never seeing any the same, or viewing waves of the sea, continuously breaking on the shore always the same but always different."

It's a project that is well suited to the Internet, although I wonder if a daily email would have been a better format. Dear Agnes is best viewed as it's created, one a day for an extended period of time, to truly appreciate the letters and the labour that produced them. To view the work takes a level of dedication and focus I'm not sure a lot of viewers have without a reminder.