

Islands Number Four

1.

Agnes Martin, *Islands Number Four*,
Repeated ovals on a grid, what appears
To be perfect is handmade, disturbed.
Tobacco brown saturates canvas to burlap,
Clean form from a distance, up close, her hand.
All wrack and bramble to oval and grid.
Hollows in the body, containers for grief.
What looks to be perfect is not perfect.

Odd oval portholes that flood with light.

2.

Description of a Slave Ship, 1789:
Same imperfect ovals, calligraphic hand.
At a distance, pattern. Up close bodies
Doubled and doubled, serried and stacked
In the manner of galleries in a church,
In full ships on their sides or on each other.
Isle of woe, two-by-two, spoon-fashion,
Not unfrequently found dead in the morning.
Slave ships, the not pure, imperfect ovals,
Portholes through which they would never see home,
The flesh rubbed off their shoulders, elbows, hips.
Barracoon, sarcophagus, indestructible grief
Nesting in the hollows of the abdomen.
The slave ship empty, its cargo landed
And sold for twelve ounces of gold apiece

Or gone overboard. Islands. Aftermath.