

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Anne Truitt

Press Packet

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Dafoe, Taylor. "Before She Died, Artist Anne Truitt Completed a Series of 'Sound' Paintings. Now, They're Seeing the Light of Day for the First Time." *Artnet*, November 19, 2020.

Block, Louis. "Anne Truitt: Paintings" *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2018.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

BOOKS

'Each individual lives the story of his or her own existence—we "translate" our lives as we live them.' —ANNE TRUITT

Days in Full Color

Yield: The Journal of an Artist

By Anne Truitt

Yale, 201 pages, \$26

BY DONNA RIFKIND

IN 1974, when the sculptor Anne Truitt was 53, she decided to begin keeping a journal. She bought a brown notebook of the sort she had once used for college lecture notes, and she wrote in the mornings while sitting up in bed, "for as long a time as seemed right."

Although she was an outlier, by location and temperament, from the hot center of the New York art world, Truitt was nonetheless a distinctive figure in that world from the early 1960s onward. In 1962, upon first seeing her sculptures during a visit to her Washington, D.C., studio, the critic Clement Greenberg decreed: "Now there will be three in Washington," linking Truitt's stature to that of the color-field painters Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis. She was represented by the distinguished dealer André Emmerich and was one of the first women to have a solo retrospective at the Whitney Museum. Intensely idiosyncratic,



TOWERING CAREER Works in progress in Anne Truitt's studio, 1976. In her sculpture the artist sought 'to translate myself into visibility.'

Truitt's sculptures were generally categorized as Minimalist (or more woundingly, in a 1991 New York Times review, "Minimalist Lite"). Yet she deplored all such labels and affiliations, seeking only, as she put it, "to translate myself into visibility in art."

Truitt had several reasons for starting a journal. She hoped it would help her restore a much-needed balance between her artist self, with its necessary ruthlessness, and her other identities—wife, mother, teacher, administrator, friend. She also wished to forge a

bond with a community of readers by sharing "what it is like to be an artist in this culture." Beneath her soft, polite demeanor there was, as Truitt admitted, "some raring part of myself who always wants to be, as my father used to say, 'the bride at the wedding and the corpse at the funeral.'"

Long before she began creating the luminously painted wood columns that established her reputation as a sculptor, Truitt had started out as a writer of poetry and short stories. In 1953 she had co-translated, from the French, a study

of the novels of Marcel Proust by Germaine Brée. Her deep dive into Proustian sense-memory was to become an enormous influence on both her art-making and her writing.

The journals continued sporadically over the decades until a year or so before Truitt's death in 2004 at age 83. Three volumes were published during her lifetime: "Daybook" (1982), "Turn" (1986) and "Prospect" (1996). A posthumous installment, edited by her daughter Alexandra, has now been issued by Yale. Truitt was thoughtful in her choice of titles, and "Yield," with its two-sided suggestion of ingathering and surrender at life's end, is especially apt.

"I have always been appalled to notice how terrifyingly determined the artist in me is," Truitt wrote in "Daybook." "That spearhead of myself advances at full charge while the camp caretakers crouch behind bushes." Her circumstances demanded the full force of that charge. In 1947 she married the journalist James Truitt, whose various jobs required frequent moves with their three children to New York, Texas, San Francisco, Japan, and back to Washington. Their eventual divorce in 1971 granted Truitt custody of her children, which included financial responsibility.

Even as her reputation solidified, sales of her art were never enough to support the household. She took a teaching job at the University of Maryland in 1975, the only regular long-term income she would earn. In the meantime she cooked, cleaned, ironed, gardened,

organized, scheduled, chauffeured, helped with homework—and took what chances she could to work in her studio. There she hoisted herself on ladders to brush coat upon delicate coat of water-based acrylic paint onto her tall wood columns, sanding down the finish between layers so that their colors—vehement reds here, foggy mauves or pellucid blues there—seemed to breathe on their own in three dimensions. Truitt's colors have a complexity of depth and polychromy that no photograph can capture. They arise out of emotions triggered by her own very particular sense-memories: "Goldsborough," currently on view at the Met, is a smooth wash of those foggy mauves that reflect an enveloping sadness she associated with a family she knew on Maryland's Eastern Shore

Truitt always felt most at home when in the studio.



when she was a child.

Truitt understood that her money worries existed within the context of her relative privilege, noting in "Daybook" that "my anxieties, such as my concern to provide my children with excellent educations, are indeed luxuries in themselves." She emphasized how precious her own Bryn Mawr education was to her, as Radcliffe had been to her mother and Smith College to her grandmother. Born

Anne Dean in Baltimore in 1921, she descended on both sides from New England Puritans and revolutionaries. A paternal ancestor, Capt. John Pulling, was the vestryman of Boston's Old North Church who helped hang the lanterns that triggered Paul Revere's midnight ride.

Her own parents were more subdued and more tragic. Her father, an amiable swell, was wiped out by the Great Depression and crushed by depression and alcoholism. Her mother died of a brain tumor when Truitt was in college. The journals recall her childhood loneliness as Truitt silently bore her parents' suffering. "I felt for them the heartbreak I feel now as I watch my children encounter the inevitable struggles of adulthood," she

writes in "Prospect." Foremost among those later struggles was the reverberating shock of James Truitt's suicide in 1981, "a fact as hard as a stone" for Truitt's children and for herself. "We wept to think of him overwhelmed," Truitt writes. "We still weep."

Still, as the final journal makes clear, she had her share of countervailing, even eclipsing, joys: the sensual pleasures of working in the studio, where she always felt most at home; the satisfactions of watching her children and then her grandchildren grow. "We are for each other a palimpsest," she writes of her grandson Charlie when she is in her 80s and he in his early 20s. "He helps me over the same bumps

in the geography around here that I used to help him over . . . and I hear in his voice the encouragement he once must have heard in mine.”

Beyond family, too, there is the consolation of community: of Truitt’s art-world friends—Kenneth Noland and David Smith; Robert Motherwell and Helen Frankenthaler; André Emmerich and Clement Greenberg. Vital as well are the canonical artists with whom she feels kinship: Delacroix, whose 19th-century “Journal” she packs into her valise for a trip to Europe; Piero della Francesca, whose “towers of color” in the “Legend of the True Cross” frescoes of the mid-15th century inspired her own; and Rembrandt, whose 1658 self-portrait at the Frick Collection speaks to her with increasing urgency as she ages.

Alexandra Truitt notes in her preface to “Yield” that parts of it seem more fragmentary than the earlier publications. This is so, yet in its finality it also seems the most complete. The whirlpools of Proustian memory brim to their fullest here: 9/11 stirs up in Truitt the same anxieties she felt throughout the years of World War II. Turning 80, she makes concessions to age, restricting herself to two steps only up the studio ladder, “and those thought out in advance.” Disintegration and death are constant preoccupations, but she’s also thrilled to learn about the work of younger artists, and vows to look at some new video-game-based works as soon as possible.

In its stripped-down intimacy, “Yield” shows Truitt at her most

eloquent in demonstrating, as her sculptures do, that all revelation in art is self-revelation. “It is ultimately character that underwrites art,” she believed, and it’s our privilege to witness the strength of character in the monuments, visual and verbal, that she left behind.

Ms. Rifkind is the author of “The Sun and Her Stars: Salka Viertel and Hitler’s Exiles in the Golden Age of Hollywood.”

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THE NEW YORKER

UNDER REVIEW

HOW A SCULPTOR MADE AN ART OF DOCUMENTING HER LIFE

Artists and writers have turned to Anne Truitt's diaries for a way forward. In "Yield," her final journal, the Minimalist iconoclast looks back.

By Megan O'Grady

June 15, 2022



Much of the current fascination with Truitt has to do with the ways in which her body of work pushes back against precisely the kind of categorical thinking that seemed to sideline her. Photograph from Bridgeman Images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

The artist Anne Truitt began keeping a journal in 1974, at fifty-three, after retrospectives of her work at the Whitney Museum and the Corcoran Gallery of Art left her feeling “crazed,” she wrote, “as china is crazed, with tiny fissures.” Seeing her sculptures again—all together at once, exposed to public view—she was faced with the “reactivation of feelings” she had sought to contain within them. Keeping a journal became a way to integrate her identity as an artist alongside her roles as a mother and breadwinner—after her divorce, in 1971, from the journalist James Truitt, she took on financial responsibility for their three children. Journaling also allowed her to refine her sense of purpose in making art, or what she describes as “the strict discipline of forcing oneself to work steadfastly along the nerve of one’s own most intimate sensitivity.”

Truitt’s frankness and intellectual curiosity about the hows and whys of a working artist’s life has made “Daybook: The Journal of an Artist,” which was published in 1982, something of a touchstone for aspiring artists and writers. (“She was . . . somebody who had a life,” the installation artist Liza Lou recalled in a 2013 podcast. “She wasn’t just ‘the auteur’ . . . the self-centered artist who only lives for her work.”) “Daybook” was followed by two more volumes of Truitt’s journals, “Turn” (1986) and “Prospect” (1996); this month, a fourth, “Yield,” edited by one of her daughters, Alexandra, will be published posthumously by Yale University Press. When Truitt died, in 2004, at eighty-three, she left behind a body of sculptural work—squared-off wooden columns, human-scaled and covered with bands of color—that challenged viewers to contemplate the limitations of their own senses. Similarly, in her journals, Truitt is often pushing to articulate something at the edge of discernment; much of the pleasure of reading them is in experiencing her thoughts still in formation as she sought to illuminate “the dark, driving run” of art-making.



Truitt at the André Emmerich gallery, in 1963. Art work by Anne Truitt / Bridgeman Images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery



Truitt's studio, in Washington, D.C., in 1979. Art work by Anne Truitt / Bridgeman Images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Truitt exhibited work early and prominently—she had her first solo show at New York's André Emmerich gallery in 1963, at forty-one; three years later, she was one of the few women included in the Primary Structures exhibit at the Jewish Museum, the exhibition that served to establish Minimalism as a formal direction a tonal galaxy away from Pop art and Abstract Expressionism. But her work didn't sell well—her sculptures weren't meant to hang on walls. Nor did she play the art-world game, schmoozing at parties or writing treatises that would launch her into publicity's slipstream. She lived in Washington, D.C., not New York. While Judy Chicago and other feminist artists had, by the early nineteen-seventies, begun overtly questioning the authority of a male-dominated Western canon, Truitt's formal explorations spoke more obliquely to the aims of second-wave feminism. But, looking at "Insurrection," a 1962 sculpture bisected into two clashing shades of red, completed the year before Betty Friedan published "The Feminine Mystique," one can imagine the kinds of revolution that were on the artist's mind.

Much of the current fascination with Truitt has to do with the ways in which her body of work—pillars or plinths handmade from wood and painted, in a painstaking process involving the application of as many as forty layers of acrylic, each one sanded to eliminate her brushstroke—pushes back against precisely the kind of categorical thinking that seemed to sideline her. Looking as if they were carved from pure pigment—it seemed as though you could cut her sculptures in half and find the color running all the way through—her blunt geometries were related to color-field painting, with its clean-edged shapes of vibrating hues; for Truitt,

color wasn't merely an optical experience but an emotional one. "I slowly came to realize that what I was actually trying to do was to take paintings off the wall, to set color free in three dimensions for its own sake," she wrote in "Daybook." "This was analogous to my feeling for the freedom of my own body and my own being, as if in some mysterious way I felt myself to be color."

The art critic Clement Greenberg placed Truitt at the forefront of Minimalism, writing in 1968, "If any one artist started or anticipated Minimal Art, it was she, in the fence-like and then box-like objects of wood or aluminum she began making, the former in 1961 and the latter in 1962." If they'd been monochrome, he added, they would have counted as the "first examples of orthodox Minimal Art." Donald Judd, who deemed her work unserious, objected to her being given such credit, replying that Greenberg's claim was "in the category of 'if the queen had balls, she would be king.'" The irony of wanting to liberate art from historical baggage only to re-create it on boys'-club terms wasn't lost on Truitt, whose approach was, in fact, distinct from that of other prominent Minimalists such as Judd, Robert Morris, and Sol LeWitt, with their emphasis on industrially fabricated objects that conveyed nothing beyond their own materiality. By contrast, Truitt, who was interested in abstraction as it refracted perception, believed that life experiences were "the ground out of which art grows." Her work alluded to a private language of sense memories drawn from the subconscious and rigorously condensed. "Artists have no choice but to express their lives," she wrote in "Daybook," a perspective reflected in her evocative titles: "Morning Child," "A Wall for Apricots," "Summer '96." However unfashionable in that moment, the idea that our characters might be entwined with our art, whether or not what we're making is explicitly autobiographical, is largely embraced today. Echoes of Truitt's humanistic, contemplative conceptualism might be detected in Roni Horn's cast-glass shapes, or in the approach of a younger generation of abstract painters such as Laura Owens and Amy Sillman—artists who convey private meaning without relying on narrative or easily read imagery.

Truitt's hybrid forms are, at last, being recognized as the breakthroughs they were. Her visibility has profoundly expanded since her death, in 2004, at eighty-three—with a 2009 survey at the Hirshhorn; acquisitions made by Dia:Beacon and the National Gallery of Art; and a half-dozen shows at Matthew Marks, most recently of her white paintings with delicate graphite lines, a series begun in the nineteen-seventies, titled "Arundel," in Los Angeles. In 2024, she'll have her first European survey exhibition at Madrid's Museo Reina Sofía. Like many women who made their mark on conceptual art—including Agnes Martin, Lorraine O'Grady, and Agnes Denes, to name just a few—Truitt has the dubious honor of being both revered and undervalued, "rediscovered" by contemporary critics and curators while having been there all along.

The focus of Truitt's life was family and the studio, and many of her journal entries are devoted to navigating the tenuous threshold between the two. There's the thrill of a new sculpture's conception: "a magical period in which we seem to fall in love with one another," she observed in "Daybook." But we're also allowed into long days in the studio, the tolls on the body, the killing administrative tasks and financial anxieties. Playing in the bath, Truitt's daughter, Mary, asked her whether artists are "just born that way," and Truitt replied that she thought they might be. "I had been absorbing her brown body against the white tub, the yellow top of the nail brush, the dark green shampoo bottle, Sam's blue towel, her orange towel, and could make a sculpture called *Mary in the Tub* if I ever chose to." Reading Truitt, one is reminded that the concept of the "art monster," a woman who sacrifices everything and everyone for her creative ambition, is absurdly reductive; the demands of art and the demands of love aren't necessarily oppositional, each coming at the expense of the other, but can

often be mutually complicating and enriching. In each volume of her journals, Truitt approaches her past from a slightly different vantage point: she wrote the entries that became “Turn” after her ex-husband’s suicide, and those in “Prospect” around the time of another retrospective, this one at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

In “Yield,” which Truitt began writing in 2001, at eighty, the lens is wide-angle; old age may be “a radical situation,” she acknowledged, but it was also another perch from which to cast her eye. Greenberg makes a cameo in her memories (over martinis and oysters at Tokyo’s Imperial Hotel), as does Marcel Duchamp, casually informing her that she might not, in fact, exist. Places changed—she visited friends in her childhood landscape of Easton, on Maryland’s shore, with its memories of “crushed oyster shell roads; pale whites, yellows, tans, and grays, sharp to your feet but tender to your eyes blending into marsh and field”—only for her to learn that many of those fields were now filled with big-box stores. The world was changing: “Actuality mocks art,” she noted after September 11th. And her physical capacities were changing, too: “I long ago decided that if the things I make ever cease to emerge into my mind’s eye, I would stop making them,” she wrote. “It never occurred to me that they might simply continue to rise up as long as I live, bid into a body no longer able to rise to meet them.”

Once again, the prose is as unembellished and direct in impact as her sculptures, and Truitt remained an even-handed witness to her own life, the pleasure of visits from grandchildren running alongside her grief at a friend’s passing. There are notably few regrets in Truitt’s sense of an ending: a critic’s query about her feminism touches off a reflection on the “dammed-up force of individuality” that characterized her marriage and the quiet defiance that fuelled her work in the studio; a graduate student’s question about money provokes rueful thoughts of sculptures she wouldn’t have the chance to make. As in her art, Truitt was constantly making monoliths of memory—including the moment a half century before when she understood what she wanted to do with her life: “And one day . . . it occurred to me that if I made a sculpture it would just stand there and time would roll over its head and the light would come and the light would go and it would be continuously revealed.”

Truitt often described her life as a series of departures or “turns” away from the future she’d expected, and the one that had been expected for her. Born Anne Dean, in 1921, she grew up in Easton, where she was taught at home by a private teacher and read to by her mother, with whom she was very close. When she first went to school, in fifth grade, she was discovered to be severely nearsighted: before she got glasses, she mostly saw light, color, and shape. By twelve, the Great Depression had ravaged the family finances and her parents’ mental health; Truitt and her younger twin sisters were sent to live for a year on their aunt’s farm in Virginia, where she learned to work with her hands. A burst appendix, followed by a nearly fatal bout of peritonitis during her freshman year at Bryn Mawr, was another deviation, one that circuitously fed her interest in psychology. She recovered while taking a physical rehabilitation course at a hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, where she played volleyball with psychiatric patients, including Zelda Fitzgerald. During the Second World War, Truitt volunteered as a Red Cross nurse’s aide (she was also a researcher in the psychiatry lab) at Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, working with traumatized soldiers, but she opted against pursuing a doctorate in psychology at Yale. The demands and rituals of care—from hauling bedpans and washing dying bodies to finding the right words to reassure—had deepened her moral imagination, allowing her “to open up the ducts,” as she put it, that would eventually connect life and art.

After her marriage, in 1947, Truitt accompanied her husband to New York before eventually settling in D.C., where he would work for the *Washington Post*. As a result of her teen-age illness, she was infertile early in her marriage, years that she later acknowledged as a crucial period of creative incubation that few women of her era enjoyed. She was mostly writing fiction then, only to grow increasingly frustrated with the conventions of storytelling. “I had less interest in narrative than I had thought, and no knack for how things happen in time,” she recalled in “Yield.” In 1955, the same year a surgeon at Johns Hopkins made it possible for her to have children, she translated a book about one of the authors who had influenced her most, Germaine Brée’s “Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time.” But it wasn’t until she turned to visual art—studying sculpture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, in Washington, where she befriended the color-field painter Kenneth Noland—that she found her calling. In 1961, at the Guggenheim, she saw her first painting by Barnett Newman. “My whole self lifted into it,” she recalled in “Daybook.” “‘Enough’ was my radiant feeling—for once in my life enough space, enough color. It seemed to me that I had never before been free.” The understanding set her on the course she would follow for the rest of her life.

Truitt wrote as she sculpted, returning to the past again and again to find fresh truths. Where her art’s eloquent allusion ended, her journals seemed to begin, offering a model of discipline and open-ended inquiry and a welcome counterweight to the kind of anxieties that so often accompany a creative practice. As Rachel



Truitt's sculptures at the Whitney Museum, in 1973. Art work by Anne Truitt / Bridgeman Images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery



Truitt's sculptures on display at the Matthew Marks Gallery, in New York, in 2010. Art work by Anne Truitt / Bridgeman Images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Kushner confides in her foreword to “Yield,” we read Truitt not only out of curiosity about her biographical details but for “selfish reasons”: “I was looking for hygiene, perhaps, of a particular kind: in thought and habits, in temperament and mood. I wanted instructions, silly as that might sound, for parsing the world with care, and honoring my own life.”

The paradoxes of creative work that defined Truitt’s being—the balance struck between our senses and our intellect, between the subtle self and the pragmatic one—are not so unlike the tensions at play in our own ambitions to make a mark on the world, to push beyond the formal confines of our particular existence. Perhaps this is why many of us are drawn to artists’ memoirs and journals: to see what’s behind those beautifully lit objects in a gallery, the uncertainty and struggle in pursuit of something subjective and fundamentally unknowable. Artists “catapult themselves wholly, without holding back one bit, into a course of action without having any idea where they will end up,” Truitt wrote in one of “Daybook”’s best-known passages. “When they find that they have ridden and ridden—maybe for years, full tilt—in what is for them a mistaken direction, they must unearth within themselves some readiness to turn direction and to gallop off again.”

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Anne Truitt: White Paintings

UNTIL APRIL 2 **CLOSING SOON**

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY / LOS ANGELES / ART

In 1943, Anne Truitt graduated from Bryn Mawr College with a degree in psychology, and for two years after that worked in a psychiatric ward at Massachusetts General Hospital. When Truitt started painting and sculpting in 1949, she wasn't pivoting away from psychology but rather investigating thought through a new medium. Her work was monochrome, delicate layers of a single color built up on textured, geometric wood. "What is important to me is not geometrical shape per se, or color per se," she wrote in 1965, "but to make a relationship between shape and color which feels to me like my experience." At its West Hollywood outpost, Matthew Marks Gallery displays 10 white paintings from Truitt's "Arundel" series, which she worked on between 1973 and 1999. "In these paintings I set forth, to see for myself how they appear, what might be called the tips of my conceptual icebergs," Truitt explained. Each rectangular canvas is stark white, with occasional graphite lines and pops of titanium white. —*J.D.*

Anne Truitt, "Arundel XLIII," 1977. Photo courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery.

Matthew Marks Gallery
1062 N Orange Grove Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90046

Davis, Jensen. "Anne Truitt: White Paintings." *Air Mail*, February 17, 2022.

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HYPERALLERGIC

Art

Anne Truitt's Spiritual Quest

As her death approached, was the artist starting fresh or beginning to let go?

by John Yau

December 5, 2020



Anne Truitt, "Sound Ten" (2003), acrylic on paper, 19 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (©annetrutt.org/
Bridgeman Images/Matthew Marks Gallery)

In 1965, while living in Japan with her three children and husband, Anne Truitt (1921–2004) wrote:

What is important to me is not geometrical shape per se, or color per se, but to make a relationship between shape and color which feels to me like my experience. To make what feels to me like reality.

Yau, John. "Anne Truitt's Spiritual Quest." *Hyperallergic*, December 5, 2020.

In her pursuit of reality, and the importance she ascribed to place in her life, starting with her childhood on the Maryland coast, Truitt merged three-dimensional columnar supports and color into a beguilingly nuanced experience that slowly reveals itself as we walk around the mute form in our midst.

In her exploration of the limits of perception, Truitt pushed the implications of Ad Reinhardt's almost imperceptible shifts in hue and Barnett Newman's precisely divided monochromatic fields into a new territory.

Truitt painted the surfaces of her sculptures in layers, each of which has been sanded down before the next coat is applied. As we make our way around one of her forms, all sorts of interactions take place.

Did the hue darken or lighten from one plane to the next, or is the difference the result of ambient light? I find myself becoming more aware of the interplay of reflection and shadow in a room occupied by Truitt's sculptures. What about that thin band of color running along the bottom? What does it mean to circumambulate the sculpture and still feel as if some part of it eludes you? What leads me inevitably to think about the relationship between beauty and an understated unease? Is it because I am reminded of how much of everyday phenomena escapes my attention?



Anne Truitt, "Sound One" (2003), acrylic on paper, 19 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (©annetrutt.org/Bridgeman Images/Matthew Marks Gallery)



Anne Truitt, "Sound Seven" (2003), acrylic on paper, 19 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (©annetrutt.org/Bridgeman Images/Matthew Marks Gallery)

These questions, which link what I see with the associations it stirs up and memories that rise to the surface, underscore that the past and present are connected, but also, to my mind and more importantly, that art and life are not separate. However inspired Truitt might have been by her encounter with the work of Reinhardt, she did not agree with his statement: "Art is art. Everything else is everything else."

In his comprehensive, beautifully written *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (2004), James Meyer, Truitt's most insightful critic, wrote: "Each sculpture is the residue of a memory or a chain of memories triggered during its completion."

We need not know what triggered Truitt's choices because she never represents them. With sculpture, she found a way to embrace her experience without turning it into an image or a narrative. In her work, this experience is translated into a color sensation that is modulated and subtle, an optical phenomenon linked to our moving body. We have to readjust our orientation to the physical world and open ourselves up to nuance.

Truitt's sculptures have often been described as eccentric because they do not fit comfortably into the well-established parameters of either Minimalism or Color Field painting, both of which she has been associated with. Yet it seems to me that this attitude toward her work is diminishing. Neither sculpture nor painting, her hybrid forms are unlike anything else that was being done at the time, and they should be recognized for that.

Truitt belongs to the small and distinct group of artists that Carter Ratcliff recently defined when he wrote in *Hyperallergic* of Joanna Pousette-Dart's shaped paintings: "[She] has found an original way to be original." (Ruth Asawa could also be placed in this group.)

For those who know Truitt's sculptures and paintings, the exhibition *Anne Truitt: Sound* at Matthew Marks Gallery (November 12 – December 19, 2020), which consists of a body of work that has never before been exhibited, will come as a surprise. In these paintings on paper, the merging of support and paint is unlike anything else in her oeuvre.

According to the gallery press release:

While making this series, Truitt described waking one morning with the impression that her sense of shape, structure, and proportion had departed her. "What is left is 'sound,' some kind of energy without name," she wrote. "It occurred to me that the 'name' of the things I am making out of the beautiful delicate strong paper is SOUND."

This statement implies that what had left the artist was her ability to recognize where she was in the world; her sense of measure had been replaced by feelings of chaos.

As the word "sound" suggests, these paintings are purely abstract and have little to do with physical place. The series consists of 14 roughly square, monochromatic works done in thickly brushed acrylic on unevenly edged handmade paper.



Anne Truitt, "Hover" (1999), acrylic on wood, 18 1/4 x 14 x 14 inches (©annetrutt.org/
Bridgeman Images/Matthew Marks Gallery)

Yau, John. "Anne Truitt's Spiritual Quest." *Hyperallergic*, December 5, 2020.

I was taken by the fact that, making these works the year before she died, she had stopped using a signature process she had long employed in her sculptures, of sanding between each coat of paint.

As a counterpoint to the paintings, the exhibition includes two box-like sculptures, both of which are 18 ¼ inches high. In “Hover” (1999), Truitt painted the sides a color she described as “orangey-apricot” and the top lavender, which she extended down the sides “a little tiny sliver.” The low height of “Hover” draws the viewer’s attention to the top, which seems to detach itself from the rest of the sculpture and float above it, a plane of lilac-colored light.

Emphasizing the physical, rather than the optical, something completely different happens in the thickly covered, brushy works on paper. Was Truitt starting fresh? Or was she beginning to let go, knowing that death was fast approaching? Maybe these two conditions are entwined rather than divergent. The size of the works echoes the field of vision when one is staring straight ahead. The first four paintings in the *SOUND* series are black. They are painted in viscous acrylic on paper with deckled edges. They have been mounted on a support in a shallow box frame, so that they float before the viewer — uneven, planar forms.

Truitt wanted the support and color to merge in her sculptures; she was not interested in making a painted sculpture. In her hands, the geometric form, with its different planes, becomes a complex synthesis of object, color, and light, an optical thing.



Anne Truitt, "Sound Four" (2003), acrylic on paper, 19 1/2 x 19 3/4 inches (©annetruitt.org/Bridgeman Images/Matthew Marks Gallery)

In a similar way, Truitt merges the paint with support in the *SOUND* paintings. The resulting works have a mineral-like presence; they resemble sheets of slate floating before us. The association with slate is especially true of the black paintings (which account for nearly half of the 14 works). At the same time, the heaviness of the works' material presence is undermined by the illusion that they are floating in the frame.

This contradiction is elevated to a poignant pitch by the scale, which echoes the viewer's concentrated field of vision.

Thinking back over Truitt's work, from her breakthrough piece, "First" (1961), which was inspired by the white picket fences of her childhood in Easton, Maryland, to these last works on paper, I was reminded of the final stanza of Robert Creeley's poem "The Rhythm" (1962):

The rhythm which projects
from itself continuity
bending all to its force
from window to door,
from ceiling to floor,
light at the opening,
dark at the closing.

In her investigation of the limits of seeing, Truitt was not a materialist. Through her work she expressed a spiritual recognition that one cannot see everything there is to see, even as we are pulled irrevocably forward, toward chaos and infinity. With the *SOUND* paintings, Truitt did not close her eyes or avert her gaze. She worked her way from black to milky white to bold red to gray. Color became visceral and rough, a celebration of the physical world in all its manifestations. In these paintings, I hear Truitt saying hello and goodbye.

Anne Truitt: *Sound continues at Matthew Marks Gallery (523 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through December 19.*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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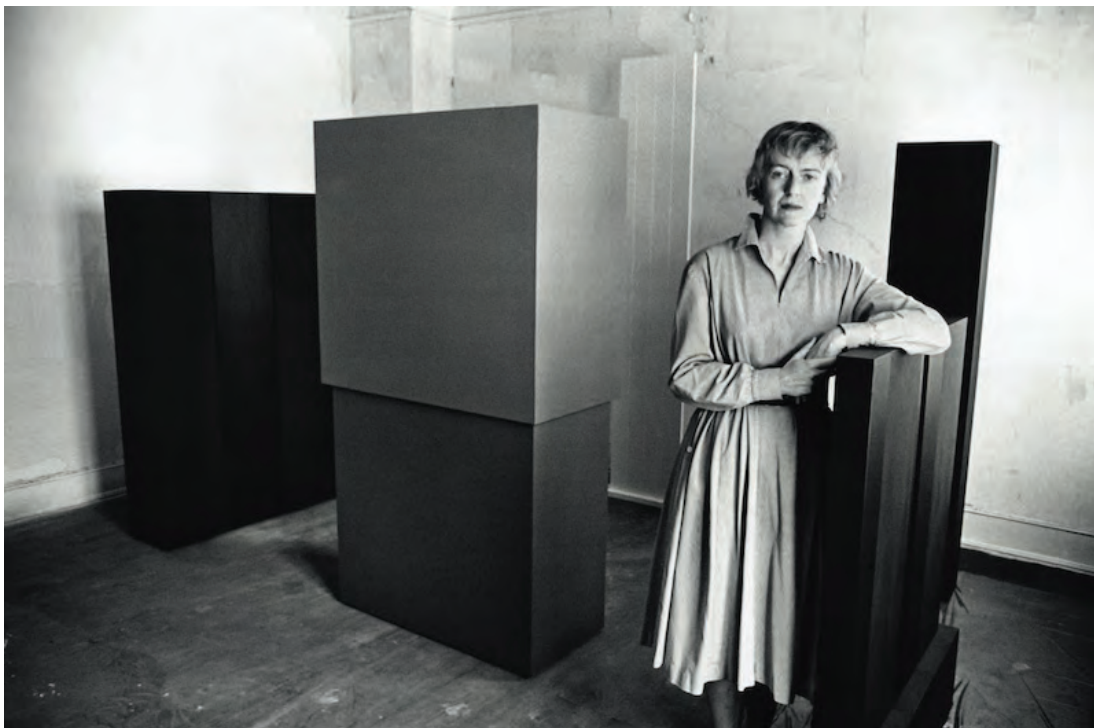
artnet® news

Exhibitions

Before She Died, Artist Anne Truitt Completed a Series of ‘Sound’ Paintings. Now, They’re Seeing the Light of Day for the First Time

The works on paper, which represent something of a departure for the artist, comprise a new exhibition at Matthew Marks.

Taylor Dafoe, November 19, 2020



Anne Truitt, 1962. Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery.

“Something strange is happening to me.”

So explained Anne Truitt in a letter to her daughter in the fall of 2003, one year before her death at age 83. “Certain ways in which I have made my work ever since 1961 have simply—very simply, silently and without saying goodbye—departed from me.”

Dafoe, Taylor. “Before She Died, Artist Anne Truitt Completed a Series of ‘Sound’ Paintings. Now, They’re Seeing the Light of Day for the First Time.” *Artnet*, November 19, 2020.

Truitt was talking about making “Sound,” a new body of work that would go down as one of the last in her decades-long career.

Each of the 14 entries in the series comes in the form of a square piece of paper covered edge to edge in thick, monochromatic swaths of paint—a pensive study in color, abstraction, and, yes, sound. They went on public view for the first time last week at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York (through December 19).

“It’s as if a person had decisively walked quietly out of a room I am used to living in and in which I were thoroughly accustomed to a powerful presence,” the artist continued in the letter. “I am surprised. What is left is ‘sound,’ some kind of energy without name. More force, no name.”

“Yesterday while walking around,” Truitt went on, “it occurred to me that the ‘name’ of the things I am making out of the beautiful delicate strong paper...is SOUND.”



Anne Truitt, *Sound Eleven* (2003). © Estate of Anne Truitt, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Dafoe, Taylor. “Before She Died, Artist Anne Truitt Completed a Series of ‘Sound’ Paintings. Now, They’re Seeing the Light of Day for the First Time.” *Artnet*, November 19, 2020.

For those familiar with the artist's greatest hits—her totemic sculptures or expansive Color Field paintings—the “Sound” series might come as a surprise. The profound interest in color that imbues much of Truitt's work is there, but the finish is different. Whereas older efforts evinced clean—if imperfect—surfaces, these works on paper are expressive and aggressive and rough.

And yet, as Matthew Marks director Cory Nomura explains, what distinguishes the “Sound” series within the artist's catalogue is also what makes it unmistakably Truitt.

“She continued to innovate within a particular language throughout her entire practice,” Nomura tells Artnet News. “It never became a rote operation. Everything was made deliberately and with intense meaning and thought behind it.”

“Anne Truitt: Sound” is the seventh solo presentation of the artist's work at Marks. (The show is also featured on the dealer's virtual exhibition platform.)



Anne Truitt, *Sound Seven* (2003). © Estate of Anne Truitt, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Since the gallery began working with Truitt's estate 12 years ago, Nomura notes, it has been making its way through the bodies of work she left behind. During that time, the market for her art has also grown significantly. Truitt's 15 priciest auction sales—which comprise sculptures, paintings, and works on paper—have all come since 2012, according to the Artnet Price Database. The top five, including a 1983 sculpture that sold for a record \$325,000 at Sotheby's, have taken place since 2018.

The artist has also received growing institutional attention as art historians seek to expand the story of Minimalism. In 2017, Dia:Beacon unveiled a long-term exhibition of Truitt's work dating from the 1960s to the 1980s.

“Anne Truitt: Sound” will be on view at Matthew Marks Gallery November 12–December 19, 2020.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

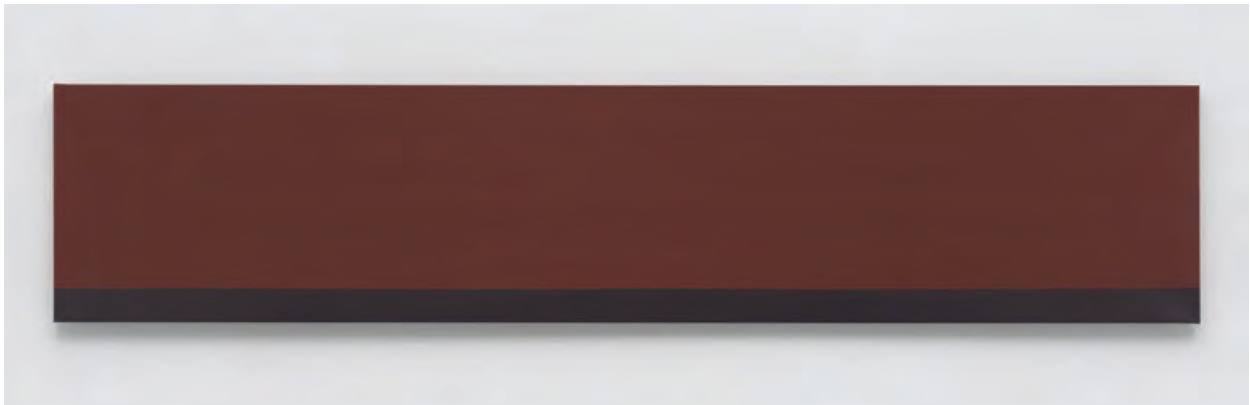
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ArtSeen

Anne Truitt: *Paintings*

By Louis Block



Anne Truitt, *Brunt*, 1974. Acrylic on canvas, 19 x 92 inches. © annetruitt.org / Bridgeman Images / Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

In a journal entry written at Yaddo in the summer of 1974, Anne Truitt recalls falling asleep as a child in Maryland, attempting to locate, in pitch darkness, the position of furniture in the bedroom. She goes on to describe what lies behind her head, out the window, beyond the lawn, the river, the town. It is only once this task is accomplished, once she is “in place,” that she can fall asleep. “I pay attention to latitude and longitude. It’s as if the outside world has to match some personal horizontal and vertical axis.”¹ In the absence of light, when only flickers of visual information are available, Truitt relies on a corporeal sense to build an image of the world.

This preoccupation with spatial orientation is present in much of Truitt’s writing, not just as a means to ground oneself, but as a way to structure the emotional landscape of her own life. Consider this early memory of Truitt as an infant being changed by her nurse Stella:

I remember lying on a table in the pale light of night. My lower body is drenched. My diaper is being changed. I already know that I will be comfortable very soon, and I feel patient. My nurse is tall and slender and serene, like my mother, though I know that she is not my mother.²

Block, Louis. “Anne Truitt: Paintings” *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2018.

Already, Truitt associates her own horizontality with helplessness, and the verticality of her nurse and mother with comfort—they are beings that, by virtue of their upright stature, provide care for her. Later on in childhood, Truitt’s mother brings her to see Stella on her deathbed. She is shocked to see her former nurse lying down:

Her length, so often measured vertically from my low perspective, was now shockingly horizontal. My knees were above her head. Her frail body was flat, scarcely lifting the cover under which it was neatly stretched, and her long hair, usually wound around her head, was combed out and spread thinly on the sheet.³

In this psychological inversion of roles, Truitt assumes the position of caretaker, standing above the bed. Upright, she has assumed full control of her world. In this vertical axis one finds choice, independence, strength. Being horizontal then, is to be subject to the tides of nature and biology: infantile impotence, uncontrollable dreams, disease, death.

All of this is to say that it would be obvious to read Truitt’s works as figures or landscapes. With their frequently elongated proportions (tall and thin or short and wide), her paintings and sculptures seem to resonate along their respective axes. While the vertical pieces embody a physical presence in space, whether imposing or shy, the horizontal pieces are something to fall into; they request the viewer’s presence. These infinite couplings—sleeping and waking, voids and bodies, nature and nurture—allow for a neat compartmentalizing of Truitt’s work. It was this division that I attempted to circumvent while visiting a new show at Matthew Marks of eleven paintings, made between 1974 and 1993.



Installation view, Anne Truitt *Paintings*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2018. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Aaron Wax. © annetruitt.org / Bridgeman Images / Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Block, Louis. “Anne Truitt: Paintings” *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2018.



Anne Truitt, *Run Child Run*, 1986. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches. © annetrutt.org / Bridgeman Images / Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

It was helpful, in reading the lines and forms of the paintings, not to try to identify horizons versus figures, but to ask “which horizon, which figure?” Truitt’s titles invoke autobiographical details, whether they are place names or phrases like *Run Child Run*, not so much implying the specific content that is being abstracted, but rather hinting at a specificity of experience, a location along the emotive axes of perception.

The gallery’s main room holds four vertical paintings, beacons against the stark walls. *Ojibwa* (1993) is bisected by a black diagonal with a slight red fringe. On either side, two fields of purple—impossibly close to each other in hue—push inwards. Up close, the mind doubts the eye. Are the purples actually different, or is the red fringe playing tricks? Three skinny paintings from 1986 appear to gaze in towards the center of the room. But, approaching them individually, their personae fade away. Despite their vertical formats, all three paintings contain horizon lines. A crooked black segment grounds the bottom of *Messenger’s* (1986) red field, while a thin strip of red rests atop *Prodigal’s* (1986) purple. Not only does this juxtaposition play with the relative value of the two reds, it pushes the figure ground relationship to its absolute limit, relegating the painting’s tension to the edge of the canvas, forcing the viewer to crouch down or tilt their head up to view the action. Similarly, the square format paintings, such as *Prospect* (1991) and *Run Child Run* (1986) consist of dense fields of color with slight blips of contrast running against the bottom edge of the canvas.



Anne Truitt, *Engadine I*, 1990. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 108 inches. © annetruitt.org / Bridgeman Images / Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

These paintings insist on the meditative quality of their content. Truitt intensifies the resonance of these fields of color not by doing away with form and line, but by pushing it to the periphery. In another journal entry, she describes the first time she witnessed violence. In her childhood garden, she would peer out through the fence to look at “the whitewashed clapboard back wall of a shed housing the grocer’s chickens. Violets grew profusely under its eaves. Nourished by chicken droppings, enormous, sweet-smelling blossoms burgeoned from thick-springing leaves.” When the grocer comes out to slaughter the chickens on the stump next to the shed, she describes the scene as “violets in the foreground and off to the left the matter-of-fact wielding of death.”⁴ The violets are what hold Truitt’s attention in this foundational memory, either because of their vivid color or the mere fact that they draw attention away from the chickens’ slaughter. Nonetheless, there is an acknowledgement of necessary contrasts in this passage: the flowers grow out of the waste produced by chickens, which are then slaughtered for sustenance. It is Truitt’s specificity of vision that focuses her unwavering gaze on the violets, without erasing the unpleasant actions both peripheral to the flowers’ placement and integral to their existence.

The show’s four horizontal canvases are installed in the back room, promising an exploration of latitudinal experience, a simplification which quickly faltered in my mind. The horizon line in *Brunt* (1974), when examined up close, reveals bleeding of both the brown and black layers into each other, suggesting a back and forth struggle with both fields. The sense of movement here is vertical rather than horizontal, a contest between two strong forces weighing upon each other. The

paintings are full of these contrasts between force and dimension. In the movement of one's head to view the crest at the top of *Morning Wave* (1986), the expanse of blue rushes out of the confines of its narrow canvas. The later paintings are even mounted on rounded stretchers, so that a bevel gracefully guides the paint from the face of the paintings to their edges.

Engadine I (1990) offers the most subtle shifts in perception. On the first viewing, under artificial light, the diagonal separating the two fields was sharply defined, throwing the composition off-kilter. On subsequent viewings, under the natural shifting light of two cloudy days, the fields were more hazy, seeming to overlap into each other. In another sequence from her journal, Truitt describes a recurring dream of night-swimming with an unknown lover. "We are the same temperature as the water. Its purple folds our purple into itself, under and over. But we remain ourselves."⁵ What is the inherent difference that allows for two colors to remain separate once pushed against each other? What else is the color infused with?

On the subject of straight lines, Truitt wrote "We never see them unless we make them ourselves; even the apparently straight horizon of the ocean against the sky curves if we see it from the air."⁶ If these lines are not found in nature, then they must relate to our bodies. In drawing a line, we locate ourselves not only along latitude and longitude, but in time, and in other imperceptible dimensions. Just as specific colors carry personal meaning, so too can specific degrees of spatial orientation—the awkward angles in which we shift our bodies to see, to embrace, or to hide.

Up close, *Engadine's* colors waver in the shifting light. Stepping back slowly, the canvas appears to have been hung crooked. I blink and realize my spine has aligned with the diagonal. For a moment, I am parallel to Truitt's axis. Then, I readjust, back to the present.

Notes

1. Anne Truitt. *Daybook* (Pantheon, 1982). From the 2013 Scribner edition. 27-28.
2. *Daybook*, 47.
3. *Ibid.* 48.
4. *Ibid.* 76-77.
5. *Ibid.* 81.
6. *Ibid.* 74.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Tuesday, January 16, 2018 | **A11**

LIFE & ARTS

ART REVIEW

BY TOM L. FREUDENHEIM

Washington
IT'S WORTH FINDING your way to the intimate Tower 3 atop the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art for its luminous exhibition of nine sculptures, two paintings and 12 works on paper by Anne Truitt (1921-2004). Once there, see if you share her sensation in encountering an exhibition of her own work: The sculptures “stood in their own space, in their own time, and I was glad in their presence.” While not even a mini-retrospective, this show confirms Truitt’s important, if slightly eccentric, position in the history of American modernism.

Born in Baltimore, educated at Bryn Mawr, and having lived in Boston, Dallas and San Francisco, Truitt by 1960 had settled in Washington. As she relates so eloquently in a film (shown in the gallery), Truitt went through years of welding figurative works. But by the early 1960s she realized that she was no longer interested in narrative art, settling on her métier of exploring the “relationship between shape and color.” The resulting three-dimensional, carefully finished wooden rectangular forms, most often columns of varying sizes, were painstakingly constructed, serving as the ground for layers of nuanced tones. As Truitt describes it, she worked with her “hand held lightly to spread thin paint in yet another transparent coat, feeling the color deepen under the brush.”



Anne Truitt 'Knight's Heritage' (1963) in the National Gallery of Art's exhibition

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Truitt didn't practice her color explorations with paint on canvas, so her work is easy to mischaracterize. Her inclusion in the influential 1966 “Primary Structures” exhibition at New York's Jewish Museum suggested that she belonged within the canons of Minimalist art that emerged in reaction to free-wheeling painterly modes of Abstract Expressionism.

Similarly, Truitt's work feels peripheral to, yet also somehow a part of, the Washington Color School, whose most celebrated members were Kenneth Noland, with whom she exchanged creative ideas, and Morris Louis. Lastly there's also the temptation to view Truitt in terms of the deft and elegant color forms of Ellsworth Kelly or the “finish-fetish” free-standing painted slabs of John McCracken.

But all those connections miss her deeply held conviction in the inherent power of her own intensely nuanced feelings about color, and in the viewer's ability to sense that. Presumably constrained by space, the NGA's curator, James Meyer, has assembled a spare overview that nevertheless touches on most, if not all, of Truitt's disciplined mastery. The exhibition brochure includes excerpts from Meyer's extensive interviews with the artist that, along with the gallery film and Truitt's three published journals (cited in the wall texts), reveal a creative sensibility of uncommon personal insight and intellect.

There's little in this concise exhibition that helps us understand the artist working toward what eventually became her comfort zone. In a powerful black acrylic drawing, "26 December 1962, No. 5" (1962)—echoing Russian constructivists, and perhaps prefiguring Richard Serra's later paint stick drawings—we can sense a tension between the pictorial and simple abstract three-dimensional form.

Truitt's "Insurrection" of that same year reflects another of her early balancing acts in the tension between sculptural form and color. Here she struggles with the structural means to carry her color interests: the uneasy parity between a bright red and a brick red (there's risk in naming Truitt's colors!) in two slices, on their own awkward base, and the addition of wedge-shaped supporting struts on the back, suggesting that the work might fall forward.

The delicately beautiful "Parva XII" (1977)—which sits on a shelf—is the only horizontal object here, suggesting that Truitt was less comfortable with this orientation or needed to express color's assertiveness on a grander scale. "Summer Remembered" (1981), a subtly tapered, tall yellow column, has a

fine, jagged Barnett Newman "zip" implying a platform. Here Truitt pays homage to an artist whose work had been a revelation to her: "My whole self lifted into it," she writes of seeing Newman's work at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 1961. That whimsical dark mauve scribble, almost at the bottom of the work, also suggests how Truitt kept experimenting with what would make her colors feel both comfortable and independent in the spaces they inhabit. Some of the works, such as the late "Twining Court" (2002), rise directly from the floor, while others are slightly raised by a barely visible recessed pedestal to suggest a kind of levitation—another attempt at liberating the color.

In the glow of these incandescent works, the viewer participates in Truitt's struggle to emancipate herself from an ironic inner conflict. On the one hand, she asserts in the gallery's film, "I'm not a sculptor, really...[I'm] trying to lift the color up and set it free...[and] trying to get color in three dimensions." Yet Truitt can't help but refer to her works as sculptures. In part this stems from the material she so painstakingly fabricated, forming the support for her variegated palette. "It is wood I love," she writes in her journals, explaining that it "will disintegrate in time at something comparable to the rate at which we human beings disintegrate." While successfully reviewing the variety of the artist's formal concerns, the exhibition leaves us wanting more of the challenging and subtle range of colors that Anne Truitt successfully labored to liberate.

In the Tower: Anne Truitt

National Gallery of Art, through April 1

Mr. Freudenheim served as the assistant secretary for museums at the Smithsonian.

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The Washington Post

Museums • Review

An artist who stood apart from D.C. intrigue and the New York whirl



Installation view of "In the Tower: Anne Truitt" at the National Gallery of Art. (National Gallery of Art/National Gallery of Art)

By **Philip Kennicott**

December 7, 2017

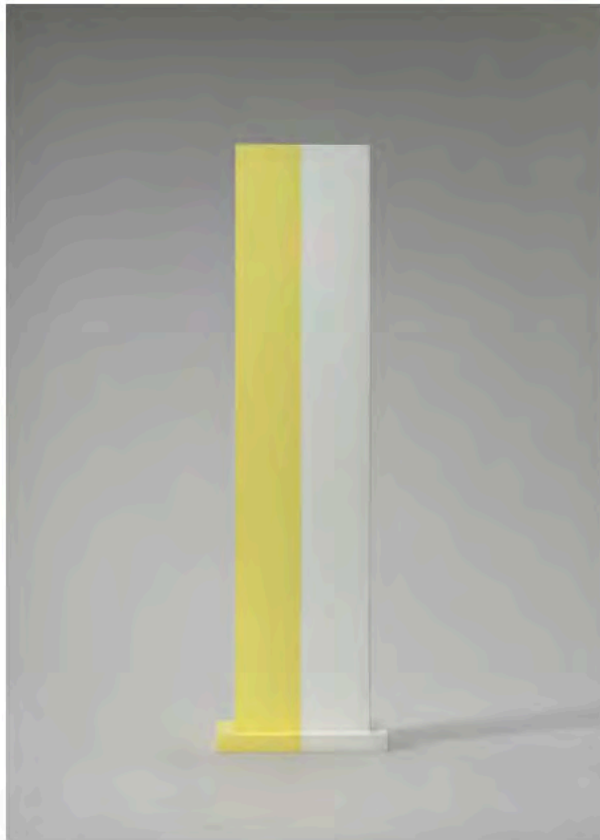
The main gallery space of the National Gallery's Anne Truitt exhibition is a modestly large but tall room, where for years the museum displayed the beloved cutouts of Henri Matisse. Upon entry, you encounter what seems to be a family gathering, a collection of wooden pillars and wall-like forms, in different colors, upright and erect, as though they all the shared the same DNA that Americans prize as markers of wealth and good health. They are mostly long and lean and stand apart from one another with a certain WASP-ish reserve.

Truitt was born on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, went to Bryn Mawr, married a journalist who

Kennicott, Philip. "An artist who stood apart from D.C. intrigue and the New York whirl." *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2017.

rose high in the ranks of *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, and found herself “one of the inhabitants of Camelot,” as curator James Meyer puts it in an interview with the artist published in 2002. One of the earliest sculptures on view is a yellow and white form with a sleek, sunny disposition. The 1962 “Mary’s Light,” honors Mary Pinchot Meyer, an artist and friend of Truitt’s, who was found shot to death in 1964 on the canal in Georgetown.

Anne’s husband, James Truitt, was a player in a major story about Mary’s affair with John F. Kennedy, and Mary’s ex-husband, Cord Meyer, was a high-level CIA figure and himself



Anne Truitt. "Mary's Light," 1962. (Copyright Estate of Anne Truitt/Bridgeman Images/Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

the subject of rumors about the Kennedy assassination. Her death remains a mystery that still embroils some of the most storied figures in this city’s imaginary golden age of intrigue and glamour.

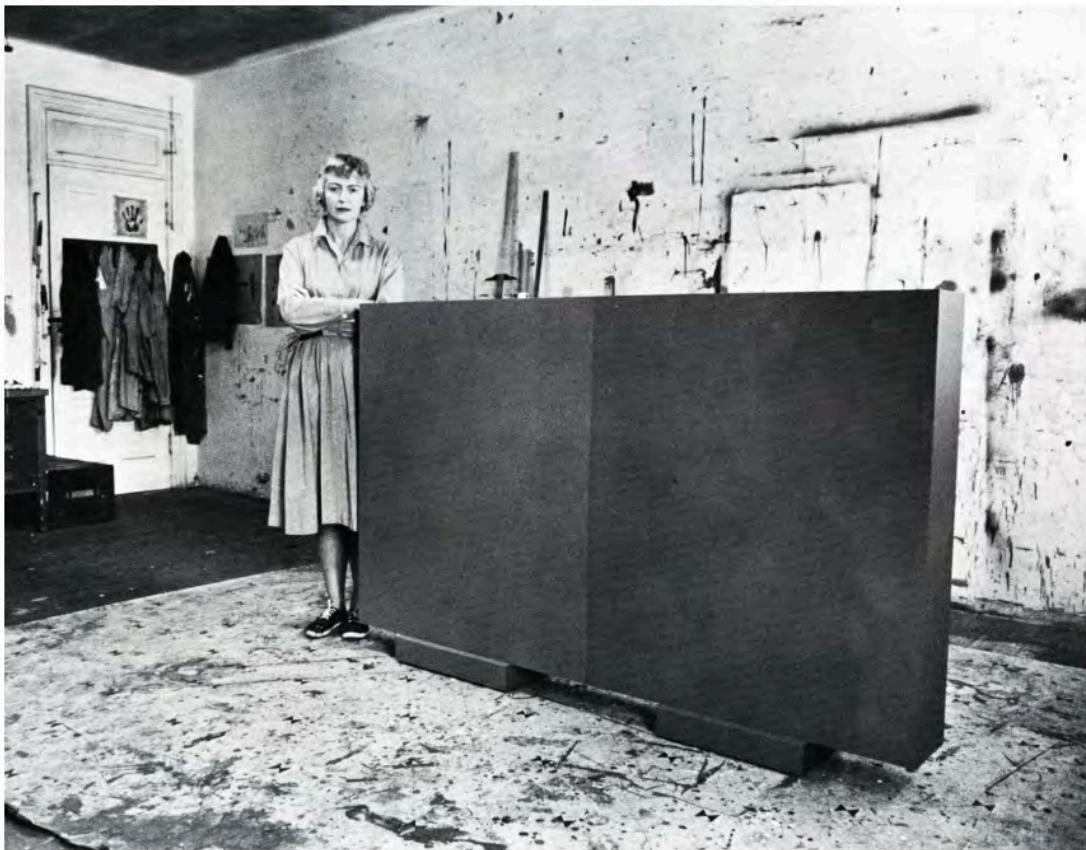
Truitt’s work remains reticent, if not indifferent, to all of that. She seems to have lived peripheral to multiple different worlds of preening ambition. Truitt, who died in 2004, found studio spaces in the interstices of Washington, raised a family and made her art. She was given the benediction by prominent critics, such as Clement Greenberg, but remained on the edge of the social and professional circles of the New York art scene. Her work was some of the earliest to focus on stripped-down, basic geometric forms, an aesthetic often called minimalism, but she rejected that label, too.

In James Meyer’s interview with Truitt, conducted when she was in her 80s, the scholar presses her on the meaning of the forms and meticulous color combinations that define her sculpture. Thrice he asks her the same question, and twice she demurs. Only on the third try does she offer a clue: “I think you’d have to say that what I’ve been about is being alone in the world, looking around at it, and trying to absorb it, at first with extremely nearsighted eyes.” Until she was in fifth grade, she says, no one knew how bad her eyes were. So, it seems, she moved through the world seeing large forms as large, soft blocks of white and gray.

It's hard to know whether she said that only to be polite, to offer a persistent interviewer something to go on. It certainly helps make sense of some of the early works, in which she seems to reduce architectural forms to basic shapes. The earliest of the proto-minimalist forms looks to be a piece of white picket fence, but could just as easily be the pale silhouette of three distended buildings with peaked roofs.

Her later works become more about color, the interplay of color and then the absence of color. The forms are so simple that one has but two choices: Take them in as a single, solitary object, beyond the possibility of interpretation; or dig into their details and find meaning in the smallest gestures. And so the absence or presence of a supporting base becomes a small drama, as does the specificity of how she applied color, the texture of the surface and the fine play of light on subtly different applications of paint.

In this, she was different from the mostly male artists with whom she was often linked, including Donald Judd, who used more industrial manufacturing processes to give his work an anonymous perfection. She spoke directly about the role of sexism in her career, saying that the impact of the boy's-club control of the larger art world "couldn't be exaggerated." But sexism isn't just about loutish male figures double-plating the glass ceiling. It marginalizes personality



Anne Truitt in her Twining Court studio in Northwest Washington in 1962.
(annetruitt.org/Bridgeman Images)

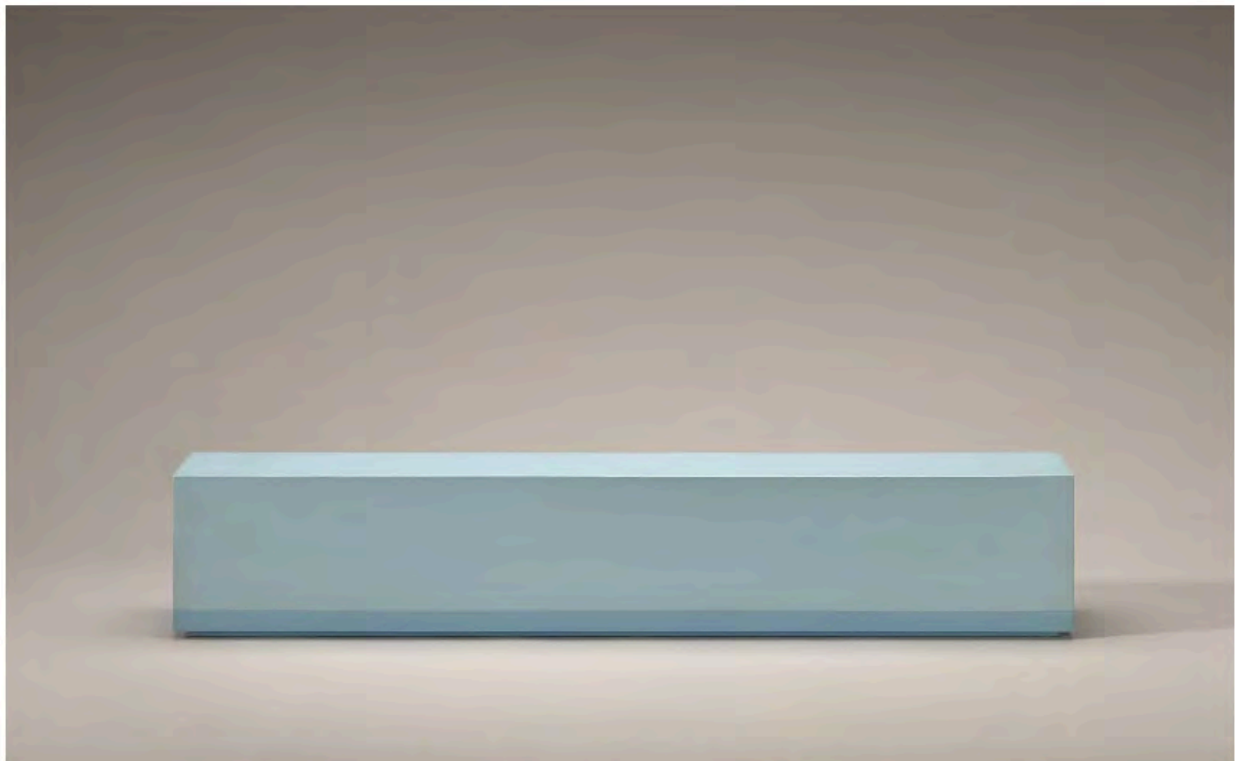
Kennicott, Philip. "An artist who stood apart from D.C. intrigue and the New York whirl!" *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2017.

types, and forms of behavior that are gendered “female.” One gets the sense that Truitt enjoyed or at least needed her solitude, and that the constant tending of reputation and social position were repellent to her. She had the potential for an enormous career, but “I never claimed my space.”

That phrase haunts this exhibition, full of work that inhabits but never claims its space. Some of the pieces are large, but not domineering. Truitt’s work can seem standoffish when juxtaposed with more assertive sculptures, and more reductive forms of “minimalism.” The bases and struts that support early works disappear in later pieces, so they refuse even a connection to the floor. A late work, from 2002, named after one of her studios, “Twining Court,” is a single, tall, retiring plinth of black. Among the most compelling is “Parva XII,” from 1977, which takes her basic stellalike form and turns it on its side, so that it can inhabit a shelf, like a cat.

The problem with interpreting, and worse, over-interpreting, Truitt’s art is that the descriptions become more and more inextricable from metaphors of femininity. And yet, what exactly is wrong with that?

In the Tower: Anne Truitt is on view at the National Gallery of Art through April 1. For information, visit nga.gov.



Anne Truitt. "Parva XII," 1977. (National Gallery of Art/National Gallery of Art)

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ARTNEWS

NEWS

DIA ART FOUNDATION ACQUIRES ANNE TRUITT WORKS

BY *Andy Battaglia* POSTED 02/02/17 4:19 PM



Anne Truitt, *Echo*, 1973.

©ESTATE OF ANNE TRUITT/THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

Adding new hues and historical associations to its canonical collection of American minimalism, the Dia Art Foundation has acquired six works by Anne Truitt that will go on long-term view at Dia:Beacon in upstate New York in May. The five sculptures and one painting belonged to the estate of the artist, who died in 2004, and have been selected to show together in a grouping that represents significant developments in Truitt's work between 1962 and 1974.

“When we bring an artist into our group, which is not very large, we want to bring them in at least at the level of those who have come in in recent years,” Dia’s director, Jessica Morgan, told *ARTnews*. “We can’t replicate what we’ve done with Dan Flavin, John Chamberlain, and other artists [in the original collection] with more than 100 works. But we want to represent a significant series or tell a story about development of work over time, which is what I think we are achieving with Truitt. Our thinking around acquisition is that we are quite literally acquiring an exhibition.”

Battaglia, Andy. “Dia Art Foundation Acquires Anne Truitt Works.” *ARTnews*, February 2, 2017.

The works date back to the early years of Truitt, whose 1963 show at André Emmerich Gallery in New York counts among the first presentations of minimalist sculpture of the era. “A sense of radiance informs this work,” Jill Johnston wrote in a review in *ARTnews* at the time.

The newly acquired works include *White: One* (1962), a columnar sculpture with bisecting planes of stark white wood, and *North* (1963), a large 5-by-8-foot rectangular mass marked by gradations of dark green and black. Other works, including a painting, *Echo*, from 1973, signal a shift in Truitt’s evolution toward softer colors like pink, mauve, and pastel blue.

The pieces will be placed in galleries at Dia:Beacon currently devoted to Agnes Martin, whose paintings there have been on view in natural light since the museum’s opening in 2003 and thus are ready, Morgan said, for a resting period and a conservation assessment. The natural light stands to accentuate the subtlety and sensuality of Truitt’s work, Morgan said. “To discern it, one has to really look—her work teaches you about the importance of looking. I don’t think I’ve ever spent so much time on the ground, on my hands and knees, looking at sculpture.”

The introduction of Truitt into the Dia stable, which is associated with the likes of Donald Judd, Walter De Maria, Fred Sandback, Michael Heizer, and Richard Serra, also addresses a formidable gap in a sculptural history of the ‘60s and ‘70s that skews markedly male. “I’ve been making a very concerted effort to bring women artists into the collection,” said Morgan, who assumed her directorship of Dia in 2015 and has since added Jo Baer and Joan Jonas. More acquisitions are planned, aimed at offering a fuller picture of developments in postwar art, she said. “Because we have this incredible concentration on a period of time, we have a unique position insofar as Dia is positioned more than other institutions to really change history in a way.”

In Truitt, that history has a worthy new investment. “She was on a par with what was happening with Judd and Serra in the ‘60s,” Morgan said. “We’re bringing her to a place where she rightfully belongs.”



Anne Truitt, *White: One*, 1962.

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ARTFORUM

REVIEWS

Anne Truitt

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

With only five works filling two rooms that could have readily absorbed many more, “Anne Truitt ‘62–‘63” proved exemplary in its economy. The three sculptures—the plinths *White: One*, 1962, and *White: Four*, 1962, and the oblong form *North*, 1963—and two related paintings on paper affirmed the parity between the intentional sparseness of the exhibition and that of the objects themselves. For all their apparent simplicity, the works are purposive, deeply considered things. As with the gallery’s 2013 presentation of Truitt’s works from the 1970s, collected under the rubric “threshold,” “‘62–63” traces a similarly liminal period, significant both for the artist’s formal innovations and her making them public. (Already by the years featured within this show, Truitt had distanced her work from the picket-fence motif of 1961’s *First* and had made the insistent possibility of reference in abstraction somehow more oblique.) If the ‘70s saw Truitt’s retrospectives at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; and the Baltimore Museum of Art; the early ‘60s were no less decisive, giving rise to her first one-person exhibition, held at the André Emmerich Gallery in New York in 1963.

However important this context, though, “Anne Truitt ‘62–‘63” was fundamentally an argument for apprehending the work on its own terms. Each freestanding sculpture was given ample room to allow for circumnavigation, and there was plenty of blank wall against which one might register a piece’s contours. This was especially effective in the case of *White: One* and *White: Four*, in that the white of the upright beams suggested not so much respective volumes occupying space as surfaces flattened into outlines. And the works’ surfaces, too, evidenced possibilities for the emergence of composition out of the layering of paint in concert with the ground that it unevenly masks. While both began as wooden armatures fabricated by a cabinetmaker to Truitt’s specifications, *White: One* is covered in streaks of paint applied in vertical strokes and *White: Four* is raked with straight-up deep grooves. Seen together, the two works effect a kind of standoff between two distinct paint applications: allover in the former versus part-by-part in the latter. But the presence of *North* in this grouping productively



Anne Truitt, *North*, 1963, acrylic on wood, 60 3/4 × 96 1/4 × 12".

complicates—maybe even sublates—this would-be binary. The work displays a continuous skin across the telltale seams of its three abutting segments inscribed with a shifting pattern of near-black hues that differentiate one section from the next. (The painting *28 Dec '62*, hung nearby, likewise divulges unexpected modulations of color; here, streaks of dark purple emerge from the dense, dark monochrome field.)

While related to contemporaneous sculptures, in which Truitt similarly segmented wooden forms (e.g., *Platte*, *Primrose*, and *Shrove*, all from 1962), *North* is considerably more complicated. One section appears half the width of its neighbor, and so again the third continues this progression. Compounded by the disparity between the front and back of the structure—a quality that is also evident in the other sculptures on view—the relations between the parts prove impossible to apprehend, much less to visually reconcile. In a transcript of Truitt discussing the titles of some of her works, she says, “*North* refers to the concept of north, of a needle pointing true north. And I made the color as true as I could to what I conceive of as being true north—north being absolutely cold temperatureless truth. And it takes up a lot of space because if you’re in pursuit of truth, that pursuit actually absorbs your entire life. It’s a consuming interest.”

—Suzanne Hudson

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047



ANNE TRUITT *Threshold:* *Works from the 1970s*

by Jonathan Goodman

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 13 – OCTOBER 26, 2013

Anne Truitt's career looks larger and larger as time goes on. Born in Baltimore, educated at Bryn Mawr in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and working most of her life in Washington, D.C., Truitt developed a radically spare aesthetic, which slightly prefigured the sleek, industrial forms of 1960s Minimalism. However, unlike such figures as Richard Serra and Donald Judd, who favored raw, rugged steel and repetitive, linear sequences, Truitt turned toward the creation of the exquisite individual object, highly finished and nearly hieratic in its unflinching simplicity. At first glance the work in the Matthew Marks exhibition may seem nearly oppressively plain, yet after spending time with her sculpture, viewers begin to see the small details that separate Truitt's art from its industrial cousins. Not always, but often, thin bands of color ring the top or bottom of her vertical sentinels, creating contrast and even the beginnings of a highly original perspective. The solitary presence of these tallish standing structures seems to have emerged from a high point in the relatively brief history of Minimalism; the title of the exhibition, *Threshold: Work from the 1970s*, indicates just how specific this period was for the artist.

Truitt's craft was remarkably refined: each of the six wooden sculptures on view boasts an exquisite surface of acrylic paint, composed of many layers of color sanded down and covered over, eventually removing any trace of the brush. Two of the sculptures are remarkable in their rare horizontal orientation. "Grant" (1974) comprises a 12-foot-long wooden slab, painted a light blue, topped by a shorter slab painted yellow. As a whole the piece is haunting in its utter material perfection, although this is hardly the endpoint of its interest value: the object also manages to exert an unconscious yet spiritual pull on its audience. The beauty of Truitt's work looks both backward and forward; influences might range from Greek caryatids to the exquisite but roughly manufactured steel forms made by Serra and Tony Smith. One should recall that Truitt, in the 1970s, was a woman working within a highly macho field—and holding her own at that. The near-religious sensibility of her sculpture, alongside the pains taken to create an immaculate surface, reveal her to have been an artist fully in keeping with both the past and the future of art.

“Jaunt”(1977) is a vertically-oriented sentinel painted orange. To liven things up, but to do so through careful posturing, is key to Truitt’s aesthetic, and in the case of “Jaunt” she has added two thin bands of color—yellow and white, respectively—to the very bottom of the sculpture, giving the sculpture its “jaunty” air. One would hardly think that so minor a modification would have so major an effect, but there you have it: the bands of paint at the bottom create a complex contrast with the object’s primary orange hue, all cohering to form an engaging yet simplified structure. The compositional field of Truitt’s painting “26th July ’73 No. 2” (1973) is similarly energized by two thin stripes of white on a planar ground; the isolated lines might be figures in a field mostly devoted to the ground behind them. Yet both focus and complexity are heightened when the viewer takes time to notice contrasts. Truitt’s “Landfall” (1970) is slightly bulkier in its dimensions, the result being that comparison of this object to a human body doesn’t seem quite as accurate as it does with the narrower sculptures. Almost sky blue in color, “Landfall” proves itself capable of maintaining interest on its own as an abstract rather than referential work of art.

The show at Marks has been well installed, emphasizing the bare, even lonely effect of these independently standing works of art. Additionally, the white-on-white paintings, part of Truitt’s *Arundel* series, show us the extent to which the artist is willing to do away with any visible trace of the hand. One invariably feels, in this highly sympathetic show, that the dictum “less is more” is expressed to an extraordinary degree. Truitt doesn’t cater to popular taste, and it may be that some of today’s audience will find her art too reductive for comfort. But for those who came of age at an earlier time, in the 1970s, each work here is a revelation in its ability to engender emotion through seemingly minor adjustments of color and form. One hopes that the show will create a larger public for an artist whose sense of shape and finish remains remarkable some 40 years after her work was made.

ARTFORUM

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

Anne Truitt

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

The overriding aesthetic of the early 1960s was marked by Clement Greenberg's procrustean sense of historical inevitability. Anne Truitt first met the demanding critic in 1959; over the years, she encountered Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, and the gallerist André Emmerich, who began to show her work in 1963. A New England blue blood who died at the age of eighty-three in 2004, Truitt is best known for her fusion of strong, boxy forms with a cultivated sense of color—Donald Judd meets Brice Marden, as it were. Yet the various associations made with Truitt's work were anathema to the purely retinal or tactile absolutism of abstraction; she was “condescendingly gendered,”

as James Meyer, the ranking historian of Minimalism, noted in these pages in 2002.

Perhaps to quell such uncertainties, the artist's painted sculptures are forsworn in this exhibition, which instead features twenty-seven lovely though problematic drawings. The survey is accompanied by a catalogue by Brenda Richardson, a former deputy director and chief curator of the Baltimore Museum of Art, who attempts to right the near wrong of the present-day assessment of Truitt's anomalous achievement (a task also undertaken, on a much larger scale, by Kristen Hileman in her 2009 retrospective of Truitt's work at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC). Truitt's drawings—mostly acrylic on paper or acrylic and graphite on paper—are notable not so much for being like one another, but for being like so many

others as well. This problem of vexing similarity is amplified by Truitt's Color Field and Minimalist mix, however much she would have cared to have her work float free of period stylistics. In short, Truitt's drawings are too “nomalous.”

From the very outset, the black rectangle of *28 Dec '62* summons forth associations with Ellsworth Kelly and, proleptically, Marden. (Richardson notes that the women painters of Truitt's generation—Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan—provide scant parallel, while members of the post-Minimalist generation do.) And when we encounter the drawing *Untitled*, 1986, its yellow and yellow-gold sliced shapes are all but Barnett Newman-like. Indeed, Newman, in his matter-of-factness, in his color that is seemingly both weight and place, is, by Truitt's own admission, her grand model—she does not command the art-historical stage the way Newman does, even if her sense of color is far more sophisticated than his ever was. *Summer '97 No. 6*, 1997, is, with its large, hot-red rectangle weighing down upon a cosmetic red lower margin, another pertinent example.

Still, certain tropes are Truitt's through and through. For example, her colored fields often seem to have weight that squeezes the thin horizontal margins against the very bottom edge of the sheet of paper, a compositional device that not only recalls the obduracy of her horizontal sculptures but also is a rare instance of a palpable connection between her painted sculptures and her drawing. Perhaps in a similar vein, certain layers of her colors typically look as if they have been pressed in and down upon the sheet with a roller. In *Shear No. 5*, 1976, for example, a maroon rectangle is pressed down hard upon a royal-blue field, of which only the margin remains. Another Truitt characteristic is the delineation of shape through the use of tape that, when pulled free of the paper's surface, leaves a minute filigree, a kind of microscopic “blur” at the edge that, at times, echoes the deckle edges of the broad sheets of paper on which she worked.

But the associations with the work of other artists remain obtrusive. A drawing such as *15 Nov 65*, with its flattened-out, ribbonlike form, brings Richard Tuttle to mind. And the drawings that are mostly graphite on paper are almost too Agnes Martin-like (not to mention Robert Ryman-like) for comfort. I do not mean by this that Truitt is copying. Rather, as with the many artists at work within the Minimalist-Color Field continuum, such resemblances arise from the same pool of influences into which they all dip. The purity and modesty of Truitt's work is up against a hammering, overriding period model. Granting its dominance, how could we not recall the work of other artists?

—Robert Pincus-Witten



Anne Truitt, *Untitled*, 1986, acrylic on paper, 30¼ x 23".

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ARTFORUM

Anne Truitt

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523 W. 24th Street
February 4–April 14

“Anne Truitt: Drawings” has little to do with Anne Truitt’s sculpture, which couldn’t be better for both media. The elegantly installed retrospective of Truitt’s works on paper spotlights her career-long formal investigations, laid flat in two dimensions instead of the standard vertical three, and to dramatic effect. Made between the 1960s and ’90s, the drawings range from slight pencil lines to intense prismatic swaths of paint, the latter of which convey acts of ecstatic defilement and reveal an alter ego whose impulses Truitt never dared indulge in the presence of her august columns. 28 Dec ’62, for instance, bears visible brushstrokes, oscillating hues, and jagged lines from hurriedly deracinated tape. In these works, the occasional preciosity of Truitt’s iconic pillars takes a backseat to roving curiosity.



Anne Truitt, *Untitled*, 1986, acrylic on paper, 30 1/4 x 23".

Three domestically inclined pencil and white acrylic drawings from 1965–66 present a link to the surprisingly figurative beginning of Truitt’s large-scale sculpture practice. First, 1961, a section of ersatz white picket fencing perhaps plucked from her suburban neighborhood in Washington, DC. A highlight within this group, 21 Nov ’62, a barely there outline of a mid-Atlantic gable, flickers into perception, bringing along with it self-assured identification and a decidedly (if understated) feminist ethos. More recent drawings, such as *Untitled*, 1986, with its acrid clashing of lemon and tangerine and severe composition, amplify Truitt’s prioritization of color, with form coming in a close second. Affinities and influences appear from time to time in modified forms, including Barnett Newman’s zips or Agnes Martin’s fey grids, though such gestures serve to reinforce the artist’s heightened individual sense of pleasure and disregard for the fashionable. By focusing on the lesser seen, the exhibition provides a fuller view of Truitt’s oeuvre and leaves one longing for more.

— Beau Rutland

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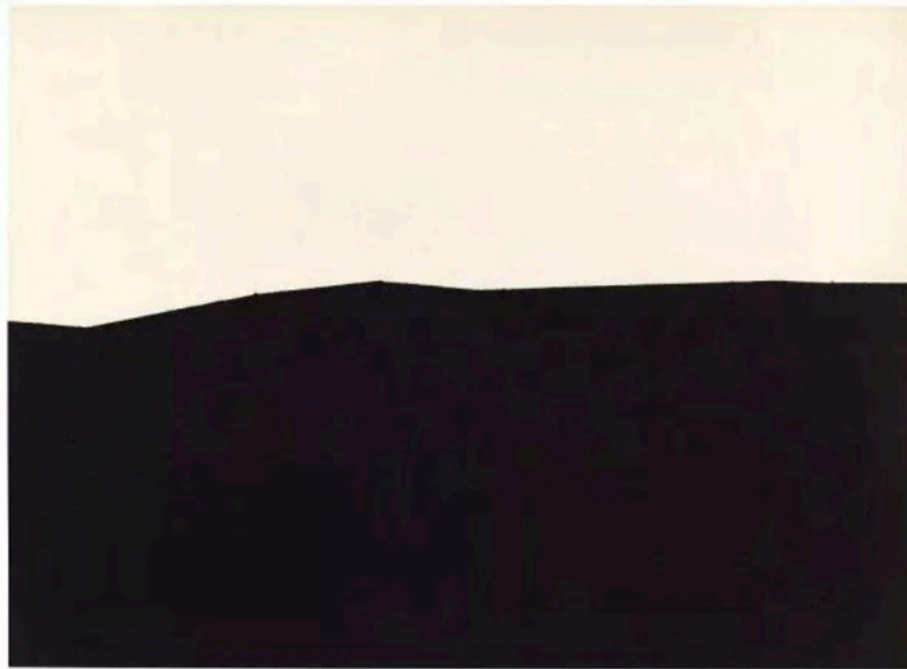
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OBSERVER

REVIEW

Transcendental Sublimation: 'Anne Truitt: Drawings' at Matthew Marks and 'Happenings' at the Pace Gallery

By [Will Heinrich](#) • 02/21/12 5:31pm



The late Anne Truitt, whose work is often associated with Minimalism, is best known for her freestanding, assertively self-effacing, brightly painted wooden pillars. Confronting and repossessing the history of sculpture and the nature of artistic ambition at a 90-degree angle, formally simple but psychologically complex to the point of opacity, they're documents of a kind of transcendental sublimation. But the same quality illuminates the best of the several dozen drawings—pale graphite grids, saturated color fields, minimally figurative angles and lines—currently on view at Matthew Marks Gallery.

28 Dec '62, named, like several other of these works on paper, for the date of its execution, is just under two by three

feet but dominates a large room. A clean-edged black shape, painted in acrylic with impossible-to-discern brushstrokes, fills a sheet of white Bristol paper. It's not quite a rectangle because its upper edge stoops down at an angle. From a certain distance, your view of the sheer, dropping emptiness may be disrupted by reflections in the glass protecting the piece, but if you step closer, you can make out pale indigo shadows flickering across the surface of the paint. What is the mark and what is the ground seem clear enough, and so does the way the expansive shape puts emphasis on the negative space; but no sooner does the white border leap out than it seems to push forward the black again. Foreground and background—and with them, free will and inherited language; surface and depth; expressing and obscuring; and

Heinrich, Will. "Transcendental Sublimation: 'Anne Truitt: Drawings'..." *New York Observer*, February 21, 2012.

making and erasing—switch places again and again until they become an infinite recursion. There's hardly space for the viewer to enter, but the movement is hard to look away from. The effect is something like sci-fi novelist Philip K. Dick's "Zebra," the massive intelligence that he hypothesized could camouflage itself by looking not just like something else, but like the whole environment.

Shear No. 5 and Shear No. 16, on the other hand, both made in 1976, bring to mind an older book: Like the imperial court ladies of *The Tale of Genji*, who expressed their esthetic elliptically, by trailing overlapping silk sleeves in different colors from the windows of their palanquins, these drawings work by means of static juxtaposition. In Shear No. 5, the near-rectangle is a deep Japanese plum color and has an asymmetrical peaked roof. The background is royal blue. The shape is painted thickly enough to be discernibly raised from its ground, but despite its density is translucent enough to let through long, narrow lines of blue and to reveal its own grainy, vertical brushstrokes. It's impossible, again, to see into the depths, but in this case not because they're hidden, but because all the artist's energy has been poured into the surface.

9 Jan '63 shows two long, horizontal rectangles, outlined precisely in ink over graphite, joined by six irregularly spaced vertical lines. Floating between drawing and diagram, it's gentle but withholding. Several other grids and house-like shapes of distinctly but faintly drawn graphite lines, sometimes filled in with light applications of white acrylic, test the boundary between declaration and hypothesis by being literally difficult to see: from the other side of the room, they look like blank pieces of paper. The long, narrow, pointy black shape of *Sable XIV*, on the other hand, like a low rise just over the horizon, has such a minimal figurative efficiency that it seems to pull the room in, like a vacuum, rather than giving its image out.

Other Minimalist work chooses easily generalized and abstracted colors and psychologically potent forms to suggest the purity of disembodiment: It uses its materials to transcend the material. But even Truitt's blacks, blues and reds clearly remain paint. And most of the drawings in this show don't use such loaded, argumentative colors at all. Instead, their streaks, dashes, spatters and stripes are rendered in and on bright floral yellow, pale peach, powder blue, orange and

green, or light plum. The self-effacement of formal Minimalism becomes a gesture of respect to the concrete particularity of any given work. One untitled drawing from 1967 could be the flag of some quiet island kingdom where the prime minister writes poetry and the standing army consists of a single policeman. Two wide vertical stripes in the middle, one a thick orange-yellow, the other dense pink, are bounded on the sides by slightly different shades of peach. It's completely self-possessed, but looking too closely feels something like interrupting.

BORDERCROSSINGS

Anne Truitt

by Julia Dault

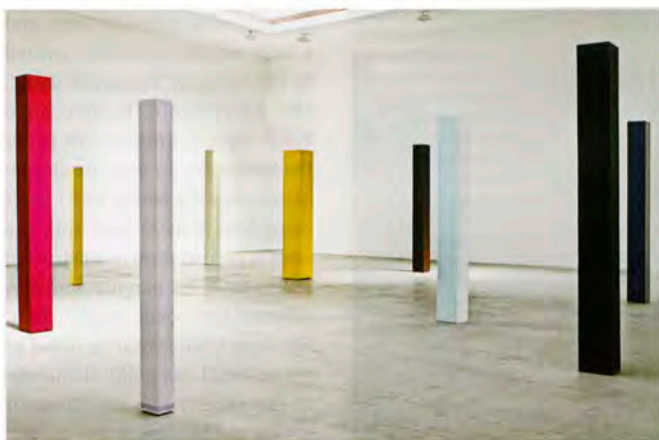
Although “Anne Truitt: Sculpture 1962–2004” covers four decades of the artist’s career, the 15 sculptures on display in Matthew Marks’s largest Chelsea space barely evidenced the passing of these many years. This is hardly surprising, given Anne Truitt’s proclivity toward slow and steady production. Each of Truitt’s columns—there were 12 on display in the gallery’s main space—is a feat of patience and labour. Her painting technique involved straining and re-straining paint through a fine sieve, applying it in extremely thin layers and, once dry, sanding it with sandpaper to rid it of brush marks, a cycle she repeated again and again. Knowing this lends even further power to the monoliths, stunning statues of colour that hum in the space, each one life-size and at once confrontational and reassuring.

as *Prescience*, 1978, *The Sea*, *The Sea*, 2003, *First Spring*, 1981, *Sun Flower*, 1971, and *Threshold*, 1997, provide lyrical contexts for the different height, width and colour of the columns. Some works appear to hover slightly off the ground, their bases unseen beneath the bulk of the vertical shafts; others look monochromatic and reveal their complexities in time, as when eyes adjust to a suddenly darkened room. What at first seemed to be an all-over yellow suddenly reveals stripes, vibrating light and dark tones of lemon and ochre; pale blue on another work surprises with a reverse of stark white; a black cap tops off yet another. These variations are significant as formal puzzles and as indicators of a larger system, however playfully illogical. Viewed in the larger context of Minimalism, Truitt’s work



2

White: Four, 1962, is the single artwork included here in which Truitt’s early experiments in translating narrative potential into the 360 degrees of sculptural space can be seen. The work is reminiscent of a white picket fence, an object and important early symbol that Truitt has cited in developing her later columns. At 233 centimetres tall, it appears solid from the front, yet from behind you see it is built like a stage set, propped up by two arms of white painted wood. It is the tallest piece in the show and appears the frailest, since, as a frame or skeleton, it lacks the muscularity and solidity of the columns. The two other stand-alone sculptures are *Gloucester*, 1963, a deep maroon and dark brown form that is divided unequally by the two tones—uncannily reminiscent of a Charleston 2 Chevaux, Citroën’s final production car—and *Pith*, 1969, an Army green column, the largest in the entire show, with a



1

The show also included three larger sculptures, each in its own peripheral space and out of view when you are standing in the midst of the colourful cathedral.

One of the foundational ideas that compels me to Truitt is her insistence on strict parameters and the uncovering of infinite variance within them. Titles such

also emerges as significant for its balance between fabrication and handcraft. From afar, these shafts of colour appear pre-fabricated. It is the exacting arbitrariness of her formal choices that track the artist’s singular taste and logic, in the process revealing her direct, labour-intensive involvement in the work’s production.

1. Installation view of "Anne Truitt: Sculpture 1962-2004" at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2010. © Estate of Anne Truitt / The Bridgeman Art Library. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

2. Anne Truitt, *Gloucester*, 1963, acrylic on wood, 73 1/2 x 72 x 13". © Estate of Anne Truitt / The Bridgeman Art Library. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

3. Jessica Stockholder, *Untitled (6688)*, 2006, mixed media on paper, 19 1/2 x 27 3/8". Courtesy Barbara Edwards Contemporary, Toronto.

heft that is bodily and powerful. The ample space surrounding this stand-alone piece begins to take on a hue all its own.

Indeed, as Truitt explains in *Daybook: The Journal of an Artist*, 1982, the first of her three published journals, "the color itself is set free into space and into the ever-moving sun, which marks time. And color is the least material of matter: vibration as light." What becomes clear is that Truitt held a converse relationship to material and to making: the more she laboured, the less material the resultant artworks became. It was colour that transported the wooden structures of the columns into an immaterial, even spiritual, realm. It is this sense that is most palpable when you are standing amidst the work. There are no gimmicks here. There is only evidence that the artist spent a lifetime working to refine a process of translating complex experiences into forms that appear so simple. ■

"Anne Truitt: Sculpture 1962-2004" was exhibited at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York from May 8 to June 26, 2010.

Julia Dault is a New York-based artist and writer.

Art in America

ANNE TRUITT THE COLUMNIST

Combining colors of subtle complexity with the simplest of forms, Truitt swam against sculpture's prevailing currents.

BY CAROL DIEHL

WALKING INTO THE GALLERIES that contained the survey "Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection" at Washington, D.C.'s Hirshhorn Museum, one encountered a pervasive hush, and an inclination to whisper. Truitt's square columns of various heights and colors stood grouped like silent sentinels. While the atmosphere was slightly funereal, the mood was hardly gloomy. Unlike ancient memorial columns fabricated in cold stone, Truitt's human-scaled monoliths are rendered in painted wood, spare but often brightly

colored, and have a warmth and emotional resonance, like capsules of unspoken experience. And whereas stone makes heavy contact with the earth, Truitt's columns, each raised on a recessed—hence invisible—plinth that creates a thin dark shadow around the bottom, seem to hover slightly off the ground.

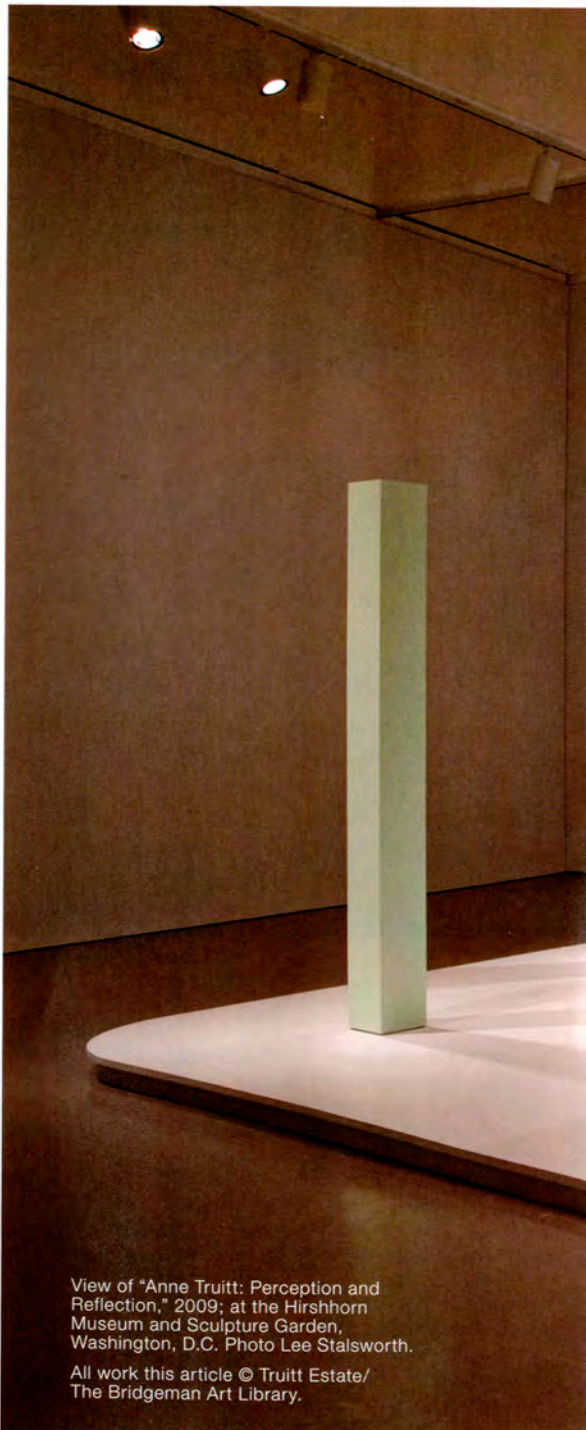
The elegiac aspect is not a surprise considering that one of Truitt's first significant pieces, *Southern Elegy* (1962), was clearly based on a tombstone. But the work she considered her crucial breakthrough—called *First*, it was made at the end of the

previous year, when Truitt (1921-2004) was 40—was inspired by a fence. It took her from experiments in sculptural realism undertaken during the 11 years of "apprenticeship to myself" that followed her studies in 1949 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Washington, D.C., to what she called "expressionistic geometric abstraction."¹

The gestation of *First* began in November 1961 when the D.C.-area resident encountered, all in a single exhibition that she saw at the Guggenheim Museum on a visit to New York, a small painted wooden construction by Nassos Daphnis, which reminded her of how much she always liked wood; the barely perceptible pattern in one of Ad Reinhart's black paintings; and a great field of color by Barnett Newman—impressions that stayed with her for the rest of her life. Because Truitt was also a writer—*Daybook* (1982), *Turn* (1986) and *Prospect* (1996), the three volumes of her "Journal of an

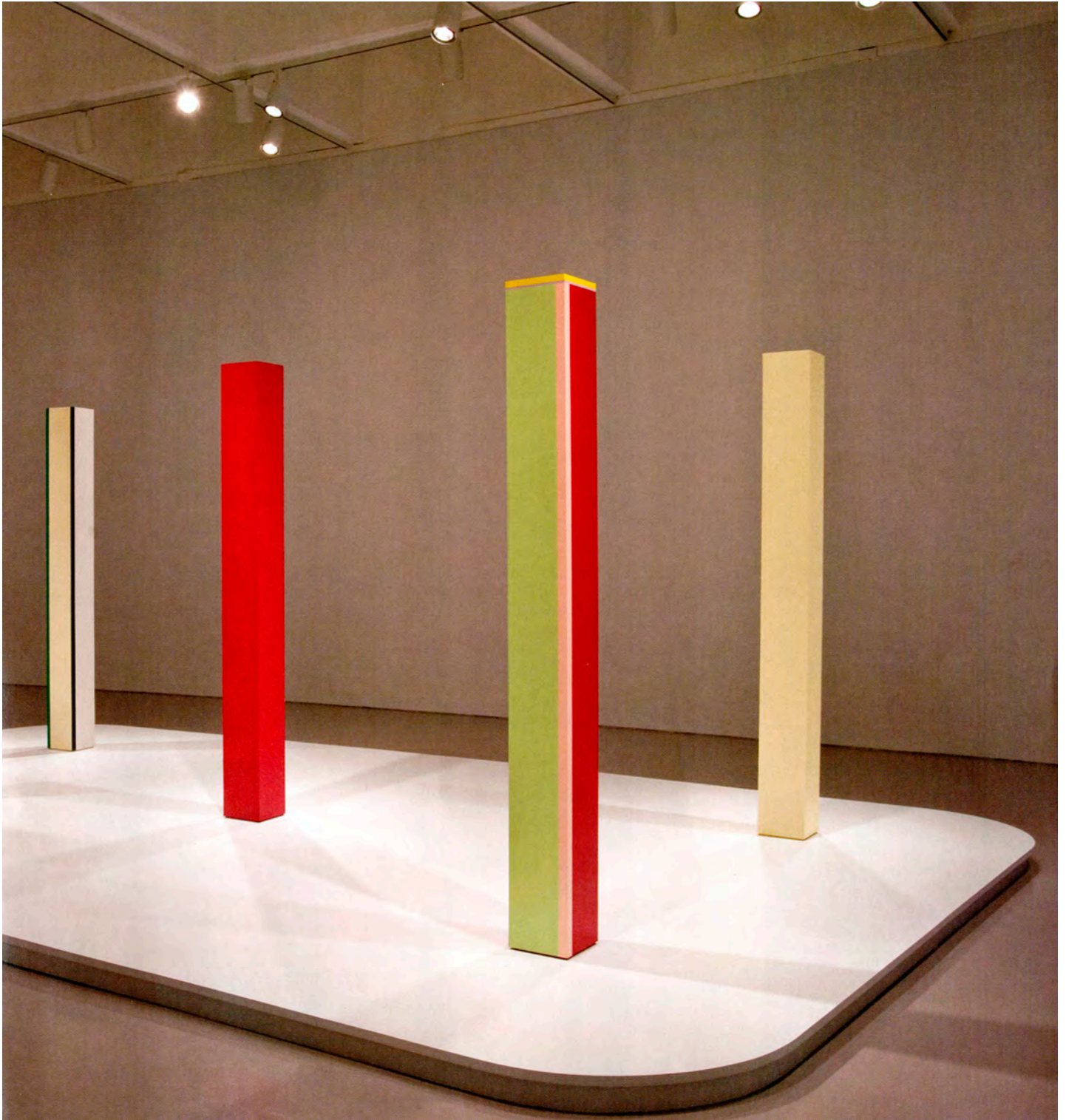
In 1961, impelled by the force of my childhood memories, I made one fence, delicately altered toward what I felt to be the essence of fence. But I immediately left behind the appearance of fence for ever less referential art. I began to isolate a reality of proportion and color, which I see gleaming behind the objective world. I have had only glimpses of this other reality. I have made things in an attempt to render it more visible.

—Anne Truitt, *Turn*



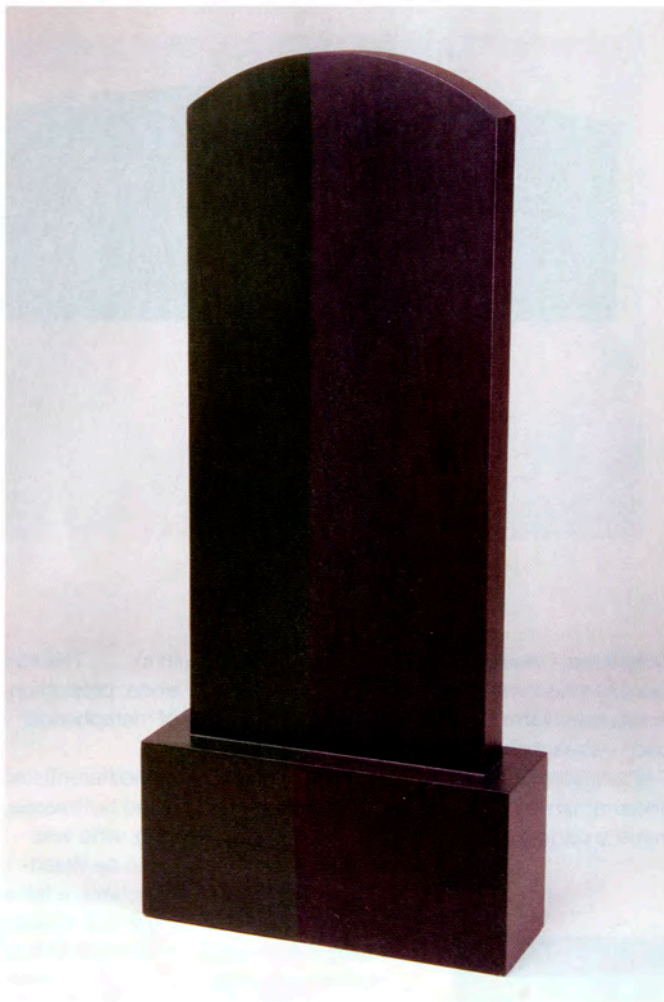
View of "Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection," 2009; at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. Photo Lee Stalsworth.

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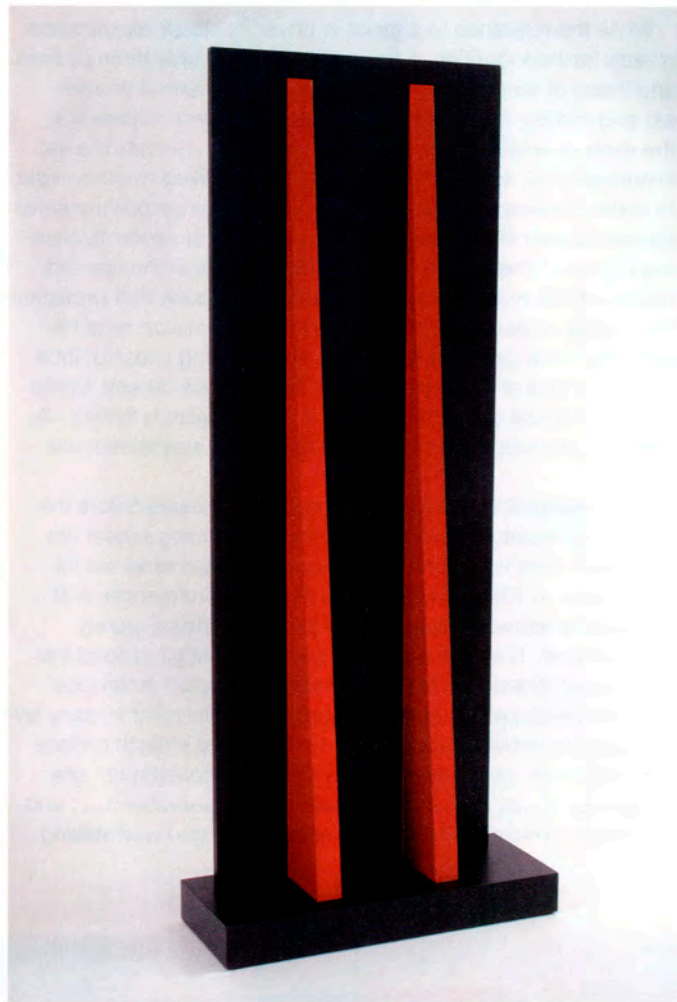


Diehl, Carol. "Anne Truitt: The Columnist." *Art in America*, March 2010, pp. 136–43.

THERE IS SOMETHING CATHEDRAL-LIKE IN *FIRST'S* TRINITY OF SLATS THAT PRESAGES THE SLIGHTLY ECCLESIASTICAL AURA WHICH WAS TO ENVELOP ALL OF TRUITT'S WORK.



Above, *Southern Elegy*, 1962, acrylic on wood, 47 by 20 $\frac{7}{8}$ by 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Photo Lee Stalsworth.



Right, *Hardcastle*, 1962, acrylic on wood, 99 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 42 by 16 inches.

Opposite, *First*, 1961, latex on wood, 44 $\frac{1}{4}$ by 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 7 inches. Baltimore Museum of Art.

Artist," are still in print—the epiphany is best told in her words:

Combined, these three works exploded to reverse my whole way of thinking about how to make art. Until that afternoon, I had thought, had initially been trained to think, and had continued dumbly to think, that art was somehow intrinsic to material, immanent in it. That if I applied certain techniques to material with due respect for its nature, art would emerge out of it rather inevitably.²

That night, unable to sleep, Truitt realized that she had the freedom to make whatever she chose:

And, suddenly, the whole landscape of my childhood flooded into my inner eye: plain white clapboard fences and houses, barns, solitary trees in flat fields, all set in the wide, widening tidewaters around Easton [Maryland]. At one stroke, the yearning to express myself transformed into a

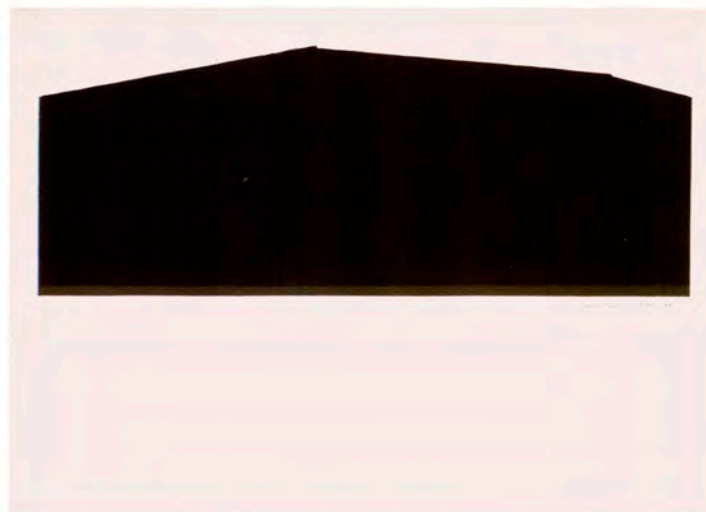
yearning to express what this landscape meant to me, not for my own emotional release but for the release of a radiance illuminating it behind and beyond appearance. I saw that I could trust that radiance, could rely on its presence, even in the humblest object. Before I went to sleep, finally spent, I decided to start by making a white picket fence.³

Truitt sketched out what she wanted, ordered the boards from the local lumber store, glued the crosspieces to the palings and painted the resulting construction white, thereby devising, in one fell swoop, the methods she would use thereafter; even the platform on which the pickets sit is, as with all of her later sculpture, elevated slightly from the floor. In the rear, which is as visually important as the front, the crosspieces are in turn braced by a vertical member whose shape is similar to those she would later enlarge.

ALTHOUGH SHE HAS BEEN CAST AS SUCH, TRUITT NEVER THOUGHT OF HERSELF AS A MINIMALIST. HER AIM WAS TO GET "MAXIMUM MEANING INTO THE SIMPLEST POSSIBLE FORM."

While the reference to a fence is obvious, closer examination reveals its incongruities. A fragment, *First* has only three pickets, and these of varying heights and widths, the central one tallest and widest; their tops are slanted at different pitches like the roofs of neighboring houses. Moreover the pickets are not evenly spaced, so that if you squint (as Truitt liked to do in order to make the shapes she saw more specific) the vertical negative spaces appear like stripes of varying thickness, similar to Newman's "zips." There is something cathedral-like in the upward motion of this trinity of slats to a triangulated peak that presages the slightly ecclesiastical aura which was to envelop all of her work. But *First* can also be read as exemplifying a loss of innocence—a loss of the expectation that life will be orderly. Unlike the picket fence of nostalgic ideal, Truitt's version is flawed. As an artist, she would continue to revel in small inconsistencies.

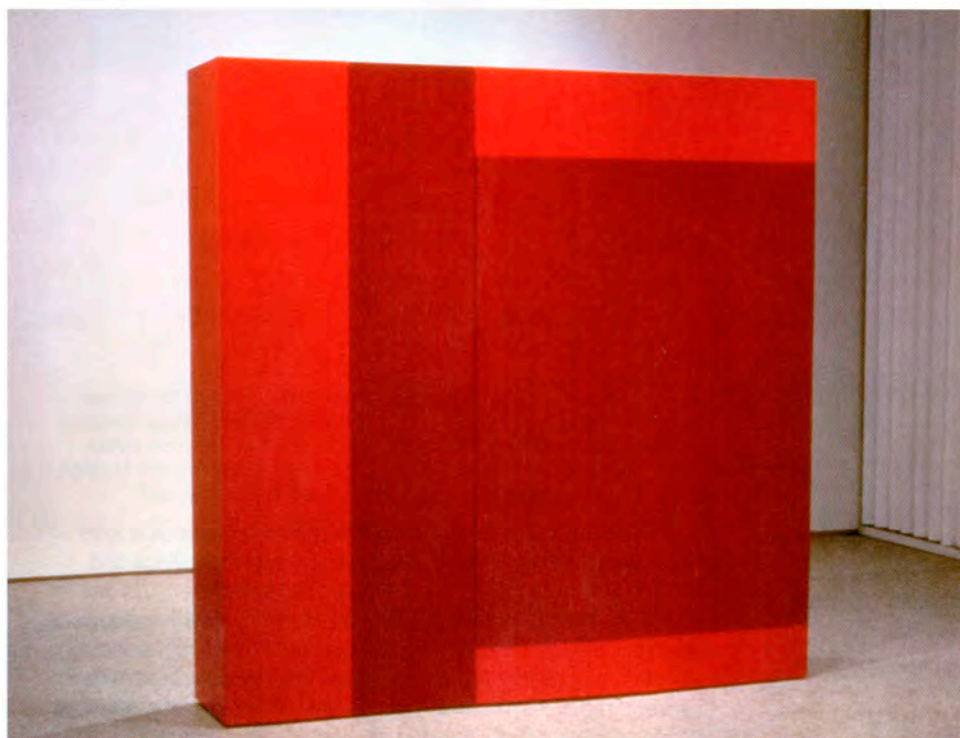
TRUITT ABANDONED MUCH of what she had made before this watershed sculpture. The only important continuing aspect not reflected in *First* was color, which became fundamental the following year. In 1962, Truitt dropped all residual references and produced a tremendous amount of greatly simplified, purely abstract work. She learned to make scale drawings, dipped into her modest inheritance to have pieces constructed at the local mill, and developed a process of applying acrylic paint in many layers, sanding between applications to produce a smooth surface and mixing her own colors. "I knew this work looked odd," she wrote later. "I was in an exalted state of mind, possessed . . . and remember thinking that no matter what the things I was making



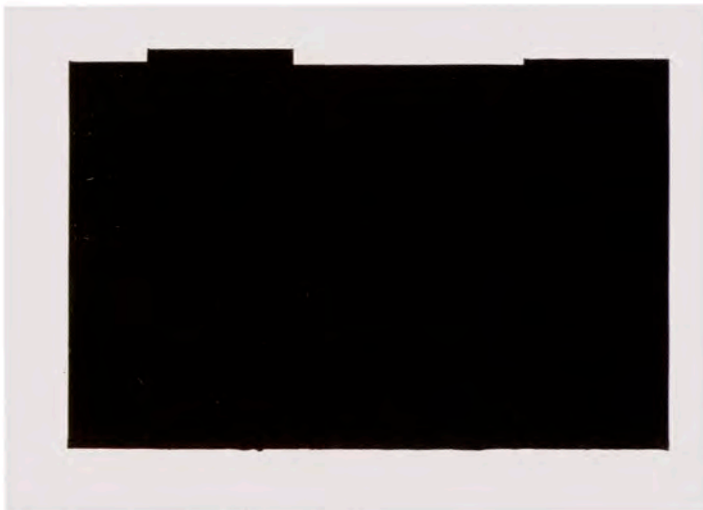
looked like, I would make them *anyway* [italics Truitt's]. . . . The sculptures had become what I have been making ever since: proportions of structural form counter-pointed by proportions of metaphorical color—essentially paintings in three dimensions."⁴

Hardcastle (1962), a tall (more than 8 feet high), undifferentiated black rectangle supported on the back with bright red buttresses, made a particular impression on Clement Greenberg, who was brought to Truitt's studio by Washington artist Kenneth Noland, a fellow student with Truitt at the ICA. Greenberg in turn showed her work to the prominent art dealer André Emmerich when he came to Washington for Morris Louis's funeral, with the result that in February 1963, the hitherto unknown Truitt had a one-person show in New York, putting her at the forefront of what was to be called Minimalism.

Although she has consistently been cast as such by curators and historians, Truitt never thought of herself as a Minimalist. While others working with greatly simplified visual elements, notably Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris, were reacting to Abstract Expressionism by attempting to expunge all personal and narrative content from their work, Truitt's aim was to get "maximum meaning into the simplest possible form."⁵ Alexan-



Valley Forge, 1963, acrylic on wood, 60 $\frac{1}{8}$ by 60 $\frac{3}{8}$ by 12 inches. The Rachofsky Collection. Photo courtesy Danese Gallery, New York.



Left to right, 5 Nov '62, 13 Nov '62 and 5 Nov '62, all 1962, acrylic on paper, 22 by 30 inches. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

der Giampietro, one of her professors at the ICA, taught that the meaning of the work is in the medium and it was the artist's job to recognize and uncover it. It was her later realization that she alone was in control of the meaning—her rejection of the kind of formalism Giampietro promoted—that allowed Truitt to make the then radical move to develop her work with drawn plans and have its “armatures,” as she called the forms, fabricated by others. Truitt's term for the color she applied in geometric patterns to these three-dimensional supports was “counter-pointing.” Although specific occurrences in her life may have served as catalysts, her intent was not to illustrate them but to stimulate a nonspecific emotional response in viewers. As art historian James Meyer puts it, her sculptures “are not depictions of images or events, but metonyms pointing to a complex of associations.”⁶

MOST OF THE WRITING about Truitt refers to the importance of Easton, Md., where she grew up and later in life again made her home. The Third Haven Friends' Meetinghouse there, built in 1682-84, is an early frame structure whose exterior has a distinctive asymmetric geometry, while its raw ship-lap wood interior walls and ceiling, supported by thick, rustic square columns, so stimulated Truitt's interest in wood that she later made a sculpture entitled *Ship-lap* (1962). It is also noteworthy that until age 10, when her extreme nearsightedness was discovered and corrected by eyeglasses, Truitt saw her environment more in terms of shapes than specific objects. Later, at Bryn Mawr College, where she majored in psychology, Truitt developed a lifelong love of Greek and Roman classical literature (her journals are sprinkled with references to Heraclitus, Cicero and Terence), which one can imagine helped foster her interest in memorials and monuments.

In 1950, three years after marrying James Truitt, who was bureau chief in a number of cities for several major publications and traveled widely, she went with him to various archeological sites in Mexico including Teotihuacán and Tula. Some of the four-sided Atlantean pillars she saw there bear a resemblance

to the segmented columns, such as *Platte* (1962), that Truitt would come to make. One of the pre-*First* pieces, from 1959, was a small sculpture made of scored brown clay that reflects the stepped geometry of a Mayan temple; it has a strange, shiplike rounded bottom raised slightly by two thin, flat, nearly hidden feet. On a visit to her studio in 1961, Noland suggested she enlarge the scale of her sculptures, and while at first reluctant, Truitt admitted that “his suggestion opened up my thinking and combined with my obsessive concern with the weights of squares and rectangles to pave the way for the change that took place some months later.”⁷ For all the clear influences on her development, Truitt's own assessment stresses intuition. When Meyer commented, in an interview, that she “devised the form with an expressive aim,” Truitt responded, “Let's not use the word *devised*, because I didn't think. I did it intuitively.”⁸

Although Truitt made many pieces in black and white, echoing choices favored by the Minimalists, as well in as the black and red of Russian Constructivism, most of her color decisions were extremely idiosyncratic, incorporating hues from popular culture in a way then not commonly used in sculpture—at least sculpture that wasn't flippant or ironic. Her 1962 show at Emmerich included a columnar work that was divided into vertical bands of red and orange; another was leaf-green and olive; in both cases, divisions between color blocks didn't conform to the edges of the structures—an aspect of the work that annoyed Judd, who reviewed the show for *Arts* magazine. *Watauga* (1962), which looks very much like a memorial plaque on a low pedestal, is half black and half rich purple, a color that must have been especially shocking when applied to a reduced form that implied Brancusi-like seriousness of purpose. Even in 1968, Truitt's *Morning Choice*, a 6-foot-tall column painted in unequal sections of (from the bottom up) bright apple green, sailor blue and hot pink, with a strip of orange, must have appeared extreme in contrast to its stark shape. Truitt explained:

What I'm trying to do is lift the color up and set it free in three dimensions. . . . I am trying to move it out into space. . . . magnetized to the line of gravity just as we are [so that] it becomes flesh, it becomes human, it becomes emo-

IN SOME WORKS, A STRIP OF LIGHT COLOR ABUTS A DARKER ONE RIGHT AT THE COLUMN'S EDGE IN SUCH A WAY AS TO VISUALLY ELIMINATE THE CORNERS COMPLETELY.

tion, it becomes alive, and it vibrates. And since I don't let it lie down on the sculpture, it goes around the corners . . . so it has to move. Sculptors are supposed to be interested in weights and balances, but I am not. I am only interested in the line holding it, the gravity. And the only reason I need the gravity is to set the color so it will move the way we do on our feet.⁹

Truitt could have been referring to *17th Summer* (1974), where a fresh, leafy yellow-green is sent aloft by the band of violet at the bottom. In other works, the stripes are vertical, irregular and more complex, as in *View* (1999), which is configured in such a way—a strip of light color abuts a darker one right at the column's edge—as to visually eliminate or flatten the corners completely.

Truitt's painstaking process of painting and sanding led to a lustrous uniform surface that, while it obliterated the grain, somehow did not wholly eliminate an awareness of the wood underneath. When, from 1964 to '67, James Truitt was the Far East bureau chief for *Newsweek* and the family (they had three children by then) lived in Japan, Truitt worked in aluminum, making approximately 22 sculptures. She exhibited a selection of these sculptures at Emmerich but, after reviewing her work with curator Walter Hopps for a 1973-74 retrospective at the Whitney Museum and the Corcoran Gallery, destroyed most of them.

SURPRISES IN THE RECENT EXHIBITION at the Hirshhorn included three drawings from 1962, flat black architectural silhouettes on a white ground that anticipate by a decade Richard Serra's similar drawings in charcoal and oil stick. Unexpected, too, was a series of paintings titled "Arundel," white-on-white, acrylic-on-canvas compositions with some graphite whose "conceptual" nature enraged some visitors—and a local critic who felt municipal money was being misspent—when they were exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1975. (The series began in 1973 and continued for more than 25 years.)

But then Truitt has never been a stranger to controversy; over the years the artist and her work have elicited strong reactions pro and con. While Greenberg and, more recently, Meyer have strongly endorsed her prominent place in contemporary art history, Truitt has been subject to more than her share of belittling gender-biased salvos, both overt and covert, beginning with an attack by Judd, who wrote, in *Art International* in 1963, "If the queen had balls, she would be king."¹⁰ The caption to a photograph of the artist by Lord Snowdon that accompanied an article written by Greenberg about Truitt in *Vogue* described her as "the gentle wife of James Truitt."¹¹ She herself wrote, "I have to guard against allowing myself to be defined, either by myself or others, in traditional, sociological terms. The nub of my discomfort is a feeling more or less conscious that it is unbecoming for a woman to feel broad-scoped ambition at all, much less to try to achieve it."¹² To further complicate things, Truitt did not fit the picture of a typical artist. Far

from being an anarchic bohemian, she was married to a prominent journalist, had three children and didn't even live in New York. Her lifestyle was hardly as radical as her art.

The astonishing thing is not that Truitt was the object of such criticism when she began to exhibit in the 1960s, or even when Roberta Smith characterized her as a "homespun perfectionist" in 1991,¹³ but that the attitude persists to this day. Reviews of the Hirshhorn exhibition in the *Washington Post* by Blake Gopnik, who anthropomorphizes her sculptures into comical characters ("I think of that one over there as Big Dave Stanford, dressed in a showy red suit . . ."),¹⁴ and Mark Berman, whose piece was titled "A Dutiful Wife Who Sculpted Her Own Identity,"¹⁵ are scathing and, there is no other word for it, sexist.

Even curator Kristen Hileman reflects this bias in the exhibition catalogue. In spite of the fact that Truitt said, "I generally feel uncomfortable with any personalizing of art criticism, and doubly uncomfortable because it is particularly common, and subtly condescending, in criticism addressed to the art of women,"¹⁶ Hileman chose to write the entire essay from the perspective of close biographical interpretation. For example, she notes of *First* that

the unexpected heights of the sculpture's pickets, one tall and two shorter, expand the work from the concept of boundaries to a depiction of three joined but distinct entities, perhaps not without parallels in the relationships among Truitt and her two siblings.¹⁷

Admittedly, Truitt inadvertently gave fodder to all of this because she was also an innovator in another way: few other prominent sculptors or painters have left such an intelligent and detailed account of what it means to be an artist on a very personal level, addressing issues from the esthetic to the quotidian

and covering the making of artworks and tending of children with equal emphasis. While for some it may all just be too much information, this is exactly what has made her books so popular.

In his 1968 *Vogue* article, Greenberg stressed Truitt's distance from the then key social scene at Max's Kansas City, saying, "She certainly does not 'belong.' But then how could a housewife, with three small children, living in Washington belong? How could such a person fit into the role of pioneer of far-out art?"¹⁸ It may have been just this isolation that gave Truitt the space and courage to follow her own dictates. Against the now inescapable chatter of multiformity, the simplicity and strength, severity and surprising warmth that characterize these sculptures come as a relief. Truitt's work allows us to concentrate once again on what's truly important: form, color, proportion and that happily ineffable quality we call "presence." ○

1 Anne Truitt, *Prospect*, New York, Scribner, 1996, p. 19. 2 *Ibid.*, p. 20. 3 *Ibid.* 4 *Ibid.*, p. 23. 5 James Meyer, "The Bicycle," in Kristen Hileman, *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection*, Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2009, p. 53. 6 James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 72. 7 *Prospect*, pp. 149-50. 8 "Grand Illusion: James Meyer talks with Anne Truitt," *Artforum*, May 2002, p. 158. 9 *Anne Truitt: Working*, a film by Jem Cohen, 1999. 10 In Meyer, *Minimalism*, p. 227. 11 Clement Greenberg, "Changer: Anne Truitt, An American Artist Whose Painted Structures Helped to Change the Course of American Sculpture," *Vogue*, May 1968, p. 213. 12 Anne Truitt, *Daybook*, New York, Pantheon Books, c. 1982, p. 110. 13 Roberta Smith, "Art in Review," *New York Times*, June 28, 1991, C21. 14 Blake Gopnik, "Georgetown's Colorful Genius," *Washington Post*, Oct. 11, 2009, E1. 15 Mark Berman, "A Dutiful Wife Who Sculpted Her Own Identity," *Washington Post*, Oct. 11, 2009, E20. 16 *Prospect*, p. 89. 17 Kristen Hileman, "Presence and Abstraction," in *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection*, p. 14. 18 Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays: Criticism, Modernism, with a Vengeance 1957-1969*, John O'Brien, ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 288.

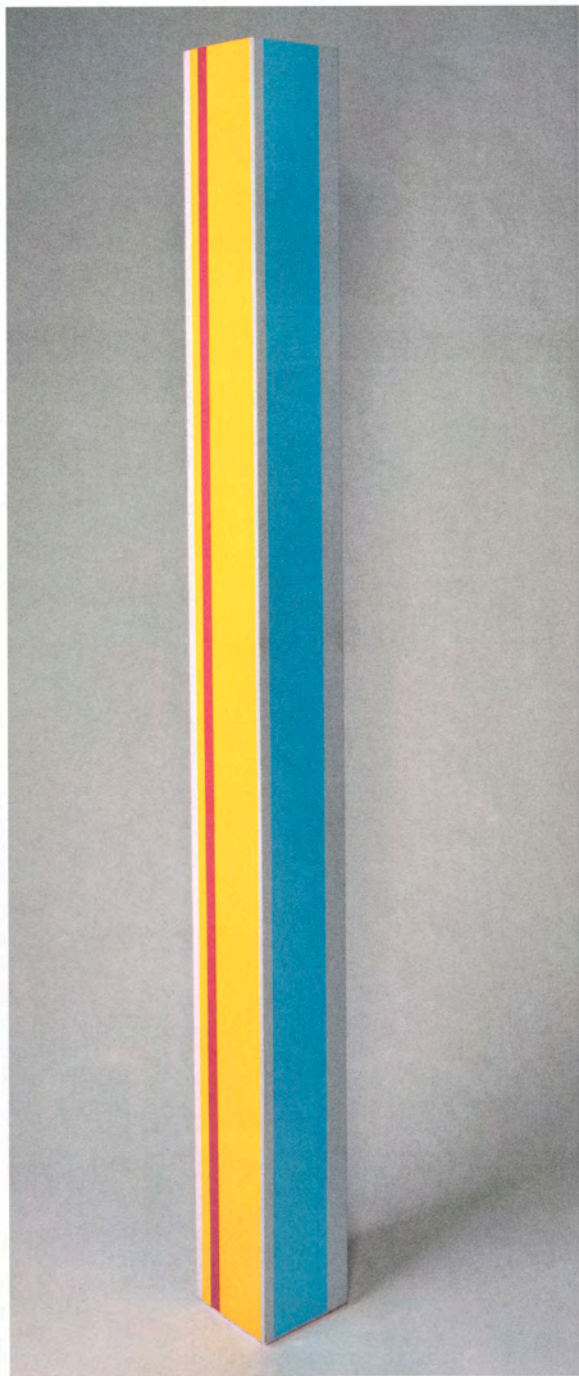
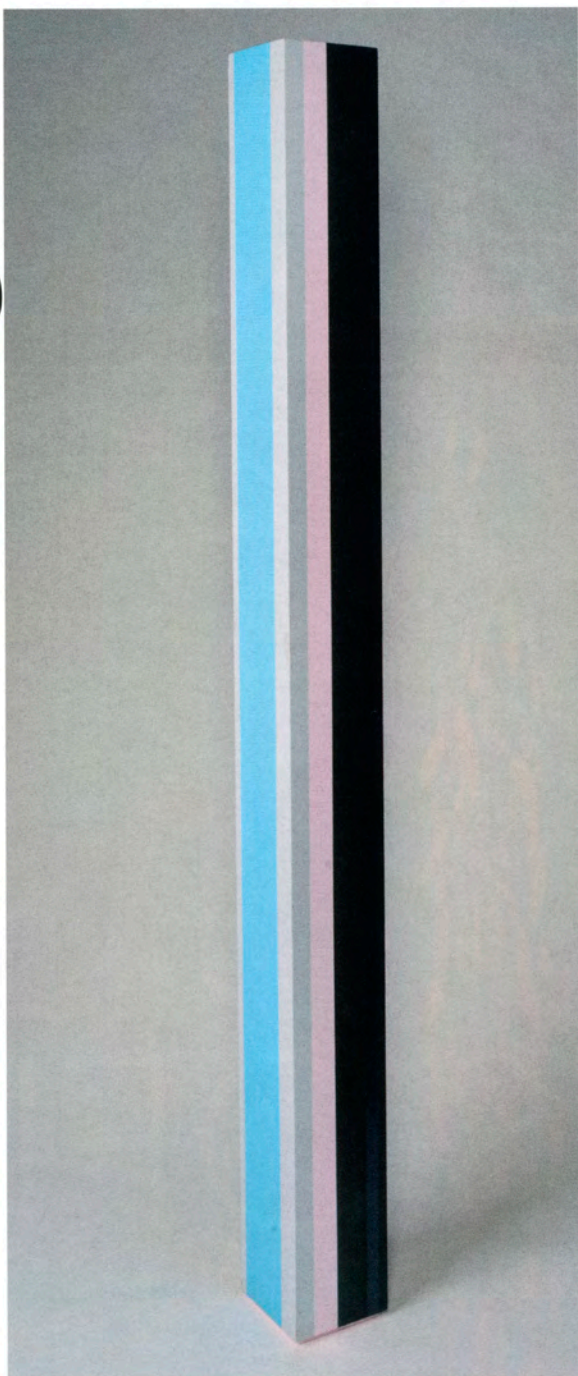
"Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection," curated by Kristen Hileman, appeared at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. [Oct. 8, 2009-Jan. 3, 2010]. It was accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Hileman and James Meyer.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

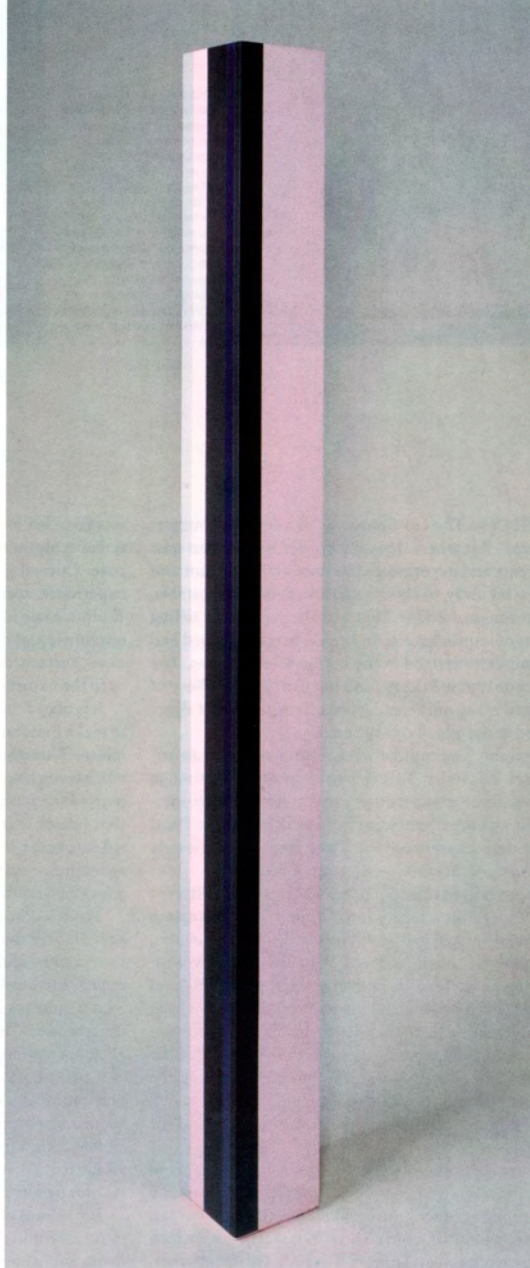
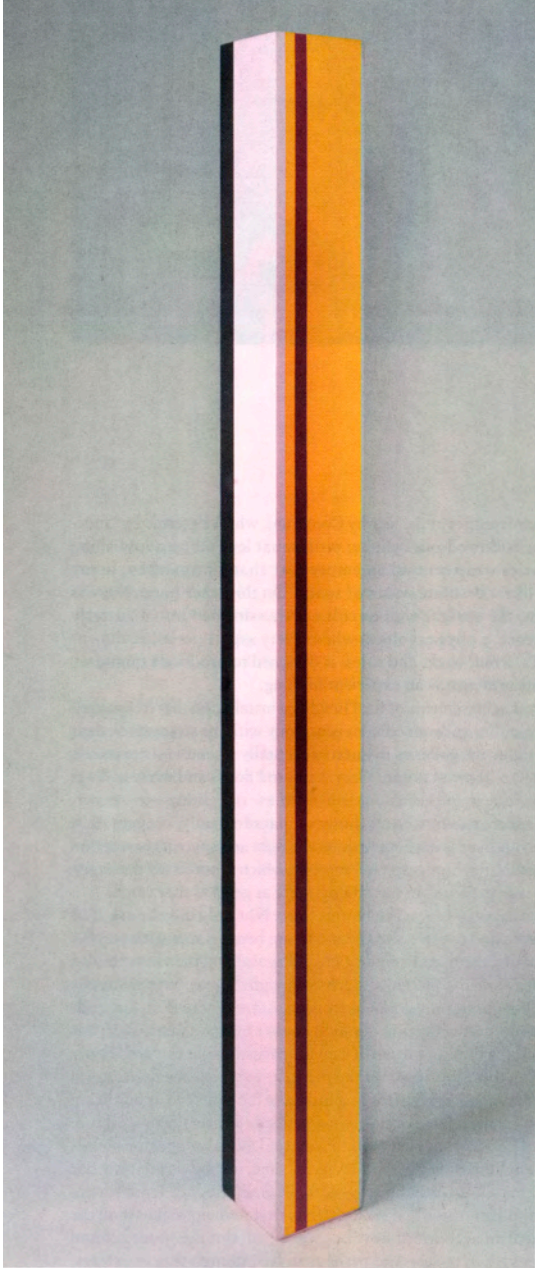
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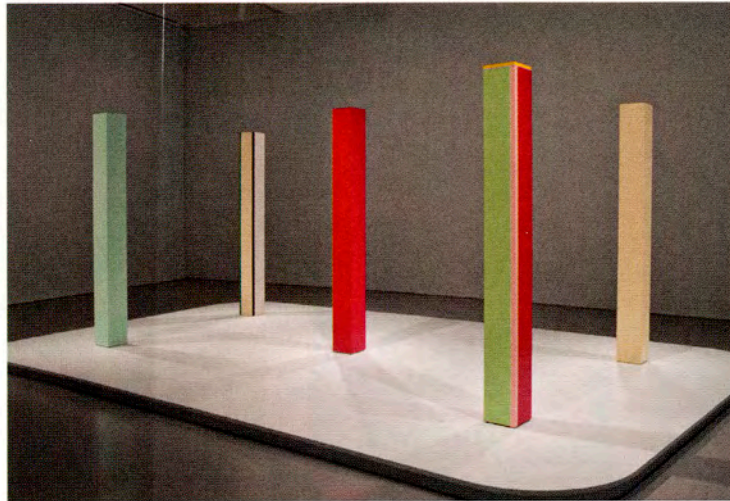
Disarming Time



Spread: Anne Truitt,
First Requiem, 1977, acrylic on
wood, 90 x 8 x 8". Four views.



The work of [Anne Truitt](#) has always stood slightly apart: Concurrent with Minimalism and Color Field painting, but never quite commensurate with their terms, her oeuvre has long eluded categorization and, for that matter, sustained critical reception. On the occasion of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's recent groundbreaking retrospective, the late artist's first in thirty-five years, *Artforum* asked art historian **Anne M. Wagner** to revisit Truitt's inimitable engagement with temporality, shape, and medium.

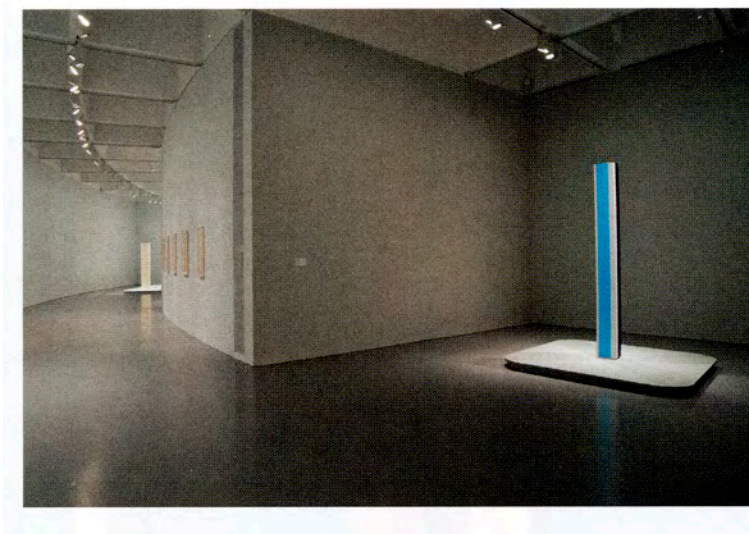


“THE PAST,” WROTE L. P. HARTLEY in *The Go-Between*, “is a foreign country: they do things differently there.” But where does the border lie between past and present? Why do some events and experiences feel unbearably distant and others not estranged at all? How far away, to choose a less than random example, are the major and minor happenings of 1974? That was the year that a sitting president resigned under threat of impeachment, an heiress was kidnapped and (temporarily) radicalized, computers arrived in the nation’s newsrooms, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* made movie history, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art hosted the first—and, until now, only—museum retrospective of Anne Truitt’s work. In 2004, she died at the age of eighty-three.

Thirty-five years is an unforgivably long time between retrospectives for an artist of this caliber. Why the delay? Was it that Truitt’s work was not quite foreign enough, or that it lacked the measure of pastness that earns an artist a retrospective in the first place? This might well have been what happened, given that Truitt never stopped producing as the decades went on: She was still making delicately novel pieces—for example, *Return* and *Evensong*—the year of her death.

Or perhaps the time was not yet ripe to grasp just what seems so different about Truitt’s art—until now. With the new exhibition, “Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection,” at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC, her work has again become part of the present, if in a whole new way. Retrospectives themselves are meant to serve as go-betweens; the beautiful and meticulously installed show conceived by Kristen Hileman could not have been a better emissary. It did everything possible to make sure that Truitt’s astonishing individuality comes clearly into view. And in so doing, the show forged the necessary link between present and past. It remains to be seen how long the bond will endure. Waiting thirty-five more years to look again at Truitt will surely shatter even the strongest connection: Let both the tastemakers and the feminists among us take heed!

Arriving at such a pointed installation was presumably no small task, given the fundamental antipathy between Truitt’s work and the spaces of the Hirshhorn. Quite distinct conceptions of sculpture and architecture are in play. On the one hand is the assertive volume of Gordon Bunshaft’s structure (which by pure coincidence was completed the year Truitt, a longtime Washingtonian,



was given her first retrospective at the nearby Corcoran), which he termed a “functional sculpture,” a hollowed-out cylinder with squat legs set on a low-slung base. Curved galleries wrap around an empty core that all too often, in my experience, seems like a desolate waste of space. On the other hand, there is Truitt’s basic idiom, the upright wall or column transformed into an utterly nonfunctional presence, a physical object whose every aspect (its color, dimensions, surface, depth, front, back, and sides) is designed to produce a quandary as to the nature of its presence as an experiential thing.

It is one of the great achievements of the Hirshhorn installation that it managed to make Bunshaft’s pie-slice galleries cohabit peacefully with the strangers in their midst. (Though by rights the galleries in question actually resemble slices once a bite has removed their narrowest point.) Gray walls and floors and white ceilings quieted the spaces, as did an impeccably evenhanded use of lighting—it was perfect, I think. Yet the same pacific devices, however paradoxically, brought each work to active life. Truitt’s art is nothing without the light and space its perception necessitates—any and every photograph is a travesty, which is not to say that some aren’t better, others worse. (Those in the catalogue are as good as they can be.)

Truitt’s other nonnegotiable requirement is time. Not only did she ask it of herself, over the weeks and months she spent coating her surfaces with acrylic, then sanding and coating them again (and again and again), but the viewer is also required to invest in a similar coin. How much is enough? It may be that anyone who would ask such a question is doomed from the start. There is no cut-and-dried answer: The sort of seeing that’s in question doesn’t function punctually; it is all about contingency, the how and when of a comprehension that can arrive only gradually. Late in life, the artist spoke of the moment at which she understood how time and sculpture go together: “I was standing in the sunshine of our living room one morning when it suddenly came to me perfectly clearly that a sculpture stood . . . on a line of gravity that disarmed time. Stood alone as a person stands alone, bathed in the light that marks the passage of time, not *subject* to time but *illuminated* by it.”¹ In this astonishing reflection, the emphases are Truitt’s own.

What kind of standing is this? The force of Truitt’s statement makes it all the more essential to give an account of how her works inhabit the space around them, and what they give us to see. And perhaps to feel, though this, as always,

is more tentative ground. Yet Truitt herself was certain that feelings—her own, first of all—were essential to the production of her art (it showed her “pain, despair, delight, and bafflement”), and in this certainty she agreed with one strand of the aesthetic thinking of her time.² Remember that it was Clement Greenberg, her sometime champion, who in 1952 titled an essay on the Abstract Expressionists “Feeling Is All.” An early encounter with one of Truitt’s sculptures, so he told her, left him feeling scared. And fear was not an emotion from which he quickly turned away.

It is not easy to explore the question of how looking and feeling converge in Truitt’s art. Nor was this a problem that the Hirshhorn show overtly asked its viewers to take up. All it really required was that they look at the artist’s work. Yet even this much is not straightforward, no matter how much a monographic exhibition seems to assume the opposite: All you do is start at the beginning, then move from youth to death. Which more or less is how this retrospective was staged.

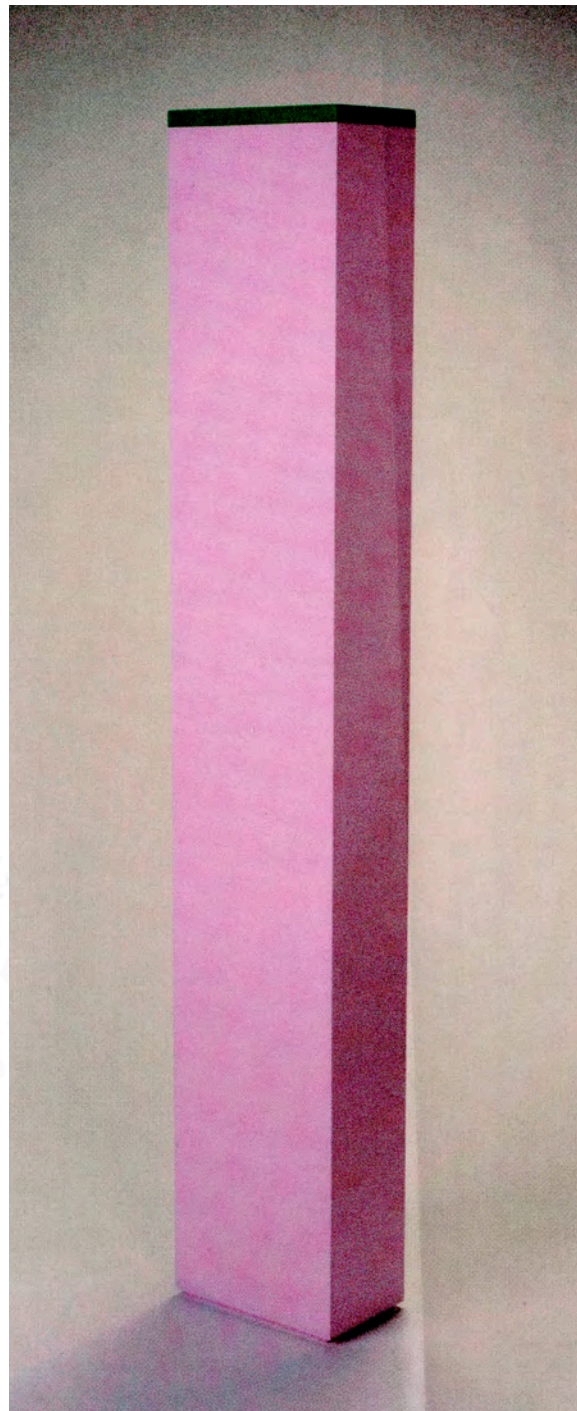
The earliest work on view in Washington—as the piece itself declares—was *First*, 1961. Not surprisingly, the show’s first gallery gave it pride of place. How could it not? I know of no sculpture quite like it, before or since, not even among the artist’s own works, which is to say that it fully deserves the primacy its title asserts. Yet it wasn’t really the artist’s first work. From 1949 onward she had plugged away at wood, clay, and metal pieces and tried cement, Sulp-metal, and stone. None of the results were in the show, though some survive. Instead, the exhibition started, as I say, with *First*. Like a white-painted stela of 1962, a piece she labeled *One*, it suggests a Pollock-like taste for beginnings.

First seems to be, or perhaps to represent, the briefest possible stretch of a white picket fence. How much of a fence does it take to convey the general type? Truitt’s thinking is quasi-mathematical in its precision: It is as if she is proposing a category, one whose constitutive elements need not be identical to join the set. Here the size and shape of each upright are declaratively different, yet the work is fencelike even so. For one thing, it is tied together structurally by means of two horizontal supports, both precisely overlapping a vertical picket to suggest the next one in the row. And then there is the impeccably white coat of paint. Tom Sawyer’s recruits could not have done better by Aunt Polly. Nor could Truitt have imagined a more economical evocation of the decorous social and spatial boundaries that governed small-town American life.

Much of Truitt’s work of the early 1960s has this evocative cast. In some pieces, her shapes are tomblike and her tone commemorative, while other pieces loom above the viewer like walls. And in every instance the works are painted, in schemes that sometimes reinforce but just as often undermine the implications of their forms. In *Two*, 1962, for example, the eponymous pairing takes the form of separate upright panels emerging from a single base. Imagine the twinned gravestones of a wedded couple. *Two* is painted black and brown, by which I do not mean that each upright bears a different color. On the contrary, each panel shares both hues. Truitt found a design that manages not only to suggest a healing-over of the gap between the panels but also to invoke a continuity with some imagined wider world. In *Two*, that is, the title roles are played by equals that are physically separate but conceptually one. And this, in turn, can happen because in Truitt’s work those supposedly separate media, painting and sculpture, likewise work as one.

Nowadays, we might call Truitt a pioneer of intermedia. Certainly her practice seemed to some viewers elusive, even anomalous, back in the day. Hileman’s catalogue essay highlights Donald Judd’s overtly defensive

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dismissal. He insisted, for example, that “the partitioning of the colors on the boxes is merely that”—a fairly egregious misreading, given that Truitt’s “partitioning” of color does real work to disturb the boundaries between image and object, thing and event. What a strange verdict for a critic who a few years later would famously champion the “specific object”—work that is neither painting nor sculpture—as the new and necessary order of the day. In Judd’s own terms, Truitt’s objects are as specific as they come.

Even more telling is Michael Fried’s bemusement at this same aspect of her work. The context is a text that Hileman also astutely invokes. In a 1963 review for *Art International*, Fried went so far as to admit that he found the interplay between shape and color in Truitt’s work “a bit confusing,” as if, in his words, “there were two rationales to look out for instead of just one.”

Precisely. As so often with Fried, what gives him trouble goes straight to the heart of the matter. In Truitt’s work there are always at least two rationales—and sometimes more. As her career continued, and she arrived at the sort of work she is now known for—the pillars or columns that (to repeat) stand alone, as a person stands alone—the roles of the two systems remained distinct and describable, yet we always know that we are still quite artificially prizing them apart. If sculpture is the vehicle for presence, then color does its best to challenge or undo that presence over time. Color,

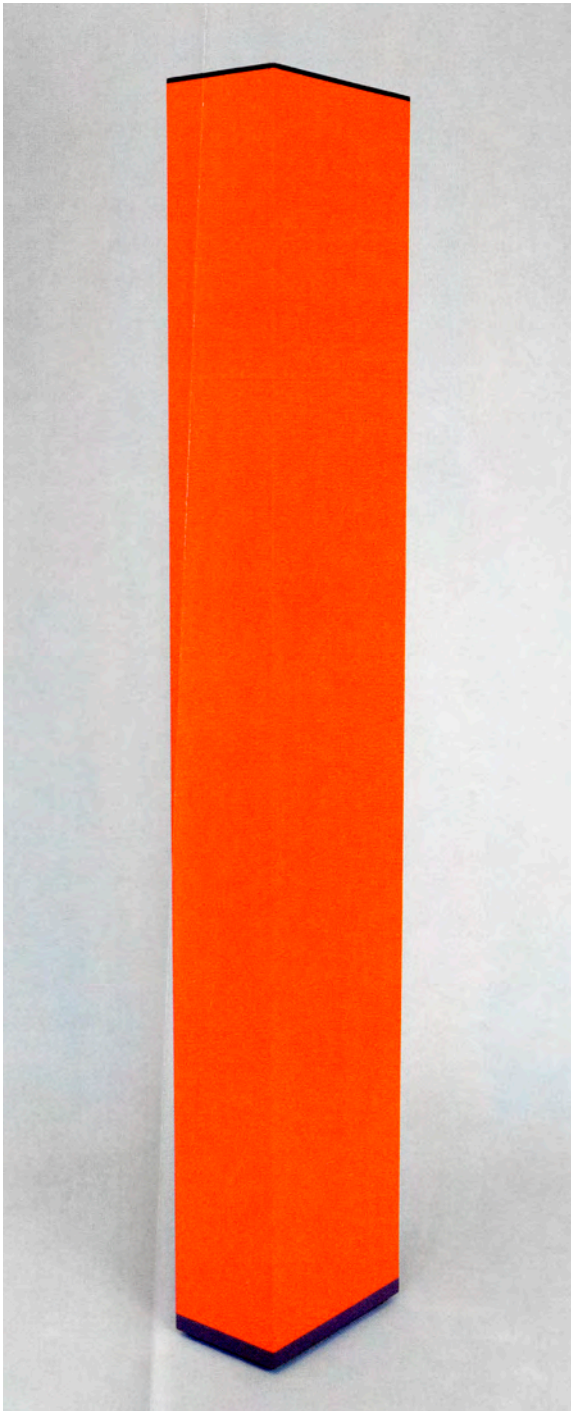
which Truitt certainly conceived of as *painting*, remains optical—it will always be a retinal phenomenon—but is nonetheless deployed to undo the earth-bound intransigence of shape. And its effects are only visible as time goes by. In other words, for Truitt sculpture is no longer, as Rosalind Krauss once vividly put it, the medium located “at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing.” Or if it occupies this position, it does so thanks to the transformative magic that color works.³

Let me put the inevitable generalities of this description in touch with a few chosen works. Take the magnificent 1977 *First Requiem*, which at the Hirshhorn was given a room of its own. To see the work, it is essential to walk around it, even though doing so reveals nothing about its columnar shape, not least

because that shape is effortlessly, automatically graspable; like other artists of her moment, Truitt gets enormous mileage from her chosen gestalt. Even so, everything changes as one makes the tour. The column simply *is* different from side to side, and these transformations are brought about by changes of color. Each side of *First Requiem* bears its own set of stripes in a vertical pattern—stripes that differ slightly in width yet enormously in hue, so much so that there is no way to predict (or remember) how any one side will look. This inability occurs despite the fact that a trip around the piece cannot be anything but brief. There are only four flat eight-inch sides to this tall column (its height is ninety inches), and their footprint forms nothing other than a compact square. Yet even so, it is the column’s color, not its shape, that determines what we see.

Vertical stripes and fields were Truitt’s favorite arrangement. But she often gave her columns horizontal bands in addition to, or in place of, the stripes. These have their own distinct effects. One major thing they accomplish is to respond to the way that each of her pieces makes contact with the ground. From the beginning—which is to say, from *First* on out—Truitt resolved the issue of how her pieces should stand before us by adding to the bottom of each four invisible wood strips (or in some cases a single piece of wood) that just slightly lift the work off the floor, so that each work casts its

As Truitt’s career continued, two systems remained distinct and describable, yet we always know that we are still quite artificially prizing them apart. If sculpture is the vehicle for presence, then color does its best to challenge or undo that presence over time.



own fine shadow and each seems, however minimally, to float. And that effect of floating is directly answered—and sometimes countered—by the colors chosen for the horizontal stripes. A dark band along the bottom can elevate the entire column above it, while a soft border at the top of the piece can seem, like mist swallowing a building, to disperse or evaporate its terminus, as if it had somehow managed to become a cloud.

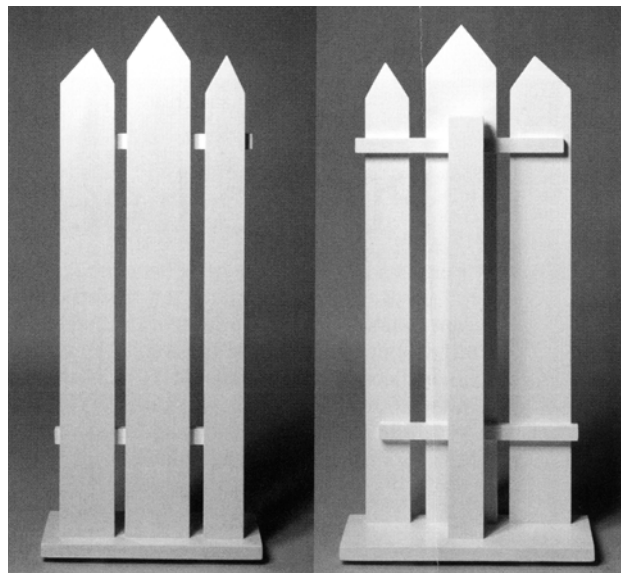
Truitt's titles sometimes speak to these effects, though I, for one, am not certain I always know precisely how. But in one set of works—a quartet of columns made over a four-year period, 1971 to 1975—it seems that there is no mistaking what was on her mind. The pieces share more than their identical dimensions. Each was dubbed a “Dryad,” and each stood for a season as well. Truitt made *Summer Dryad* first, then *Winter* in 1973. The *Autumn* and *Spring* Dryads followed, both being finished the same year. Within this group, color transforms the constancy of structure so very strikingly that it seems to offer a primer on what hue can do.

For Truitt to invoke a dryad was risky: The verticality of her columns may be bodily, but their spare geometries never duplicate the human. Here, though, by virtue of their titles, the Dryads invite us to see the pillar's volume (the figure) as a concentration or intensification of Nature—a body in which nature and woman are one. They are a tree. The simplicity of the upright cedes to the changing seasons of the imagined forest, and an all-too-human romance with the “magic of nature” stands waiting in the wings.

Sylvia Plath, too, invoked dryads in a pair of poems of 1957. Or at least she tried to. Both texts proclaim the difficulty of the task. Here is a stanza from one:

But no hocus-pocus of green angels
Damasks with dazzle the threadbare eye;
'My trouble, doctor, is: I see a tree,
And that damn scrupulous tree won't practice wiles
To beguile sight:
E.g., by cant of light
Concoct a Daphne;
My tree stays tree. . . .'⁴

I think it is easy to imagine Truitt reading this poem with careful sympathy and acknowledging an unexpected sisterhood between the younger Plath's predicament and her own creative goals. The relationship lies in the way in which each artist regards the “treeness” of her tree. To Plath, the tree stands for the mundane materials she must use to create. Her words are only grass and leaves—no wiles or hocus-pocus there. The same with Truitt. Her tree, too, “stays tree,” even when a dryad is invoked: It cannot stop being the wooden column that it is. And the only wiles she deploys are the fundamental properties of color, appearances that, if they dazzle, never wear out. If the light stays steady, the marvels of aura and afterglow, halo and radiance, show themselves again and again. This, I think, is one thing Truitt means by “disarming time.” We cannot stop seeing, as the artist well knows. Occasionally, exhibitions like this one give us the opportunity to begin that rich process all over again. □



“Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection” is on view at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, until January 3.

ANNE M. WAGNER IS A PROFESSOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

NOTES

1. Anne Truitt, from a lecture delivered in 1998, as quoted by Kristen Hileman, “Presence and Abstraction,” in *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2009), 19.
2. The full quotation reads, “I had hustled my pain, my despair, my delight, my bafflement onto paper and into clay and wood and stone, and fixed them there as if in magic enchantment.” Anne Truitt, *Daybook: The Journey of an Artist*, as quoted by Hileman, 12.
3. Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977; paperback edition, 1981), 5.
4. Sylvia Plath, “On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad” (1957), in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Harper, 1981), 62. The second of the two is “On the Plethora of Dryads” (1957).

The New York Times

Where Ancient and Future Intersect

WASHINGTON — Before art went nuts in the 1960s and splintered off into a thousand different directions, the smart money was on purity. Paintings and sculptures would be whittled down to the bare bones of form, material and technique. Transparency and logic would yield intellectual rigor and abstract beauty, and this would provide escape from the confusion and corruption of mainstream culture.

ART REVIEW

KEN
JOHNSON

The sculptor Anne Truitt (1921-2004) was a purist, but only to a point. A protégée of the archformalist critic Clement Greenberg in her youth, she worked within an extremely limited set of variables throughout her five-decade career. She was best known for slender, flat-topped, human-scale monoliths resembling models of Modernist skyscrapers. Made of wood and smoothly finished in semigloss colors configured as stripes, wide bands and rectangles, they were supremely tasteful marriages of Color Field painting and Minimalist sculpture.

Yet despite her purist impulses, her work was not puritanical. In "Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection," a splendid retrospective at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, her sculptures resonate poetically on multiple levels.

Organized by Kristen Hileman, an associate curator at the Hirshhorn, the exhibition of 49 sculptures and 35 paintings and drawings has a beautiful, futuristic look. With the museum's curving walls painted pale gray and Ms. Truitt's monoliths and other constructions placed singly or in groups on white platforms with rounded corners, it looks as if it were designed by Stanley Kubrick in his space-odyssey mode.

Ms. Truitt's works are less radical technically than those of the most celebrated Minimalists. For one thing, she resisted industrial modes of fabrication. During a period spent in Japan in the '60s with her husband, the journalist James Truitt, she created aluminum sculptures, which she didn't like and destroyed.

Looking closely you can see how lovingly painted her handmade works are. She applied multiple coats, alternating brushstrokes between horizontal and vertical directions and sanding between layers. Her colors are always exquisitely nuanced, whether tending to eye-strainingly dark combinations à la Ad Reinhardt or to pale, Impressionist pastels or to Pop-like candy-bright hues. This makes her pieces seem less like painted sculptures than like three-dimensional paintings. It aligns her with artists like Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland and Gene Davis, the second two being members, along with Morris Louis, of the Washington Color School of the '60s and '70s, to which the Washingtonian Truitt also belonged.

Ms. Truitt's earliest works suggest that she might have become a representational sculptor had her influences been otherwise. "First" (1961) has three white, pointed pickets joined like a sec-

tion of fence. But the sense of a symbolic urge can still be felt in her most abstract works, although obliquely.

The stele, her favorite shape, has been used since ancient times for memorial and funerary monuments, and the form gives Ms. Truitt's work an archetypal, timeless feeling. "Southern Elegy" (1962), a representation of a tombstone (an arch-topped tablet on a plinth) is one of several early pieces that refer directly to the cemetery.

A writer of uncommonly graceful prose much admired for her published journals — "Daybook" (1982), "Turn" (1986) and "Prospect" (1996) — Ms. Truitt described her works in psychological terms. In the catalog essay, Ms. Hileman quotes a revealing passage. Recalling her junior year at Bryn Mawr, Ms. Truitt wrote, "I was obsessed with the idea of MYSELF as a citadel, an inner stronghold for which the experience of my life would on the one hand provide nourishment and other the other build more and more intactly."

This may explain why works that depart from the stele are less powerful. An anthropomorphic, integrative container of the self, the monolith had a personal significance for Ms. Truitt unlike any other form. She added moldings or crosspieces to some works, but those elements only disrupt the unity of the stele without contributing anything very exciting formally or metaphorically. "Grant" (1974), the only large piece that lies horizontally on the floor, has nicely colored bands of mauve and ochre around it and an additional, short plank on its dorsal side for formal variety, but it has none of the imposing impact of the stand-up works.

The exhibition includes some of Ms. Truitt's paintings on canvas, which are disappointing. Rather than using the flat rectangle to further explore color and other painterly possibilities, she created vaporous fields of white on beige fabric. More like Agnes Martin than Robert Ryman, they hint at a Zen spirituality, but have little of the presence of the sculptures. A puzzling series of pieces called "Pliths," which resemble small fringed rugs slathered in black paint, are the least impressive of Ms. Truitt's more experimental efforts.

The most compelling works remain the simplest verticals. "Mid-Day" (1972), at 10 feet high, is monumental without being overbearing, and its fire-engine-red paint gives it a fierce energy that is intensified by the compressive, rectilinear form. As in two especially vibrant works from 1968, "Morning Choice" and "A Wall for Apricots," which sport wraparound bands of fruity hues, it sometimes seems as if you are looking at columns of pure, dematerialized color. But the optical is always anchored in sensuous immediacy. Collapsing the deep past (the ancient stele) and the future (the Kubrickian monolith) into the personal and perceptual present, Ms. Truitt's apparently reductive sculptures exude a heady, soulful vibe.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Maximal Results, Minimal Means

BY LANCE ESPLUND

Washington

Anne Truitt, the American abstractionist who died five years ago at age 83, is usually placed under the umbrella of Minimalism—an art movement her sculptures are credited with jump-starting in 1961. But the label narrows the distinctiveness of her achievement. Truitt was an abstract painter and sculptor; but mainly—working with slender, painted, squared wood columns, through which she gave mass and airy volume to color—she was a painter working in three dimensions. Her gifts are brought vividly to life in “Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection,” the first full retrospective of the artist, at the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

Unlike the machine-tooled feel of most Minimalist art, Truitt’s work is unafraid of being warm and handmade; of being metaphoric, contemplative and evocative of nature. Her painted sculptures were originally inspired by Barnett Newman’s abstract paintings. But Truitt’s art has as much in common with the complex, muscular geometries of Piet Mondrian, Ellsworth Kelly and the Russian Constructivists as it does with Newman’s stripes or the pared-down forms of Agnes Martin and Donald Judd. Although abstract and spare, Truitt’s sculptures do not shy away from being human in scale; nor do they mind flirting with the decorative, the monumental or the elegiac.

Still, Truitt’s sculptures can be elusive. At the conclusion of the Hirshhorn’s retrospective is a short film about the artist. Visitors would do well to start there before heading to the beginning of the loosely chronological show. The film, “Anne Truitt: Working” (2009), made by Jem Cohen, comprises a montage of images: We see jars of paint, autumnal leaves, and wind rippling the surface of a pond, as well as Truitt making sculpture in her Washington and Yaddo studios. But the heart of the film is its soundtrack—the snippets of Truitt’s wise and emphatic voice espousing the tenets of her studio practice.

Truitt—part chef, part shaman—talks about making art, and especially fine-tuning color, in language that veers between the mystical and the matter-of-fact. Among the qualities she demands from her colors are that they “zoom into being,” “lift,” “sing,” “vibrate” and “float across” form. “Color,” Truitt says, “is a question of amount . . . of a little bit of this and a medium amount of this.” When color is “right,” she says, “it becomes flesh . . . human. . . emotion . . . it becomes alive.” She observes that the idea of having enough color, “is like having enough mashed potatoes—you need enough.”

Truitt was trained as a thera-

pist at Bryn Mawr College and, later, as an artist at Washington's Institute of Contemporary Art. Born in Baltimore and reared in Easton, Md., she spent most of her life in Washington with her husband, journalist James Truitt. Before the Minimalist sculpture of 1961 (where the Hirshhorn show begins), her art consisted of figurative sculptures that Truitt, in 2002, described as "very ugly and very primitive" and categorically dismissed: "They had nothing to do with art . . . they had to do with self-expression."

Nothing that could be dismissed as mere "self-expression" is in the Hirshhorn's elegant gathering of more than 85 sculptures, paintings and drawings. But I still wish the show, organized by Kristen Hileman, had included formative works from the 1950s. The exhibition begins with the beautifully spare, abstract sculpture "First" (1961), which initially appears to be merely a fragment of a white picket fence. Truitt alights at the Hirshhorn without her messy beginnings—which makes this not a proper retrospective per se.

Immediately, the show moves into the dark and foreboding, black, gray, white, red and violet abstract sculptures from 1962. They stand alone on the floor and suggest tombstones, totems, barriers, obelisks and sentries. "Hardcastle," a narrow black wall over 8 feet tall, supported by electric-red struts, is one of the largest works in the show. The sculpture, which alludes to a man run over by a train, is an abstract distillation of monument, rise and support, as startling as a draped casket.

Truitt, building layer upon layer, hand-painted each sculpture. Visible wood grain, brushstrokes and translucent glazes add ripples, vibration and movement to her sculptures' surfaces. In many of these earlier works, wide or narrow colored stripes cascade like flowing water from sculpture to plinth. Surfaces shift

from glossy to matte to chalky; and edges and incised lines, enlivened by reflected light, sparkle like electric current.

The Hirshhorn's Truitt drawings and paintings include "Piths," (2002-04) dense tar-black paintings that simultaneously resemble pelts, animal footprints and frayed, woven floor mats. But her greatest works are the signature sculptures that she made from the mid-1960s up until her death, in 2004. A master of color, Truitt can get her columnar wood sculptures to blush and breathe; to feel translucent, scented and lit from within. Shifting color ever so slightly in weight and hue, her striped forms feel alive.

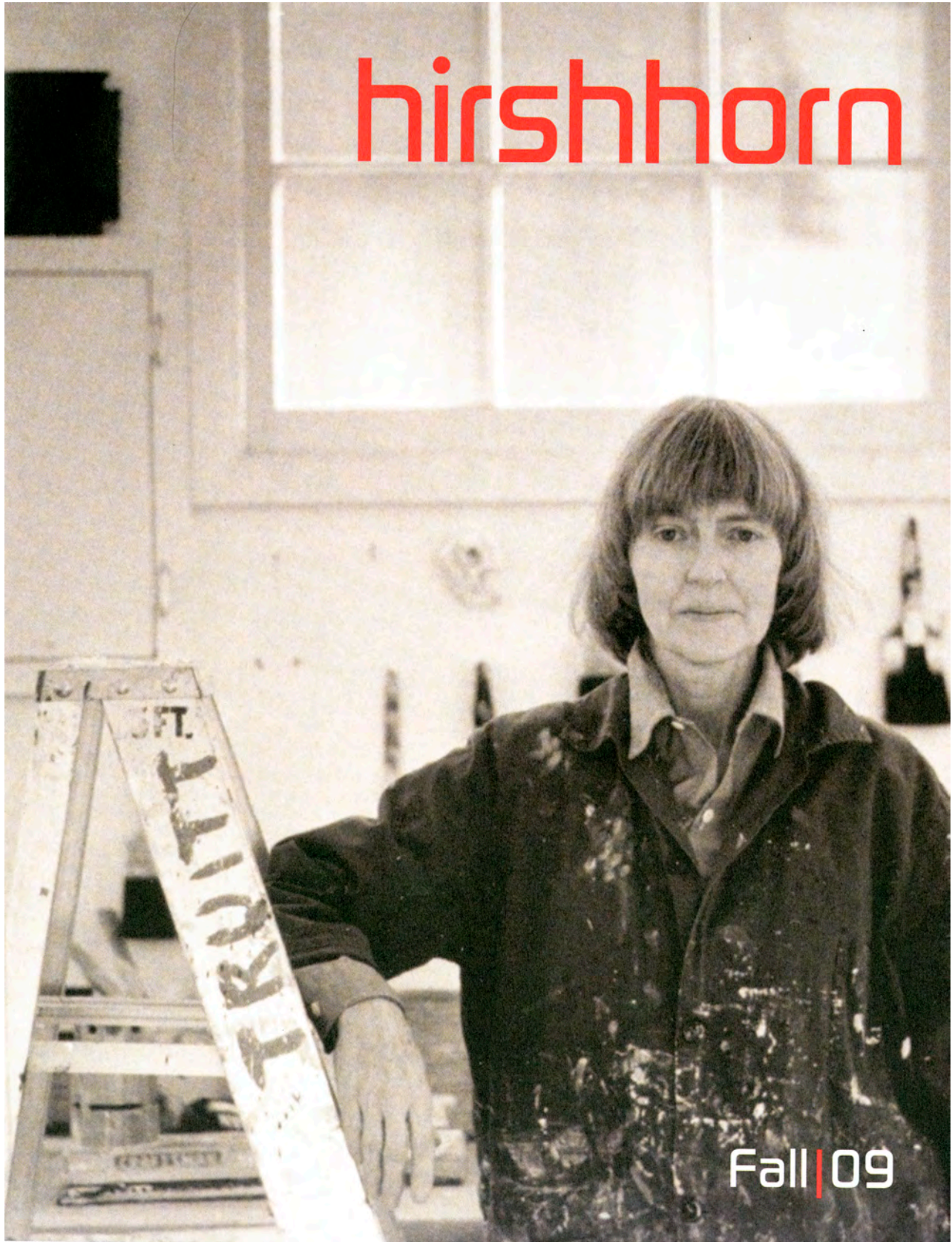
At the Hirshhorn, many of Truitt's sculptures are gorgeously, harmoniously grouped. They feel like classical columns in search of roof and pediment; and they move us, from sculpture to sculpture, as if from season to season or parent to child. "A Wall for Apricots" (1968), in baby blue, chartreuse and taxi-cab yellow, expands and compresses in equal measure. The mostly robin's-egg blue of "Landfall" (1970) freshens like a floral breeze. "Elixir" (1997) and "View" (1999), in chilly, Easter-egg pinks, greens, yellows, violets and blues, feel like homage to spring. The brushy, crimson stripe circling "Nicea" (1977) flutters like an eyelash, opens like a fresh wound.

As simply stated as stacks of building blocks, Truitt's best sculptures are unassuming yet dead-on. They do not feel like painted forms but, rather, like living presences. And they reverberate like color notes sounding against one another. Their power lies in their economy; and in their full embrace of the beauty and metaphoric richness of color—maximal results achieved through minimal means, not Minimalism.

Mr. Esplund writes about art for the Journal.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Hileman, Kristen. "Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection." *Hirshhorn*, Fall 2009, pp. 3–6.



Anne Truitt *Pe*

October 8, 2009–January 3, 2010

by Associate Curator Kristen Hileman

Abstraction is not easy.

Rather than working in representational imagery that depicts such things as everyday objects or human forms, some artists express themselves exclusively in a vocabulary of color, shape, and compositional arrangements. Broadly speaking, people are used to receiving information in words or pictures that have a fairly direct and recognizable relationship to the reality in which we live (think photography, film, and television, as well as the entire genre of illustration). How then does communication unfold when an artist intentionally distances her or his images from reality, abstracting experience and ideas? Does this process of abstraction make concepts more personal or more universal? And what sort of role should/do art historians, curators, and critics play in mediating abstraction through more familiar modes of exchange?

It seems important to raise these questions in relation to the art of Anne Truitt, the subject of the Hirshhorn's exhibition *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection*. Truitt is a pioneering but under-studied figure in the history of twentieth-century abstraction. She was a contemporary of Color Field artists Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, and her reduced geometric sculpture, notably her hallmark columns, developed in tandem with the work of Minimalists like Donald Judd during the early 1960s. However, her work has not occupied as prominent a place in the discourse of post-1960s art as theirs. Among the reasons that could be proposed to explain this, a particularly provocative one is that Truitt's work eludes (and given the artist's independent personality one might even say intentionally eludes) easy categorization, and categorization is a key strategy by which critics, scholars, and curators interpret abstraction, indeed any kind of art, for a broader public.

While her palette was incredibly important to her work, unlike the Color Field artists, Truitt explored color in three dimensions, rather than on canvas. And although she had the rectangular and columnar infrastructures of her sculptures fabricated, Truitt transformed them through non-primary, hand-painted color in a way that distinguished her from the Minimalists. Further, the

ception and Reflection

artist's work was inflected with the correspondences of its physical dimensions to the human body and architectural elements from her childhood on the Eastern Shore, as well as color compositions and titles that evoke the names of places and literary allusions, among other references. In retrospect, it is the human stamp that Truitt gave to streamlined, geometric shape that seems a crucial and unique link between the generation of Abstract Expressionists that preceded her and the radically reduced abstraction that developed over the course of the 1960s.

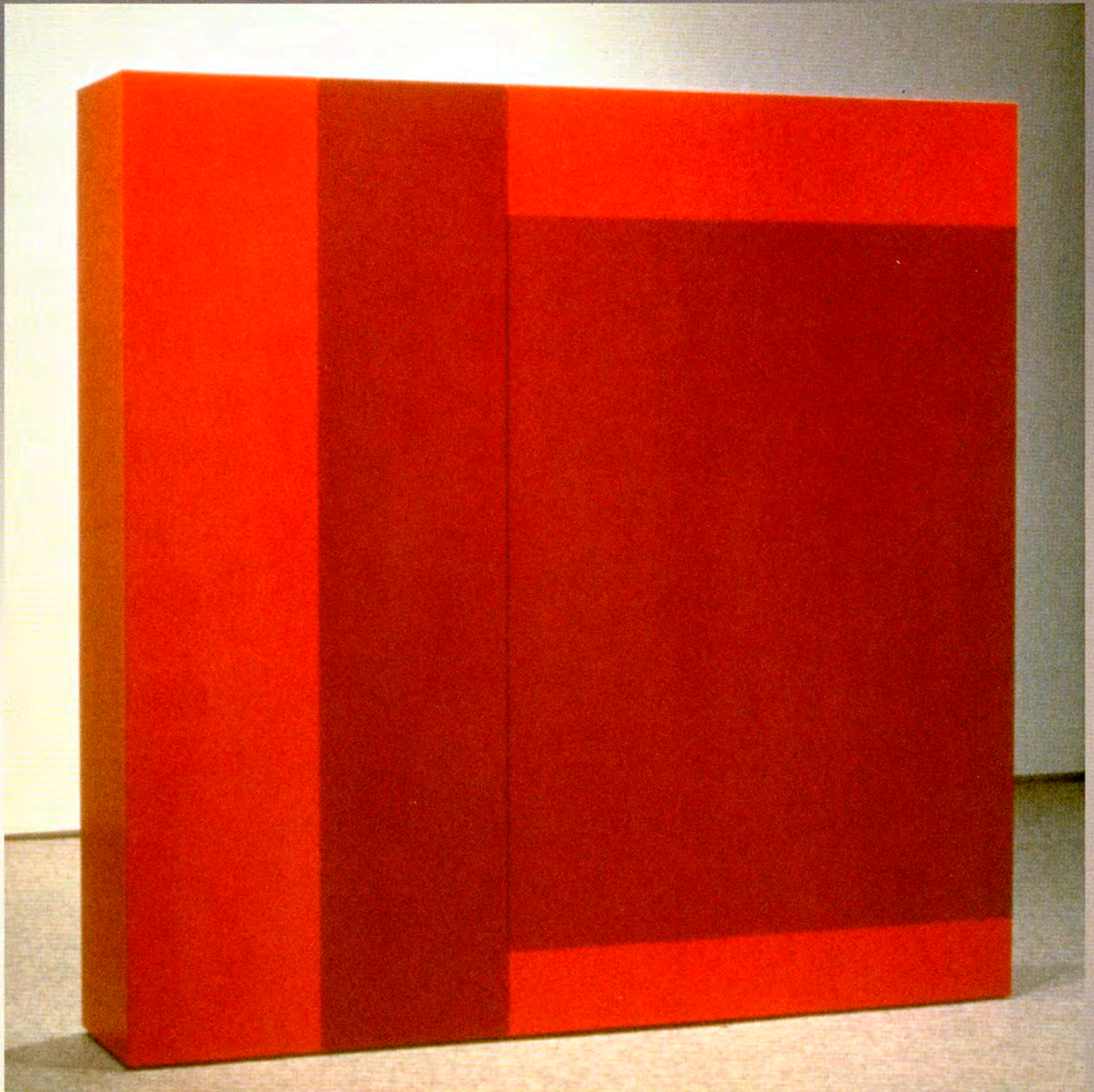
However, one senses from writings of that same decade by Donald Judd and others that this connection to art of the past was demoted in favor of the "new" Minimalist mode of art-making in which expressive gestures were replaced by manufactured objects that, broadly speaking, claimed to have no references or dependencies outside of the relationships initiated during a viewer's physical encounter with them. Interestingly, here we are faced with a more general question of whether the scholarly and critical interpretation of abstraction is not just a matter of analytical categorization, but of taste, judgment, and even fashion, with the result that one kind of artistic practice is promoted over another.

So where does that leave Truitt's work? Her art is ripe for rediscovery and ready to be considered on its own terms. By the late 1960s, critical dialogue emphasized the "far-out" and forward-looking. Today, we are currently in a scholarly moment that welcomes a re-evaluation of the past and acknowledges the interplay between an artist's output and his or her individual experience. *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection* and its accompanying catalogue offer a contemporary study of the artist's career, documenting its evolution from the late 1940s until her death in 2004. The project also recognizes the essential need to enable new generations of viewers to draw their own conclusions through firsthand exposure to pieces from collections across the United States, brought together in the Hirshhorn galleries.

Continued on the next page...



Left: Anne Truitt's *Night Nod*, 1977. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Museum Purchase, 1978. Artwork © Estate of Anne Truitt/The Bridgeman Art Library, photo by Lee Stalsworth; Right: Anne Truitt in her studio, Washington, DC, 1995, photo by John Dolan. Artwork © Estate of Anne Truitt.



Truitt was born in Baltimore in 1921 and raised on Maryland's Eastern Shore, a geographic and architectural setting that influenced the art that she came to make. In 1947, she moved to Washington, DC, where she would spend the majority of her adult life. Having worked in the field of psychology and also writing fiction, Truitt delved into the visual arts in the late 1940s, enrolling in Washington's Institute of Contemporary

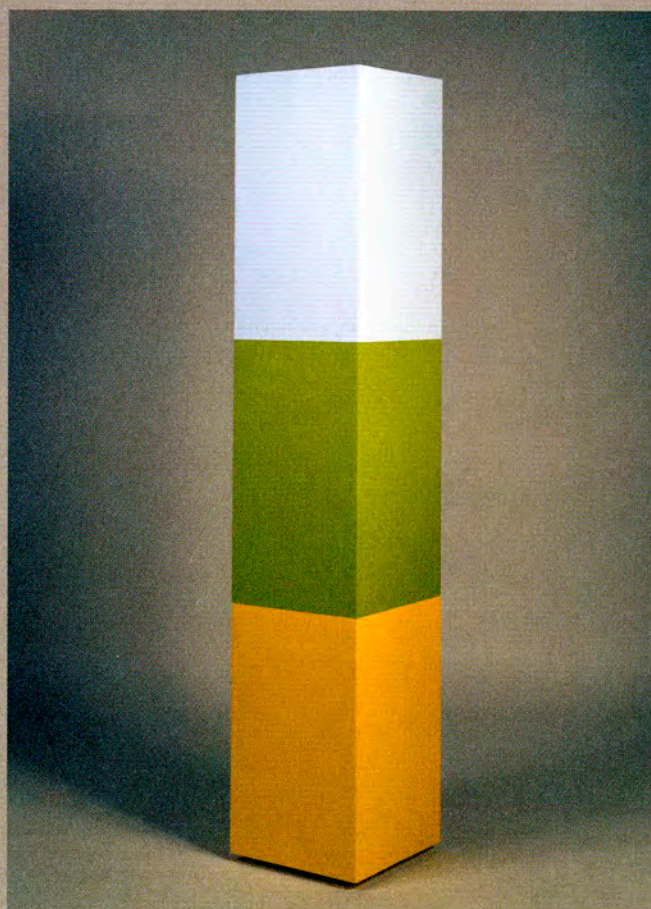
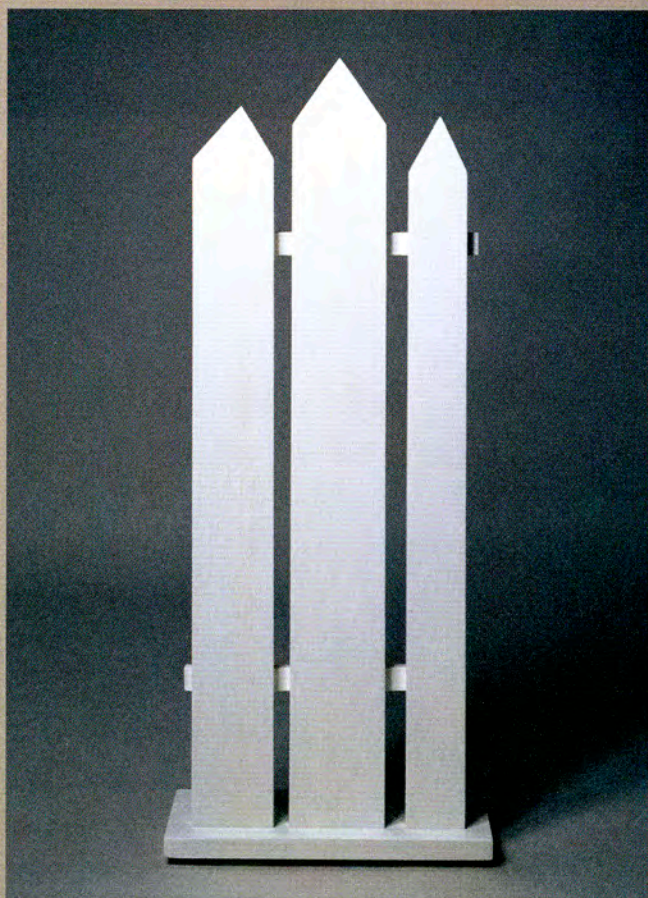
Art. Throughout the 1950s, she primarily made figurative sculpture in such materials as clay, cast cement, and stone, much of which she intentionally abandoned or destroyed in the early 1960s. Also during this period, the artist and her husband, journalist James Truitt, were part of a lively Washington social circle that brought together artists, journalists, politicians, and government officials.

After visiting the Guggenheim Museum's *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists* exhibition in November 1961, where she was impressed by the paintings of Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman, Truitt's work took a dramatic turn toward reduced, geometric abstraction, establishing the focused and individualized area of artistic exploration that she pursued for the next forty years. In addition to producing sculpture, paintings, and drawings (all of which are represented in the exhibition), Truitt also published three auto-biographical books, *Daybook* (1982), *Turn* (1986), and *Prospect* (1996). Truitt lived in Northwest Washington's Cleveland Park neighborhood since 1969. She passed away in December 2004, after completing the remarkable columnar sculptures *Return* and *Evensong*, both on view at the Hirshhorn.

The almost 100 works in *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection* embody Truitt's "life in art," to quote the title of an exhibition of the artist's sculpture organized by Brenda Richardson for the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1992. The works also present themselves for the contemplation of today's audiences who will ultimately arrive at their own

meanings for Truitt's rich language of abstraction. No doubt, some viewers will appreciate the work because of its place in the trajectory of art history while others will connect with it by developing their own associations for Truitt's forms. Still others will look for a universalizing of experience in the artwork—whether that be a shared investigation of how we perceive color and light or how beautiful objects have the power to prompt emotional response and reflection that transcends particular circumstance. But happily and hopefully, many will respond in a way that not only cannot be categorized, but also cannot be fully articulated, just as abstraction in general, and Truitt's art in particular, consists of so much more than the attempts to explain it.

Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection is organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The exhibition is made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Judith Rothschild Foundation, and the Anne Truitt Patrons Committee, with additional support from the Hirshhorn Board of Trustees and the Museum's National Benefactors and Director's Circle members. The Anne Truitt Patrons Committee co-chairs are Tim Gunn and Martin Puryear. Members are: Judy Cotton and Yale Kneeland, Celia Faulkner Crawford, Jean Efron and Anthony P. Picadio, Mrs. Robert Eichholz, Henry H. and Carol B. Goldberg, Jacqueline and Marc Leland Foundation, Victoria and Roger Sant, and Lynn and Rodney Sharp.



Anne Truitt's work from left to right: *Valley Forge*, 1963, The Rachofsky Collection. Artwork © Estate of Anne Truitt/The Bridgeman Art Library, photo courtesy of Danese Gallery, New York; *First*, 1961, The Baltimore Museum of Art; Gift of the artist, Washington, DC (BMA 1995.70) Artwork © Estate of Anne Truitt/The Bridgeman Art Library; *A Wall for Apricots*, 1968, The Baltimore Museum of Art; Gift of Helen B. Stern, Washington, DC (BMA 1984.57) Artwork © Estate of Anne Truitt/The Bridgeman Art Library.

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ARTFORUM



PREVIEWS

WASHINGTON, DC

Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection

HIRSHHORN MUSEUM
AND SCULPTURE GARDEN
October 8, 2009–January 3, 2010
Curated by Kristen Hileman

With this retrospective, Anne Truitt, who died in 2004, finally gets the full treatment. Included will be several of the painted wooden abstractions that caught Clement Greenberg's eye in the late 1960s, eliciting comparisons to Donald Judd and Robert Morris, as well as lesser known work from the succeeding three decades, when she experimented with metal fabrication, augmented her signature columnar forms with horizontal extensions, and developed a two-dimensional practice. From the beginning, Truitt insisted on the importance of referentiality and color—both troublesome to the Minimalists with whom she is often grouped—in seeking “maximum meaning in the simplest possible form,” an objective so deceptively straightforward it requires the cognitive acrobatics of a koan. The show is accompanied by the artist's first monograph, with essays by curator Hileman and art historian James Meyer. —*Lisa Turvey*

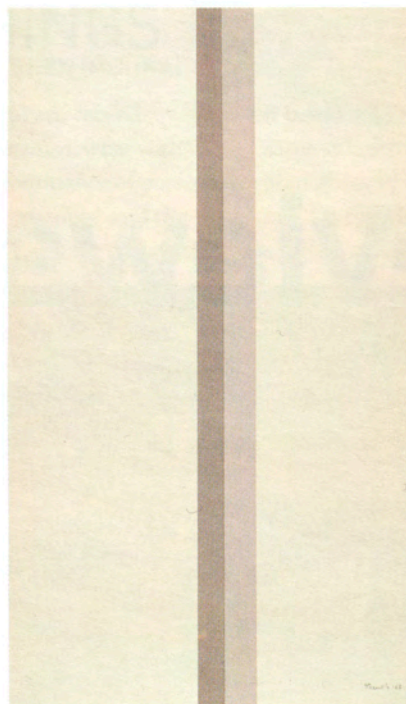
MODERN PAINTERS

SAN ANTONIO

ANNE TRUITT

LAWRENCE MARKEY GALLERY

Few people know that Clement Greenberg considered Anne Truitt's monochromatic, handpainted, columnlike sculptures from the 1960s (she continued making them until her death in 2004) key to the development of Minimalism. Even fewer have had the opportunity to see her works on paper from the same decade, which support Greenberg's claim. The show's 10 *Sumi Drawings* from 1966 are both expressive and restrained, demonstrating why Truitt, though reluctant to claim a spot in the crowded, male-dominated artworld or in any movement associated with it, was nonetheless aligned with Color Field painters such as her friend Kenneth Noland and Minimalists such as Donald Judd. The drawings are intimate, brushy counterparts to Truitt's body-size vertical sculptures. Made when the Washington, DC-based artist and writer was living in Japan with her journalist husband and children, each features two adjacent taupe stripes of Japanese sumi ink stretching top to bottom and several inches across an otherwise pristine piece of thick handmade paper. While for the most part these small works—all approximately two feet tall and one foot wide—are rigidly composed and tightly restrained, they also bear expressive marks. For example, some have ragged edges, patches of unevenly absorbed ink, and traces of an erased signature. They reveal a profoundly confident, skilled artist who was aware of the potential to link her work to bona fide schools of art, yet diligently pursued her own idiosyncratic path. It is probably this resistance to easy categorization that contributed both to Truitt's being long overlooked and to her current embrace by those of us tired of quick flash, starved for slower substance, and interested in a more egalitarian version of art history. —KATE GREEN



Anne Truitt, *Sumi Drawing*, 1966. Sumi ink on paper, 23½ x 13¾ in.

ARTFORUM

JAMES MEYER TALKS WITH ANNE TRUITT

GRAND ALLUSION

ANNE TRUITT'S HOUSE IN WASHINGTON, DC, SITS ON A HILL

above the city. A typically Mid-Atlantic dwelling of a certain vintage—shingled, with a porch and pale blue shutters—it is easy to miss. The artist's studio in the backyard resembles one of those fishing shacks that dot the coast of New England, quite the opposite of the grandiose compounds and lofts that have become the self-conscious markers of artistic success. John Russell recently wrote in the *New York Times* that Truitt's work "never calls out for our attention." I'm not sure I agree—some of her sculpture is quite imposing—but the observation would serve aptly as a description of Truitt's home, and of the artist herself.

Truitt is one of the few significant artists of her generation who continue to work. Born Anne Dean eighty-one years ago and raised in Easton, Maryland, and Asheville, North Carolina, she is old enough to remember the slow, plodding sound of horse-drawn ice wagons and the horror of segregation and local lynchings (one allusion of her eerie 1962 *Southern Elegy*). At Bryn Mawr she studied psychology in her quest to become a therapist. During World War II she worked as a Red Cross nurse's aide in the psychiatric ward at Massachusetts General Hospital, where she treated soldiers suffering from battle fatigue. The trauma Truitt witnessed impelled her to change course and enroll in art school. Marriage to the journalist James Truitt and motherhood did not preclude the quiet cultivation of her work (she made sculpture and drawings in the '50s). In 1955 she published a translation of Germaine Brée's *Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time*, a study of her favorite author. In 1963, at forty-one, Truitt had her first show, at André Emmerich Gallery in New York—a remarkable debut that stands as one of the earliest exhibitions of Minimal-type sculpture.



Truitt has been the subject of retrospectives at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art; forthcoming projects include Ann Goldstein's group show at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, "A Minimal Future?" and a solo exhibition at the Sheldon Art Gallery in Lincoln, Nebraska, next year. Still, after four decades, Truitt's art is not easy to place. Championed early on by Clement Greenberg, she emerged as a central figure in the Washington

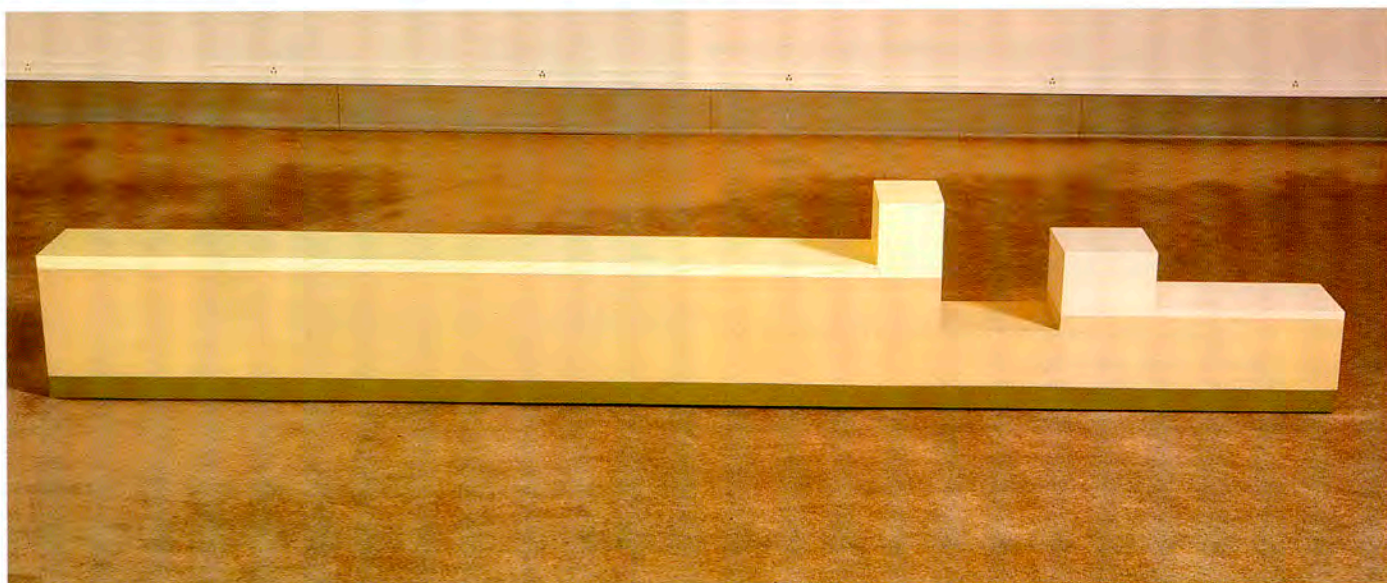


Truitt received me without the slightest fuss. Our first meeting lasted several days. I was intrigued, yet you could say I was also a bit skeptical at first. After all, it was common knowledge that Greenberg had been "wrong" about the '60s—wrong about Minimalism and Pop, which he dismissed. The inexorable march of art history finally marched against him. Truitt was the artist he'd praised at the expense of Judd; he called her work a happy antidote to unfeeling Minimalism. That Truitt was female—

a sculptural counterpart to Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis; yet her spare geometric forms more closely resembled the objects of then emerging artists Donald Judd and Robert Morris. Selected for such canonical Minimal shows as "Black, White and Gray" (1964) and "Primary Structures" (1966), Truitt was identified as a Minimalist, yet her hand-painted surfaces, instinctive color, and retention of allusion countered that tendency's literalist impulse, best summarized by Frank Stella's tautological maxim "What you see is what you see." Truitt's titles—*Sea Garden*, *Catawba*, *A Wall for Apricots*—suggest on the contrary a practice that points beyond its material substance toward an opaque yet constitutive subject matter.

When I knocked on Truitt's door some years ago as I was researching the history of Minimalism, I did not know what to expect. After being asked to wait in Marfa for two days before being presented to Donald Judd and having Dan Flavin cancel his interview with me countless times, I was relieved when

with Helen Frankenthaler, she was one of the only women admitted into Greenberg's canon—made her role more complex. Few artists have been so condescendingly gendered (who but Truitt has been described as a "gentle wife" or, more recently, a "grandmother with heart"?). The critical web around Truitt was dense, making her work difficult to see. As for Truitt herself: The conversations revealed a sensibility and intelligence as formidable as any I have encountered. Don't let the ladylike demeanor fool you: Ferociously curious and extremely acute, more widely read than most academics I know, Truitt can leave one painfully aware of the gaps in one's education. (I will not soon forget the embarrassment of admitting that I had only a dim awareness of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins; to Truitt, he is an old friend.) One senses that this colleague of Greenberg and David Smith has seen it all—and never diverted from the course she set for herself several decades ago. She is, to use a hackneyed word, unique. —JAMES MEYER



JAMES MEYER: Your debut show at André Emmerich, in 1963, was one of the first exhibitions of large-scale geometric sculpture. How did you come to make some of the earliest “Minimal” art?

ANNE TRUITT: The question implies that I did it on purpose, which is not true. What happened is that I began to see how I could make exactly what I wanted to make in a new way. It was a complete volte-face from my previous work. At the time I was making life-size figures of steel pipes with chicken wire and plastic and cloth. They were gothic figures and sort of bestial; I was also making casts of clay heads in very dark, colored cement, very ugly and very primitive. They had nothing to do with art in a way; they had to do with self-expression. In November 1961 I began to make the things I am making now.

JM: It all began with *First*, that modest little sculpture in the Baltimore Museum that resembles, but isn't, a white picket fence.

AT: It went in a rather literal progression. I did *First*, which is a perfectly straight picket fence that I put together myself. And then I did *Southern Elegy*, which is a perfectly straight tombstone structure, and then *Two*, and made a jump: I realized that changes in color induced, or implied, changes in shape. That though color and structure retained individual-

WHAT CLEM WANTED ME TO DO WAS TO STAY WITHIN THE LANGUAGE OF SCULPTURE, TO RETAIN SCULPTURAL CHECKS AND BALANCES. ACTUALLY I JUST LOST INTEREST IN THAT LANGUAGE AFTER 1961. AND NOW MY SCULPTURES PIVOT ON THE INVISIBLE LINE OF GRAVITY THAT HOLDS THEM TO THE GROUND.

ity, they could join forces rather as independent melodies can combine into a harmonic whole. And that when I combined them in a particular way, they had a particular content—particular to me, that is, a meaning that was important to me. Once it had occurred to me that I could use color metaphorically for content, I realized that I could go ahead with new freedom. What I was doing dawned on me as the works got bigger: strange-looking objects that just stood there in the studio for almost a year, where no one came but me.

JM: Why were you dissatisfied with the figurative work?

AT: It was nowhere near broad or wide or deep or open enough. With abstraction you can go as far as you can go. But with the figure you are stuck because you're dealing with actuality.

JM: What was it about these simple shapes and fields of color that was going to be the language of your work?

AT: I'm sorry, I just don't think that way. It's as if you're asking me to put the cart in front of the horse when I have neither horse nor cart. I just thought, I must make these things.

JM: But why this form and that color to express a particular content?

AT: I never thought about it. The objects came in with their intrinsic subject matter—like baseballs thrown on a curve. I don't know how to put it into words.

JM: Well, I'm suggesting the forms you used weren't arbitrary. Your early work is mostly large, bulky shapes.

AT: I think you'd have to say that what I've been about is being alone in the world, looking around at it, and trying to absorb it, at first with extremely nearsighted eyes. I didn't see a damn thing until I was in fifth grade. Nobody knew I couldn't see. So when you talk about the big things that I made, I think what it may have been is this person going around through the world, either on her legs or on her bicycle, in a place

confettied by large, anonymous structures—just big blocks of white or gray. I couldn't see anything except these big blocks. And I had to go on smell and sound.

JM: And tactility.

AT: And tactility. It's sort of a frightening way to grow up. I wandered around in a daze.

JM: You've said that you wanted to capture memory in a concrete form. Most of the artists who came to be called Minimalists purged their work of metaphor or subject matter. Some of the artists coming along in the '90s, such as Roni Horn and Felix Gonzalez-Torres—

AT: I know their work.

JM: —embraced a Minimalist vocabulary in reaction to Minimalism's desubjectivizing impulse. The cube and floor plane and modular repetition became a language for exploring personal content. In your work, the form was generated by the artist herself in order to contend with a particular subject matter. The relation of form and content is not imposed but inextricable. But what's interesting, what makes your work hard to place within the Minimalist arena yet extremely relevant

now, is that you devised the form with an expressive aim.

AT: Let's not use the word *devised*, because I didn't think. I did it intuitively.

JM: Whereas your peers came to a Minimalist vocabulary to purge their work of content and feeling.

AT: My idea was not to get rid of life but to keep it and to see what it is. But the only way I seem to be able to see what anything is, is to make it

in another form, in the form in which it appears in my head. Then when I get it made I can look at it.

JM: When you had your first exhibition, at Emmerich, the work must have looked far out and strange.

AT: It was a strange distillation of a person's life. The works were not devised and they were not art. I didn't make them out of art. I've never understood people who made art out of art.

JM: What do you mean by "art"?

AT: You know. Something devised, something where people live to express themselves. I did that for twelve years—worked and worked and worked to make something on the outside that met and matched my inside.

JM: But I thought your work was expressive. You've mentioned that *Hardcastle*—one of your largest works, a tall black wall held up by red struts—alludes to a man who was run over by a train not far from your parents' summer home. It was a horrible event from your childhood.

AT: No. This was about trying to objectify my life. It wasn't about me myself. That was the whole virtue of it.

JM: How did Greenberg come to see your work? Was it through Kenneth Noland?

AT: Yes. First it was Ken, who told David Smith. David was the biggest, strongest supporter anybody could ever have.

JM: So they were the first two people to see your work?

AT: Yes; and then Clem. Clem said, "Now there will be three in Washington."

JM: You, Noland, and Morris Louis, presumably. In his essay on Minimalism, "Recentness of Sculpture" (1967), Greenberg talks about how difficult your work was for him initially, how he had to go back again until he finally "saw" it. Yet you've said he was impressed right away.

AT: Right away. There was no question about it.

JM: He was particularly impressed by *Hardcastle*.

AT: He backed away from it and said, "Scares the shit out of me." That's the only time I ever heard Clem swear. I remember being startled.

JM: That essay and the one he wrote about you the next year, "Changer: Anne Truitt," marked you as "Greenberg's Minimalist." He characterizes your work as a welcome antidote to that of Judd, Morris, and Andre. He praises the handmade quality of your sculpture and its intuitive color and attacks the industrial look of "orthodox" Minimalism. But you've also said that you later felt Greenberg was disappointed in you.

AT: He was not supportive all the way through; he was polite. I think he

was disappointed—angry in a way—maybe because I didn't do what he thought I should do. Perhaps he thought that I should pay attention to him and ask him what to do. I'm not quite sure what he wanted. But he didn't want what I did—which was never to ask him any questions at all, never to ask his opinion, and to go my own way. Maybe what Clem wanted me to do was to stay safe within the language of sculpture, to retain sculptural checks and balances. Actually I just lost interest in that language after 1961. And now my sculptures pivot on the invisible line of gravity that holds them to the ground. I just got simpler.

JM: More "minimal," which he didn't like. He said that your work hovered on the look of "non-art," like Judd's.

AT: No, he didn't entirely like it. Maybe he thought I should use color in a Cubist fashion, should fit my work into that art-historical imperative.

JM: Like David Smith or Anthony Caro, whose welding and balancing of parts he traced straight to Picasso: a perfect modernist narrative.

AT: I said to myself, I'm not going to do it. And I just stayed down here in Washington and kept on working.

JM: You decided not to show *First* (your "fence") or *Southern Elegy*, which resembles a tombstone, at Emmerich. That decision presented you as a "pure" abstract artist in your first show. The figurative origins of your work—its allusive nature—were repressed. How was that decision made?



AT: I think it must have been made by Ken and Clem. They were sort of guiding me along. Ken was busy telling me the folk knowledge of what it was like to be an artist. He was as generous as he could be.

JM: You've described the first show as a success. How so?

AT: I guess in terms of comment. At that time Clem was really dominating things, and Ken was powerful. Helen Frankenthaler came to see my work and traded. There were all these people in this world around André Emmerich.

JM: And they were all at their height.

AT: It was the apogee for them. February '63, that was it, you know. There was nobody else around.

JM: Pop was just taking off, yet Greenberg was still calling the shots.

AT: Even I could see that I was at the center of a power game.

JM: Greenberg made you one of "his" artists. What was it like to put up a show with him? I ask because Judd, as you'll recall, criticized the Emmerich installation in a review. He described the arrangement as "thoughtless," implying that you didn't care about how the works were placed.

AT: Let me go back to February 1963, with these three men—Bill Rubin,

JM: And yet you've told me that Greenberg and André Emmerich were disappointed that you never "took off" sufficiently. You didn't work your career.

AT: I never claimed my place. Louise Bourgeois stayed on the scene. She claimed her place day and night, year in and year out, and she has it and she should have it. Louise Nevelson claimed her place and stayed there and fought for it. Frankenthaler, too.

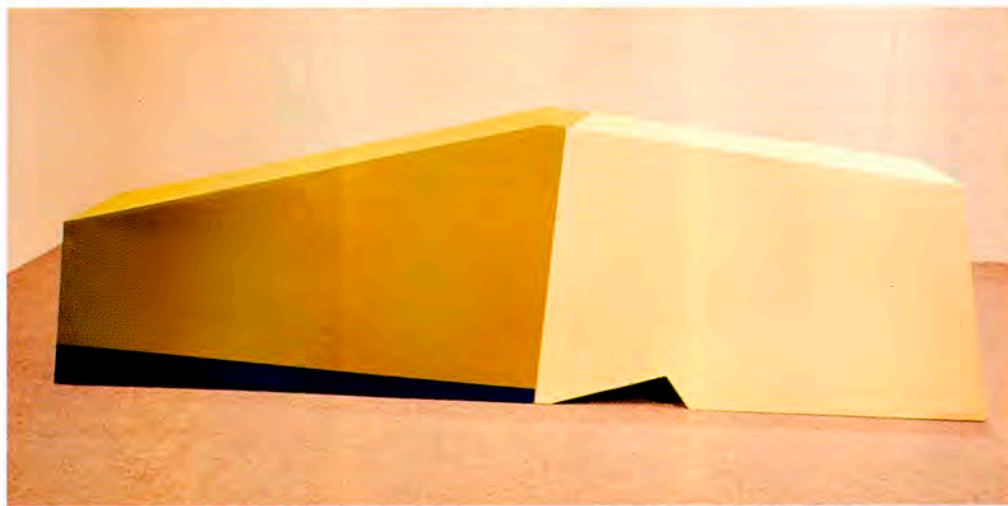
JM: Does your reserve on this score have anything to do with being a woman?

AT: Let's say that had I been a man, I would have been an equal. Also, I had been brought up never to call attention to myself.

I NEVER CLAIMED MY PLACE. LOUISE BOURGEOIS STAYED ON THE SCENE. SHE CLAIMED HER PLACE DAY AND NIGHT, YEAR IN AND YEAR OUT, AND SHE HAS IT AND SHE SHOULD HAVE IT. LOUISE NEVELSON CLAIMED HER PLACE AND STAYED THERE AND FOUGHT FOR IT. FRANKENTHALER, TOO.

Clem, and Ken—arranging the stuff in André's gallery. I was completely floored. I had never thought of the works together. I had simply thought of them as individual sculptures. I was astonished to see how they considered them in relation to one another. And they put two of them in the back room because they didn't "fit."

JM: So they installed your show. Did you agree with their choices?



AT: Well, for once in my life I was feeling rather passive. I was very conscious of being a neophyte. And they were very powerful; they were men in their own world.

JM: Much has been said about what an uphill battle women artists faced in the '60s. One looks at figures like you and Agnes Martin as something like survivors. Are the claims of sexism overrated or exaggerated?

AT: Underrated. Couldn't be exaggerated.

JM: Yet your shows got reviewed in all the magazines and by major critics. You've shown consistently for over forty years.

AT: I know, it's incredible.

JM: The successful women of your generation, we can count on one hand.

AT: We didn't even finish a hand. It isn't that these artists made a great big ruckus—they just stayed in situ. I think they were right. There's nothing wrong with it. But my character and my work are very quiet. My work depends on my being quiet. Psychologically, I can't afford that kind of public attention. I don't have the temperament for it.

JM: You've lived quietly in Washington all these years. Why did you stay?

AT: The light is wonderful in Washington. And I have a lifetime of friends here. It's the latitude and longitude I was born on . . .

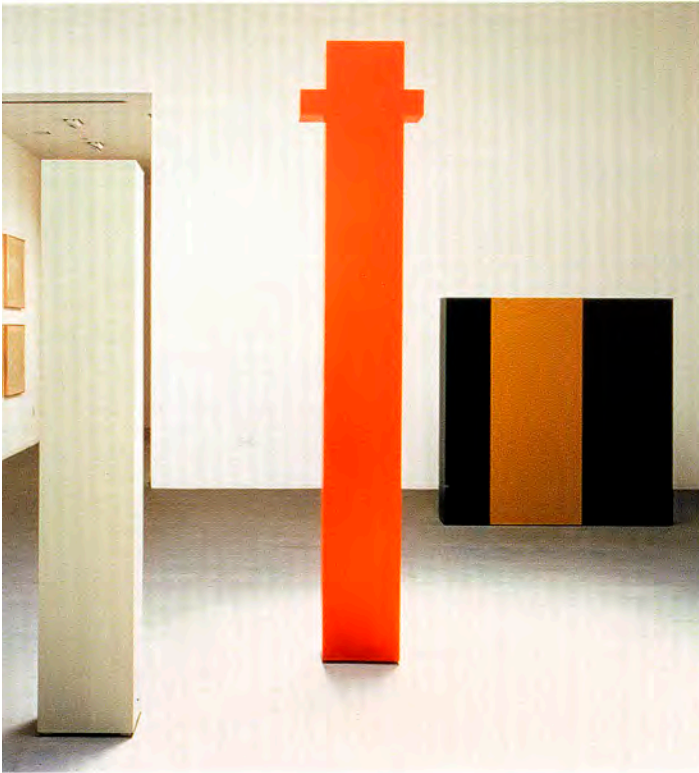
JM: There's another aspect to your life here. Being in Washington may be unhelpful for a career in the art world but is so interesting in terms of the real world. You were one of the inhabitants of Camelot. Your then husband, James Truitt, was high up at the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* during the Kennedy administration.

AT: Well, I was tangential to the "corridors of power," if that's what you mean. For someone who is as simple a person as I, I've led a sort of melodramatic life. It was my husband who pulled me into it, of course.

JM: People often try to connect the artist's life and work in obvious ways: They refract the art through the lens of biography. I can already see a reading that goes like this: "Truitt, living in Washington at the height of the Cold War"—

AT: I'm just agog with interest at what you're going to say—

JM: —"devised an abstraction that sought to escape, and yet expressed, US imperialist power." I'm thinking of the old reading of Abstract Expressionism's manipulation by the US Information Agency to represent an American ideology of "freedom."



AT: That's true.

JM: Yet the artists who lived in New York were far removed from power. Newman and Rothko were children of immigrants; they lived modestly. But you're in Washington—in Georgetown—during the Cold War. And you're keeping one studio across the street and another in Twining Court.

AT: I worked in between carpools and buying food and cooking and whatever else I had to do. I lived an outside life, but really I was living an inside life.

JM: Yet you were a personal friend of the people running the country. A lot of your friends were in the CIA.

AT: I've always thought it was peculiar, too. I was floating around in that world . . . I didn't pay attention to what was going on. And remember, much was secret. People were covert. It was interesting really, looking back on it. But my private feelings about it were that it was just very strange. I don't understand why fate led me to be in such a situation.

JM: There doesn't seem to be a clear-cut relation between your work and that situation—which doesn't mean there isn't one.

AT: I don't really see it. But that's exactly the way it was.

JM: You turned eighty last year. Has age, in some way, affected your work?

AT: I don't think age makes any difference except that it endows a person with freedom. Age cuts you off, untethers you. It's a great feeling. The other thing is, when you get to be eighty, you're looking back and down, out from a peak. I can look down and see my life from my own

little hill; I see this plain, all the years of experience.

JM: Does that mean making the work is somehow easier?

AT: No, it's harder. It costs me much more; I have all those years that I have to face and it takes a certain amount of courage. It's not a light and foolish thing. Color is getting more complex and harder and harder to mix. There are more complexities in it because my own experience is much more complex.

JM: Is it physically more difficult to work?

AT: It's not more difficult to be faithful, but I have to be faithful to more and more. And I have less psychic energy as I get older. Heaven knows I have less physical energy!

JM: But it has not changed the fundamental process or ambition of the work. If anything, the ambition has increased.

AT: Yes, I would say, by leaps and bounds.

JM: And the laborious process you use—painting the wood support in layer after layer of crosshatched color—hasn't changed. What happens if you're not pleased with the result?

AT: I take the color off and begin again.

JM: All the color? The white undercoats?

AT: Take them all off. Go back to the wood and come forth again. You never make the same mistake twice. Next time I will have learned.

JM: How do you get rid of the twenty or so coats?

AT: It's a horrible job. You have to wear a mask and rubber gloves and use newspaper and paint remover to take off all the paint. And sand.

JM: To the bare wood.

AT: It's a patient business. Sometimes you can be on that very last coat and it'll go wrong. All of a sudden it just won't do anymore: My hand goes out. So it's always a question of attention, of waiting.

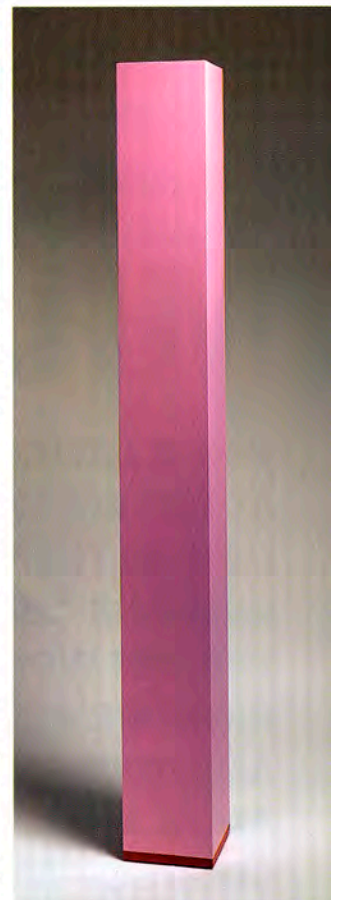
JM: Do you put the sculpture away?

AT: I take the color off it and begin again. Or I go in the house and wait. Or I move on to another sculpture and look at it out of the corner of my eye. At a certain point I'll go back to it. I don't exactly fix it. I just pick up where I am.

JM: And when the sculpture's ready?

AT: It's over. The whole thing is over as far as I'm concerned. Then I have to take care of the object itself. The reward is the making. I think all artists would agree with that. □

James Meyer is assistant professor of art history at Emory University and author of *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the 1960s* (Yale University Press, 2001).



Newsweek

The Heart of the Matter

Sculptor Anne Truitt's Baltimore show is a jewel

Anne Truitt is an artist of the old school. That she was born into genteel circumstance in Baltimore in 1921 and graduated from Bryn Mawr during World War II are only indirectly connected. Yes, Truitt is a grandmother who lives and works not in Soho but in Washington, D.C., reads the classics, and is given to saying things like "I have a friend in Horace." ("I like to smoke when I talk," is about as downtown as she gets.) Of course she writes well, having published two critically praised memoirs, "Daybook" (1982) and "Turn" (1986). But what really marks her as an orphan of the current cacophonous scene is her beautiful sculpture. Fifteen examples of it, dating from 1961 to 1988, are the subject of a jewel-like exhibition, "Anne Truitt: A Life in Art," at The Baltimore Museum of Art through April 19.

Truitt's work is deceptively simple. Take "Autumn Dryad" (1975), for instance. It's a boxy wooden column, a little taller than most people, painted entirely orange except for a grayish mauve band around the bottom. At first glance, it seems like a design fillip for a Scandinavian airport lobby. But as you continue to look at it (and you cannot help but look at it), you notice that the acrylic paint has been lovingly applied in untold coats. Simultaneously, the sculpture looks like it's solid color, like butter is yellow all the way through. The piece makes your mouth water (which is, by the

way, the test of all good abstract art). "Autumn Dryad" is visceral—as opposed to conceptual—minimalism. As Truitt puts it, "Everything is written on the body. Your experience stains your body like color dyes a canvas. [That's why] the paint sinks into the wood. It marries the wood." In almost all the works on view, the bride and groom indeed live happily ever after.

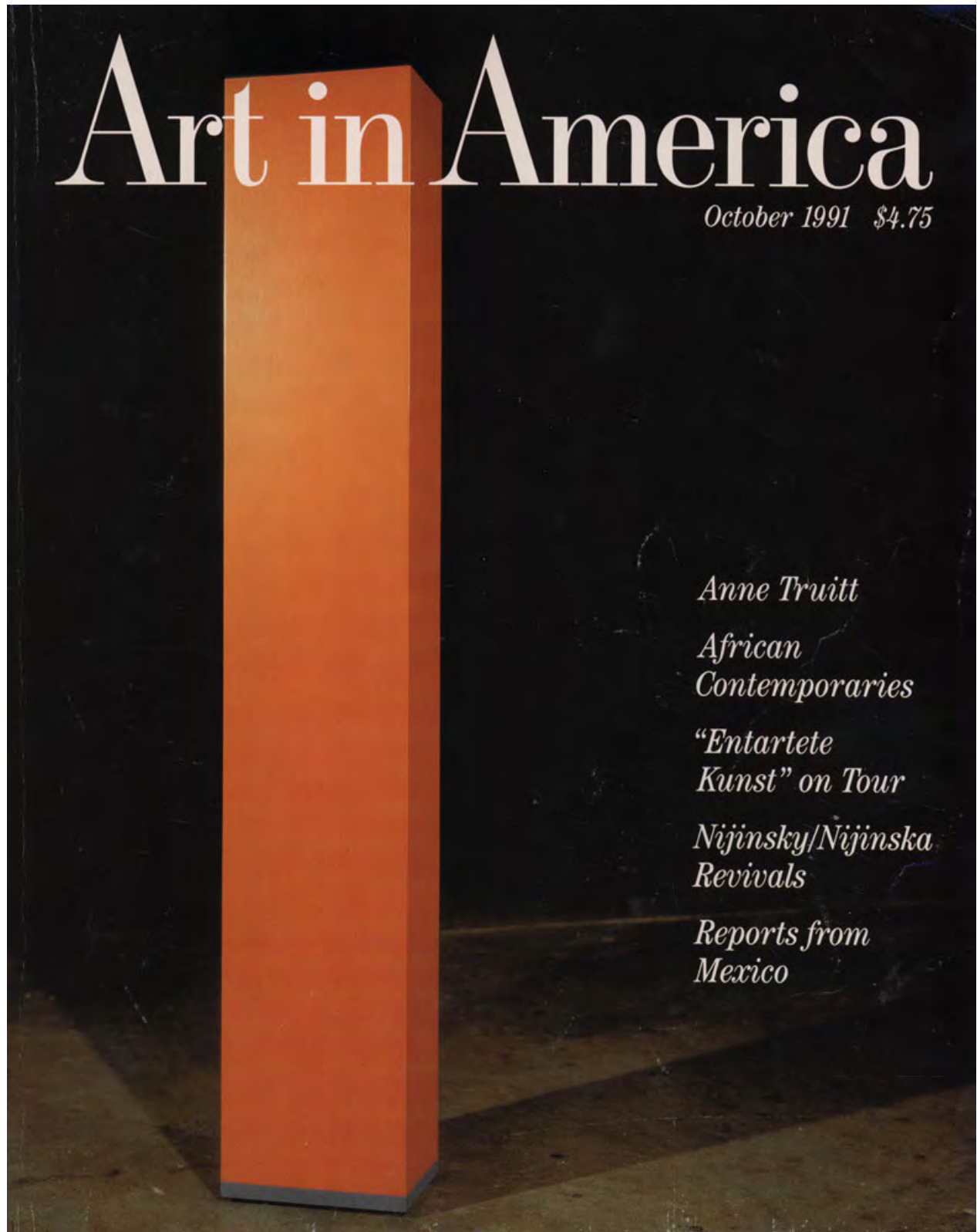
Poetic point: Truitt's remarkably consistent sculpture first surfaced in New York in a gallery solo show in February 1963. The exhibition was badly (in both senses of the word) reviewed by Donald Judd (who showed *his* first minimalist work 10 months later). Truitt has been underrated ever since. Perhaps it has to do with her use of romantic, nonprimary colors on the kind of basic geometric forms other sculptors prefer to render in black or white or naked steel. Maybe it's her work's inescapable allusions (to a place, a season, a time of day) that cause theorybound critics to see it as too much heart and not enough head.

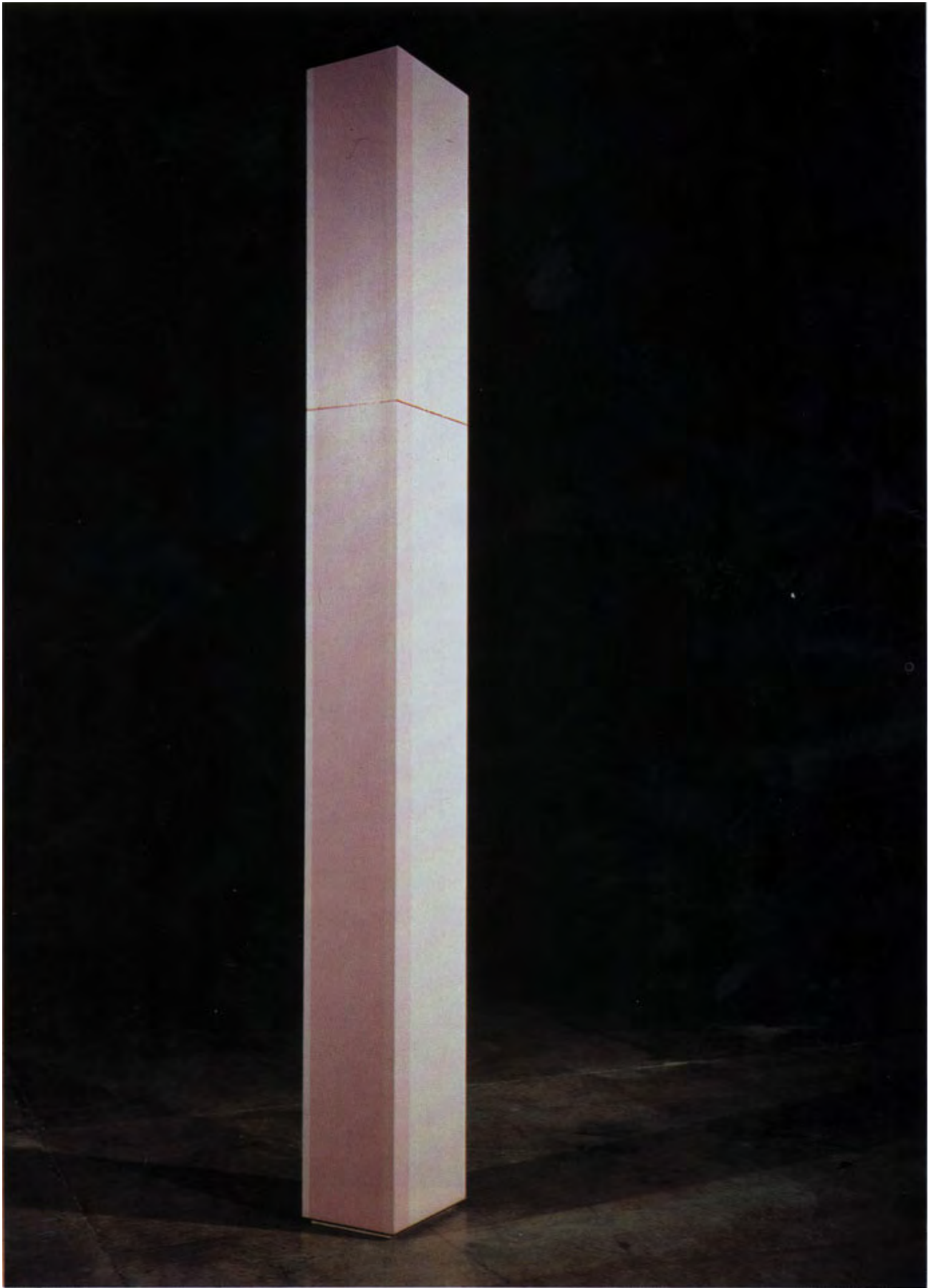
The rebuttal that this exhibition gracefully offers is that Truitt's art is anything but reductive. She doesn't whittle down material excess and then call a halt just before the sculpture disappears. She builds *up* from an emotion until she's made her poetic point, and then lets her objects stand there and sing. For those who choose to listen, it's more than enough.

PETER PLAGENS

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Adams, Brooks. "Solid Color." *Art in America*, October 1991, pp. 112–15.

Solid Color

Combining skills of a sculptor and painter, Anne Truitt has produced a 30-year body of work that unites volume with quiet pictorial incident. In an upcoming show, the ratios of walls and lattices again solidify her memory of place.

BY BROOKS ADAMS

Anne Truitt makes abstract sculptures of startling power and grace. Built of wood and covered with many layers of paint, they are strange amalgams of sculpture and painting, often presenting illusions of what the artist calls "solid color."¹ With names such as *Nicea* and *Autumn Dryad*, they also suggest funerary steles and feminist totems; as early as 1963, Donald Judd compared them to tombstones. A miniretrospective at the Emmerich Gallery last spring of sculpture from 1961-91 underlined the quiet solidity of the 70-year-old artist's achievement and suggested many exhilarating alternatives to the macho canon of Minimalism.

Truitt has long been associated with the Washington, D.C., school of Color Field painters, such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. Early on, she was championed by Clement Greenberg. In the early '60s, her work was also discussed as part of what later became known as Minimalism: she was mentioned under the rubric of "ABC Art" [see *A.I.A.*, Oct.-Nov. '65] and was included in important shows such as "Primary Structures" at the Jewish Museum in 1966. But, as a perceptive catalogue essay by Jane Livingston for the Emmerich show makes clear, none of these categories comfortably fits Truitt's work. What to do, for instance, with the fact that Truitt lived and worked from 1964 to '67 with her journalist husband in Japan (where she made aluminum pieces that have mostly been destroyed), or with the fact that she herself is a distinguished writer, having published two volumes of her journals, *Daybook* (1982) and *Turn* (1986)? In a sense, Truitt can write her own history; in another sense, her work subtly wrinkles the linear progress of art history.

The earliest pieces are redolent of white picket fences and dark green, Waspy club rooms. To my eye, they also suggest vernacular jokes on serial imagery *before* the advent of Minimalism, although the artist tends to endow them with the high reverence felt for things seen in childhood. *White: Five* (1962) might seem like nothing more than a slice of paneling at first glance, but on longer inspection, it takes on a more ambiguous, expansive quality. Describing her youth in Delaware, Truitt writes in a *Turn* entry dated July 24, 1984:

The people around me, except for my baby nurse, who left about the time of my sisters' birth and died soon after, and my father when he was well, were not only inexpressive but preoccupied. I turned to my physical environment, the garden's trees, grass, flowers, bushes. The garden was bisected by a brick path. I noticed the pattern of its rectangles, and then saw that they were repeated in the brick walls of the houses of Easton; their verticals and horizontals were also to be found in clapboard walls, in fences, and in lattices. In my passion (no other word will do for the ardor I felt) for something to love, I came to love these proportions—and years later, in 1961, when I was forty years old, this love welled up in me and united with my training in sculpture to initiate and propel the work that has occupied me ever since.²

White: Five, vertically divided into five stripes, stands on a little white base. This plinth lifts the sculpture up off the floor, creating a strip of black



Above, Anne Truitt: White: Five, 1962, painted wood, 54 by 23 $\frac{7}{8}$ by 8 inches.

Opposite, Nicea, 1977, painted wood, 84 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 10 by 8 inches.

All photos this article courtesy André Emmerich Gallery.

In the 1970s Truitt applied her paint in ever-shifting, occasionally brilliant, hard-to-name shades. The sequential placing of color sometimes produced a quasi-narrative experience.

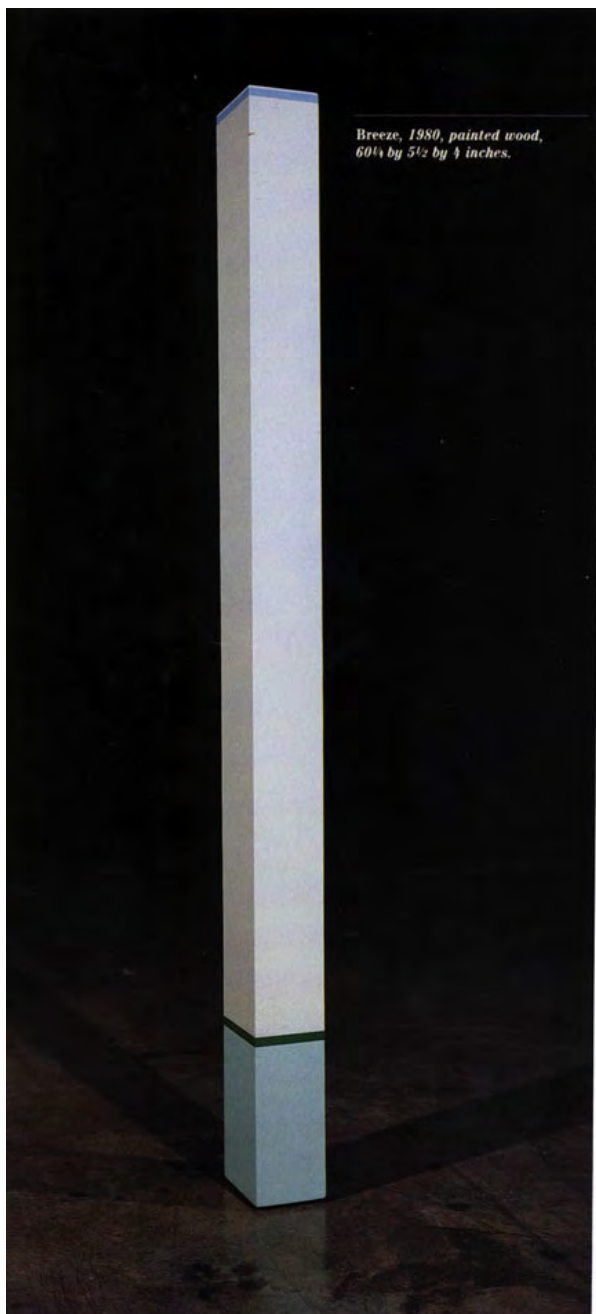
shadow underneath that seems to announce that the piece is *not* a building, fence or tombstone planted in the ground. Looking at the sculpture's back side, we discover a cruciform support system that looks almost Suprematist in its pristine whiteness. At Emmerich the sculpture was placed near the wall, as if to indicate that it is a relief with one dominant view; it casts shadows on the wall and looks sturdy, yet rocks slightly when touched. It's a strangely equivocal sculpture, multidimensional yet not quite in the round.

In the '70s, Truitt's sculptures became more fully freestanding. Color was applied to the various sides of the totems in ever-shifting, sometimes brilliant, hard-to-name shades. The sequential placing of color areas sometimes produced a quasi-narrative experience. *Nicea* (1977), for instance, is painted at least two tones of pink, but by wrapping the color around the corners in cool, barely discernible vertical stripes, Truitt leads the viewer to pursue an uncapturable color whole. About two-thirds of the way up this colossal, candy-colored confection, she has painted a delicate "neck" of tiny red brushstrokes that suggests a bloody incision as well as a horizon. This painted line imperceptibly raises the emotional tenor of the piece to a hairsplittingly fragile and, one is tempted to say, almost hysterical pitch; Livingston speaks of a "quivering sweetness." Yet these associations spring from quiet pictorial incidents on a four-square column that seems otherwise imperturbable.

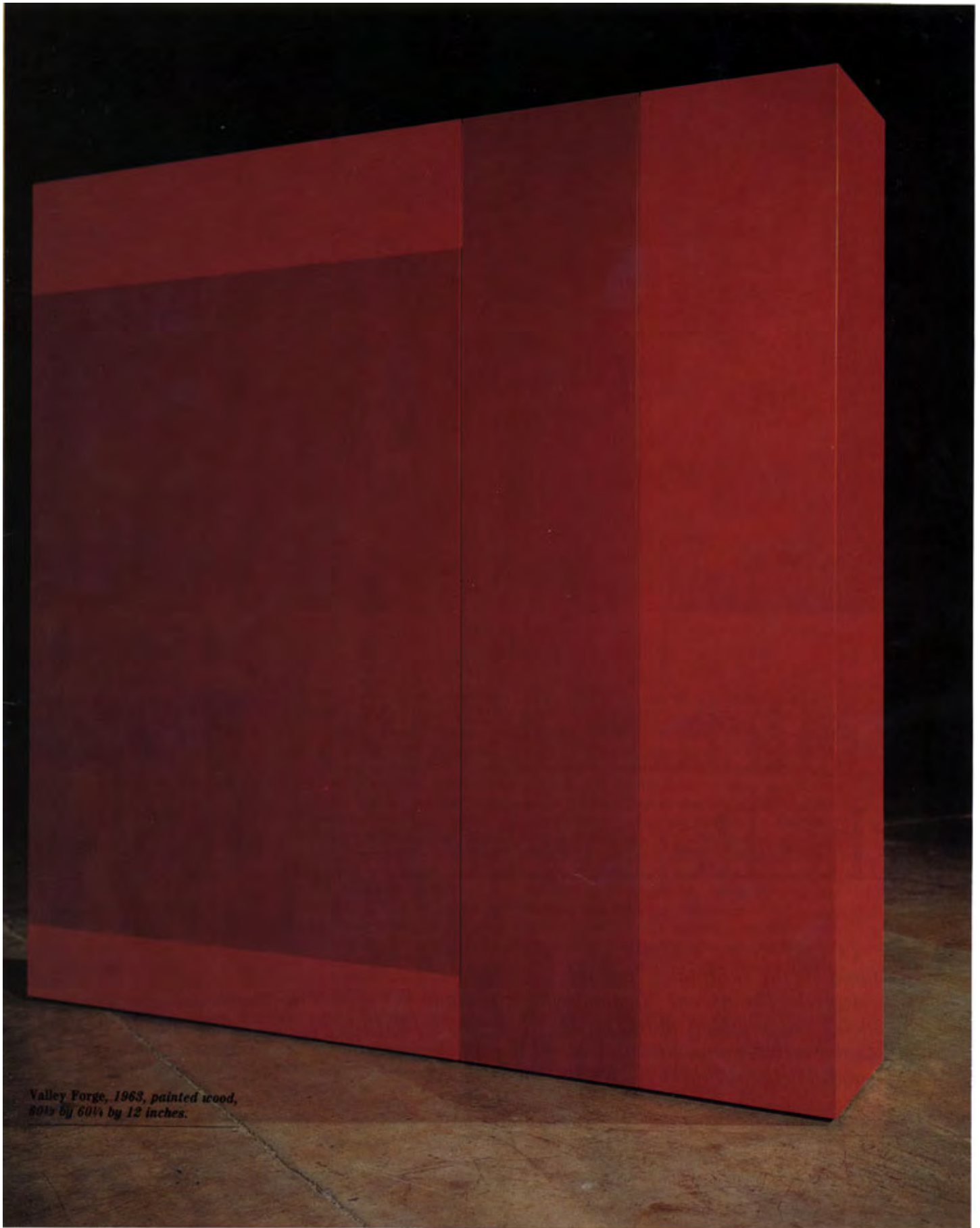
"Some artists are able to make their work by a kind of accumulative process," Truitt writes in a *Turn* entry dated June 15, 1982,

—but I am not. The authenticity of my work depends on an intuitive insight by way of which it presents itself, whole, as if it already existed, somewhere in my mind above my head. In the case of the sculptures, I then make scale drawings of their dimensions and have the structures fabricated by a cabinetmaker; they are made of fine-grained 3/4-inch plywood, carefully mitered and splined. They are hollow and if they are tall are weighted at the bottom so that they will not tip. The insides are sprayed with preservative, and they have holes drilled up into their hollows so that they can breathe in various temperatures. I paint these structures with a number of coats, sanding with progressively finer sandpapers between each one, until I have layered colors over them in varying proportions. By way of this process, the color is set free into three dimensions, as independent of materiality as I can make it.²

In the recent work, color has become even more subtle. *Avonlea* (1991) is a tall, square column, regularly divided into three vertical strips on each side. It has a small indented base that lifts it ever so slightly off the floor; it rises to just over our heads. At first glance it looks white but gradually reveals itself to be pale green-white, pink-white and yellow-white. After 30 years, Truitt is still playing on the white paneling idea. Yet now the choice of colors seems more inflected and various. The title alludes to a house known in childhood: the artist speaks in *Daybook* of the single oak tree at Avonlea.⁴ (My companion suggested that the title also alludes to the Canadian town in *Anne of Green Gables*.) Truitt, a grandmother, may well be returning to girlhood sites in her work; her newest suggests just this sort of spirit of the place. □



Breeze, 1980, painted wood,
60 1/4 by 5 1/2 by 1/2 inches.



Adams, Brooks. "Solid Color." *Art in America*, October 1991, pp. 112–15.

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The New York Times

American Abstracts

By JOHN RUSSELL

•
Other exhibitions of interest this week include:

New Sculptures by Anne Truitt (André Emmerich Gallery, 41 East 57th Street): Whether seen singly or as an informal group, Anne Truitt's new sculptures make an effect of tranquil high breeding. Each is a tall, thin, perfectly formed rectangular column to which paint has been applied with tact and discretion. All lines are straight, and no line ever wavers (though one does have a serrated edge). The bands of pure paint run from top to bottom, without inflection, and they also run horizontally, around all four sides. Sometimes the horizontal ones bunch together at the bottom like ankle socks, and sometimes they occur higher up at just the point when we might think that the piece was getting a little bland. It is tempting to see these pieces not as sculptures at all, but as paintings wrapped around a columnar support. Either way, they are very distinguished, and they are there through March 29.