

# ANNE TRUITT

Anne Truitt was one of the leading figures associated with minimalism, the sculptural tendency that emerged in the 1960s featuring pared-down geometric shapes scaled to the viewer's body and placed directly on the floor. Born in Baltimore in 1921, Truitt grew up in Easton, a town on Maryland's Eastern Shore. After majoring in psychology at Bryn Mawr College and marrying the journalist James Truitt, she enrolled in studio classes at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Washington, DC. Following sojourns in Dallas, New York, and San Francisco, Truitt settled in Washington in 1960. Apart from a stint in Tokyo, 1964–1967, the artist lived and worked in the District until her death in 2004, maintaining a succession of studios during a period when affordable space across the city was still available to artists. She saw her studio as a retreat where she



Anne Truitt's 35th Street studio, 1979. © annetruitt.org/Bridgeman Images



Anne Truitt in Twining Court studio, 1962. © annetruitt.org/Bridgeman Images

could focus on her art, explaining, “In my studio I feel at home with myself, peaceful at heart, remote from the world, totally immersed in a process so absorbing as to be its own reward.”

Truitt's art is unique within the field of minimalism; she alone remained a traditional studio artist. Whereas artists such as Donald Judd (1928–1994) and Carl Andre (b. 1935) abandoned the studio and enlisted industrial fabrication and materials, Truitt painted and sanded her wood sculptures by hand in multiple layers. And while many minimalists favored neutral tones, Truitt, in order to

suffuse her work with memory and feeling, developed a daring palette that ranged from deep reds and blacks to pale yellows and lavenders. This exhibition, a survey of Truitt's sculpture, painting, and works on paper from 1961 to 2002, traces the career of an artist who developed her work quietly and independently in the former carriage and row houses of this city.

*The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art.*

*The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Foundation.*

*Additional funding is provided by The Tower Project of the National Gallery of Art and Steven Elmendorf.*

# Truitt's Washington



## ***Anne Truitt, Working***

directed by Jem Cohen

2009

16mm film

13 minutes

In 1974 Truitt was invited to a residency at Yaddo, a retreat for artists and writers in Saratoga Springs, New York. She returned there frequently, serving as its acting director in 1984. Among the artists she met there was the filmmaker Jem Cohen, who interviewed and filmed Truitt in her Yaddo studio in 1999. Five years later, just after Truitt's death, Cohen filmed Truitt's last studio located behind her house on 35th Street NW, in Washington, DC, to complete this portrait of the artist.

[DEX 26]

**21 Nov '62**

1962

graphite

Estate of Anne Truitt,  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

In late 1962 Truitt developed two kinds of drawings: works in pencil, such as this, and acrylics on paper, seen nearby. In Truitt's pencil drawings of this period, architectural forms are enlarged and abstracted. As a viewer focuses on this image, the profile of a house appears and almost disappears; Truitt would later explore relationships of the visible and invisible in her white *Arundel* paintings (see adjacent gallery). The gabled roof and chimney in this work recall Genesar, a home on Maryland's Eastern Shore built by ancestors of the Truitt family in the early eighteenth century.

[DEX 10 and 11]

**26 December 1962, No. 1**

1962

acrylic

National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection  
(Museum Purchase with the aid of funds  
from the National Endowment for the Arts  
and the William A. Clark Fund)

**26 December 1962, No. 5**

1962

acrylic

National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection  
(Gift of the artist in memory of Gene Baro)

Whereas Truitt's pencil drawings reveal a mastery of contour and negative space, her acrylic works on paper are characterized by bold opaque surfaces of layered paint and edges that almost appear to flicker, made with strips of masking tape. The first drawing may evoke the roof of a building. In the second, the roof is more explicit; a notch at the bottom suggests a door.

[DEX 14]

**1 June 1976**

1976

acrylic with graphite on paperboard

National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection  
(Exchange and gift of Ramon Osuna)

[DEX 4]

***Parva XII***

1977

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of Margot Wells Backas

Truitt made more than seventy *Parva* sculptures. Titled with the feminine form of the Latin word for "small thing," they were more modestly sized than most of her sculptures. She gave *Parva XII* to her friend, the literary editor Margot Wells Backas, who advised Truitt as she developed her journals into the books *Daybook*, *Turn*, and *Prospect*.

[DEX 15]

**Working Drawing**

1962

acrylic and graphite

Estate of Anne Truitt,  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

This working drawing, probably a study for the sculpture *Knight's Heritage* on view in the adjacent gallery, seems to present Truitt's initial conception of the work: a rectangular shape divided by fields of scarlet, black, and orange held up by two supports. In the completed work she chose a palette of crimson, dark yellow, and black, and omitted these elements. By jettisoning these remnants of the traditional pedestal, Truitt brought her sculptural practice to the forefront of an emerging tendency known as minimalism—an art of simple geometric shapes placed directly on the floor where a viewer stands.

[DEX 12]

**Insurrection**

1962

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection  
(Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Stern)

Standing nearly eight-and-a-half feet, *Insurrection* is one of the tallest sculptures that Truitt made. She completed the work at her Twining Court studio, the upper floor of a former carriage house near Dupont Circle that she took over from the painter Kenneth Noland in 1962. The two-toned asymmetrical composition of scarlet and crimson and the diagonal strut on the back entice viewers to walk around the sculpture, comparing the two sides.

[DEX 5]

**Knight's Heritage**

1963

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of the Collectors Committee

Eschewing the low pedestal and supporting struts of *Mary's Light* and *Insurrection*, *Knight's Heritage* is a fully realized work of minimalist sculpture—a geometric shape placed directly on the floor, where viewers may circumnavigate and perceive it from all angles. Slightly shorter than the average viewer, it challenges us to peer down its top. The yellow grooves between the divisions of crimson, black, and saffron create a perceptual vibration, while the bold hues may evoke flags or medieval tournament banners.

[DEX 6]

***Summer Remembered***

1981

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of Carolyn Small Alper

[DEX 1 and 2]

***Spume***

1972

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of friends of Anne Truitt

***Mid Day***

1972

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of Harry and Margery Kahn

Although identical in size, these sculptures elicit dramatically different associations. *Spume* is the word for sea foam, while *Mid Day* evokes high noon—the hour of the day when sunlight is most brilliant.

[DEX 9]

***Arundel XI***

1974

graphite and acrylic on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection  
(Museum Purchase with the aid of funds  
from the National Endowment for the Arts,  
the William A. Clark Fund, and Margaret M. Hitchcock)

Truitt began her series of *Arundel* paintings in 1973 and continued to make them into the 1990s. Composed entirely of white paint and pencil, these works are among the artist's most abstract. Truitt wrote about the series in her journal *Daybook*: "A force is only visible in its effect, and it is the split second in which this effect becomes just barely visible that haunts me. The turns of life are secret."

[DEX 8]

***Sand Morning***

1973

acrylic on canvas

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of Robert and Mercedes Eichholz

(from left to right)

***Structures/Buildings,  
Easton, Maryland***

1961–1962

graphite

Estate of Anne Truitt,  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

***Dutchman's Lane***

1961–1962

graphite

Estate of Anne Truitt,  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

***Dutchman's Lane***

1961–1962

graphite

Estate of Anne Truitt,  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

These working drawings were made in Truitt's studio on 30th Street NW, in Georgetown, located in a boarding house across the street



Truitt's studio at 1506 30th Street  
NW, Washington, DC

from the artist's home. It is also the site where she made her first wood sculpture. The drawings recall the artist's hometown, Easton, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, revealing Truitt's rekindled interest in personal memory during this period and her exploration of both figurative and abstract imagery to capture these vivid recollections. Where the first drawing is an elevation view of the facades of buildings on a commercial street, the second is an aerial view of the residential street Dutchman's Lane, showing its houses and inhabitants. In the final drawing, these memories yield an abstract arrangement of floating rectangles.

[DEX 23]

***Truitt '66 [4]***

1966

acrylic

Estate of Anne Truitt,  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

In 1964 the Truitt family moved to Tokyo, where the artist's husband, James, was appointed head of the East Asia bureau for



Truitt's studio in Tokyo, Japan, 1962.  
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*Newsweek*. The three years Truitt spent in Japan were among her most experimental. Working with a fabricator, she made painted aluminum sculptures that appeared to bend in space, like the thin, asymmetrical form in this drawing. Although Truitt later destroyed the sculptures, she kept her Tokyo drawings, among her most distinctive.

***20 Feb '68***

1968

acrylic

Collection of Mary H. Davidson Swift

***Untitled***

1968

acrylic

National Gallery of Art,  
Gift of the Woodward Foundation, Washington, DC

Primarily known for her vertical columns, Truitt completed a



Truitt's house and studio at  
3520 Tilden Street NW, Washington, DC

number of horizontal sculptures, including *Parva XII*, seen in this gallery. Truitt made these two drawings in the studio of her house on Tilden Street NW, in the Cleveland Park neighborhood, where she lived after returning from Tokyo in 1967. Brought together for this exhibition, the pair of works demonstrates Truitt's extraordinarily subtle calibrations of color and shape.



[DEX 25]

**24 Oct '71**

1971

acrylic

Collection of Mary H. Davidson Swift

Truitt was awarded a Guggenheim Foundation grant in 1970 and used some of the funds to build a studio in the backyard of her house on 35th Street NW. To create this work, Truitt used rollers and masking tape to cover an entire sheet of paper in different shades of orange. The rough edges of the sheet are part of the composition—contours created without drawing.



Truitt's studio at 3506 35th Street NW, Washington, DC.

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[DEX 21]

***Mary's Light***

1962

acrylic on wood

Angleton/Khalsa Family

Mary Pinchot Meyer was an artist and one of Truitt's closest friends. From 1952 to 1957 the two shared a studio with another artist, Mary Orwen,



The studio Truitt shared with Mary Pinchot Meyer and Mary Orwen at 3314 P Street NW, Washington, DC (rear)

in a former carriage house in Georgetown. It was during a 1961 visit with Meyer to the Guggenheim Museum in New York that Truitt saw works by abstract painters Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt, which inspired her to create the abstract, hand-painted works for which she became known. Truitt's sculptures are containers of memory and feeling: the asymmetrical planes of white and pale yellow on the front and back and low pedestal of *Mary's Light* almost seem to lift the work off the floor.

[DEX 13]

## **Flower**

1969

acrylic on wood

National Gallery of Art,  
Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase)

The column became Truitt's signature format after she returned to Washington from Tokyo in 1967. It allowed Truitt



Truitt's studio at 1928 Calvert Street NW,  
Washington, DC

to sheath a wooden surface in color and lift the form up into space, in her lifelong effort to "set color free into three dimensions." *Flower*, along with *Seed*, *Root*, and *Pith*, is the last of a sequence of works evoking a flower's growth and, metaphorically, the various stages of love. Truitt made these sculptures in her studio on Calvert Street in the Adams Morgan neighborhood.

[DEX 22]

## **Twining Court II**

2002

acrylic on wood

John and Mary Pappajohn

The title of this sculpture refers to Truitt's studio in Twining Court, an alley near Dupont Circle, where she made *Insurrection* and *Knight's Heritage*. The years spent there (1962–1964) were among her most productive, yet Truitt also recalled the studio's lack of heat and population of rats. Among Truitt's final works, this stark sculpture is an abstract embodiment of her memories of this pivotal period.



Truitt's Twining Court studio, 1962. © annetruitt.org/Bridgeman Images