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Moving Vision: Anne Truitt, Paintings 1972-1991

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ANNE TRUITT

PAINTINGS

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MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Pages 1, 73: Anne Truitt's studio, Washington, DC, 2004
Page 74: Anne Truitt in her studio, Washington, DC, 1991

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I've struggled all my life to get maximum meaning in the simplest possible form.
—Anne Truitt, 1987[1]

Prospects

Beholders of Anne Truitt's art regularly testify to its power to *move* them, both emotionally and physically. Especially with regard to the sculptures for which she is best known — freestanding columns of painted wood — commentators often emphasize the elusive yet persistent force these works exert on us to circle around them, or to imagine doing so. Her deceptively simple shapes and their subtly graded colors solicit movement, guiding it without coercion. Truitt motivates us through the technical management of a work's perceptual effects and the formal relations underpinning them: relations between, for instance, the actual physical support (a wood structure, a canvas, a piece of paper) and its optical or virtual image; between a delimited surface area and the openness of its color; between a work's shape, scale, or format and its internal delineation and modulation. In this way, she coordinates the conventions of her medium to structure our visual experience and communicate her meaning.[2]

Truitt's painting *8 Jan '72* (1972) [plate XX] initially appears to be a broad, horizontal field of unmodulated green. The work's support — the careful construction of the stretcher combined with the precise tacking of the canvas to it — emphasizes the long rectangle's actual shape. The tight folds of the fabric over its edges and around its corners reinforce the integrity of the painting's frontal aspect, and the image the work projects has the character of an extraordinarily flat and delimited plane of evenly distributed color.[3] Yet on attending to it closely, the beholder will gradually notice a section with a slightly different shade of green. A rectangle only six inches high but eighty-five wide is positioned near the left edge and just above the lower one (about two and a half inches inward and five up). After covering the gesso ground with smooth layers of acrylic, Truitt used tape to mask out this long shape before applying additional coats of paint to the rest of the surface. Removing the tape created a reserve area in which the original green persists against its slightly enhanced background. (Almost at once, that description gives way to doubt: *against* mischaracterizes the relationship of the two greens, which remain similar enough to seem identical at a glance.) The delicate shift of value between the internal shape and the larger quadrangle is almost imperceptible. Nonetheless, the interior form, once it is perceived, structures our

unfolding experience of the painting's visual effects and establishes the work's particular mode of pictorial address.

Continued observation reveals that the masked area is somewhat distended. While its left, right, and bottom sides are parallel to the edges of the stretcher, its upper contour is gently curved. That limit is not a drawn line, but rather a physical ridge produced by successive layers of acrylic built up along the edge of the tape. Since the curve is below the painting's central lateral axis, it begins to suggest a horizon. The elongated format of the canvas and the field's leafy-green color contribute to the image's quasi-naturalism. In fact, the narrow margin between the left edge of the picture and the left side of the internal shape is scarcely noticeable, making it seem as if this "horizon," when scanned from left to right, runs continuously across the surface. (The scare quotes are meant to indicate the equivocating, wavering nature of the description.) We project an expansive "landscape" accordingly, and its notional "perspective" invites us to visually explore dimensional space. Although Truitt did not construct it geometrically, the vestigial perspective in *8 Jan '72* — however elusive it is to describe or even perceive — projects a standpoint from which the painting opens onto a world. Its horizon is before us, as a physical limit but also a temporal one.[4] Yet the ease of passage into that fictional space is soon qualified. Notice that the shape's right side is relatively distant from the edge of the picture (about nine inches). That limit interrupts the impression of a continuous expanse spread out before our view. We now see the internal rectangle as the circumscribed shape it actually is, flattened in aspect and shifted compositionally left to an offset position. The shape reverts from vestigial naturalism to stubborn abstraction. Deflecting our probing gaze, it is as if the painting itself asserts its resistance to, and independence from, our projections.

In other words, *8 Jan '72* is both open and closed to us. The simultaneity of that opposition applies not just to the divergent perceptual effects the artist instituted to guide our visual experience of the painting (naturalistic one moment, abstract the next). It also applies to our interpretive efforts, to our understanding of what *8 Jan '72* means. As *beholders*, we seek to grasp the significance of what we believe is the content — the thought, the feeling, the memory — of an artist attempting to express it in "the simplest possible form." As *interpreters*, we strive to articulate Truitt's intent, her "maximum meaning," as she communicates it within or against the conventions of her medium. The dual operation is fraught with the possibility of error. We may not understand; the painter may fail in her expressive attempts. Our interpretive doubt, we might say, meets our belief that the artist's meaning is available to us at the painting's metaphorical "horizon" — that is, its range of feeling and guessing, not just seeing and knowing.[5]

In Truitt's art, our intuition of her meaning is compelled, and controlled, by a work's formal effects. One of her consistent achievements is moving vision across a surface (or around surfaces joined in three-dimensional form). Other paintings share some of *8 Jan '72*'s conspicuous characteristics. In *Noon Place*

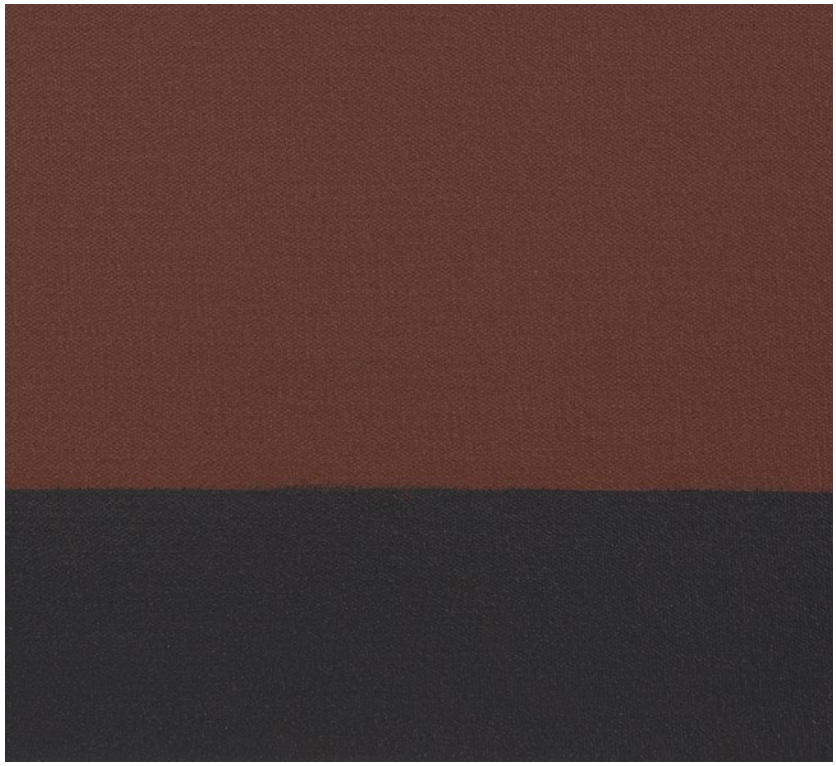
(1973), for instance, an elongated rectangle near the picture's top edge is positioned near the work's left side, leaving a relatively wider margin at the right and thus projecting for the viewer an offset viewpoint (that is, we sense ourselves being shifted to the left as we instinctively strive to counterbalance the composition). In *Brunt* (1974) [plate XX] Truitt again creates a horizon. A three-inch strip of black runs along the bottom edge; the rest of the canvas is reddish brown. Viewers might expect the long border between the colors to be absolutely crisp (an expectancy heightened by their contrasting values). Yet Truitt manipulated her taping technique to produce slight bleeds of one color into the other along the length of their border, causing the boundary to waver in perception [fig. 1].

To illustrate Truitt's tactic in *Brunt* by contrast, consider its inversion. *Engadine I* (1990) [plate XX] comprises two colors so close in value that they appear at first indistinguishable. Actually, the field is divided into halves, one black and the other dark indigo, strictly separated by a slanted but still upright border produced by masking. Between applying the two colors, she burnished the tape to produce a crisp and inviolable barrier, and when raking light catches the ridge separating them, it can resemble a white line [fig. 2]. As further evidence that these types of pictorial phenomena were of more than passing interest to Truitt, consider *Druid* (1992) [plate XX]. Along its bottom edge, a viewer encounters another uncompromising line between two similar reds. In this case, the horizontal ridge between the two veers off the canvas just before reaching its right side. As in *8 Jan '72*, the line's termination interrupts what might have been taken as a continuous low horizon, restoring to the frontal view its resolutely abstract aspect.

Metaphysics

Although Barnett Newman's painting *Onement I* (1948) measures only twenty-seven by sixteen inches, it is difficult to overestimate its critical status in his body of work. The canvas comprises a single cadmium-red band that bisects a modulated, almost brown cadmium-red ground. Newman roughly applied the central vertical stroke of *Onement I* over a strip of masking tape that remains on the surface. (The use of tape to mask out lines or areas of canvas binds Truitt's technical procedures to Newman's precedent in obvious ways.) Initially, Newman meant only to test the color with the application; pleased with the result, he decided not to remove the tape.[6] He told critic David Sylvester:

> *What [the stroke in Onement I] made me realize is that I was confronted for the first time with the thing that I did, whereas up until that moment I was able to remove myself from the act of painting, or from the painting itself. [Before], the painting was something that I was making, whereas somehow for the first time with this painting the painting itself had a life of its own.*[7]



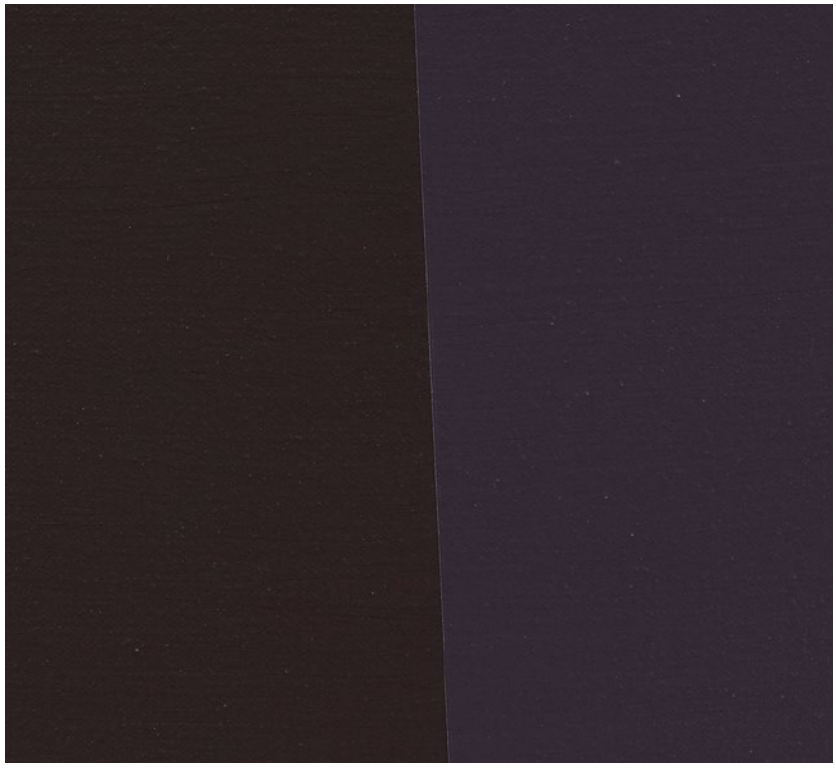


fig. 1: *Brunt* (detail), 1974. Acrylic on canvas. 19 × 92 inches; 48 × 234 cm / fig. 2: *Engadine I* (detail), 1990. Acrylic on canvas. 48 × 108 inches; 122 × 274 cm

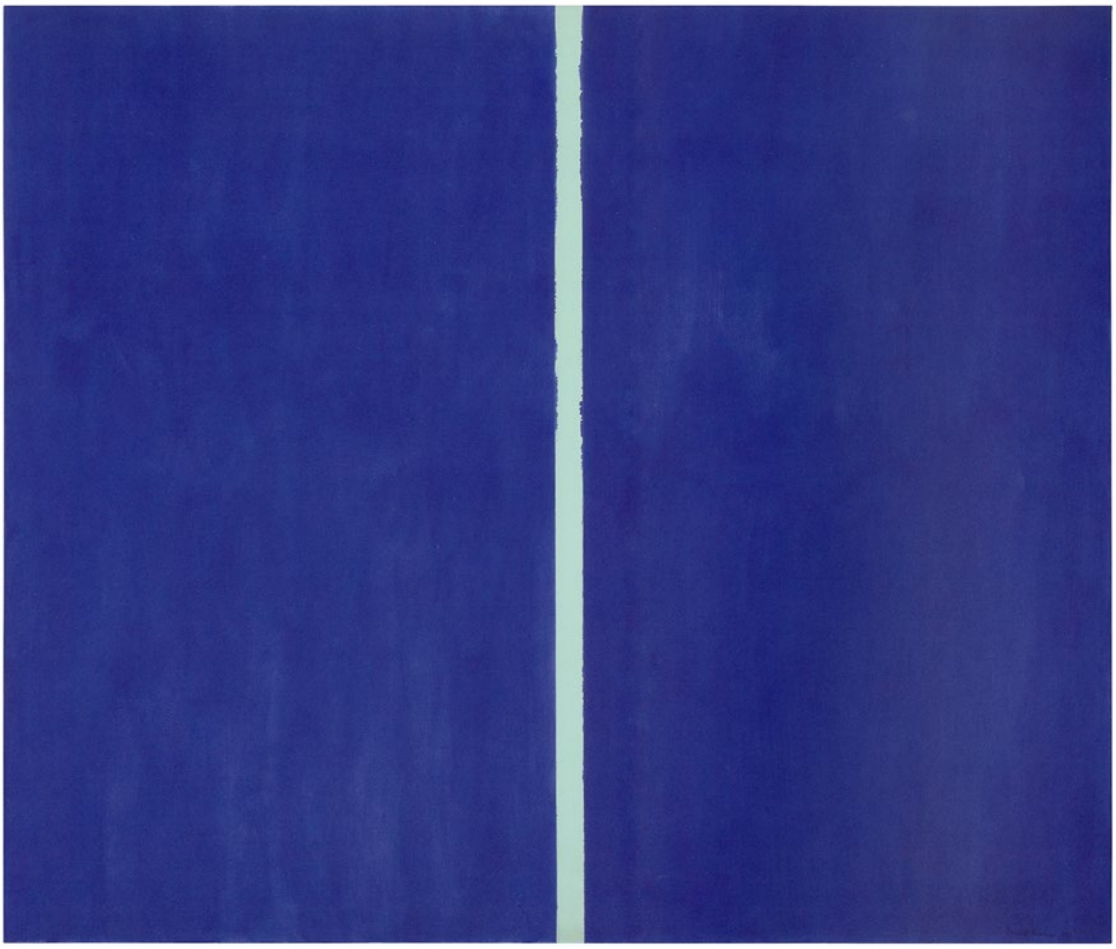


fig. 3: *Barnett Newman, Onement VI*, 1953. Oil on canvas. 120 × 120 inches; 259 × 305 cm

"It was full," he explained another time.[8] It was also a rebirth, the "beginning of [his] present life," fittingly completed on an anniversary of his own origin, his forty-third birthday.[9] So significant was the arrival of *Onement I* that Newman claimed to have stopped working for nine months in order to contemplate what he had achieved (an interval that, somewhat obviously, suggests human gestation and birth). We might say that Newman's proleptic creation of *Onement I* was metaphysical in the sense that it instituted a meaning that appeared to him as self-governing, at once originated by and independent of himself. From this perspective, artistic creation follows the structure of parentage.[10]

Truitt had an origin story of her own — a stirring narrative in which Newman's metaphysical art figured centrally. In 1975, she described her 1961 encounter with *Onement VI* (1953) [fig. 3], installed at the Guggenheim Museum in New York:

> *When we rounded into the lowest semi-circular gallery, I saw my first Barnett Newman, a universe of blue paint by which I was immediately ravished. My whole self lifted into it. "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.*[11]

The author's account of the episode confers upon the event a significance that transcends the routine experience of an exhibition. She is moved — not just by the *picture* as a blue object stimulating her eyes, but by *Onement VI*'s metaphysical content, its radiance, as a *painting* (to Newman, the distinction was crucial).[12] Indeed, her epiphany intensifies as she leaves the museum:

> *I staggered out into the street, intoxicated with freedom, lifted into a realm I had not dreamed could be caught into existence. […] I stayed up almost the whole night […] and at some point during these long hours I decided […] to make exactly what I wanted to make. […] I knew that that was exactly what I was going to do and how I was going to do it.*[13]

Truitt's narrative of her maturation as an artist unfolds as a recognition that to create is to transform *materials* into *meaning*. Concomitantly, creation renders metaphysical content real. The works she saw that day tipped the balance, she went on to testify, "from the physical to the conceptual in art."[14] As we might guess, for Truitt the conceptual — far from signifying immaterial ideation — would be a matter of transmuting feeling into form as the very means by which the metaphysical could be "caught into existence." Immediately upon her return from New York, Truitt produced what she considered her first fully realized sculpture, aptly titled *First* (1961).[15]

Truitt's exclamation that *Onement VI* establishes for its viewers "enough space, enough color" embraces the degree to which Newman subordinated the materiality of the object (the actual canvas support) to pictorial imperatives (that

is, to his sense of the virtual plentitude he sought to create). He repeatedly spoke of his desire to transform the physical shape of the canvas "into a new kind of *totality*," a word that designated something more than just formal coherence, more than a unity of design that his deceptively simple compositions often seem at first glance to embody.[16] For Newman, "totality" named the metaphysical. Could a painting, he asked, "overcome [its] format and at the same time assert it? Could it become a *work of art* and not a *thing*?"[17] Toward that end, he took extraordinary care in preparing each canvas to reduce any physical interference to his application of color. Not only did he use tweezers to painstakingly remove extraneous strands of lint or thread from the raw surface, he also repeatedly shrank and stretched the material in order to "make the fabric inert."[18] Newman explained: "For me, the material, whether canvas or paint, has to be inert, so that I myself can create the sense of life."[19]

The irreducibility of metaphysical content — inseparable from the artist's life — to the material conditions of the medium is also central to Truitt's art. Like Newman's fastidious procedures, aspects of her technique neutralize the materiality of her wooden constructions and canvas surfaces. Or, more pointedly stated, her process of preparing her secondary supports prior to painting them renders their actual surfaces inert, and thus wholly acquiescent to the virtual emanation of color. For her sculptures Truitt would typically prime a ground with at least three layers of pure white gesso, sanding between each one to smooth it even further. She would then apply up to forty coats of paint, taking care to alternate the direction of her brushstrokes between layers and continuing to smooth the acrylic with fine-grain sandpaper. The resulting pictorial effects are elusive and difficult to reproduce photographically. But of her intent to transcend the physical, Truitt commented: "Color is set free into three dimensions, as independent of materiality as I can make it."[20] To gloss that remark figuratively: the condition for Truitt's *suspension* of color (its lightness, its openness) is the *suspension* — in the broadened sense of deferral or annulment — of the medium's actuality.[21]

Limits

Truitt's *Engadine II* (1990) [plate XX] comprises two pale grays extremely close in value but differing in luster. In the nine-foot canvas's muted expanse, an approximately fifteen-inch-wide strip on the left seems to shine. The contrast of gloss and matte results in part from the number of coats applied to each section, and a physical ridge left by the masking process separates the two like a line. In Kristin Hileman's description, such close-value combinations are "variances that test perception."[22] Manipulating texture is another technique by which painters can achieve matte or gloss effects within a single hue, but Truitt by and large seems to have renounced that tactic. Still, it is not totally absent from *Engadine II*. Ever so slight horizontal striations within the larger field — extremely low ridges and

rivulets produced by the bristles of a wide brush — reveal undercoats of paint and suggest atmospheric space. (It is tempting to say that the dimensional effect is analogous to whiteout, the phenomenon experienced by pilots unable to determine position and orientation in relation to the horizon in conditions of poor visibility.) Those long horizontal strokes are uniformly level, which is to say that Truitt suppressed her arm's natural tendency to produce gradual arcs as she brushed the surface. Nonetheless, the "impersonal" mode of application in *Engadine II* does not automatically create the sense that the painting is depersonalized. Truitt doesn't totally eradicate her touch, after all, and the brushwork in the matte field, although sequestered from the smaller area, subtly exposes the material flatness underpinning *Engadine II*'s optical effects.

While it might seem odd to attend to details of a painting's manufacture that are only *just* perceptible at close range — and all but invisible at a distance of a few feet — it would be a mistake to dismiss Truitt's labor at this surface level as unrelated to the global effects she sought to achieve. (The mistake is easy to make: witness the incomprehension that characterized the critical and public reception of the *Arundel* works [1973–99], a series of pencil and white acrylic paintings whose aerated but keenly partitioned surfaces create images that somehow achieve pinpoint accuracy yet are positively impervious to description.) All of her efforts in *Engadine II* make the canvas we see the particular painting it is. What's more, she was evidently concerned with guiding the viewer's perception of the image by delimiting the surface in specific ways. Thus while the striated, horizontal strokes in the matte area of *Engadine II* produce the impression of ambiguous depth, the vertical partition next to it appears as a resolutely frontal plane that reinstates our awareness of the painting's flatness. The surface itself seems to foreground the distinction between its literal (physical) and pictorial (metaphysical) modes of existence. Truitt thus makes our awareness of the discrepancy count in our experience of looking.

The dialectic of materials and meaning can further be adduced by considering the relationship between *Engadine II's* primary and secondary supports (the canvas and the wood stretcher around which it is secured). Observe that Truitt had the support manufactured with quarter-round molding, or else had its bars milled with a rounded edge. This molding lifts the canvas away from the stretcher, but since it curls inward from the perimeter, the resulting form is a rectangle with curved bevels.[23] Notice that along the top and bottom edges Truitt applied the gray acrylic with short brushstrokes perpendicular to the edge (that is, her marks curve around the tight arc of the molding instead of running parallel to the painting's edge). The subtle textural difference between those marks and the striated ones below reinforce the shape of the stretcher, whose rounded edge provides a semicircular transition between the sides of the painting and its frontal plane. This construction introduces a sculptural quality to the pictorial image, a three-dimensional solidity that compromises, without canceling, projections into depth.[24] By contrast, that feature is absent from the paintings I discussed earlier,

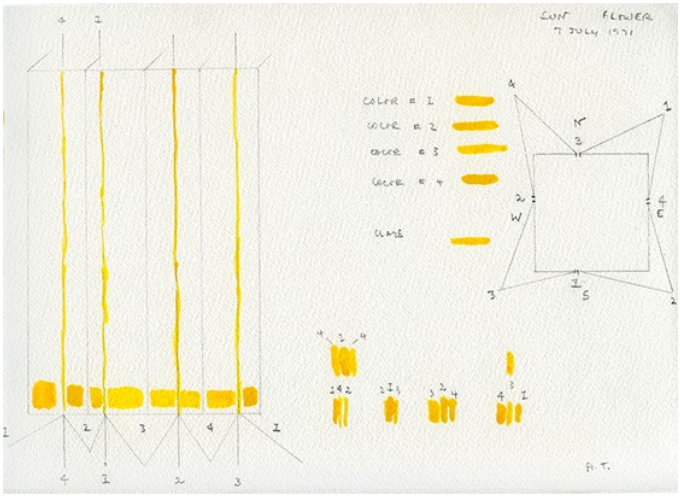
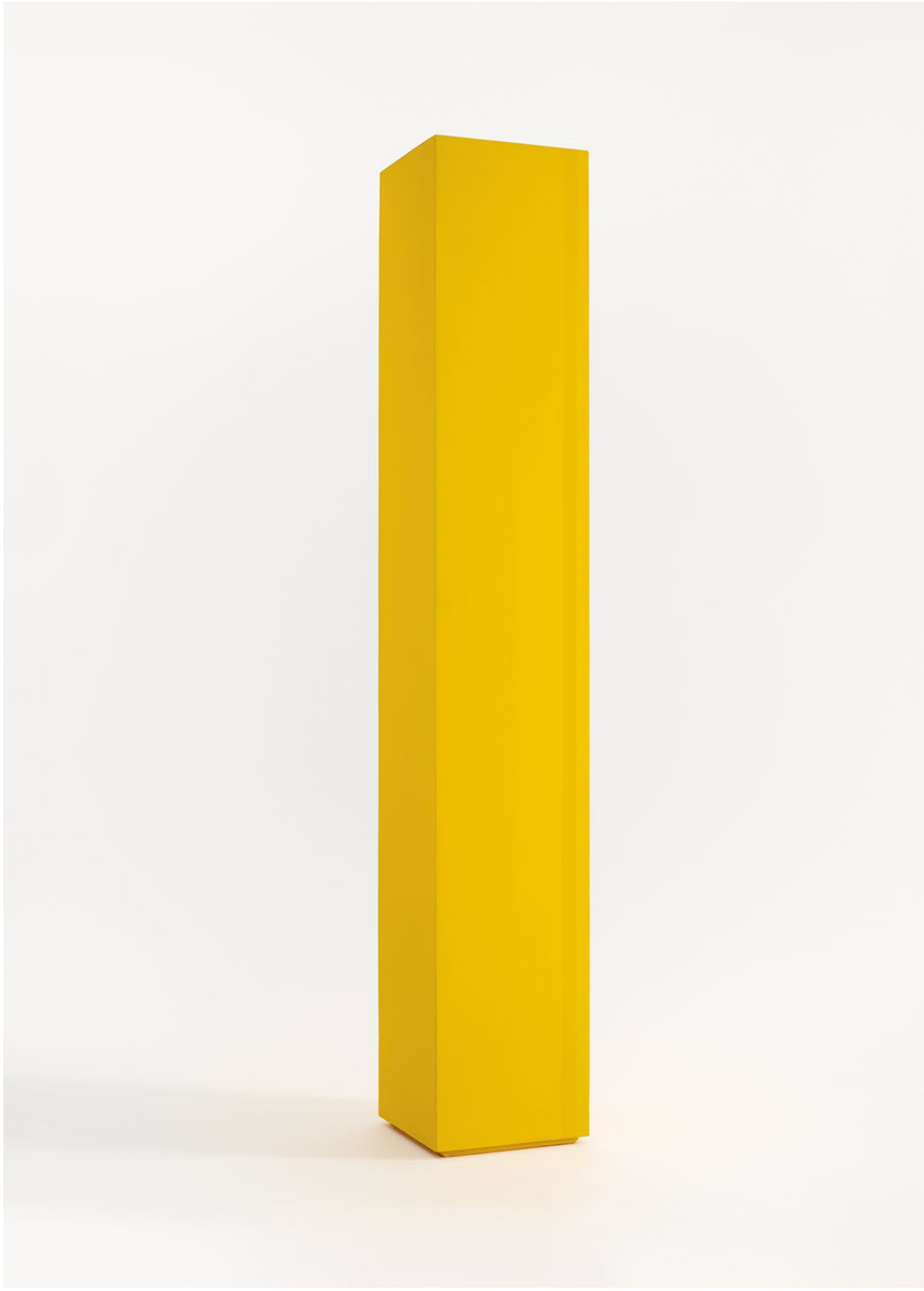


fig. 4: Working drawing for *Sun Flower*, 1971
fig. 5: *Sun Flower*, 1971. Acrylic on wood. 72 × 12 × 12 inches; 183 × 31 × 31 cm.

8 Jan '72 and *Brunt*. Both have stretchers that are firmly squared at the corners, and the landscape format helps sustain the imagery's quasi-naturalism. These kinds of technical choices control our experience of each work and, consequently, determine a *point of view* from which we might grasp Truitt's meaning in particular instances.

Standpoints

My present claim for a given work's governing point of view might seem to run counter to my earlier proposal that Truitt's art *moves* us, virtually and metaphorically. But I do not mean to suggest that there is a fixed standpoint or position in coordinate space that an empirical viewer must occupy for these paintings to be intelligible as expressions of Truitt's artistic meaning. In any case, it would be willful to deny her interest in creating works that take into account multiple viewpoints. In a working drawing for *Sun Flower* (1971) [fig. 4], a six-foot-tall column with twelve-inch sides painted in shades of yellow, Truitt sketched her sculpture in both overhead and elevation views [fig. 5]. On the sheet's right half we see a top view of the square column; next to it, a numerical key for her color choices. Each side of the sculpture is given a cardinal direction, but what interests me most are the viewpoints at the work's corners, which signpost the combinations of yellow that are visible when two planes are viewed simultaneously. From the northeast, for example, the diagram indicates that a viewer would see color #1 turning the ninety-degree angle. (It also shows where that shade would meet the thin vertical strip of #3 or #4 that demarcates it from the flanking shade on either plane.) The work's pictorial effects are nurtured by the precision of its material construction, such that the vertical lines created by its corners, when seen under consistent illumination, threaten to disappear altogether. When lighting is



variable, these lines appear as white filaments delineating one shade from the next. To reprise a prior formulation: the suspension of the materiality of the work's secondary support helps suspend the work's color as a continuous band in our peripatetic encounter with *Sun Flower*. We are moved by its phototropic energy.[25]

It is of further significance that in some of her working drawings Truitt also rendered the four sides of each column as a continuous plane of color, suggesting that she conceptualized the circumambulating viewer's encounter with the completed sculpture as seeing a painting in three dimensions. Conversely, it is notionally possible to see a painting by Truitt as a sculpture in two dimensions (as an unfolded column, in a manner of speaking).[26] The pronounced depth of her stretchers seems pertinent in this regard. I have already drawn attention to the way the pictorial articulation in *Engadine II* conspires with the sculptural construction of the secondary support to establish the painting's standpoint. Similar strategies are in play elsewhere.

Truitt frequently mounted canvases on stretchers that project two or more inches from the wall. This allowed her, as we'll see, to treat their sides as surfaces in their own right. *Messenger* (1986) [plate XX], at eight feet tall and less than nine inches wide, is a narrow but vaulting painting. On its front plane, a slender field of piercing scarlet surmounts a thin register of black. The dark band's upper edge initially appears to be a gradual curve but is in fact three straight segments formed by Truitt's masking procedure. The fractional degree change at each angle is enough to suggest perspectival recession. It is as if in perceiving *Messenger*'s slim plane of color we are also invited to sense the constricted but still spatial volume of a narrow corridor. (The effect can also be seen in *Rock Cry* [1989], where a tapered band bisects the dark canvas like a thin wedge. The brilliant red mark where it meets at the painting's lower edge suggests a gleam of light at the end of a tight chasm.) An oblique view of *Messenger* produces even further impressions of spatial folding. Because of its deep stretcher bars, Truitt was able to articulate its sides as proper painting surfaces — that is, as planes oriented toward a viewer's sight. As the black strip turns the corner at either edge, slight — *very* slight — changes in the angle of its silhouette seem to crease space, creating pictorial dimension along the tacking margin [fig. 6]. Truitt grants to what is normally out of sight a key role in establishing her painting's metaphysical statement.[27]

Two other paintings of this moment fold space in analogous ways: *Prodigal* and *Morning Wave* (both 1986) [plates XX and XX]. Like *Messenger*, these slender works display thin horizontal bands of segmented masked lines. In *Prodigal* and *Morning Wave*, however, those strips are to be found along the top. The latter picture also contains a sliver of white that glimmers between two blues (like the lip of a surf break, as suggested by the work's title). In *Prodigal*, Truitt's success in transforming the sides of the object into pictorial surfaces is evident in the conspicuous way she steers the crimson band around the tacking margin [fig. 7]. When the line turns the corner, a noticeable change of angle creates a faceted

fig. 6: *Messenger* (detail), 1986. Acrylic on canvas.
96 × 8½ inches; 244 × 22 cm

shape in three dimensions. Said another way, the marginal areas demand a level of attention usually reserved for a painting's face. At the same time, the elevation of *Prodigal*'s red band to the summit of the purple-red field makes it into a horizon of sorts: a distant limit glimpsed peripherally as Truitt moves our vision up and down the eight-foot painting.[28] The scale of that minute landscape, should we deem it to exist at all, escapes our corporeal projection. The impression of a point of view that is at once spatially oriented yet somehow disembodied (or "lifted into […] enough space, enough color," as Truitt described her experience of Newman's *Onement VI*) also holds for the paintings *Run Child Run* (1986) and *Prospect* (1991) [plates XX and XX]. Their square format centers vision, holding it steady as if the eye were levitating in a color space tenuously oriented by the slice of topography along the bottom edge.

Meaning

In her paintings Truitt committed herself both intuitively and conceptually to creatively resolving the dialectical tension between materials and meaning. As we have discovered, this project involved a deep engagement with certain pictorial conventions that guided, without coercion, her activity: sets of problems and solutions that bore upon her own interest in the variable relationships that could be instituted between a painting's color and internal delineation; between

fig. 7: *Prodigal* (detail), 1986. Acrylic on canvas. 96 × 8½ inches; 244 × 22 cm

its actual shape and its pictorial format; between its front and side planes; and between its projected viewpoints and constructed standpoints. My considerable attention to these formal issues as driving factors in understanding Truitt's achievement might seem to contrast with the artist's own accounts of her art and its significance. In her journals, interviews, and conversations, she made it clear that each work embodied a personal meaning. As paintings, sculptures, and drawings, of course, they also *represent* her meaning through the qualities of their medium.[29]

A medium relies for its communicative potential on conventions — which is to say that only in relation to the conventions of a medium can any artistic expression be deemed intelligible. This does not mean that an artist *must* strictly follow or submit to conventions in her attempt "to put maximum meaning in the simplest possible form" (as Truitt characterized her efforts). To relinquish vital responses to following existing patterns would be to take conventions punitively, as constraints or limitations that cannot be transcended, rather than as conditions of possibility. Creating in a medium, properly understood, permits an artist (or any of us) to share meaning with others. In theory artists may adopt, toward conventions, stances of skepticism (and therefore work against them) or belief (and thus willingly accept them). But in practice the choice is not so polarized. Proceeding by intuition is a method for investigating the possibilities of a medium, of giving (material) form to (immaterial) feeling, for publicly sharing the personal. It disappointed Truitt when

viewers failed to sense the meaningful intent behind her works. Perhaps her audiences were unable — or unwilling — to acknowledge her works of art as expressions within a medium, taking them instead as mere objects.

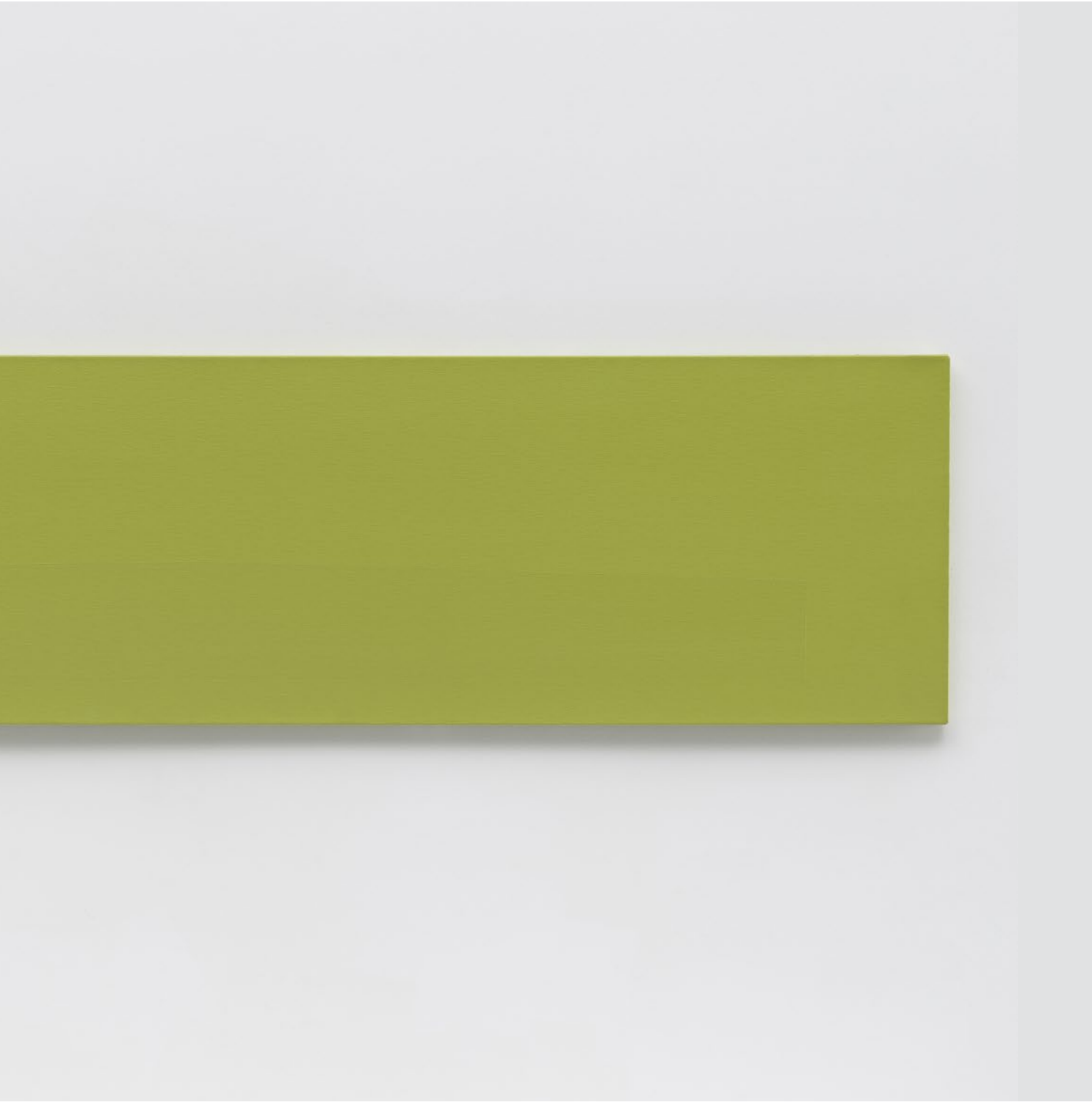
A common tension in the commentary on Truitt's work centers around a pair of claims that have divergent implications for interpretation. On the one hand, the meaning of each work — clearly guided by, and sometimes titled after, specific places, people, and events Truitt encountered during her lifetime — remains indivisibly associated with the artist's biography. In this situation, criticism sometimes relegates itself to the role of discovering the references toward which an artwork points, as if finding the referent will enable us to understand it. On the other hand, there is an assertion that a work's meaning is dependent upon the viewer's literal experience of the object at hand and thus, in some measure difficult to specify, independent of Truitt and whatever experience served as its original impetus.[30] But as I've tried to suggest, the content or meaning of Truitt's art is not, or not merely, explained by the inventory of subjects known to have been important to her and to which her works often refer. Nor is content a matter of the personal associations that we, as individual viewers, might make while experiencing her art. Rather, it has everything to do with Truitt's objectification of her personal experience: its representation — or, as she described it, "the sharp delight of watching what has been inside one's own most intimate self materialize into visibility. It is in that exquisite moment when what has been subjective becomes, as if by magic, objective, whole, separate from one's self."[31] Our understanding of her expression necessarily relies on *interpreting* the pictorial and sculptural effects of her works, not simply experiencing them. As the reader will have gathered, I believe that formal analysis is especially suited to articulating compelling accounts of Truitt's art that are not only independent of a viewer's necessarily limited knowledge of the artist's biography but also impartial to his or her own experiences of particular works. When an artist realizes metaphysical content in an expressive medium (when her truth is "caught into existence"), it may become credible to those who encounter it, existing for them without a doubt. Truitt intuits, in her art, what form best makes her expressive intent believable — rendering it, for us, simply true.

Notes

The author thanks Charles Palermo and Kenneth Walker for enlightening conversations regarding Truitt's art, and Craig Garrett for his valuable editorial contributions.

1. Anne Truitt to Victoria Dawson, in "Anne Truitt and the Color of Truth," *Washington Post* [14 March 1987], quoted in Kristen Hileman, "Presence and Abstraction," in *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2010), 12–47, at 30.
2. Pinpointing the circumambulatory incentive, Kristen Hileman describes *Landfall* (1970): "Because one can never perceive more than two sides of it at once […] the three blues that one suspects define the sculpture can never be objectively judged next to each other to confirm their differences. Viewers must take the memory of color with them as they move around the work, assessing the change in value via their perceptual recollection as much as through direct observation" ("Presence and Abstraction," 33). Clement Greenberg hinted at both senses of "feeling" when he confessed, "I had to look again and again, and I had to return again, to discover the power of these 'boxes' to move and affect" ("Recentness of Sculpture" [1967], in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 vols., ed. John O'Brian [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–1993], 4: 250–56, at 255. Hereafter cited as *CG:CEC*). Truitt herself associated such effects with what she called "narrative." Of *Axilla* (1983), she explained: "[The] colors vary in hue as they circle the column so that apprehensions of the sculpture take place in time, in a cumulative fashion as the viewer walks around it" (*Turn: The Journey of an Artist* [New York: Penguin Books, 1986], 60). For a study of Truitt's strategies of formal sequencing in relation to memory, see Miguel de Baca, *Memory Work: Anne Truitt and Sculpture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).
3. Just as it was her practice to use wood forms made to her specifications for her sculptures, Truitt ordered her canvases and stretchers custom-made by skilled craftspeople. In the 1950s, one of them — James Lebron, an expert art handler and framer — invented an eponymous strainer that incorporated the kinds of fasteners used by cabinet makers to create strong, perfectly flush joints. Over the years Truitt had stretchers made by different providers, and her painting surfaces were usually mounted by them or by studio assistants.
4. In its pictorial effects, we might say, Truitt's perspective is *prospective*. Not incidentally, Truitt was drawn to the word "prospect," using it not only to name a 1991 painting but to title the third and final volume of her published notebooks, also composed over the course of 1991–92: *Prospect: The Journey of an Artist* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996). The journal takes the form, as she puts it, of "fold[ing] the past into the present" (14). The literary technique, Truitt seems to have wished, would create for readers a simultaneous prospective and retrospective view of her "whole experience." Temporally, *Prospect* (the book) moves backward and forward, opening the meaning of the past to a momentarily closed future that, once reached, yields the perspicuity necessary to assess the meaning of past projects. Anne M. Wagner pursues the implications of Truitt's writerly project in "The Threshold: Language and Vision in the Art of Anne Truitt," in *Anne Truitt: Threshold* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2013), 7–21.
5. By invoking "intent," I do not wish to suggest a narrow definition of the term: that is, to designate a preformed mental plan known to the agent's introspective consciousness. There are, of course, unconscious intentions and intentions that fail to be realized. Nor am I suggesting that Truitt's intent can always be understood through her many statements. Interestingly enough, Truitt herself seems to have harbored a rather rigorous understanding of intent as a kind of mental plan. As she put it: "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" (*Turn*, 56). And, when asked to comment on the metaphoric content and subject matter of her work, Truitt told the art historian James Meyer that "My idea [in generating a work] 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" ("Grand Allusion: James Meyer Talks with Anne Truitt," *Artforum* [May 2002], reprinted in Meyer, "In the Tower: Anne Truitt" [exhibition brochure] [Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2017], n.p.). In fact, I think "intuitive insight" serves as an excellent definition of what I mean by "intent."
6. Barnett Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio" [1970], in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John O'Neill (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1990), 302–08, at 306. Hereafter cited as *BN:SWI*.
7. Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester" [1965, revised 1972], *BN:SWI*, 254–59, at 256.
8. Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio," 306.
9. Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester," 255.
10. Ann Temkin discusses this motif in "Barnett Newman on Exhibition," in *Barnett Newman*, ed. A. Temkin (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 22–75, esp. 33–35.
11. Anne Truitt, *Daybook: The Journal of an Artist* [1982] (New York: Scribner, 2013), 155. The plural "we" refers to Truitt and Mary Pinchot Meyer, who accompanied her to the Guggenheim exhibition *Abstract Expressionists and Imagists*, curated by the art historian H. H. Arnason.
12. Newman contrasted "pictures" as literal objects to "paintings" as works of art in numerous places (see for example "Interview with David Sylvester," 255). Among Truitt's contemporaries it was the critic Michael Fried who most rigorously articulated the opposition in his 1967 *Artforum* essay "Art and Objecthood," reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72. Importantly, in his analysis Fried discusses Greenberg's account of Truitt's art.
13. Truitt, *Daybook*, 155–56. Emphasis added.
14. Truitt, *Daybook*, 156.
15. Elsewhere, Truitt characterized Newman's alchemical lesson as a "lightning revelation" (Draft letter to E. A. Carmean [September 28, 1976], quoted in Hileman, "Presence and Abstraction," 45n.25). Although cliché, the rhetorical figure at work in Truitt's short phrase helps explain the dialectic of materials and meaning toward which her account of Newman gestures: it is a metonymy. The trope works by an exchange or transfer of name. More specifically, it substitutes an attribute of a thing for the thing we mean to designate. But metonymy allows for substitutions of many varieties, including a conversion between the material and the immaterial (such as when we speak of following "the heart" when really meaning our emotions). Here, Truitt converts a moment of immaterial ideation ("revelation") into a physical event ("lightning"). For my model of metonymy, see Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," *A Grammar of Motives* [1945] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 503–17, at 504. For an account that treats metonymy in Truitt's art according to an alternate sense of the term (as a "chain of associations"), see James Meyer, "Truitt at André Emmerich," in his *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 63–74, at 70; and Meyer, "The Bicycle," in *Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection*, 48–64.
16. Newman, "Chartres and Jericho" [1969], *BN:SWI*, 194. Emphasis added.
17. Newman, "Chartres and Jericho" [1969], *BN:SWI*, 194. Emphasis added.

8. Newman, "Interview with Lane Slate" [1963], *BN:SWI*, 251–54, at 252. On Newman's preparatory techniques, see Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, "The Paintings of Barnett Newman: 'Involved Intuition on the Highest Level'," in *Barnett Newman: A Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. Ellyn Childs Allison (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 117–41.
19. Newman, "Interview with Lane Slate," 252. Newman's full statement reads: "Raw canvas has a kind of allure that is captivating, a sense of false mystery that is very sentimental. By shrinking it and stretching it, I destroy this sentimental quality. For me, the material, whether canvas or paint, has to be inert, so that I myself can create the sense of life. Otherwise there is the danger that I may fall in love with the material. I think that happens to many painters, and the result must inevitably be [simply] aesthetic, so that instead of creating a work of art one makes, at best, only a beautiful *thing*, an art object. I hope I'm not doing that" (252).
20. Truitt, *Turn*, 56–57.
21. During the post-war decades it was Clement Greenberg who distilled the idea that authenticity in modern art could be judged according to the degree a painter acknowledged the physical limits of the medium while simultaneously revoking the capacity of those limits to constrict or inhibit the expression of feeling. The physical *limits* of the medium — and the historical conventions by which those limits had been both made explicit and answered — were, Greenberg insisted, not so much *limitations* as productive conditions of possibility that the artist necessarily worked within or against to institute a meaning irreducible to them. Greenberg articulated the project of modernist art's self-definition in a number of key essays, all reprinted in *CG:CEC*, but especially in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), 1:5–23; "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), 1:23–37; "Modernist Painting" (1960), 4:85–93; and "After Abstract Expressionism" (1962), 4:121–34. As a critic, Greenberg discussed Truitt's art in "Recentness of Sculpture" (1967), 4:250–56, at 55–56 and "Changer: Anne Truitt" (1967), 4:288–91.
22. Hileman, "Presence and Abstraction," 15.
23. The fabrication relates to, while inverting, Newman's strategies. He also used quarter-rounds but fastened them in the opposite direction, with their flat sides facing the outer perimeter (see Mancusi-Ungaro, "The Paintings of Barnett Newman," 120). Lifting the canvas away from the strainer helped avoid, on the painted side of the canvas, impressions of the frame that could form due to its pressing against the wooden bars. Ghost-like boxes, should they appear in the image, would automatically set up a virtual frame-within-a-frame, and therefore evoke the kind of recession into space associated with conventional mimesis (or painting as a "window" onto the world) that Newman was trying to overcome.
24. Greenberg observed this phenomenon in reverse with regard to the sculptures: "It was hard to tell, in Truitt's art, where the pictorial and where the sculptural began and ended" ("Changer," 290).
25. Truitt once expressed her aims with words that lend themselves well to the sculpture under consideration: "I hold the structure neutral: a column. Painted into color, this wooden structure is rendered virtually immaterial. The color itself is thus set free into space and into the ever-moving sun, which marks time" (*Daybook*, 184). For an insightful consideration of this passage and Truitt's art more widely, see Brenda Richardson, "Anne Truitt: A Tenth of a Second to Live," in *Anne Truitt: Drawings* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2012), 5–36, at 13–14.
26. Truitt characterized her sculptures as "essentially paintings in three dimensions" in *Prospect*, 23. As a topic for further reflection, it seems germane to mention Michael Fried's description of Jules Olitski's sculpture *Bunga 45* (1967) in relation the issues of (virtual) surface and (actual) space toward which some of Truitt's works point. Olitski's piece comprises fifteen or so ten-foot metal tubes of various diameters, placed upright, riveted together, and painted in various hues. Fried characterizes Olitski's project in terms I think might usefully bear upon our assessment of Truitt (who, as I've pointed out, is also discussed in Fried's essay): "[*Bunga 45*] amounts to something far more than an attempt simply to make or 'translate' his paintings into sculptures, namely, an attempt to establish surface — the surface, so to speak, of *painting* — as a medium of sculpture. The use of tubes, each of which one sees, incredibly, as *flat* — that is, flat but *rolled* — makes *Bunga 45*'s surface more like that of a painting than like that of an object" ("Art and Objecthood," 163).
27. Barnett Newman made narrow paintings too. A series of six canvases from 1950 are all less than six inches wide but range from three to nearly eight feet in height (the most extreme being *The Wild* at an inch and a half wide but eight feet tall). But there is a crucial difference. Newman seems to have resisted the implication that his thin paintings were meant to be seen from the side, even as they project out from the wall relatively far: *Untitled No. 2, 1950* (Menil Collection, Houston) is five inches wide and four feet high, but stands out just over three inches. While it is true that the lateral view of his larger canvases is central to explaining Newman's modes of address, he insisted on the primacy of the frontal, which is to say facing aspect of his paintings. Hence his decision to cover the sides of *Untitled No. 2, 1950* with a simple wood frame constructed by his friend and fellow painter Jackson Pollock. The frame gives the painting a boxlike aspect and calls attention to the relationship between the surface image, on the one hand, and the object's physical construction, on the other — a move typical of Truitt's work, too. For a detailed discussion of these works and their formal effects, see Michael Schreyach, "Barnett Newman's 'Sense of Space': A Non-Contextualist Account of its Perception and Meaning," *Common Knowledge* 19:2 (Spring 2013), 351–79.
28. Truitt discusses her interest in peripheral vision with regard to the *Arundel* paintings in *Daybook*, 125–26. For an analysis of that concern, see Wagner, "The Threshold," 18–19. Not surprisingly, Truitt's interest in folded space finds a precedent in her own body of work, and particularly in the aluminum sculptures (mostly destroyed) that she made in Japan in the 1960s. For a keen analysis of what she terms the "topological maneuver of the fold" in Truitt's work, see Anna Lovatt, "Turning," in *Anne Truitt in Japan* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2015), 5–29, at 17–21.
29. Truitt's claims for the personal meaning of her works was not unqualified. She cautioned against taking her art as a solipsistic record, insisting that it "was about trying to objectify my life. It wasn't about me myself. That was the whole virtue of it" ("Grand Allusion," reprinted in Meyer, "In the Tower," n.p.).
30. Art historian Miguel de Baca captures both poles: our attention to Truitt's sculptures "begins with the references included in the works […] and radiates outward to appeal to the viewers' own vast stores of knowledge" (*Memory Work*, 7).
31. Truitt, "Miriam Schultz Grunfeld Lecture" [1998], quoted in Hileman, "Presence and Abstraction," 13.



8 Jan '72, 1972
Acrylic on canvas
22¼ × 96 in; 57 × 244 cm