

Background cathedral
like in the upward
motion



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Background

Anne Truitt was an American minimalist sculptor and color field artist. She was born, Anne Dean on March 16, 1921 in Baltimore, Maryland. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College with a degree in psychology.

[1] Anne married journalist James Truitt in 1947 and they moved to Washington DC where Anne studied sculpture at the Institute of Contemporary Art and at the Dallas Museum of Fine Art. Truitt became a full time artist in the 1950s working with clays casted and wrapped in cement. In the 1960s Truitt began to experiment painting multiple layers of colors on her sculptures which she was later became known for. She once wrote in 1965, “ 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”.

[2] Anne Truitt’s masterpieces include not only sculptures which she is famous for but also parvas, paintings, piths and other works on paper her artistic mind can create.

Works

Anne Truitt’s artistic self was awakened when she and her husband visited New York in 1961. When she was viewing the works of Ad Reinhardt, Barnett Newman and Nassos Daphinis in the exhibit “ American Abstract Expressionists and Imaginists” at the Guggenheim Museum.

Examining Dahnis’ work, Truitt was reminded of how much she liked wood and the multitude of color by Newman’s art made a great impact on Truitt’s

works. In her third published journal, *Prospect*, Anne wrote the works “Reverse(d) my whole way of thinking about how to make art”.^[3] She realized her passion in making art herself and taking control of materials to use in solidifying her own ideas and creativity. In *Prospect* she wrote of that afternoon: “ 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 will due respect for its nature, art would emerge out of it rather inevitably” .^[4] That night Truitt could not sleep with her desire to create something of her own. She wrote: “ And suddenly, the whole landscape of my childhood flooded into inner eye: plain white clapboard fences and houses, barns, solitary trees in flat fields, all set in the wide, widening tidewaters around Easton. 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 making a white picket fence” .^[5] After she was struck by artistic inspiration, that year, Anne Truitt made the white picket fence inspired, wooden sculpture, *First*.

Examining *First*, incongruities are revealed in that, it has only three (3) pickets and they are of different heights and widths are not evenly spaced. The center picket was the tallest and widest one and all the tops of the

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pickets are tilted at different pitches. Carol Diehl in her article compared these pitches to the roofs of neighbouring houses and added that “ there is something cathedral like in the upward motion of the trinity of slats to a triangular peak that presages the slightly ecclesiastical aura”[6].

To some First can also be interpreted as a loss of innocence in the anticipation of life being organized with the flawed version of Truitt’s picket fence. Curator Kirsten Hileman interpreted the sculptor as the artist’s relation to her siblings. Hileman wrote: “ the unexpected heighlights of the sculpture’s pickets, one (1) tall and two (2) 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 (2) siblings”.[7] Continuing her artistic drive, the following year, 1962, Anne Truitt continued to produce more sculptures but she abandoned remaining references from First and created a great amount of significantly simplified, solely abstract work. During this time she had developed a procedure of coating acrylic paint in several layers, polishing between applications to generate a smooth surface and mixing her own colors. In her journal, Prospect, she wrote: “ 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...The sculptures had become what I have been making ever since: proportions of structural form counter-pointed by proportions of metaphorical color-essential paintings in three dimensions”.

[8] As time passed by Anne Truitt started creating more abstract, vertical wooden columns painted in layers of acrylic paint. Her first show was at New York in 1963 at the Andre Emerich Gallery where Clement Greenberg, an art

critic, considered her a precursor of the Minimalist movement together with Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland.

Curator Kristin Hileman defined Truitt's work as otherwise stating that "minimalist artists sought to purge their work of meaning and strip their work down to its most fundamental features while Truitt tried to fill her work with meaning and trigger emotional associations in viewers".[9] Reacting to such comments of her work being minimalist, Anne Truitt commented: "I have never allowed myself, in my own hearing, to be called a minimalist. Because minimal art is characterized by nonreferentiality. And that's not what I am characterized by. My work is totally referential. I've struggled all my life to get maximum meaning in the simplest possible form." [10] She produced *Hardcastle* in 1962 which is an undifferentiated black rectangle about more than eight (8) feet high. It was supported on the back by bright red buttresses.

Truitt's sculptures are metonyms to a multifaceted of relations.[11] Most of her works were associated with Easton, Maryland, her home town and her love of Greek and Roman classical literature. In 1962, Truitt made *Ship-lap* which was inspired by the Third Haven Friends' Meetinghouse in Easton Maryland.

Built in 1682 - 1684, the house has an early frame arrangement. The outside has a unique asymmetric geometry while its raw ship-lap wood inner walls and ceiling was held by thick, rustic square columns. Also during that year she made *Platte*, which was inspired by Teotihuacan and Tula's four-sided Atlantean pillars and *Watauga* which resembles a memorial plaque and was

painted half black and half purple. The latter seemed shocking when it is applied to a condensed form that implicit Brancusi-like seriousness of purpose.

[12] Truitt's Morning Choice sculpture made in 1968 is a six (6) foot tall column painted in uneven segments with apple green, navy blue and bright pink with a strip of orange was very intense especially in contrast to its bleak shape. In 1974, Truitt displayed her play in color with the 17th summer sculpture. Truitt painted the yellow green sculpture purple at the bottom. In her View made in 1999, she painted stripes in vertical form which are irregular and illustrating a more complexities with strips of light colors blue and yellow adjoined darker ones at the column's edge.

Truitt explained this radicalism in her journal: " 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 emotion, 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"[13] One of Anne Truitt's popular exhibitions was in Danese Gallery, New York in 2011 which featured thirteen (13) of her sculptures. With her signature style of wood column about five (5) to seven (7) foot tall and layered with acrylic paint, the sculptures are monochrome but some have

vertical stripes which appears to be lifted off the floor because of the different color painted on the end of the column touching the floor. Among the works showcased were *Sound* created in 1999 which is a two (2) sculpted cube painted in blue-green. *Twinning Court I* made in 2001 is a deep and rich like lacquer ware is “ as dignified as sentry, sudden as an electric shock”.

Lastly *Cambria* dated 2002 is painted in maroon giving its viewers the feeling of secrecy and tranquillity perceiving to slumber. Anne Truitt’s works reveal her personal life as a controversial female artist in the 1960s, author, mother of three (3) and grandmother. Each of her sculptures is a tribute to a specific event or relationship in her life with *First* (1961) depicting her relationships with her two (2) siblings and the loss of innocence, *Creswell* (1980) which was attributed to her daughter and her marriage, *Sorcerer’s Summer* (1991) when she was unfairly demoralized by people in the Washington art scene and *Tribute* (1997), which marked the beginning of calmness and acceptance in Truitt’s life, honest and forthright without revealing anything.

[14]

Truitt as an Unconventional Artist

Anne Truitt was different from other artists in a sense that she was an introvert compared to other artist. Photographer John Gossage described Truitt as someone who didn’t fit in with the bohemian art bar world. He depicted her as more of an art historian with her “ old-school, Bryn Mawr manners”.[15] In an interview regarding her balancing of time in her art and family Truitt said: “ It’s very difficult to do. It’s difficult to hold the line and it’s difficult to stay true, true in very many ways. True to yourself, true to

your experience so you don't lie about it, don't fudge it. ... It's extremely difficult and you have to make sacrifices.

...You can't have it all. You can't. In a way, you can't have much of a personality or anything because everything has to go into your work. So often you just look dull".[16] According to curator Kirsten Hileman, Truitt's importance lies in the fact that she had created art that echoes the movements in American art. Truitt provides the artistic scene " an alternative kind of minimal abstraction".[17] For Truitt's former students, Tim Gunn, Chief Creative Officer of Liz Claiborn and Project Runway co-host, and filmmaker and photographer, Jem Cohen, aside from Truitt's artistic discipline, her honesty and courage made her undeniable, rich and overdue.

[18] Truitt's aim was to get maximum meaning into the simplest possible form. Later she realized that she was the one in control of the meaning of her works thus she created sculptures which mirrored the events and relationships in her life as artist, author, mother and later grandmother.

Influence in Modern Art

Anne Truitt was associated both the minimalist and Color Field movement together with Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. Her works of wooden columns with acrylic paints inspired artists in examining layers of paint to produce an array of color which may deem extreme and radical during her time. Truitt's intricacy with the minimalist's rigid assertion on primary structures was reduced to their formal and material essence when Clement Greenberg contrasted her. According to Greenberg, Truitt's work was new art and that " seriously new art doesn't ordinarily win acceptance that fast"

(Clement Greenberg Changer Anne Truitt). He regarded Truitt as the artist who made the first serious venture into minimalism with her First (1961) and later on Hardcastle (1962) and other “ box-like objects of wood and aluminium”.

Conclusion

Anne Truitt was an American artist based on Washington DC.

She was widely associated with the minimalist and color field movement despite her strong reactions towards such relations to her art. Truitt was famous for her wooden columns painted with acrylic. Her works of art depict her sentiments and relationships during times in her life. She was widely criticized as an artist because unlike others she was very plain and boring as she would say. She never mingled in the artistic bar scene instead during her free time she spent her time with her family. She distanced herself from the then key social scene at Max’s Kansas City. It is believed that the isolation gave Truitt the courage and freedom to follow and dictate her own path. As Greenberg once wrote “ She certainly does not belong.

But then how could a housewife with three (3) children, living in Washington belong? How could such a person fit into the role of pioneer of far-out art?”[19]

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