

ARTFORUM

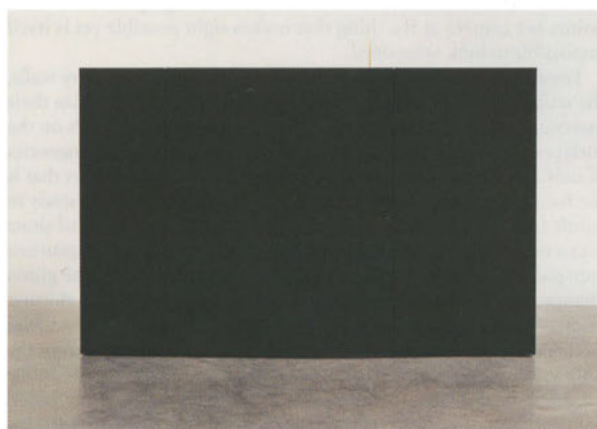
REVIEWS

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 1/2 x 96 1/4 x 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