Anne Truitt, *Summer Snow*, 1974

Kayla Conklin

Every viewer of Anne Truitt's (1921-2004) *Summer Snow* (1974) experiences the Minimalist sculpture differently. Truitt crafted the sculpture with eight-foot-tall wooden panels that tower just above the able-bodied standing viewer and demand a gentle gaze upward. A horizontal base supports a vertical columnar form jetting toward the sky. The result is a crowbar, or "L"-shaped sculpture that appears, at first, unrelentingly geometric and sturdy. When photographed, the sculpture is a bland corporate board-room gray, and the texture is even and smooth. However, when viewed in person, amidst the unsteady streams of light and dancing dust particles in the air, the work animates and the color changes. A closer encounter reveals that Truitt's choice of acrylic pigment is not gray but an icy blue with a glossy finish. The texture is not smooth but cross-hatched. The subtle cross-hatching bears the memory of the artist's coarse brushes working against the horizontal grain of the wood. Even so, Truitt explained, "I see in [the sculptures] no trace of the hours and hours of intense labor by way of which they were made."[1] Even though not a precise document of the labor of an "action artist," as Truitt self-identified in an interview conducted two years after completing *Summer Snow*, the sculpture demands another kind of action, located in the body of the viewer.[2] As the viewer circumambulates the sculpture and their retinas dash from edge to edge, light pirouettes in the gloss of the paint, vogues in the crisscross patterns of the wood grain, and veers around ninety-degree corners. The light, air, angle, height, and environment are the object's media as much as wood and acrylic.

With its paradoxical title, *Summer Snow* presents a subjective encounter with flux.[3] Truitt explained that her sculptures "look so objective. Yet each one sprang from the very core of my subjectivity."[4] Through her poetic title, Truitt renders impossibility possible. By visualizing icy flurries in the balmy summer heat, Truitt depicts a sense of stability amidst contradiction. One may never encounter a summer snow in nature but does encounter *Summer Snow* in the gallery. The work wavers between colors like the title wavers between seasons. The cold, snowy connotation of the blue is fleeting and deeply dependent on the beholder's senses, memory, and psyche.[5] Bodies as sensorium are not fixed but vary based on previous encounters. Thus *Summer Snow* highlights a plurality of subjectivities: that of the artist and of each viewer.

What explains the impulse to invest in subjectivity? When Truitt completed the sculpture, the United States experienced rising distrust in political infrastructure following the Watergate scandal in 1972 and ongoing Cold War and Vietnam War-era tensions. This historic moment of heightened socio-political anxieties and distrust toward the government spurred an artistic investment in redefining truth.[6] Furthermore, Truitt's spouse, James Truitt, was an active journalist, and, in her own words, that "meant a lot of time-consuming entertaining and being entertained" by other journalists in Washington, D.C.[7] Truitt's prioritizing the plural subjective truths perhaps acknowledges a distrust in "objective truth" and honors the variability of perception.

---

1 Anne Truitt, *Prospect: The Journal of an Artist* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 45.

2 Anne Truitt, interviewed by Howard Fox," *Sun and Moon 1* (1976), 46. This interview is referenced in Anne Middleton Wagner, "The Threshold: Language and Vision in the Art of Anne Truitt" in *Anne Truitt: Threshold* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2013).

3 For more information on Truitt's poignant choice of titles, see Miguel de Baca, *Memory Work: Anne Truitt and Sculpture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 11. de Baca writes, "Unlike other artists who pay little attention to titling, Truitt was deliberate; she titled and retitled her sculptures, sometimes many years after their completion."

4 Anne Truitt, *Prospect*, 45.

5 de Baca, *Memory Work*, 12, 39.

6 Joshua Shannon, *The Recording Machine: Art and Fact during the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

7 Anne Truitt, "Lecture, February 2, 1975" in *Anne Truitt: Threshold*, 86–87.

American University Museum