

INTRODUCTION

Late in her life, Anne Truitt shared a budding friendship with fellow minimal artist Carl Andre. In one of their conversations, Andre remarked on Truitt's *Catawba* (1962; plate 9), a sculpture grouped with one of his artworks at the Museum of Modern Art when it reopened in 2004 after its sweeping renovation. "It has ontology," he said, adding: "It must have cost you to make it." She received his words as a knowing smile between artists; only another artist could truly comprehend the intellectual and emotional energy suffused in the labor of making art.¹

Truitt's pondering of the "artist's life folded into art" runs through her remarkable career as a visual artist and author.² At the heart of her sculptural practice is the theme of memory, which enabled her not only to express her personal experiences but also to address how perception was changing for a contemporary viewership. Truitt had a peculiarly tenacious attachment to the memory theories of Marcel Proust, an attachment that began in the 1950s when she produced a translation of secondary literature on Proust by the French scholar Germaine Brée. Truitt gravitated toward the Proustian idea that an object in one's focus could unleash a powerful return to the past through memory, which in turn brings a fresh, even critical, attention to present experience. Whether describing experience representationally or in the abstract, Truitt's artwork aims for an appeal to the viewer's memory that repudiated existing critical claims about how art should be perceived. The recourse to remembered sensory information ran counter to the prevailing modernist tenet of perceptual immediacy, especially as it applied to abstract painting, which dictated that a given artwork must not yearn for the memory of past experiences to define it. But Truitt's freestanding planks and plinths, the earliest

of which resembled fences, tombstones, and walls, required a newly attentive sensory perception, one deeply contingent on present viewing contexts but not devoid of historical references.

Social and contextual analyses of minimalism are now welcome in contemporary art history, but this was not always the case. The 2001 book *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* by James Meyer is foundational.³ Rather than obeying a single orthodoxy, Meyer explains, minimalism's earliest practitioners embodied heterogeneous approaches to artistic forms. His book was the first to legitimate Truitt seriously as a pioneer of minimalism, and yet she still remains liminal even within the diversity of practices he describes. Despite the fact that Truitt's work "becomes legible in relation to Minimalism," its referential qualities distance it from the work of other, better-known artists in his survey, even though he acknowledges that literalism in minimal art is no longer as transparent as it once seemed.⁴ If one sees Truitt's artwork as significant to the period *primarily* because it is infused with authorial intention, then it is no wonder she seems perpetually adjacent to minimalism, even though she was one of the first artists to have innovated it.

This book, by contrast, contends that Truitt's deployment of memory needs to be understood as a novel act of *beholding*. One of the distinguishing features of Truitt's approach to perception is that there is no pre-social relationship to objects—no imaginary phenomenological encounter that is, in Hal Foster's articulation, "somehow before or outside history, language, sexuality, and power."⁵ In the Proustian world that Truitt embraced, even familiar interactions with objects fluctuate depending on situational contexts. The insertion of memory into perception can be overwhelmingly vivid or frustratingly indirect; either way, it summons an experience that resists simplification. Truitt's appeals to memory suggest such richness; the past unfolds powerfully into the present both spontaneously and irregularly, as a matter contingent upon the viewer's frame of mind. Furthermore, because memories are not fixed mental images, either in the artist's mind or in that of the viewer, Truitt's artwork dismantles the notion of a singular, unified subject. This framework for memory—symbolic systems collaborating from both within and outside the individual—implies a public form of subjectivity that would become associated with one of minimalism's most important cultural innovations.

ON REMEMBERING

Memory is a vast concept, linked to countless forms of artistic expression throughout history. An oft-recounted legend of the origin of memory in the Western tradition centers on Simonides of Ceos, a Greek poet who attended a lush banquet where he performed oratories to his hosts and the gods. Under divine protection, Simonides was summoned away from the gathering, and at that very moment a catastrophe struck: the roof collapsed, killing and disfiguring all gathered inside. Returning to the site of the

disaster, the spared Simonides remembered where guests had sat around the banquet table, and so was able to help grieving families identify remains. From this mythic act, the ancients developed an orderly method of remembering information by associating it with arrangements of objects in an imaginary room. The great orators of antiquity could remember entire passages of text by committing them to discrete visualizations of familiar places.⁶

Today we know memory as more than just a repository for information to be accessed in a routinized way. Instead, memory recovers complex sensations derived from lived experience. Memory is emotional; it is an instrument of self-knowledge and a fundamental way in which we relate to our surroundings. Where it concerns art, a move into this more subjective realm has been attractive to artists who find in memory an appealing relativism. This was nowhere more evident than in the rebellious 1960s, where the contingencies of memory seemed to belie the ideals of intentionality and coherence so praised in the work of the previous generation of action painters.

Memory is also the product of social experience and emerges as a historical particular during periods of flux. When the master ideologies of the nineteenth century began to fray in the early twentieth, memory seemed to be the mechanism by which some were seduced back into a conservative past no longer suited to the ideals of a new generation. Hayden White devised the phrase “burden of history” to explain the open hostility to history threaded through the cultural production of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷ At the same time, in banishing memory, the danger existed of doing away with individual subjectivity. This was also a problem because automation, assembly lines, and the crush of an incipient popular-culture industry were beginning to colonize the mental habits of the industrializing West. The future of memory was caught between the “nightmare of history” (to borrow another phrase, this time from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in an echo of Karl Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*) and the persistent inevitability of individual mnemonic return. As Richard Terdiman argues of this historical tension, when the past “is no longer obviously connected to the present, memory is of diagnostic importance.”⁸

The production of a memory is in fact a highly unstable confluence of fungible internal images and exterior sensory contexts, further sharpened by one’s private beliefs, wishes, and fears about the mental picture as it develops. Naturally, our memories are dynamic: they change as we change. In 1932, the cognitive psychologist Sir Frederic Bartlett wrote in his groundbreaking tome *Remembering*, “The traces [of memory] that our evidence allows us to speak of are interest-determined, interest-carried traces. They live with our interests and with them they change.”⁹ Memory tends not to linger in the past, but rather accesses the past in order to focus our experience of the present. Put another way, a thing remembered will never rematerialize as the thing it actually was, and the discrepancy between these two images reveals as much or more about the present as about the past. Bartlett defended the subjective imagination as an integral intermediary between memory and expression, that is, what we remember and what

we know. Bartlett's belief in the superimposition of the past and present in memory was consistent with thinkers in the early twentieth century whose theories suggest that time itself is other than linear. As the contemporary critic Andreas Huyssen has argued, the work of Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin in philosophy, Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis, and Marcel Proust in literature explores how inward thinking—including remembering—permits fragmented, perhaps even incoherent, versions of the past to emerge.¹⁰

In the long shadow of war and its unparalleled loss of life, the postwar generation of the 1950s and 1960s puzzled over how to constitute what it had just witnessed historically, bringing memory once again under scrutiny. In the preface to the first edition of *History and Truth* (1955), Paul Ricoeur wrote of the “philosophico-theological problem of a total or ultimate significance of history.”¹¹ Sensing an impending disintegration of the cultural monopoly of the West, Ricoeur articulated that in dissolving history, “suddenly it becomes possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among others. All meaning and every goal having disappeared, it becomes possible to wander through civilization as if through vestiges and ruins.”¹² Much of the continental theory written in the generation following the war opened up such a discursive space for thinking beyond the configuring logic of objectifying narratives of history. It is in this climate that we see a flowering of writing on the subjectivity of memory work, the resurgent popularity of thinkers like Bergson and Proust, and enriching critical revisions of Freud. In all, going forward from the 1960s, the partial and conditional character of memory served to critique master ideologies, national identities, and political consensus in an effort to better characterize a more diverse and highly mediated society.

Memory work also took on a different salience in the 1960s due to changes in thinking about structures of temporality, specifically the sense that access to images and information approached near instantaneity. The art historian Pamela Lee coined the useful term *chronophobia* to describe the agonistic relationship with time characterizing the art and art criticism of the period. To Lee, technological advancement is a major influencing factor, contributing to the culturally shared sense that time was passing with unprecedented speed. Thus memory work in the 1960s was not a simple revisitation of the antihistorical attitudes of modernism, but rather needs to be understood within the contemporary evolving conceptions of time that became “a figuration of uncertainty about the mechanics of historical change itself.”¹³ Here, the phenomenon of memory—a collaboration of present and past sensations—encourages contemplation that disturbs such temporal acceleration.

In his study of postwar France, Pierre Nora points to the absence of implicit meanings in contemporary culture, resulting in the social need to establish sites of memory (*lieux de memoire*), such as monuments and memorials, to create some semblance of social cohesion in a heterogeneous and fast-paced world.¹⁴ Accordingly, one of the larger questions I pursue in this book is that of Truitt's keeping memory alive in a period obsessed with newness as a cultural condition. It is fascinating to me how the negation

of “monumentality” is enshrined in the history of minimalism. Note that the sculptor Tony Smith’s assessment of his own work in 1966—“I was not making a monument”—has come to theorize minimalism as a whole, without further consideration of memory as a core dimension of human experience.¹⁵ Robert Smithson’s antagonism to monumentality is similarly well known and studied. But this standard posture against monumentality and the collective memory it augurs should also be seen in the light of the period’s countercultural leanings; in this sense, memory (both individual and social) can be understood as an important part of contestation in the public sphere, where voices from the center and periphery struggle for recognition. And in this, it is my belief that the more we know about Truitt’s comprehension of memory and what she was trying to do with it through sculpture, the more early minimalism will engage diverse and abundant critical structures beyond the ones already known.

By now, the reader should be getting the sense that despite proliferating interests in memory and temporality throughout the 1960s, memory is curiously absent from our present art historical understanding and interpretation of minimal art. In fact, an emphatic experience of the “real” versus the seduction of the imaginary and mnemonic is a vital concern in the genealogy of minimalism’s posture within and against modernism. Part of this is attributable to the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which held particular sway during the late 1960s and in the decades following, as Minimalism began to coalesce historically. James Meyer has notably established the French philosopher’s role in some of minimalism’s seminal texts authored by artists and critics alike.¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), translated into English in 1962, contends directly with the weaknesses of imaginary projection—one could say, remembered images—in comparison with the vividness of direct perception. Another of Merleau-Ponty’s books, *The Visible and the Invisible* (published posthumously in 1964 and in its English translation in 1968), treated the inseparability of the visual, bodily, and phenomenal parts of perception in characterizing a viewer’s subjectivity.¹⁷ His writings endure as a theoretical lens through which historians continue to understand minimalism, and it is not wrong to retrospectively connect certain effects of Truitt’s sculptures to those described in his examples. For instance, Merleau-Ponty’s compelling description of the feeling of being grounded in one’s own body as prior to perception is, I think, vital, and offers in theory what minimal art does so appealingly well in example.

With this book I am looking for a more nuanced consideration of Truitt’s phenomenology—a phenomenology based on recollection—which can be seen as intellectually kindred to Merleau-Ponty (and, for that matter, Bergson, Benjamin, Freud, and others), but which begins by applying Marcel Proust. I want to be clear that no work of art can be reduced to a single access point of interpretation, so this book is not a “Proustian reading” of Truitt’s sculptures. That being said, Proust is a vital influence for us to consider because the artist said that her contact with the French author was transformative. She called it a “turning point” and the “spine along which my thought has developed ever

since” she translated Brée’s book.¹⁸ It was from Proust that Truitt learned how to fashion time into aesthetic experience. Proust is an ideal gateway through which to begin to understand site- and sight-based memories, the contingency of sensory information, the often strange and inexplicable ways that different memories swap representational content in the recesses of the mind, the creative expression of memory, and in all of these, the attitudes toward psychology and memory that impacted Truitt’s reception of these ideas in the middle of the twentieth century, and how she applied them to her understanding of modernism.

To start: Proust is best known for his masterwork, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, a novel in seven volumes originally published between 1913 and 1927. Much of the author’s contribution to a theory of memory concerns episodes of *memoire involontaire*—“involuntary memory”—that the narrator experiences throughout the novels. Proust’s vignette of involuntary memory unleashed by the madeleine is the classic example. Upon tasting the madeleine, Proust’s narrator is powerfully reminded of his aunt’s house in Combray and the ritual performed therein of drinking tea and eating cookies before mass. Later he discovered that the Combray church had been destroyed in war, which came as an upsetting shock. Thus we see how an object—the madeleine—motivates the narrator’s reassessment of an entire and unpredictable range of memories and histories as he tries to integrate the past into his present life and circumstances. No doubt one of the reasons Truitt was attracted to Proust was that the autobiographical narrator in *Recherche* is on a journey to realize his poetic vision—simply put, to become an artist. This information reached Truitt at crucial time in her career. Indeed, one of the principal contributions of Brée’s 1950 assessment of Proust (the one translated by Truitt for Rutgers University Press in 1955) was its argument for the novel’s contiguity as an artistic creation, a remarkable distillation of the narrator’s sustained peregrination through the sensory effluvia of memory.¹⁹

Such distillation is evident in the linguistic architecture of the Proustian sentence, which is so often an amalgamation of metaphors supplying dense, vivid sensory information. As a writer, Proust used language to cultivate intense imaginary experiences. Of his language, Julia Kristeva has observed that “sensation is always already a memory and a word,” and the reader feels especially immersed in the narration of his remembered reality. Proust’s style revises the ancient art of memory: an entire spectrum of sensations is relived through precious objects and relationships infused into a surprisingly vast array of familiar locations in the narrator’s memory bank. Kristeva continues: “Readers can find their own path to this sensory resurrection by discovering other enigmas and worlds that had been inaccessible to their limited powers of perception.”²⁰ Thus the Proustian memory is twofold: both the meaning that it had for the author and the meaning that it has for the reader, whose own imagination is sparked by his vivid descriptions.

It may be strange to will this literary argument about the reader’s/ beholder’s experience into the realm of sculpture, but it is a central concern of Truitt’s work. Is it not

the renowned vividness of the Proustian literary experience that rests in the author's ability to merge the real and the imaginary, the present and the past? Kristeva locates the alluring quality of reading Proust in the "*conjunction* between subject and object," in which the "I" of the autobiographical novel stretches to include the reader's sensory apparatus, quickening perceptual acuity through the act of reading.²¹ Similarly, I would like to suggest that Truitt's sculptures reflect attention to the act of perception, and that this attention begins with the references included in the works (and their titles, which I will discuss later) and radiates outward to appeal to the viewers' own vast stores of knowledge.

As we know, one of the enduring claims that minimalism made in the 1960s was that the ambiguity of the individual artwork allowed for renewed attention to the viewer's embodied experience of perception. In Truitt's case, the impetus to create sculpture existed as a clearly articulated wish to establish an immersive experience for the viewer in the present. Her desire becomes all the more penetrating when we realize that for most of her young career she was linked to the modernist critic Clement Greenberg, who prescribed a curiously disembodied perception of painting. Truitt was also grouped with the painters Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, even though her work actually repudiated many of the critical claims made about their enhancements to the special status of painterly experience. Her entwining with and difference from color field painting is a subject of great importance in the chapters that follow.

To recap: this book is about how Truitt's art engages in the remarkable condensation of present and past experience achieved through memory. This is true for the ancient art of memory as much as for everyday, quick assessments of unfamiliar situations: our psychology subconsciously matches up new phenomena with schemata that already exist in memory, the so-called mind's eye. Likewise, viewers enjoy the jolt of memory that comes when familiar visuals are brought forth by the sensory content of Truitt's work: a fence, a tombstone, a certain color or juxtaposition of colors. Naturally, given the unpredictable connections between an image and a memory, seeing one of Truitt's sculptures may coagulate into a memory for some viewers and not for others. But there is a deeper exploration of the phenomenon of memory at work, which we might call spatiotemporal or physical. In Truitt's words: "Apprehension of the sculpture takes place in time, in a cumulative fashion as the viewer walks around it."²² The word *cumulative* implies a sequenced sensory experience in the actual time and space of encounter. An immediate sensation is not always and regularly the singular focus of experience, but rather its convergence with impressions recorded over time. Truitt's sculptures incite, by virtue of their requirement of such time, an added reflection on the space of experience—"as the viewer *walks around* it." Spaces are strongly suggestive of social and cultural associations, and this, too, is Proustian. A place is never phenomenologically neutral, but rather already enmeshed in the discourses introduced to it by any number of viewers' presences. The oscillation between past and present forestalls a single interpretation; instead of recognition as an isolated outcome of seeing one of Truitt's

works, the added dimension of time lends the beholder new purchase on the spatial and situational contexts through which different memories and meanings come into our understanding.

ON GENDER

Gender matters here, too. Truitt's adaptation of memory tropes strategically decentered the idealized subject of high modernist painting and threatened the masculine identity inscribed therein. The most extensive scholarship on Truitt's sex is Meyer's analysis of the matter as it played out in criticism, becoming central to Clement Greenberg's 1968 assertion in *Vogue* that Truitt was a "good" minimalist pitted against the aggressively "far-out" look of other, male minimalists such as Judd and Morris.²³ Taking a step back, one would expect that Truitt was aware of the masculine prerogatives of the art world and its aesthetic discourses from a much earlier point in time. Not only was she completely fluent in the gendered oppositions that dominated post-painterly abstract painting in the 1950s and 1960s, but she also already knew that Greenberg idealized her male Washington colleagues, the painters Louis and Noland, for having captured his prized "instantaneous" look. Greenberg located aesthetic experience chiefly in the eye, discounting all embodied aspects of form that threaten to contaminate an object's instantaneous optical apprehension.²⁴ I argue along with the art historian Marcia Brennan, among others, that Greenberg's view presumed an interpretive process that had been invested with the social authority of men.²⁵ Instead, Truitt's work proposed very close and sometimes fluctuating transactions between past sensory knowledge and present perception, thereby interrupting "instantaneous" vision. From this point of view, Truitt's plural dimensions of memory essentially rebuffed Greenberg. She thus unsettled the previously held assumption of the viewer's universal subjectivity and the practice of abstract painting it enshrined, proposing instead an active spectatorship positioning the beholder as a fully embodied subject. Perhaps sensing the transgressive nature of her work, Truitt's art dealer, André Emmerich—who also represented Louis and Noland—deleted the gendering determination of her first name from the title of her debut solo show at his gallery in 1963.

It would be misleading to suggest that there is something inherently feminine, or feminist, about Truitt's thematizing of memory in her artwork. And yet, memory is called upon frequently in second-wave feminism as a tactic for raising women's consciousness. I will briefly relate two examples to situate this effort in the 1960s. The first is Betty Friedan's pathbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which characterized the crisis of her female subjects' malaise as a fundamental loss of memory. Friedan asserted that women are deprived of purpose when they are "tied to the *immediate* situation in which they [find] themselves," to the extent that they lose the ability to integrate past and future personal projections.²⁶ In Friedan's study, a renewed comprehension of temporality is key to envisioning an alternative in the future. The second example

is Monique Wittig's invocation of memory in her landmark novel *Les Guérillères* (1969; translated 1971). Wittig, like Friedan, understood memory as a potent resource for women to assert the wisdom gained from past experience, looking forward to a more self-possessed future.²⁷ Truitt makes no mention of these or other feminists in her published or unpublished journals, but it is clear that she was intensely focused on the idea that the past intervenes in one's experience of the present—sometimes in mundane circumstances, and sometimes in circumstances that require active response—as a social critique. By studying Truitt with this new emphasis, I advocate for a deeply embedded resistance to established male authority in her practice that is not currently a part of scholarly studies of her art.

It is interesting to consider whether Truitt's example asks us to think in different ways about the social construction of gender and whether she expressed her own gender as a range of bodily and psychic experiences. The beginning of an answer might be found in an especially revealing passage in the first of her three published artist-journals, *Daybook*, in which Truitt wrote candidly about her relationship to gender, feeling “the cave of womanhood” at her back as a hollow into which she could repair, finding in it her role as a mother and, when she was married, a wife.²⁸ I have always been alarmed by this phrase, finding in it an endangering Freudianism that might tempt us to invoke biological interpretations of Truitt's art. But then Truitt writes about her emergence from the cave and aspiration to succeed in an art world whose patriarchy was pointed and brutal. Truitt knew the costs of pursuing her labor honestly and aggressively. At times she seemed too feminine, at others not feminine enough—but what's clear is that she endured episodes of sexism right from the start. “I should not like to be in a position in which I could not breathe for fear of going against what I feel is right,” she concludes. “But, were I a man, I would not have had laboriously to pick my way through such an obvious train of thought to such an obvious conclusion.”²⁹ Such a response may not have the sound of radicalism, but it persuades me of Truitt's awareness that her professional goals did not align with sociologically defined roles, something that would have been especially true in the early 1960s when she began to strike out on her own.

IN WORDS

This study leans on close readings of Truitt's words in order to connect her experiences to her sculptures. Naturally, any artist's writing is informative, but Truitt's writing about her career as an artist is absolutely crucial because it offers another interpretation of her work outside the narrow confines of postwar art criticism. She was a lifelong prolific writer, and her massively successful autobiographical journals are intense projections of her memory. *Daybook* was a project undertaken in the wake of consecutive career retrospectives at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1973 and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1974. *Daybook* described her awakened desire to “discover how to see myself from a perspective that would render myself whole in my own eyes,” interpreting

her life as episodes—memories of both happiness and disillusionment—accumulating toward her fully realized identity as an artist.³⁰ Because she so valued the act of writing as a true intellectual labor, I borrow extensively from the memories narrated in Truitt's exquisite, densely woven prose to substantiate my claims.

Using Truitt's writings as evidence is of special importance to me because it resists the other ways in which the artist has been spoken for historically. I proceed with caution, however, because biographical criticism has too often seduced art history into the formation of an uneven canon, lionizing some artists and deprecating others. Minimalism in particular equated its own intellectual seriousness with an abstention from biographical information on the premise that knowing a given artist's expressive intent negates the character of what was advertised as essentially expressionless art. Anna Chave's revelatory article "Minimalism and Biography" (2000) argues that, rather than a lack of biography outright, certain biographical admissions and omissions benefited select artists' and critics' careers in the 1960s and 1970s. Arguably, women artists had the most at stake because of preexisting biases against women's work as inherently expressive or biologically determined rather than rational or progressive.³¹ These deployments present me with an incommensurable situation: memory as a concept that guides my analysis of these artworks' effects, and memories that are fundamental to the understanding of individual sculptures' personal origins and yet cannot serve as the ground for their eventual interpretation.

In truth, this apparent contradiction is what attracted me to Truitt in the first place, because here we have a visual artist whose reputation is inextricably bound up with her ability to write movingly about her experiences. Manifestos and explicative statements are not unknown to modern art by a long shot, but Truitt is a special case. Her books are narratives, and her overall writing indicates an instructive incongruity in the structures of memory—her own memory, no less—that lends texture and equivocation to her recollections. What I want to say about this is that we cannot always take the artist at her word—and that this quality is part of the brilliance and capaciousness of Truitt's prose. For instance, at various points in *Daybook* alone, memory appears as "instantly accessible," "reluctant," the "distance" from which to measure present experience, and "radiant"; sometimes it is liberating, and at other points it seems ominous.³² The most direct way of comprehending Truitt's biography, then, is to first subject her voluminous writing to close reading, bearing in mind that the description or evocation of a certain memory is but one highly motivated stage in its articulation and that it may evolve over time. In this book, understanding that the autobiographical subject is a confluent projection of personal and social identities, I also look beyond Truitt's words to learn more about the local and specific culture in which she lived. This endeavor was especially gripping given the myriad ways in which the artist differed from other minimalists who would be her colleagues. I approach the artist's archives with the same attitude of heterogeneity. Her unpublished letters and interviews are personal offerings; if anything, they situate her as a historical, but no less partial and no less expressive, subject.

The titles Truitt gave to her sculptures, too, are important source texts. Unlike other artists who pay little attention to titling, or who try to deny personal subjectivity by titling their artworks with seemingly random language, Truitt was deliberate; she titled and retitled her sculptures, sometimes many years after their completion. Here, I am certain that Truitt's titles are significant in the semiotic sense; these words suggest the fundamental gesture of making meaning, even though their precise contexts may be indecipherable. The Truitt title is not a name continuous with a subject, but rather a way of coaxing a lost image into being.³³ Although Truitt's titles provide this study with entry points into valuable vignettes that guided formal changes in her practice, my goal is not to achieve transparency between memory and form. One of the principles at work in Truitt's comprehension of memory is the practical impossibility of total recall. Like Truitt, I wish to maintain the sense of something fugitive in her works.

The structure of this book is chronological and maps a trajectory from Truitt's semi-representational sculptures in the early 1960s to the nonobjective look she achieved by 1968, considered her mature practice. This chronology is important because it leads out with Truitt's initial repudiation of modernist ideas and it marks evolutions in her thinking about the correlation of reference and perception. To that end, each chapter in this book is organized around a sculpture or group of sculptures denoting a specific stage in Truitt's early career. The opening chapter chronicles the inauguration of her starkly geometrical yet allusive style with an analysis of *First* (1961), a sculpture based on the iconic American white picket fence. *First*, I argue, is a response to the strong sense of social division Truitt experienced both as a child and in her adult milieu. In 1961, a Washington colleague introduced Truitt to the paintings of Barnett Newman, to which she formed an immediate attachment. Truitt's fascination with Newman's zip-style paintings accounts for the geometric quality of this and other of her early works. It is my argument that the allusive *First* is a three-dimensional, sited response to Newman. Truitt boldly repudiated the paradigm of modernist flatness through her stylistic attraction to architecture, which she evoked through sculpture. In the years following *First*, the influence of architecture led to an increased association in Truitt's work between the space of perception and bodily response, which I address in the second chapter. The change in her practice was also related to the fallibility of memory, that is, its inability to recall images, which Truitt analogized to abstraction. *Hardcastle* (1962) is a large, black rectangular plinth based on the artist's tenuous memory of a fatal car accident she heard about as a child. Here Truitt began to explore nonobjective design as a way of rupturing the denotative function of her earlier architectural forms, appealing to the beholder in deliberately incomplete references. Through a protracted consideration of *Hardcastle* alongside contemporary pop artworks dealing with the motif of car crashes, I discover a deep mutuality between Truitt's problematized memory and the resistance to narrative in a broader cultural discourse.

Truitt's sculptures from 1963 onward possess a much wider public interface; at the same time, they solicit an intimate relationship with the viewer, as her successively lay-

ered, sanded-back colors become visible only through prolonged looking. These formal innovations stemmed from the artist's preoccupation with the contingency of personal memory as opposed to codified public history. Chapter three focuses on *Valley Forge* (1963), one of a suite of works Truitt completed to figure out this opposition. The title itself borrows from the geography of Truitt's beloved college years at Bryn Mawr while also making a surprising reference to a well-known chapter in the American Revolutionary War. By holding structure constant, Truitt radically decontextualizes the viewer's experience of color. Such a tactic strongly protests against historically painterly attempts to localize color, as well as other artists' period-specific attempts to standardize it.

The fourth and final chapter considers the years that Truitt lived in Tokyo, from 1964 to 1967. The work from this period has not been addressed at length anywhere, and to interpret it I discuss Truitt's formal experimentation with color and her attempts to force a sense of perceived space out of patterns differing in value and hue. Truitt worked with Japanese fabricators to execute sculptures in aluminum, which she then painted by hand with industrial marine paint. In Japan, she also used space age materials that were unheard of in the United States, including a newly invented fluxless solder, to create precise edges for her metallic sculptures. After an unsuccessful exhibition of these artworks in 1965, Truitt reset her working practice. She became ever more convinced to pursue sculptural forms that would be perceived as pure, suspended color. This led her to produce hundreds of works on paper to flesh out the organization of sensuous, colorful shapes in implied space. When she returned to the United States in 1967, her first fabrication was an upright column to which she applied many highly wrought layers of thinned magenta pigment, enough to achieve a jewel-like, recrudescence surface quality. Titled *Return*, this work signaled new contact with a point of origin, a return to the course that Truitt had set upon by building *First*.

As in Proust, a "return" signifies aesthetic language devised anew to describe an understanding of old objects. This concept that the beholder's bodily encounters are mediated not only by the context of one's surroundings, but also frequently and profoundly by what we know of the past, distinguishes Truitt from those who would be her peers. The primary goal is not recuperation, but rather imaginative dispersion, seeing the present as newly focused by the unpredictable stirrings of memory. This basic formula remained the cornerstone of Truitt's practice for the remaining four decades of her life.