

*Anne Truitt in Japan*  
Matthew Marks Gallery  
through October 24, 2015

A Geometer's Paradise  
by Rebecca Allan

Paper possesses tensile strength, texture, and the capacity to transmit light, making it a distinctive surface for unfurling ideas. For Anne Truitt (1921–2004), known primarily for her totemic sculptures imbued with layers of meticulously applied color, paper offered a ground for exploring perception and sense-memory as she sought to orient herself during a time of personal and professional dislocation. *Anne Truitt in Japan* at Matthew Marks Gallery is the first exhibition of Truitt's works on paper executed between 1965 and 1967 in that country. This austere yet forceful presentation also provides an intriguing counterpoint to the sculptures that Truitt made throughout her life, and examines another dimension of her working practice, one that has been largely overlooked until now.

Truitt's arrival in Japan in 1964 was accompanied by significant dread. Her husband, a prominent Washington journalist, had been appointed as the Japan bureau chief for *Newsweek*. After a brief separation from him in 1963, she made the decision to stay in the marriage and moved with him and their three children to Tokyo.

Truitt's Tokyo was undergoing a massive reconstruction following the devastation of World War II and the building boom preceding the 1964 Olympic Games. Navigating its bewildering (and often unnamed) streets Truitt created drawings in color that spoke to her interest in cartographic location, and in the security that she associated with longitude and latitude.

The first room of the exhibition contains five luminous works on rice paper. Each sheet was successively dipped in diluted acrylic paint to form glazes of color—fuschia, lichen green, blue-violet, persimmon—that intersect along soft curves and tidal edges. The translucent paper takes up and distributes the color along its fibers, evoking sheets of rain, or thermal maps.

Several works reference Truitt's attempts at maneuvering Tokyo's confounding urban layout. Ignoring street signs, she would look out the back window of a taxi to internalize her route from home to studio. These drawings contain strictly delineated rectangles, paired trapezoids, and shapes that resemble carpenter's squares.

Juxtapositions of dissonant color within each shape create force fields that calls to mind 17th-century tantra drawings, or Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist paintings. Expanses of white space suggest areas of the map that Truitt cannot yet see, like the street grids that incrementally download as we anxiously await directions from our smart phones.

The ground rules of linear perspective are flouted in *Truitt '64 [2]*. Here, the artist applied thin layers of cobalt blue, ultramarine, and cadmium red within a truncated chevron. The careful taping off of shapes to delineate each color produces a white-knuckle precision. A narrowing of the form at its opposite ends, anticipates Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.

*Truitt '66 [7]* is made with the thinnest possible slice of paper, reminding me of the strips that are often wasted when larger sheets are cut down to accommodate a desired size. Here, two trapezoids and an isosceles triangle in regimental shades of blue bifurcate the white strip. Works in this category were generated by creating, on a larger sheet, an overall composition of hard-edged shapes with acrylic colors. They were later finalized when they were cut down into the resulting strips.

*Truitt '66 [1]* and *Truitt '66 [11]* are to my eye more directly related to the aluminum sculptures that the artist created and later destroyed because she found the metal lacking the aesthetic qualities she desired. Their unifying principal is the fold, a form that is present in Japanese screens, accordion books, and the human body. Truitt exploited the metaphoric power of folded form, not unlike the way in which Dorothea Rockburne has created choreographic records of movement in her folded drawings. James Lee Byers, a close artist friend of Truitt's in Japan, wrote letters to her comprising rolled and folded sheets of paper. In their utilization and manipulation of paper, each of these artists has elaborated on the relationship between distance and intimacy, and what is recorded by our kinesthetic sense when our bodies register what our eyes perceive.

The works made by Anne Truitt in Japan reveal in purest form the scaffolding of thought that underlies the artist's thinking process and the disciplined mastery of color and form that she wrought from disorientation and difficulty. Though I would have enjoyed seeing one or two of Truitt's sculptures to contextualize the drawings, I understand that cloistering the works on paper from this period allows us to evaluate them in their own light, and I see this quiet exhibition as a geometer's paradise.