

Press kit: Anne Truitt. Pioneer of Minimal Art

Anne Truitt

Pioneer of Minimal Art

K20, March 28 – August 2, 2026

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Press Preview: March 26, 2026, from 10 am at K20

Press Conference: March 26, 2026, 11 am at K20

Speakers:

- Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
- Vivien Trommer, Curator, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

Content

K21

Press Text Exhibition	2 – 6
Opening and Supporting Program	6 – 8
Wall Texts	8 – 12
Exhibition Preview	12 – 14

Download press information and images:

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#K20AnneTruitt

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#K20

Anne Truitt. Pioneer of Minimal Art

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen presents the first European retrospective of the US artist and writer Anne Truitt (1921 – 2004). Bringing together around 120 works spanning more than four decades, the exhibition delivers long-overdue European recognition to Truitt, who for decades has been acknowledged in the United States as a leading figure of what would come to be known as Minimal Art. Featuring Truitt’s landmark sculptures of the early 1960s, her luminous works on paper, the radical white-on-white *Arundel* paintings, and the deep black *Piths*—among the final works she produced—the exhibition traces the full breadth of her practice. Seen through Truitt’s work, Minimal Art is recalibrated—no longer purely rigorous or detached, but revealed as poetic, intimate, and profoundly sensuous. At its core is her deeply embodied use of paint, through which form and color fuse into memory, meaning, and affect.

The Reappraisal of a Pioneer

The exhibition at K20 in Düsseldorf brings together works from all phases of Truitt’s career, situating her art and life within a broader reflection on how artistic canons are formed. As Susanne Gaensheimer, Director of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, notes: “Following our successful exhibitions of Carmen Herrera in 2018, Charlotte Posenenske in 2020, and Lygia Pape in 2022, the exhibition continues the institution’s effort to expand the history of postwar art by foregrounding influential woman artists whose contributions deserve renewed attention.”

K21

Structured chronologically, the exhibition traces Truitt’s practice from 1961 to 2004 across seven chapters, illuminating her sustained engagement with sculpture, painting, and works on paper. Highlights include her early, vividly colored sculptures—*Hardcastle* (1962), *Remembered Sea* (1971), and *Quipe* (1984)—installed with generous spatial clarity in K20’s white galleries. Shown publicly for the first time since the 1960s is *Summer Run* (1964), a rare metal sculpture produced during Truitt’s time in Japan. Large-scale, elongated paintings such as *Echo* (1973) and *Ojibwa* (1993) underscore her lifelong exploration of color as both structure and sensation. A dedicated section revisits the *Arundel* paintings, whose radical white-on-white surfaces provoked controversy at their debut at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1975. Also on view are the *Piths*, a series of deep black canvases Truitt worked on in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Completing the exhibition, a short film by Jem Cohen (b. 1962), filmed in 1999, offers an intimate glimpse of Truitt at work in her studio.

The exhibition is made possible through major loans from leading US American institutions, including the Dia Art Foundation and Glenstone, as well as from private collections in Belgium, Switzerland, and Spain.

Truitt’s Breakthrough

In 1961, Truitt visited the seminal exhibition *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York with her close friend, the painter Mary Pinchot Meyer (1920 – 1964). There she encountered, for the first time, the

monochrome paintings of Barnett Newman (1905 – 1970) and Ad Reinhardt (1913 – 1967). Truitt was forty years old, and the visit marked a decisive artistic awakening.

“It seemed to me that I had never before been free,” she later recalled. “I stayed up almost the whole night.” That night, Truitt conceived her first mature work, entitled *First* (1961). The following morning, she purchased wood, clamps, and glue from a local lumber store and constructed a form resembling a small picket fence, painting it with ordinary white household paint. This moment initiated one of the most concentrated and productive periods of her career. Between 1961 and 1963, Truitt produced 35 large-scale wooden sculptures in pale whites and deep, dark hues—works that marked a decisive break from the modern figurative sculptures she had made between 1949 and 1960. With this shift, Truitt arrived at her distinctive artistic language.

As a point of reference, the early piece *Untitled* (1959), from an important private collection, is shown at K20 for the first time, underscoring the radical nature of this transition. Many other early works from this formative period have since been destroyed.

Reception Since the 1960s

When Minimal Art emerged in New York in the early 1960s, it unsettled audiences with its simple forms, serial objects, and embrace of industrial aesthetics. As early as 1963—preceding the later rise of Donald Judd—Truitt held her first solo exhibition at the renowned André Emmerich Gallery in New York. The exhibition both fascinated and polarized the art world. Truitt was the first artist to present painting as free-standing sculpture. “What I was actually trying to do was to take paintings off the wall, to set color free in three dimensions for its own sake,” she later explained in 1974. Her wooden sculptures, distinguished by luminous, deeply saturated hues, resist the anonymity of industrial form. Meticulously constructed and painted by hand, they transform form and color into carriers of memory, meaning, and affect—rooted in lived experience and the felt reality of being in the world.

Truitt’s work quickly attracted critical attention. In 1967, the influential US American critic Clement Greenberg hailed her as a pioneer of Minimal Art, writing in *Recentness of Sculpture*: “I was stopped by their dead-pan ‘primariness,’ and I had to look again and again ... to discover the power of these ‘boxes’ to move and affect. Far-outness here was stated rather than merely announced and signaled.” Yet Truitt consistently resisted being subsumed under the label of Minimalism. “My art is maximal as far as I am concerned,” she asserted in 1986. “It may not look as if there is much there, but for me it is everything.” A year later, she clarified her position: “My work is totally referential. I’ve struggled all my life to get maximum meaning in the simplest possible form.”

Color as a Carrier of Meaning

What distinguishes Truitt’s work—and marks a decisive departure from the Minimal Art of many of her male contemporaries—is her profoundly sensuous understanding of color. Her sculptures were developed from precise scale drawings, built by a fabricator from marine mahogany plywood, and finished entirely by the artist in a prolonged, physically exacting process. Truitt began with multiple layers of white primer, followed by more than forty hand-applied layers of acrylic paint, each carefully sanded down with sandpaper. The result is a surface of exceptional smoothness, depth, and inner luminosity. For Truitt, color and

structure were inseparable; they were meant to form a single unity—paint had to “marry” the wood, as she put it.

Slightly elevated on small risers, her sculptures appear to hover, less as solid objects than as radiant volumes of color that activate the surrounding space. Truitt worked her materials until they became saturated with lived experience—personal encounters, sustained reflection, and memories of specific places. Through their evocative titles, her works register intimate states of mind while remaining attuned to historical and political events. Yet they never prescribe a fixed meaning. Instead, they invite individual association, opening onto experiences that are at once deeply personal and universally human.

Broadening the Canon

The exhibition demonstrates how Truitt reimagined sculpture in all its formal, emotional, and conceptual depth within the male-dominated art world of the postwar period—and why, despite sustained critical and institutional recognition during her lifetime, her work has remained less widely known than that of many of her male counterparts. This retrospective affirms Truitt as the influential pioneer of Minimal Art she had been since 1961, restoring a crucial and long-missing chapter of art history. At the same time, it underscores the continued resonance of her work and writing for younger generations of artists today.

Thus, the exhibition reveals that Minimal Art was far broader and more heterogeneous than its canonical narratives suggest. Seen through Truitt’s work, the movement emerges as richer, more nuanced, and more open to subjectivity. In an era shaped by digital image saturation and accelerated modes of perception, her works resonate with immediacy. Truitt invites viewers to slow down, to move around her sculptures, and to encounter the world—quite literally—from shifting perspectives. It is an invitation to attentive looking, quiet reflection, and the cultivation of empathy.

Catalogue

Published on the occasion of the artist’s first European retrospective, this extensively illustrated catalogue brings together a text by Truitt herself, selected archival materials, and three newly commissioned scholarly essays. *Anne Truitt. Pioneer of Minimal Art*, edited by Susanne Gaensheimer, Vivien Trommer, and Manuel Segade; Hatje Cantz Verlag; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; 2026. Contributions by Miguel de Baca, Suzanne Hudson, Anne Truitt, and Vivien Trommer. 256 pages, 135 illustrations. English, German, Spanish. Museum edition: €35.00, Retail edition: €40.00

The exhibition is organized by the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Musée de Grenoble, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, and is made possible through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung.

The Terra Foundation for American Art, established in 1978 and having offices in Chicago and Paris, supports organizations and individuals locally and globally with the aim of fostering intercultural dialogues and encouraging transformative practices that expand

narratives of American art, through the foundation's grant program, collection, and initiatives.

"Through her bold use of geometry and color to express emotion and memory, Anne Truitt shaped sculptural practice in the 1960s. The exhibition *Anne Truitt. Pionierin der Minimal Art* invites visitors to understand abstraction as a language of perception and opens up new approaches to modern sculpture and to one's own aesthetic experience," says Dr. Martin Hoernes, Secretary General of the Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation.

Curator: Vivien Trommer

Selected Biography

Anne Truitt was born Anne Dean in 1921 in Baltimore, Maryland, and grew up in Easton on the Eastern Shore of the United States. She studied psychology at Bryn Mawr College, graduating in 1943. During World War II, she worked as a Red Cross nurse's aide at Massachusetts General Hospital, serving in the wards at night after working as a research assistant in the hospital's psychiatric laboratory during the day.

After marrying James McConnell Truitt in 1947, she initially lived in Washington, DC. Because her husband worked as a journalist, the family moved frequently, living in San Francisco, Dallas, and New York, and from 1964 to 1967 in Tokyo, Japan. Beginning in 1944, Truitt studied sculpture with Franz Denghausen (1911 – 1987) in Cambridge; in 1949 with Alexander Giampietro (1912 – 2010) in Washington, DC; in 1950 with Octavio Medellín (1907 – 1999) in Dallas; and in 1951 with Peter Lipman-Wulf (1905 – 1993) in New York, where she studied life drawing and wood carving.

Truitt had her first solo exhibition in 1963 at the André Emmerich Gallery in New York. Her sculptures were included in the key exhibitions that shaped the concept of Minimal Art, among them *Black, White and Grey* at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford (1964), *7 Sculptors* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia (1965/66), *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors* at the Jewish Museum in New York (1966), and *American Sculpture of the Sixties* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1967). She later presented major solo exhibitions at leading US museums, including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (1973), the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (1974), and the Baltimore Museum of Art (1975/1992). In 2009, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC, organized a major posthumous retrospective of her work.

Alongside her artistic practice, Truitt wrote four widely acclaimed books that distilled years of journal entries into an intimate account of her life as an artist: *Daybook* (1982), *Turn* (1986), *Prospect* (1996), and *Yield* (2022). A book of her selected writings, *Always Reaching*, was released by Yale University Press in 2023. Over the course of her life, Truitt received numerous honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and several honorary doctorates. She died in December 2004 in Washington, DC.

K20

**Press kit
March 25, 2026
page 6/14**

The exhibition is organized by the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Musée de Grenoble, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, and is made possible through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung.

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Curator: Vivien Trommer

**Media Partner of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung**

K21

**Supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of
North Rhine-Westphalia**

Supporting program

Opening

Friday, March 27., 7 – 10 pm / K20 / Entry free

We cordially invite you to the opening of the exhibition at K20.

Speakers:

Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

Ina Brandes MdL, Minister of Culture and Science of the German State of North Rhine-Westphalia

Vivien Trommer, Curator, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

Sneak Peak for young adults with Prof. Dr. Axel Buether (in German)

Even before the official opening, students, trainees and pupils (from secondary level II) have the opportunity to experience the exhibition and talk to special guests.

Prof. Dr. Axel Buether researches how colors influence our experiences, behavior, and health. As a professor of visual communication and perceptual psychology, he develops scientifically grounded color strategies for businesses and public institutions.

**Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen**

K20

Press kit
March 25, 2026
page 7/14

In this Sneak Peek, he uses the works of Anne Truitt to discuss color psychology, spatial effects, and perception. Together, we ask: What does color reveal about our inner worlds, and which shades move us most deeply?

Moderation: Jacqueline Est, Assistant Curator of Education

Friday / March, 3, 4 – 5.30 pm

Admission free with student or pupil ID

Exhibition tours (in German)

Sundays and holidays / 3 – 4 pm

Fee: €5 plus admission; registration required

as well as at the _Open House. The KPMG Art Evening

Free admission; on-site registration

Curator-led tours (in German)

Sunday / April, 19 / 3 pm

Wednesday / May, 13 / 5 pm

Wednesday / June, 3 / July, 1 / 6 pm

Entry free with an exhibition ticket

Combined Tours: Exhibition and Collection (in German)

What connects Anne Truitt's works with those of artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin, and Ad Reinhardt?

In a combined tour of the exhibition and the K20 collection, we'll explore Minimal Art and Color Field Painting.

Fee: €7 plus admission; registration required

K21

Dates:

Sat, April, 18, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sat, May, 16, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sat, June, 20, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sat, July, 18, 3 – 4.30 pm

Philipp Holstein reads from Anne Truitt (in German)

Daybook, Prospect, Turn, Yield

Tuesday, April 28, 7 pm / K20 Trinkaus Auditorium

Free admission, no registration required

Across four volumes of diaries, Anne Truitt reflected on her daily life—as an artist and teacher, as a child, a divorced woman, and a grandmother. These books offer insight into the continual formation of a personality, as well as into the intellectual foundations of her art. Even without ever having met her, readers often feel that they have found a friend in Truitt through the act of reading. The texts are also strikingly entertaining. At times, they unfold like a soap opera in which the great minds of the era make their appearances. For those who wish, the diaries can also be read as a form of guidance for living and a model for self-care. Truitt addresses themes of loneliness, motherhood, and moral responsibility.

Writers such as Rachel Kushner and Audrey Niffenegger have cited these texts as sources of inspiration. This evening is dedicated to introducing Anne Truitt through her writings.

Philipp Holstein is Head of the Feuilleton at the Rheinische Post. He leads the focus area "Text and Music" at the Robert Schumann Hochschule and teaches at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. In his event series "One Hour of the Present," he regularly presents and discusses new literary publications.

Art Appreciation and Mindfulness (in German)

At first glance, Anne Truitt's works appear minimalist, but upon closer inspection, they reveal a sensual, poetic depth. In a slow, meticulous process, the artist applied paint layer by layer—and in the same way, we take our time when viewing the art and deepen our appreciation through mindfulness exercises in the exhibition space.

With Natalia Gershevskaya – Art Educator & Guide for Mindful Art Appreciation

Fee: €30 including admission, registration required

Dates

Sat, Apr 18, 11.30 am – 1.30 pm

Sat, May 9, 11.30 am – 1.30 pm

Sat, June 13, 11.30 am – 1.30 pm

Sat, July 11, 11.30 am – 1.30 pm

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**Anne Truitt – Family Tours (in German)****Mal langsam**

Through tactile and visual exercises, hourglasses, and colored glasses, families explore the exhibition, discuss their favorite colors, and then create their own meditative paintings in the art studio.

Fee: €3 plus admission, registration required

Dates

Sun, Apr 5, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sun, May 3, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sun, June 7, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sun, July 5, 3 – 4.30 pm

Sun, August 2, 3 – 4.30 pm

Wall texts

1921 – 2004

Finally in Europe

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen presents the first European retrospective of Anne Truitt. Bringing together around 120 works spanning more than four decades, the exhibition celebrates an artist long recognized in the United States as a leading innovator of Minimal Art – yet still largely unfamiliar to European audiences.

When Minimal Art emerged in New York around 1960, it caused a stir with its simple forms, serial objects, and industrially produced materials. Truitt's pioneering box like sculptures led the influential critic Clement Greenberg to hail her as a pioneer of this new movement as early as 1967. Truitt, however, rejected that label: "My art is maximal as far as I am concerned," she stated in 1986.

Nevertheless, from 1961 onward, Truitt forged a new understanding of sculpture. She treated color as a carrier of meaning and, unlike her male colleagues, placed personal experience at the center of the artistic encounter. This exhibition reveals that Minimal Art was not only rigorous and formal but, through Truitt's use of color, also deeply poetic, intimate, and sensuous. With this exhibition, following presentations of Carmen Herrera (2018), Charlotte Posenenske (2020), and Lygia Pape (2022), the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen continues to broaden the narrative of postwar art by foregrounding woman artists of decisive influence.

K21

1961 – 1963

Beyond Modern Sculpture

In 1961, Truitt visited the groundbreaking exhibition *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, accompanied by the painter Mary Pinchot Meyer. For the first time, she encountered the monochromatic paintings of Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt.

Truitt experienced the exhibition as a profound awakening. She later recalled, "It seemed to me that I had never before been free ... I stayed up almost the whole night." Inspired, she began to envision her work *First* (1961). The next morning, she purchased wood, clamps, and glue, constructing a piece reminiscent of a small picket fence, which she then painted with white house paint.

This marked the beginning of one of her most productive periods. Between 1961 and 1963, Truitt created 35 large-scale wooden sculptures in shades of bright white or deep, dark tones. In early 1963, Truitt presented her first solo exhibition in New York City, marking a moment that astonished the art community: She was the first to take painting off the wall

and redefine it as freestanding sculpture. Moreover, her radical use of color – subtle, layered, and deliberate – imbued simple form with meaning, memory, and affect.

1964 – 1967

Japan. A Pivotal Turn

When Truitt moved to Japan with her family, the country was in the midst of rapid change. Tokyo pulsed as the world's largest city, the new Shinkansen bullet train raced through the countryside, and the 1964 Olympics announced Japan's vibrant return after World War II. Her husband, James Truitt, reported on these years of change as Tokyo Bureau Chief for *Newsweek*.

For Anne Truitt, this period proved to be a decisive artistic turning point. She created 23 aluminum sculptures, applying vivid layers of marine paint to their surfaces for the first time. Truitt experimented with folded metals, letting the structures come alive in intense, contrasting colors. She also explored these dynamic interactions of form and color in her works on paper. During this time, her works were broadly exhibited in both Tokyo and the United States.

Truitt experienced her time in Japan as both isolating and profoundly clarifying. The distance sharpened her artistic vision. Upon returning to Washington, DC, in 1967, she began to reflect on the interplay of color and light, working with layers, translucency, and the delicate tension between color and form. Still, her doubts about the metal pieces lingered. She described them as “simply intelligent work, lif less.” In 1971, she destroyed all the remaining sculptures in her possession and returned to the material that had defined her earlier breakthroughs: wood.

1974 – 1975

Signs of Change

This series of 72 drawings in pencil and white acrylic paint is dedicated to the small town of Easton, Maryland, near Washington, DC, where Truitt spent the first 14 years of her life. When her parents fell gravely ill during the Great Depression, Truitt and her siblings moved in 1934 to live with their aunt and uncle in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Against the backdrop of both personal and societal upheavals— divorce, financial insecurity, the oil crisis of 1973, and the end of the Vietnam War – Truitt translated this renewed sense of uncertainty into drawing. As she worked, she also reflected on the architecture of Easton and recognized that buildings can act as protective fortresses – though her own childhood home only briefly offered such a sense of safety.

In the *Easton Notebooks*, she searched for an abstract visual language to express this inner conflict and her doubts as an artist. She experimented with subtle shifts of brightness, pressing the pencil more lightly or more firmly onto the paper. In the precise lines, one can

sense both the strong and delicate movements of her hand, the passage of time, and the sometimes unexpected changes that shape life.

**1969 – 2004
Color in Space**

Truitt established herself with her slender, freestanding sculptures, whose subtle colors can transform entire spaces. In the 1960s, she was one of the few woman artists to take part in major exhibitions across the United States, playing a pivotal role in defining Minimal Art. In 1973, the Whitney Museum in New York City celebrated her sculptures and drawings with a widely acclaimed solo exhibition – a landmark moment in her career.

Precision was at the heart of Truitt's practice. She had her constructions built in marine mahogany plywood by a fabricator, then applied multiple coats of white gesso, followed by as many as forty layers of acrylic paint. Each was meticulously sanded down to achieve a perfectly smooth surface of striking depth and luminosity. Elevated slightly on small risers, the works seem to hover in space like blocks of pure color.

Truitt worked her material until it became infused with memory, thought, encounters, and places. Her evocative titles reveal a deep sense of empathy and personal reflection, while her sculptures open spaces for individual associations and point toward shared human experience.

**1973 – 1999
Traces of the Unseen**

In 1975, Truitt presented ten *Arundel paintings* for the first time at the Baltimore Museum of Art – and caused a public scandal. Today, she stands out as one of the early pioneers of radically minimal white-on-white painting.

The series, begun in 1973 and originally called the *White Paintings*, includes elongated, square, and rectangular canvases. Truitt primed each surface with a chalky white gesso before layering fine lines of graphite and dense titanium white. Only upon close inspection do these barely perceptible traces emerge from the painting's white surface. The subtly frayed edges and delicate variations of brushwork reveal her effort to make visible the unseen currents of force and energy.

The heated media reaction to her exhibition spurred Truitt to speak publicly about her art. Through her books – *Daybook* (1982), *Turn* (1986), *Prospect* (1996), and *Yield* (2022) – she began to share her thoughts and experiences, offering a personal window into her life as an artist. Today she is known as much for her writing as for her art.

1969 – 1993

Beneath the Surface

Truitt began creating her first abstract paintings as early as 1966 in Tokyo. Eschewing traditional brushes, she used paint rollers to achieve precise compositions in rich, luminous colors. Truitt herself described these works as “color fields” or “horizons.”

Echoing her sculptural vision, Truitt’s paintings explore a delicate balance between space, color, and form. Her elongated vertical and horizontal formats seem to expand the painted surface, as if space were beginning to unfold. Using a masking technique she herself developed, Truitt built each composition gradually – layer by layer – allowing fields of color to meet, overlap, or gently repel one another. In her later paintings, she heightened their physical presence by letting the paint flow softly over the rounded edges of the stretcher, extending color into the surrounding space.

Without prescribing a fixed interpretation, Truitt’s paintings fuse vibrant color and subtle associations into a whole. Here, color becomes a medium of connection – linking surface and space, matter and sensation, thought and perception.

2001 – 2004

The Last Paintings

K21

These black canvases – entitled *Pith* – are among Truitt’s final series, which she worked on during the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001.

Her journals reveal how, like many artists at the time, she sought to process the attacks and to understand their long-term consequences. She reflected on how the events were politically leveraged to stir patriotism in the United States. They also brought back memories of her experiences during World War II. In 1943 and 1944, before becoming an artist, Truitt worked in a psychiatric clinic, conducting research on methods to counter the effects of oxygen deprivation in pilots – a role that brought her into direct contact with the traumatic toll of war.

These reflections resonate in her profoundly black canvases, whose frayed edges dissolve into space. As if suspended in a vacuum, Truitt captures the in-between: a moment of shock and dislocation, held in place by the expanses of acrylic that seem to freeze the very sensation of upheaval.

K20

**Press kit
March 25, 2026
page 13/14**

Exhibition Preview

**Playground
from April 25, 2026**

Press preview and press conference: April 23, 2026, from 10 am at K20

The exhibition “Playground” invites children to touch, climb, run and imagine in an otherworldly landscape by the artist Sonia Kazovsky. Installed in K20’s largest exhibition hall, this site-specific artwork approaches play as an artistic, sensory, and relational experience. In Playground, children and their caregivers can wear transformative props and costumes, roll down a vast desert hill, gather around a bonfire, and swing on an upturned street light. Playground re-centers on children as a core audience of art museums and offers a shared space for imagination.

Supported by Targobank and NL Netherlands

**Jon Rafman. Main Stream Media
May 30 – September 27, 2026**

K21

Press preview and press conference: May 28, 2026, from 10 am at K21

Jon Rafman (b. 1981, in Montreal) has been considered a pioneering artist of the digital age since the 2010s. Euphoric and critical at the same time, he uses the possibilities of the internet and its exuberant computer-based visual language for his videos and films. Through his engagement with music, pop culture, fashion, and design, Rafman continuously experiments with and develops new imaging techniques. The exhibition at K21 will feature Rafman’s latest experiments with artificial intelligence (AI) in a museum setting for the first time. This will be the artist’s first solo exhibition in a German museum, presenting an overview of his work since 2008, including *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (2008–ongoing), *Kool Aid Man in Second Life* (2008–11), and *Dream Journal* (2019). The exhibition will focus on his current project, *Mainstream Media Network*, which includes a music television channel currently in development that uses AI models to revive the historic MTV of the 1980s. The exhibition will be accompanied by an extensive lecture and education program focusing particularly on media literacy for young people. A monographic publication will also be released.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Friends of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and is supported by the Karen and Uwe Hollweg Stiftung and LEAP Foundation.

Media partner of the exhibition
Monopol

**Holly Herndon & Mat Dryhurst. Starmirror
June 27 – October 11, 2026****Press preview and press conference: June 25, 2026, from 10 am at K21**

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin partner to realize a major exhibition with artists and technologists Holly Herndon (b. 1980 in Johnson City) and Mat Dryhurst (b. 1984 in Birmingham). The duo is internationally recognized for their work at the intersection of art, music, machine learning, and experimental organization.

With *Starmirror*, Herndon and Dryhurst transform the exhibition spaces of both institutions into a training ground for collaborative art and music production between humans and AI. Working with the architectural office sub, they create an immersive sound installation that functions simultaneously as a recording and listening environment. Throughout the exhibition, visitors are invited to participate in public vocal recording sessions, alongside local community choirs and under the guidance of a vocal ensemble. The recordings will form a dataset that enables the artists to form an AI choir. A songbook specifically developed for the project is based on “Ordo Virtutum”, a 12th-century medieval morality play by Hildegard von Bingen—the Benedictine abbess and polymath—in which a soul must choose between the forces of good and evil. The exhibition presents AI as a tangible, collective process and sheds light on hierarchies of technical protocols and their invisible role in shaping the world around us.

The exhibition is one out of eleven selected projects, that the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) supports through its new program “Art & AI – Fonds for Artistic Projects on AI and society”.

The exhibition design is conceived by the architectural office sub.

The exhibition is a collaboration between the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin where it will be on view from 31 October 2025 to 18 January 2026.

Funded by the Art & AI programme of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation). Funded by the Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media).

Media partner of the exhibition
Monopol