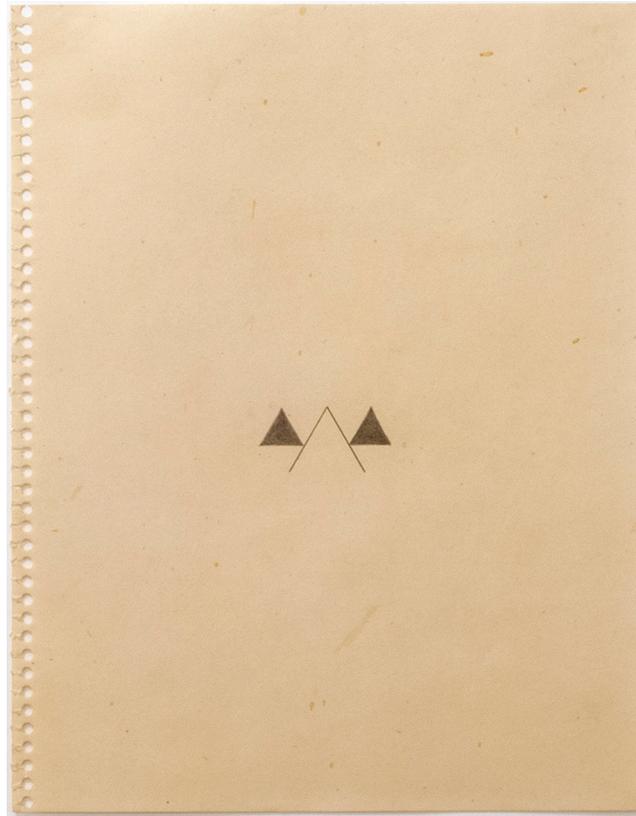


ANNEMARIE VERNA GALLERY

INSIGHT #1 – Richard Tuttle, *Helios*



Richard Tuttle, *Helios*, 1975, 28 x 21.5 cm, pencil on paper, photo: Annemarie Verna Gallery, Zurich

Helios, a pencil drawing from 1975, belongs to the so-called *center point drawings*. It is not a group of works or a series, but rather works on paper whose defining aspect is the center point. In *Helios*, the triangle occupying the middle, open at the bottom, aims toward the center like an arrow. On its right and left there are two smaller, closed and shaded triangles. The center of the picture, an intrinsic point of calm, is formed by the confluence of imaginary lines. These ensue from the vertically directed arrowhead and the three horizontally aligned corner points of the triangles.

Although the pictorial evidence transpires below the center line of the image, the forms point beyond this border and activate the otherwise empty upper half of the page.

The internal organization of *Helios* is thus focused on the center. In the *center point drawings*, which were created from 1975 onwards, the center point is also determinative for the location of the drawing on the wall and thus for its positioning in a spatial context. [Richard Tuttle](#) does not think of his drawings as two-dimensional pictorial surfaces, but as part of an atmospheric structure. In 1990 he wrote:

„For years, I worked with drawing at different heights. The paper ‚designated‘, but was place. In the Cartesian method of locating by using a grid, paper is already place.“¹

Helios belongs to an extensive collection of 289 drawings that Richard Tuttle entrusted the Annemarie Verna Gallery to administer back in 1976. These works on paper, created between 1968 and 1976, had to first be reviewed and ordered. Toward the end of 1976, in collaboration with the artist, this process led to the *List of Drawing Material of Richard Tuttle*, including precise descriptions of the sheets, work details and a numbering system. *Helios* is number 170.² A selection of 100 drawings was exhibited at the Kunsthalle Basel in 1977. In 1979, this compilation of drawing material was augmented with illustrations and collected in the book *List of Drawing Material of Richard Tuttle & Appendices*. To this day, the publication continues to be an indispensable reference work, not only for Tuttle's early drawings, but also for his imagery and compositions in general.

In the course of this intensive engagement with the drawing material, the need for more precise stipulations became apparent, especially with regard to the *center point drawings*. The initial notation "Center point drawings to be placed in center of wall at a specified point (height), using a specified means of hanging" was individually formulated for each work, with specific installation instructions given for the respective drawing. For

Helios, the center of the sheet was placed at a height of 54" (137.2 cm) from the floor and a very direct hanging method – the application of glue to the back of the upper corners – was prescribed. Adhering the work directly to the wall has something immediate and raw, but also destructive about it, as it causes damage to the paper every time the work is hung. In the 1980s, Tuttle therefore decided to use a simple frame for *Helios*.

The fact that Tuttle employs such instructions to determine how his works are hung, framed and positioned – which applies not only to his drawings – is essential to his working process and understanding of the work. Artworks are spatial in their physical manifestation, i.e. they relate to the wall surface, floor and boundaries of the given space, but also to the prevailing lighting. With his works, Tuttle does not primarily respond to a specific site, but engages with the changing spatial situation³ created by the placement of the artwork. Only in the confrontation with the spatial presence does the work of art attain its full development. This presence also includes the perceiving subject – both the artist and the viewer. The chosen installation heights are not arbitrary, but serve as recurring coordinates in the very personal spatial orientation of the artist.

Richard Tuttle usually assembled the drawings, which were created between 1968 and 1976, into groups or series. *Helios*, on the other hand, is a single sheet that vividly demonstrates a principle in Tuttle's art: the similar-dissimilar. *Helios* can be linked to other works from this period by means of formal similarities. Triangles, repeated motifs as well as the themes open-closed, light-dark or positive-negative can be found in many other drawings. At the same time, however, the distinctly graphic formulation of *Helios* is dissimilar to most other drawings, and only explicitly evident in *White Angle*, 1974 (nr. 123), *60" center point works (11)*, 1975 (nr. 133) and *Send*, 1975 (nr. 162).

Moreover, *Helios* has its own strong narrative element. Forms and titles open up potential fields of meaning ranging from

mountains to the center of the solar system and the world of ancient Greek gods. This complexity also characterizes Richard Tuttle's intellectual engagement with ever-changing historical, scientific, cultural and literary themes. From these diverse sources, he develops a complex and perpetually ambiguous substrate that nourishes his works. Tuttle never provides simple explanations, but instead delivers commentaries that lead to adventuresome wrong turns and detours.

In many respects, *Helios* and the other 288 drawings in the *List of Drawing Material of Richard Tuttle* represent the cornerstone of his oeuvre. The forms developed and invented therein, the different materials, titles and installation specifications are still valid today.

(Text: Laura Mahlstein, PhD; Translation: Julia Thorson)

1) Richard Tuttle, "Paper is Place", Greenwich Village, New York, January 7, 1990, written for the planned but never published catalog for the exhibition Radikal auf Papier [Radical on Paper], Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau, February 10 to March 25, 1990, in: *Richard Tuttle: A Fair Sampling – Collected Writings 1966–2019*, ed. by Dieter Schwarz, Cologne: König, 2019, p. 195.

2) *List of Drawing Material of Richard Tuttle & Appendices*, ed. by Gianfranco u. Annemarie Verna, Robert Krauthammer, Alfred Gutzwiller, Richard Tuttle, Zurich 1979, nr. 170, pp. 217/218.

3) Robert Ryman often uses the term *situation* to describe how works of art are only finished once they are installed, as they need the wall and the light as specific spatial references. See Madeleine Grynsztejn: "A Universe of Small Truths", in: *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2005, pp. 18–64, 43; and Yves-Alain Bois, "Ryman's Lab", in: *Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture: Paintings from the Daros Collection, Zürich: Scalp 1999*, pp. 105–121, 108.

ANNEMARIE VERNA GALERIE

INSIGHT #1 – Richard Tuttle, *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*



Richard Tuttle, *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, 2009, 29.5 x 82.5 cm, watercolor, acrylic, graphite, colored pencil, ballpoint pen and goldleaf on paper and cardboard
photo: Annemarie Verna Gallery, Zurich

Rest on the Flight to Egypt from 2009 consists of eight small notepad sheets and a small cardboard panel adorned with gold leaf. The slightly overlapping sheets are horizontally arrayed on a black cardboard and held in a gilded frame.

Rest on the Flight to Egypt is much more than a drawing in the classic sense of the word. In addition to colored pencils and ballpoint pens, [Richard Tuttle](#) also made use of watercolor and acrylic paint, which he applied with brushes. The 12.5 x 8.7 cm sheets of paper vary in composition and motif and include sketched notations, freely painted arcs, architecturally suggestive combinations, and a peculiar shape resembling a hollowed-out fossil. As the edges of the individual drawings overlap, the result is not only an eight-part juxtaposition, but also an in-front-of and behind with an alternation of visible and concealed zones.

Rest on the Flight to Egypt thus illustrates an important aspect of Richard Tuttle's oeuvre: the hidden. Time and again, half-covered, covered and hidden margins, texts, frame sections or entire poems elude a cursory glance and reinforce the sense that Richard Tuttle's works are never entirely at one's disposal.

The torn-out notepad sheets of *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* are symptomatic of Richard Tuttle's works on paper. For him, paper is not simply a plain white ground for drawing, a pure carrier, but an independent material.

„Paper is a web, a body. If we don't forget, paper is dynamic, it could embody consciousness.“¹



Size, texture, thickness, coloring and ruling, but also the torn edges of spiral-bound notebooks or the adhesive residue from glued watercolor pads are qualities that contribute to the *pictorial action*. They form reference points within the drawing, but also define the edge of the sheet. While the center of the work is of importance in the early *center point drawings*, it is striking how deliberately Richard Tuttle later treats paper margins, textile hems, frame members and outer edges, thus directing the viewer's attention to the boundaries of the work.² In *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, too, the ripped-out sections emphasize the bottom edge of the small sheets. The unevenly frayed perforations from the spiral binding are effectively staged against the black background and generate a rhythmic staccato of open and closed squares. A closer look reveals how tenuously the tattered shreds are attached and how subtly the lower perimeter of the sheets hovers over the black background. Here the drawing becomes a paper object.

Concentrating on the motifs in *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, a fine movement – similar to different tonal pitches in a musical score – can be seen running through the eight-part sequence of drawings. This movement is disrupted by the fourth sheet, which is not mounted vertically like the rest, but instead horizontally. Its torn-out spiral holes rest atop the preceding third sheet, connecting with the green rectangle and yellow horizon

as a collage element. The two double arcs in yellow form a kind of bracket around an intriguing central void. The gap at the top of the sheet is sealed by a strip of cardboard encased in gold leaf. Richard Tuttle said:

„[The] Gold rectangle over horizontal drawing is on top = ‚the rest‘, I guess?“³



The golden bar is thus inserted less as a caesura than as a factor of expansion – quite literally so, as the fourth sheet is wider than the others. But also in a figurative sense, for the light reflected by the gold integrates the surrounding viewing space into the work in the form of an echo.

The front strip of the otherwise white frame of *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* was also gilded according to the artist's exact specifications. The gold leaf was applied to a red background and finely polished. Like the eight drawings, the individual gold leaf pieces overlap, rhythmically dividing the front of the frame into individual sections.



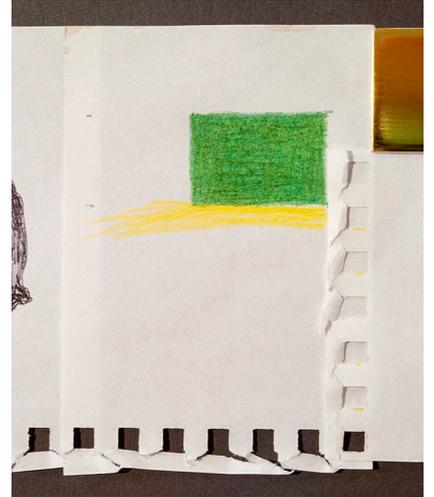
Gold as a color and material is a recurring element in Tuttle's work, such as in the portfolio *Gold* from 2001, the work group *Fake Gold* from 2015, or the gold-framed 20 *Collage Drawings* from 1977. The artist thereby references two major themes of Western art dating back to the Middle Ages: the tradition of the gilded frame and the symbolic nature of light in Christian philosophy – the reflective gold symbolizing the good and the beautiful, but also the reflection of the divine.

„Light is a memory of all the things beauty taught us in the past, and it accesses the Future of our dreams.“⁴

To a lesser degree, a certain symbolism of light is certainly also important for Richard Tuttle. Its physical and metaphorical penetration of space and time, as well as the visual possibilities of light and shadowed zones, play a central role in the illumination of his works in the exhibition space.

Rest on the Flight to Egypt convincingly demonstrates how Richard Tuttle's pictorial inventions, choice of material and titling contribute to the multilayered fields of reference. Alongside their standing as autonomous elements, such aspects can also be read as commentaries on existing traditions and discourses, even extending beyond a Western context.

(Text: Laura Mahlstein, PhD; Translation: Julia Thorson)



- 1) Richard Tuttle, "Costume", in: Richard Tuttle: *A Fair Sampling – Collected Writings 1966–2019*, ed. by Dieter Schwarz, Cologne: König, 2019, p. 199.
- 2) McDowell Tara: "Framed Drawings", in: *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2005, pp. 227–231, 227 and Storr Robert: "Just Exquisite? The Art of Richard Tuttle", in: *Artforum* 36, November 1997, p. 93.
- 3) Richard Tuttle, correspondence with the author 2010.
- 4) Richard Tuttle, "I wonder what beauty means to me?", in: *Richard Tuttle: A Fair Sampling – Collected Writings 1966–2019*, ed. by Dieter Schwarz, Cologne: König, 2019, pp. 391–395, 395.

INSIGHT #1 – *Indoor Outdoor (1–4)* von Richard Tuttle



Richard Tuttle, *Indoor Outdoor (1-4)*, 29.8 x 84 cm, acrylic on paper, photo: Annemarie Verna Gallery, Zurich

Indoor Outdoor from 2012 is a hybrid work on paper. Neither the term painting nor drawing seems to fit. Using his brush, [Richard Tuttle](#) placed one or two small color events in acrylic on each of the four sheets. The application of color and surface treatment are of a painterly quality, while the isolated figures have something drawn about them and the last sheet even features a small collage of paint and adhesive strips. The round holes from the spiral binding are all severed from being torn off, but otherwise intact. The four sheets of paper, each measuring 29.5 x 21 cm, are arranged contiguously in perfect alignment on a black cardboard panel, held by a black frame. This gives *Indoor Outdoor* a rigor that is otherwise rather unusual for Richard Tuttle. A slight amount of play in the paper reveals narrow gaps between the sheets. The visible black of the cardboard below takes on the appearance of fine cuts tapering towards the top and bottom. The white paper surface is thus divided into visible segments, reinforcing the autonomy of the four sheets.

This formation of an ensemble between work unit and individual part is a central and compelling aspect of Tuttle's oeuvre – an oeuvre that is mostly composed of work groups, series and multi-part works.

With *Indoor Outdoor*, the multipartite nature of such works can be understood as a visual sequence – a sequence, however, which leaves the direction, pace and rhythm of viewing open, allowing the various elements to attract the eye. For example, the reddish elements on sheets two and three form a striking focal point. They create a strong chromatic accent and tend to transition from abstraction into the representational. They are reminiscent of a cloud, crescent moon and star, suggesting associations with outdoor. This dialectic between abstract form and figurative object is decisive for Tuttle's vocabulary and results in the fact that his glyphs¹ always simultaneously function as enigmatic allusions.

**„If you create the space between appearance and reality,
you can do anything.“²**

The same applies to the double figure in light and dark brown on the first sheet. The two curved brushstrokes facing each other here seem to embody the duality of the title. Finally, the collage on the last sheet is also a visual invitation. More three-dimensional than the other elements, its physical constitution is not immediately apparent. Richard Tuttle placed a torn piece of adhesive tape on a layer of gray paint. On top of this he applied two more layers of paint, first a light blue, then a pink circle cut at the bottom. He then worked this pinkish red area with a pointed object, scraping off paint and pressing minute holes into the collage. Tuttle's works often feature such damaged surfaces or crumpled and glued paper. Paint and paper thus become a haptic working material. The artist also makes frequent use of adhesive tape. This is everyday material that is not intended to last for eternity, imbuing the montages with the appearance of fragile crafted structures.

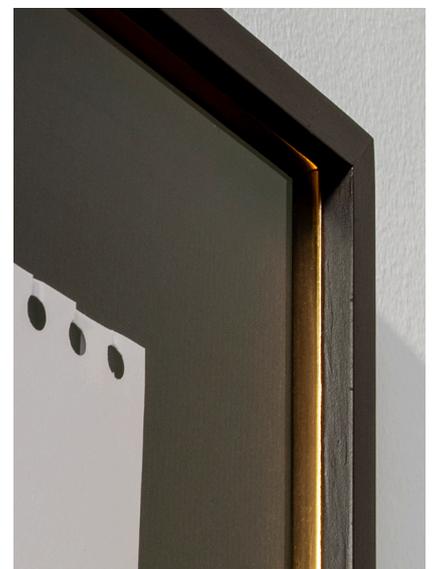
In reference to the title *Indoor Outdoor*, the motifs are reminiscent of nature, stars, atmospheric moods or the four elements, i.e. the outdoor realm.

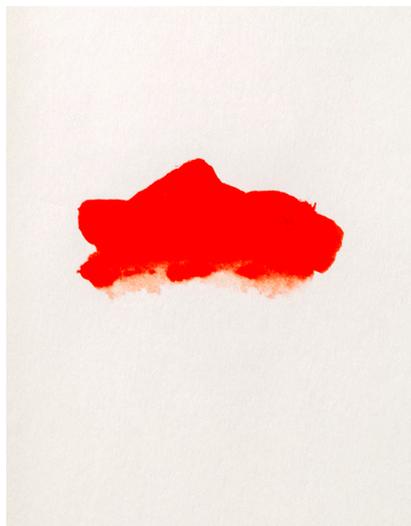
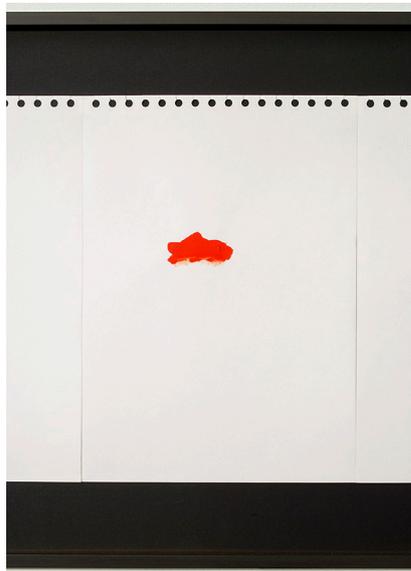
The interior, on the other hand – indoor – is more difficult to perceive. But taking a closer look at the framing, it becomes clear that the interplay between indoor and outdoor is fundamental to Richard Tuttle's drawings. When viewing *Indoor Outdoor* from the front, the frame cannot be clearly made out, as the synchronization of the rear panel in black and the frame in the same color neutralizes the multi layered nature of the drawing, glazing and framing. Only when the work is viewed from the side does a gold-plated inner frame strip become visible as a reflective strip between the rear panel and the glass. The gold is not directed outwards – as in the black chamfered frames from the 19th century with their gilded inner beading – but is kept behind the glass and drawn into the space of the work itself. As a consequence, the light reflected by the gold also radiates inwards. The gold inner strip is the same width as the black outer strip, resulting in a spatial doubling in which the glass acts as a membrane between inside and outside.

By the time of the *Framed Drawings* in the 1980s, framing had become an integrally established part of a drawing for Richard Tuttle. Individual sheets and groups of works are framed with painstakingly elaborated, painted or gilded frames. At times, as objects in and of themselves, they protrude far beyond the drawing. This creates an intensive interplay between work, framing and wall. In such cases, the frame plays the role of mediator, located at the point of transition from work to wall or from the illusion of drawing to spatial reality. This evokes the tradition of painted artist's frames from the 19th century as well as reflections on the relationship between work and wall in American art of the 1960s and 1970s.

Indoor Outdoor demonstrates Tuttle's virtuosic treatment of the drawing as a physical body. The drawing on the sheet of paper, the combination of the sheets and the joining of sheet, background, glass, frame and wall provide various means of creating sequences, rhythms and spatial relationships. The individual units are combined into ensembles in which the individual parts remain visible as such and relate to one other.

(Text: Laura Mahlstein, PhD; Translation: Julia Thorson)





- 1) Richard Tuttle often refers to his symbolic forms as glyphs. Originally used for an incised or sculptural representation, today the term mainly refers to the graphic depiction of a character within a particular typeface. Siegel Katy: "As Far as Language goes", in: *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2005, pp. 334-345, 335.
- 2) Richard Tuttle in conversation with Tara McDowell in: McDowell Tara: "Framed Drawings", in: *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2005, pp. 227-231, 227.