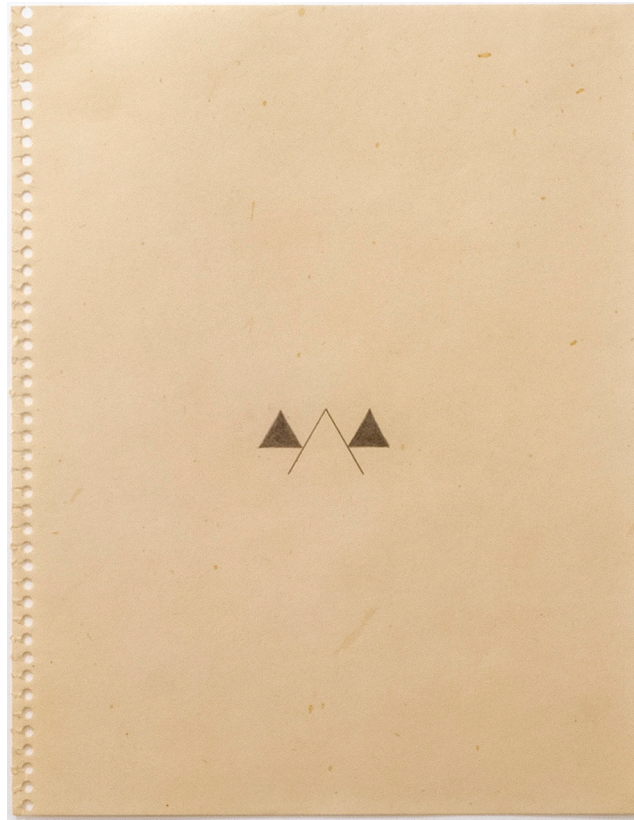


ANNEMARIE VERNA GALLERY

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.