

Richard Tuttle  
MATRIX/BERKELEY 160

University Art Museum /  
Pacific Film Archive  
mid October 1993 - early January  
1994

Detail of sculpture, 1993



Since the early 1960s, Richard Tuttle has made art that focuses on the tenets of Modernism, testing them and advancing that which he believes to be of value. Surprise and humor often distinguish his art from a more severe and programmatic approach taken by other artists of his generation. Writing about himself, Tuttle said, "One of the major curiosities of the work of Richard Tuttle is that he should take so seriously what others find so funny. That is, he delights in all sorts of puns—visual and literary—and doing 'tricks,' even magic, but in the overall he takes his work with deadly seriousness."<sup>1</sup>

The present exhibition, *Space/sculpture*, extends Tuttle's investigation of the drawn vertical line as an element suggestive of both the aesthetic legacy of Western art history and the sublime perfection of the natural world. Specifically, in this exhibition, Tuttle has responded to his own previous exhibition, *Chaos, The Form*, held in Baden-Baden, Germany, in which there were small pieces close to the floor which were connected by pencil lines to the ceiling. "I happen to think that the Modern period is characterized by a rush toward *us*. There's something which is not included in this rush forward; that, you could almost say metaphorically, is the line. When I ask what my work might look like without the line, I'm asking what art will look like in a period that is the next step into time."<sup>2</sup> "In the Berkeley exhibition, five of the pieces will have the pencil line descending to the floor and five will have it rising to the ceiling."<sup>3</sup> From the relationship of these works Tuttle hopes that, "the

viewer will be able to make a piece in the mind which has no line at all."<sup>4</sup>

Despite their free-form appearance, Tuttle's sculptures are the result of an extremely rigorous process that is contemplative, philosophical, and highly informed by art history. As is much of the work he has created over the past thirty years, these sculptures are concerned with the complex relation between chaos and order. In a monoprint made by Tuttle at San Francisco's Limestone Press in 1993, the artist incorporated Heidegger's translation of the earliest known example of Greek philosophy, "The Anaximander Fragment":

"Things pass from concealment to unconcealment, along lines of usage; for they let order belong, and thereby also reck, to one another in the surmounting of disorder."<sup>5</sup>

This fragment has been interpreted as describing a universal law in which there is a continual flux and "retribution of cosmic powers."<sup>6</sup> That is, the actions of one phenomenon, a flood, for example, in going beyond certain natural limits, will engender its opposite, a drought, through a law of mutual balance. Thus, what may appear to be chaotic in its particulars can be understood as one aspect of a larger harmony.

Tuttle has recently spoken about the importance of the legacy of the Spanish sculptor Julio González who, alongside Picasso in the 1920s and '30s, opened a vast new territory for sculpture by abandoning the medium's traditional dependence on solid mass in favor of what he called

"drawing in space." Using bent and welded metal rods, González could suggest with great subtlety the volumes and contours of forms while at the same time leaving his work open to the interpenetration of space. In so doing, González—like Tuttle in his own spatially open compositions—underlines the tenuousness of seeing form in a particular *place*. Rather, both of these artists suggest that any form not only exists in relation to its context, but that such form, and its context, are in a perpetual state of change.

Tuttle's embrace of space as an integral aspect of his sculpture, as indicated by the title of this exhibition, *Space/sculpture*, is especially fortuitous given the complex spatial properties of the atrium gallery of the museum. In planning for the exhibition, the artist gave special consideration to the unusual variety of perspectives and distances from which the pieces could be seen. Although they were conceived individually, Tuttle has raised the possibility that they might also be conceived as multiple aspects of a single aesthetic experience. "Starting with concept," Tuttle observes, "each piece evolves along lines which will make it a 'bite,' if the relation of the ten pieces to the 'eleventh' were a caterpillar biting an apple ten times in ten different places. The title *Space/sculpture* tries to portray the relationship of the ten pieces in the space to the eleventh 'sculpture.'"<sup>7</sup>

Tuttle's sculpture illuminates the relation between the eye and the mind, helping us to "see" seeing. He draws our attention both to the pleasures and paradoxes of visual perception in the present moment

as well as suggesting how seeing itself has changed over the course of history.

Richard Tuttle was born in Rahway, New Jersey in 1941. He currently lives in Santa Fe and maintains a studio on a mesa north-east of Abiquiu, New Mexico.

Lawrence Rinder

1. Richard Tuttle, "Serious," artist's statement, 24 August 1993, fax, p. 1.
2. Richard Tuttle, interview with Lawrence Rinder, *UAM/PFA Calendar*, Sept./Oct. 1993, p. 4.
3. Richard Tuttle, artist's statement, 25 August 1993, fax, p. 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 13-58.
6. Paul Seligman, *The Apeiron of Anaximander: A Study in the Origin and Function of Metaphysical Ideas*, (London: Athlone Press, 1962), p. 17.
7. Ibid. p. 1.

Works in MATRIX (all works are 1993, mixed media, lent by the artist):

*Space/sculpture, I.*

*Space/sculpture, II.*

*Space/sculpture, III.*

*Space/sculpture, IV.*

*Space/sculpture, V.*

*Space/sculpture, VI.*

*Space/sculpture, VII.*

*Space/sculpture, VIII.*

*Space/sculpture, IX.*

*Space/sculpture, X.*

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Selected recent exhibitions:

Institute of Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, Netherlands, *Richard Tuttle: Twenty Floor Drawings '91* (traveled to Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Valencia, Spain '92 and Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana '93; catalog); Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Valencia, Spain '92, and Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana '93, *The Poetry of Form: Richard Tuttle Drawings from the Vogel Collection* (catalog); Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland, *Time to Do Everything: Floor Drawings and Recent Work '92* (catalog); Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany, *Chaos, The Form '93* (catalog).