

MOUSSE

The Ground and Heaven Are One: Richard Tuttle

The American artist shares some thoughts on his practice, textiles, a formative experience in India, and allowing the viewer the widest possible freedom.



The Critical Edge III (2015), Courtesy the artist and The Pace Gallery. Photography by Damian Griffith

We must remember that the textile was symbolic in the counterculture of the 1960s, like long hair and smells, which went with the headbands. Now, the textile is symbolic in another way; it's interesting how things change. Collecting makes it visible. I have a pu'a from Kalimantan made to carry heads home from battle. When it's rolled up, its power disappears. The Balinese have a form of textile called *buboli*, which is woven so it filters out the bad spirits on your way to the temple. On some level, you can collect textiles as art. The invisible part of the world has a counterpart in the invisible part of the textile.

I am less interested in the “textile” aspect at this point, and more in that it's a more efficient way to paint than paint. And I'm more interested in the way the eye moves from panel to panel, how one can depict infinite movement that moves off the grid, than how it holds growth and form. We may someday get used to reading this kind of writing; I really want to learn what's possible to know from it.

I've been making a list recently of artists, poets, and philosophers whom I really love to love. Right now I am in Switzerland, where I installed a work of mine in a museum that is for seeing art, as opposed to looking at it. There are so many great works. I feel I have so many friends, I was humbled and grateful to be approached for this. It doesn't matter if they are historic. One of the newest artists on the list is someone whose publishers sent him into the high Alps in 1700 to paint the glaciers, which people were too afraid to go to see themselves; the publishers made prints from his paintings. The paintings had no value for a hundred years, even though they were the first paintings to give the world the wildest nature as controlled by art.

Textiles are a kind of poetry. The ground and heaven are one. There is a fluidity between them. What can create that fluidity? Almost anyone—a crying child, the wind blowing your hair, the dust you are supposed to become one day.

During my great adventure of going to India to make textiles when I was younger, I was so sick, almost dying, and I made jewelry for me and my friend there as part of my recovery. She had beautiful ivory teeth, so I chose tiny ivory beads around the throat as the first part of a necklace. There is a photograph of me twirling three tubes of textiles that we made in Surat—actually combining, juggling, and twirling—not bad for a little boy from New Jersey, no? Especially since I learned all I know about textiles from looking at the light on a river.

Ha! That makes me laugh, for I think of panorama as a lesser art, mostly because it insults the viewer, for whom I have the highest regard. Isn't it funny how film strips are shown horizontally when made to be vertical? Asiatic scroll painting lets you wander through the horizontal; it usually gives you a narrative element. This is not unlike *The Critical Edge*, my new show at Pace Gallery, where the viewer is free to make choices. It allows the visitor the richest possible experience of the light in darkness of which I am capable, at this time. The bonus is, it's not supposed to be that easy, is it?