

## Richard Tuttle at Sperone Westwater

Cast shadows have been an intermittent feature of Richard Tuttle's work at least since his brilliant wire pieces of the early 1970s. They figure again in the 60 new works (all dated 2007) seen in "Memory Comes from Dark Extension" at Sperone Westwater. Paradoxically, the shadows lend substance to these wee wall constructions. Made of stuff like papier-mâché, cardboard, hot glue, foil and sawdust, most of them are between 7 and 9 inches high and about half as wide. Each protrudes a few inches from the wall, mounted on the front edge of a cruciform structure that consists of an L-shaped bracket made of hammered aluminum armature wire supporting two wooden elements, one horizontal and one vertical. Each work was lit by a single, centered spotlight, ensuring that its conspicuous shadow became a formal element within the whole.

In the continuum between painting and sculpture that the artist has explored for four decades, this body of work leans toward sculpture. Of these objects (which he calls "extensions" and gives an alphabetical designation), 39 were grouped into four "sections" that constituted discrete works. According to gallery staff, only those that occupied the central space and composed what was titled *Section I (New York), twenty-one "...Extension A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U"* are to be understood as individual, stand-alone pieces. A few are subtly engaging, compelling the viewer to look long and hard to uncover their quirky complexity, such as a painted passage that is nearly concealed behind a flap of paper in *Section I, Extension J*.

Tuttle's taxonomy can be as tiresome as the titles are ponderous. Only in *Section V (New York), nine "...Extension A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I"* do the "extensions" operate in visual concert, striking a balance between variety and unity, the



Three mixed-medium sculptures in Richard Tuttle's exhibition "Memory Comes from Dark Extension," 2007; at Sperone Westwater.

many and the one, without being overwhelmed by arbitrariness. They overcome the monotonous modularity of the mount and build to a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Though doubtless not the artist's intention, it is amusing to imagine that *Extension C*, which includes a golf-ball-size lump of clay, twine, plaster and wire, is a model for a massive work. Inviting thoughts of a similar shift in scale are the U-shaped perforations in a squarish scrap of plastic that features in *Extension I*. They look like those air vents in big advertising banners. Elsewhere, the safety-in-numbers approach backfired, demonstrating Tuttle's admirably fecund practice but diminishing the impact of individual "extensions." The visual tedium of the repetition cried out for a heavy edit.

Tuttle has achieved a deservedly high profile by pressing a formally idiosyncratic position, despite legendary critical vitriol from major writers. He has emerged as a hugely influential master anti-craftsman, inspiring an untold number of laconic, inscrutable gestures. That he has had the last laugh would be more fun to watch if his new work measured up, if the focused attention *Section V* inspires were rewarded elsewhere. That doesn't happen. Tuttle merely marks time with these slight, fussy things.

—Stephen Maine

Alice in Wonderland: not playing cards come to life but little white boxes turned into creepy crawlies waving angular-spiral arms, poised on prickly-pear-pad feet. Things only got stranger when you picked up a checklist: it identified this as the "Small Rose" series—the name maybe deriving from the bud of a cactus pad, or from a vague flower stylization suggested by those spirals, or maybe due to a purely arbitrary decision by the artist. The whole gallery isn't seen from the entry, and Craft played that for effect. When you reached these seemingly animate creatures, the rest of the first gallery was visible and you saw other similar boxes with multiple sharp spiral arms, considerably larger in size, sitting squarely on the floor. You had a brief apprehension that the little ones were lures and would scuttle away, and the larger were predators or traps.

But in fact each is impassive, its white (painted aluminum) surface showing not the least trace of touch, and each is different. One is penetrated by a passage in which a set of childlike chubby legs with pronated feet surreally descend from a space insufficient for the rest of the body. In another, five large trumpet-shaped blooms (*datura*?) hang down with a kind of poisonous languor. In this "Medium Rose" series, the stiff spirals also rise from a barge-shaped protrusion