

The Modern



BEING THERE ART ASSIGNMENT #5
RICHARD TUTTLE
RELATIVE IN OUR SOCIETY, 1990

*“In some sense, the best art—or the aim of the best art—is to just let it be...
It’s not about making something happen, but about allowing something to take place.”*
—Richard Tuttle

This activity packet for high school students was designed in collaboration with Iris Bechtol to expand on ideas embodied in Richard Tuttle’s *Relative in Our Society*, 1990, an assemblage that is part of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth’s permanent collection.

Richard Tuttle (born 1941) draws beauty and poetry out of humble materials, creating works that exist in the present moment, reflect the fragility of the world, and allow for individual experiences of perception. Since the 1960s, he has been exploring and deconstructing the materials, forms, and spatial dimensions of art.

Tuttle’s work is rooted in intuition rather than predetermined systems. He does not begin a work with its final appearance in mind; rather, his process is one of search, improvisation, and discovery. The viewer’s sensory and conceptual experiences of the work are also central to his approach: how one perceives the shapes and textures of diverse materials, the nuances of their juxtapositions, and the ambiguous, open-ended meanings his constructions suggest.

Please watch and read the selected videos and texts about Richard Tuttle and assemblage. These resources will provide you with context about the artist before you begin the activities.

Art Term, Tate, “Assemblage”

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/assemblage>

Video, SFMOMA, “It’s alive! Richard Tuttle creates a wire piece for SFMOMA”

<https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/its-alive-richard-tuttle-creates-a-wire-piece-at-sfmoma/>

Video, Art21, “Richard Tuttle: Structures”

<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/richard-tuttle-in-structures-segment/>

Blog Post by Terri Thornton, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, “Remember when. Remember how. Richard Tuttle’s *Relative to Our Society*”

<https://www.themodern.org/blog/Remember-when-Remember-how-Richard-Tuttles-Relative-to-Our-Society/159>



Richard Tuttle

Relative in Our Society, 1990

Wood, wire, mesh, cedar branch, electrical wire, light bulbs, paper, and Masonite

73 x 23 x 10 inches

Museum purchase

Material Considerations: Assemblage

Before beginning, I would like to share this short poem by Mary Oliver with you:

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

*As long as you're dancing, you can
break the rules.*

*Sometimes breaking the rules is just
extending the rules.*

Sometimes there are no rules.

Refer to this poem if you feel stuck or just need a reminder to break, extend, and even disregard the rules of art.

Think about the term “assemblage,” as explained on the Tate’s Art Term webpage.

Remember that assemblage is sculpture assembled by placing disparate objects into a composition. It takes advantage of everyday materials, often discarded and considered “non-precious.” By working with these kinds of materials, anything becomes available for the artist to select and improvisationally “play” with.

Sometimes, I compare assemblage to making a meal with the random ingredients laying around the kitchen: the one can of chickpeas left in the pantry, the last bit of cream, a clove of garlic, half a lime, the curry powder hiding behind the sea salt, the spaghetti someone was saving for something else.

Three questions for you to consider before you begin locating your own materials:

1. Think about the way Richard Tuttle listed the materials for *Relative in Our Society*. Are you able to identify all the materials in the work?
2. Have you ever composed a sculpture with so many commonplace items such as electrical wire, a cedar branch, or light bulbs?
3. Do “found objects” have value for artists, even if we did not participate in their initial making?

Sculptural Response: Assemblage

Now, it's your turn!

Don't forget to experiment freely.

- Collect 10 to 20 objects from various rooms in your home. When choosing, think about the physical and familial relationships between the objects.
- Create a sculpture or installation from these objects inside or outside your home. Try to use only string, tape, or other non-permanent attachment devices, and limit your use of glue.
- Consider the spatial relationships of your objects when composing your sculpture.
- Photograph your sculpture. Compose your photograph so only the sculpture and the space it occupies are in the frame. Move other objects or move your sculpture as needed to get the ideal composition. Even, natural light is best, so try to avoid harsh or raking sunlight, if possible.
- Title your artwork and create a material checklist. Think back to the way Richard Tuttle listed the materials he used. Do not list the materials as "mixed media." Be specific!

Thank you for participating in these exercises about Richard Tuttle and assemblage.

If you would like to share your results, please fill out the photo release form and send it along with your files to jbarnett@themodern.org.

Please save the file as either a JPG or PDF and include First and Last name_Modern_5.

For example,
JesseBarnett_Modern_5.pdf
JesseBarnett_Modern_5.jpg

If you have any questions about the packet, instructions, or file sharing, please don't hesitate contacting me.

Take care out there.

Jesse Morgan Barnett
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