

## **Interview with Richard Tinkler by James Barron**

**Richard Tinkler:** I make them in pairs. I divide the space up into these different areas and then fill it in. Different colors in different shapes produce different effects.

**James Barron:** Did you always have this aptitude to record lines so precisely?

**RT:** I don't think they're actually that precise, but they're consistent. They're always off, but in a consistent way. I just do things naturally.

**JB:** When you say 'off,' do you mean it's an error, or is it intentional?

**RT:** No, I'm trying to make it as even as possible – to make it perfect, by doing it just as well as I can. It just needs to be off enough so that the space comes alive. I don't even know why I shade this way – it's just what I like to see. For some of these things, it doesn't really matter what I do; it's just that when I do it over and over again, it starts to mean something. Sometimes I pick something intuitively to begin with, and then it acquires meaning as I work with it.

**JB:** What happens to your sense of time when you're working on these?

**RT:** People ask if it's meditative, or something like that, but to me it just feels like working, like what work feels for anyone else. I'm making a lot of little decisions. I feel really focused, but in a comfortable way. It's not stressful.

**JB:** When you finish a work, is there a sense of relief or achievement?

**RT:** It feels good to finish them. I mean, they don't always work out. Sometimes I have to redo them; sometimes I change my mind before I finish it and leave it to start the next one. Sometimes the unfinished works end up looking really good.

**JB:** With some time.

**RT:** Yes. Earlier I did paintings in one sitting, in one day, but that doesn't really work anymore. There's a series of layers – each layer sits for a while before I go back in and add to it.

**JB:** It's a different process, then, for drawing.

**RT:** Yeah, they're pretty different processes, actually. They fill different needs or desires that I have. The paintings are more of a struggle. You have to work harder with the material, and things are less likely to work out. The drawings almost always work out. But I feel like I need the struggle with painting so that the drawings come easily. When the drawings work, I always feel like I carved them. When it works, everything falls into place, and the whole page is one object.

**JB:** Do you have associations with particular colors?

**RT:** Not that I know of. But I do like how a totally different thing happens with each color in these monochrome drawings. I like what happens when colors interact, but I don't have a specific association with each one.

**JB:** Do you ever work on paper that's toned?

**RT:** No, it's always white. Bright white.

**JB:** Are you intimidated by the first marks when you have a blank white page?

**RT:** No, because I have a way of starting. I always have an idea in my mind of what I want to do first. And as soon as I finish one I start another one; it's a continuous process. I'm never at a point where I'm not drawing. Everything starts from the middle, and the underlying shapes are often similar.

**JB:** This one looks like something from the sixties.

**RT:** A lot of times I feel like what I want to see is from the late sixties – or early seventies, even. I don't know why that is.

**JB:** To me, '67 to '71 is this kind of epiphany in popular music. I can sense a bit of this feeling of enlightenment that was happening in that cultural moment. Do you ever listen to music while you're working on the drawings?

**RT:** Yeah, I mostly listen to classical music, but I also like to listen to public radio sometimes.

**JB:** Are there particular composers that you like?

**RT:** I tend toward early music – Renaissance, Baroque, etc. But I love it all. I grew up in an orphan class family. We didn't go to art museums; we didn't watch television; we didn't go to the movies; we didn't listen to pop music, but I could listen to classical music. I had this radio that I could reach as a really little kid, so I started listening to it really early on. And then I had some records – it was like my introduction to art. All of art history is there, in classical music. You have all the different periods and ideas. When I was a kid in the 80s, there were still great orchestras in every city, with great conductors – all these people had come over because of the war. America was full of great orchestras. And they had radio broadcasts almost every night of the week, and there would be introductions where the conductor spoke about the music. They would have Pierre Boulez – all these remarkable people broadcasted for free, if you were there to listen to it. I think that's part of the reason why I'm comfortable with abstraction. For me, there was never a question of whether there could be meaning in abstract art. No one questions whether Mozart is *about* something, but I think there is still anxiety about the abstract in art – on the right, the question of whether it depicts anything, and on the left, whether it has agency, whether it can be about anything. No matter what they'll say publicly, people privately have a lot of anxiety about abstract art.

So in a strange way, I think my parents gave me this amazing gift. In a way that no education could have ever done, music grounded me in abstraction. My family is from Maryland, and it's kind of Appalachian people, so I grew up with a lot of crafty textiles. My mom had this pile of lace doily samples that she didn't use anymore. I remember stuff like that; when you're a little kid, your mind is being built without you realizing it. And then a lot of your adult life is spent trying to conform to this structure of desires, this itch, that have been placed in you by your childhood. There's something about what I'm doing that comes down to that. Abstraction has always been readily available in folk art and textiles. Things can be both useful and beautiful.