

Tuttle's Art On Display At Whitney

By HILTON KRAMER

To Mies van der Rohe's famous dictum that less is more, the art of Richard Tuttle offers definitive refutation. For in Mr. Tuttle's work, less is unmistakably less. It is, indeed, remorselessly and irredeemably less. It establishes new standards of lessness, and fairly basks in the void of lessness. One is tempted to say that, so far as art is concerned, less has never been as less as this.

The exhibition of Mr. Tuttle's work opening today at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Avenue at 75th Street, is billed as a "major" show. How anything so egregiously subordinate to the most minor of minor art could be misconstrued as "major" is a problem I am content to leave to metaphysicians more gifted than I am at fathoming the ineffable. Suffice it to say that the show, such as it is, occupies the entire second floor of the museum.



But then, come to think of it, it doesn't occupy the entire second floor of the museum. Its bits and pieces lie strewn around the ample second-floor galleries in a pathetic attempt to master its vast empty spaces. Many visitors will leave this area of the museum wondering when an exhibition is going to be installed, and their wonder will be well-founded.

A stick of wood rising from the floor. A bit of wire fastened to a wall embellished with a few penciled lines. Some bits of string arranged on the rug. Some dyed fabric tacked up to resemble a painting. Some so-called "drawings" of a kind that beginning design students the world over are content to consign to the waste basket. That, alas, is what this "major" show consists of.

It is all a bore and a waste—a bore for the museum visitor, who has a right to expect something a bit more engaging for the money he has just handed over at the admissions desk, and a waste for the museum itself, which does not boast an excess of exhibition space.

Mr. Tuttle, who was born in 1941, has for some years enjoyed an underground reputation as a minimal artist. On the basis of this exhibition, I think it would have been wiser to leave that reputation underground. There, perhaps, the exceedingly minimal pleasures of this minimal oeuvre would continue to be savored by the minimal public that specializes in arid productions of this sort. What is the point of burdening a major museum facility with such a minuscule accomplishment?



Marcia Tucker, the curator at the Whitney responsible for this debacle, offers little help in answering this question. For her, this show is an occasion, as she says, "to discover or explore something which is unknown in order to find out for yourself what it is about." She is still working on the problem—admittedly, a difficult one in this case—and promises to produce a catalogue of her discoveries after the show closes. I can hardly wait.

Meanwhile, we are to be treated to a series of modifications in the installation. The present arrangement will be altered on Oct. 7, and altered yet again on Nov. 4. (How many aficionados, I wonder, will dutifully pay up their three admission fees in order to savor the full subtlety of this farce?) The comedy closes on Nov. 16.

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