

Dia Art Foundation
Readings in Contemporary Poetry
Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and Richard Tuttle

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Dia:Chelsea
535 West 22nd Street, 5th Floor
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Introduction by Vincent Katz

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge is a poet and editor who lives and works in New Mexico and New York. She is the author of twelve books of poetry, including *The Heat Bird* (1983), *Empathy* (1989), *Sphericity* (1993), *Endocrinology* (1997), a collaboration with the artist Kiki Smith, *Four Year Old Girl* (1998; reprinted 2011), *Nest* (2003; reprinted 2015), *I Love Artists: New and Selected Poems* (2006, U. of California Press), and *Hello, the Roses* (New Directions, 2013).

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's poems are often in sentences, but as a poem proceeds, the logic of syntax falls away, and the rhythms of phrase-by-phrase music take over. At that point, her native concerns rush to fill the void, and the listener is swept by images, voices, sounds, in an almost Romantic submission to elemental emotions. This sentence from her poem "Hearing," gives a sense:

"A voice with no one speaking, like the sea, merges with my listening, as if imagining her thinking about me makes me real."

And then there is the way individual sentences pile up against one another, accumulating, but also deflecting, meaning. Rounds, questions, methodologies from other disciplines, other readings, philosophy, science, politics, are asked by the poet to ruminate, to question their own attempts at sophistication, while, simultaneously, questioning an imaginary listener.

The poems build up in sections. They do not go in for effects, or quick fixes. The tone is even-handed. Often, the overall feeling is abstract. Occasionally, specific details – a horse, a fox, a mouse – intervene. And then there are these opening lines from "I Love Morning":

We're in New Mexico.

It's summer – all morning to lounge in bed, talk on the phone, read the paper.

Berssenbrugge's poems mysteriously seem to take in all of existence – politics, violence, as well as human and animal affection, intimacy – but intimated as opposed to projected. A recent poem, "Star Being," gazes upward. The language is more florid, the pacing more

urgent. Perhaps this signals a change. We're here to find out. Please join me in welcoming Mei-mei Berssenbrugge to Dia.

Richard Tuttle has worked in many different media, and in some ways beyond media. His first show in New York was at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1965. In 2016, his work was included in an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He lives and works in Maine, New Mexico, and New York.

An accurate but mystifying sentence from his gallery's website reads, "Tuttle's work exists in the space between painting, sculpture, poetry, assemblage, and drawing."

Richard Tuttle's recent installations allow for all kinds of access – there are physical openings, but also openings of color, shape, material. He's been doing that for a while, one could say, but before, he seemed to revel in the recessive, whereas now he seems to want to be slyly in your face. His poems operate similarly. Here's the beginning of his poem "Clouds":

That's who you are
going to have to wait
from
This is said with a thing
for a thing
(from "Clouds")

Tuttle tends to write short poems, with short lines. The line breaks are significant. He respects the sound and visual aspect of poetry, but also the function of the line. He is attuned to poetry's ability to shift time. And his chiseled, precise, works feel, despite their American language, to be inheritors of a Chinese tradition, perhaps a humorous one like that of Han-shan or Li Po. Here's a section of a recent Tuttle poem:

10-year old
trap in
additional garbage
that can go
toward the south
Special ones can't
stolen possessions
-thick and fast
atomic cat—

Faster than you can react, poetry. Please welcome Richard Tuttle.