

## An Appreciation of Richard Saul Wurman and his Astounding, Never Ending Oeuvre

Richard Saul Wurman, the TED inventor, a cartographer and people connector, “seeks ways to make the complex clear”. (NY Times, 2012, on the occasion RSW received Lifetime Achievement Award from the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.) Also part historian, RSW explored how cities evolved and published his first book on this topic, *Cities: Comparison of Form and Scale*, 1963/1974, the spark that lit our relationship fire. I received a rare signed copy of the book when Richard noticed I expressed great enthusiasm for the subject thirty years ago at a Cranbrook symposium. We became friends, and I knowingly added “generous spirit” to the long list of superlatives that trailed his name.

His mantra has always been *you only understand something relative to something you understand*. That idea also grew until it manifested into a wonderful book that once again RSW shared with me, a wide ranging exploration of the human mind. Having come to terms with that mission, after stalking the notion of comprehension for a lifetime, Richard has found himself at the gates of a new frontier, the interior space of our emotional makeup. He has already put away the toolbox he needed for the comparisons of scale and form in *Cities*, instruments useful to his life as architect, and teacher.

Then he closed his physical eye. Like many artists before him, he trusted that gesture would allow him to enter more comprehensively the interior world that called out to him, freeing his imagination to run again as a boy, or a deep river. Richard the Boy also excelled with tools, pencil and brush. Many years ago he shared with me works on paper created while still living under his parent’s roof in Philadelphia. They were precocious, and insightful. It is remarkable that in these twilight years Richard has returned to the explorations of his youth, subject matter resonating with those early works, birds, for example. Birds, a symbol of transcendence and freedom of spirit, have clearly landed on his shoulder. Or perhaps they never truly left.

This late life artistic endeavor fits perfectly into his favorite design: his own life, which he describes as “purposeful-accidental”. He is still mapping out the perimeters, adjusting old boundaries as this new growth demands, still a connector but this time it is the past into the present that is literally being drawn into his net. That generous spirit also prevails as Richard shares his excitement and spreads the joys of self discovery, of understanding.

The net cast out into the greater world has now pulled in its horizons. The irascible RSW is out to catch the soul.

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New York City, March 22, 2021