

# Overview

## William Bailey

"I admire painters who can work directly from nature," William Bailey says, "but for me that seems to lead to anecdotal painting. Realism is about interpreting daily life in the world around us. I'm trying to paint a world that's not around us." Gazing into a Bailey still life, I wish it did describe the world. It would be a world that makes no effort to manipulate us, a world of order and grace but not without eccentricity or passion. For a moment I imagine each of these pots as a small animal, with a living self-contained existence, poised for a look at me in that curiously contemplative way animals have. "I want to take everything that's irrelevant out of my imagery and bring to life something with a presence, a silence, some sort of mystery," Bailey has said.

Bailey was born in 1930 in Iowa and attended the University of Kansas, though both his undergraduate and graduate degrees are from the School of Art of Yale University. After he received his Master of Fine Arts degree in 1957, he was hired at Yale as a teacher, and, except for a few years spent traveling or teaching elsewhere, he has been teaching at Yale ever since. Since 1980, though connected to Yale, he has taught very little. "I take teaching seriously when I am doing it," he says, "but it doesn't preoccupy me when I'm not. I never think of myself as an educator."

He doesn't think of himself as a realist painter, either, though that is how most other people regard him. In a literal (as opposed to metaphorical) sense, Bailey has only two subjects for his painting: nudes and still lifes. He works in a narrow range, and looks "for something intimate that can also be monumental." He sees the table top in his color aquatint, *Piazza Rotonda*, as "a vast territory with small objects in it," and *Torre Romeggio*, the small black-and-white print he did at the same time, as "more urban, like hill towns in Italy, with objects looming up in front of you."

Bailey first went to Italy as a student in 1955, and since 1972 when he bought a house in a small town in Umbria he has spent several months of every year

there. Many of his works are named after Italian towns, streets, piazzas, or districts. Sometimes a painting reminds him of the feeling of a particular street or town, sometimes he pays homage to a place he enjoys by using its name, sometimes he simply uses a name he likes. "What's happened in my still life painting has more to do with Italy than anything else," he says. He speaks of the way the light hits a hill town picking out the earth colors of the walls. He mentions proportions of buildings seen across a valley. He says architecture has "invaded" his painting.

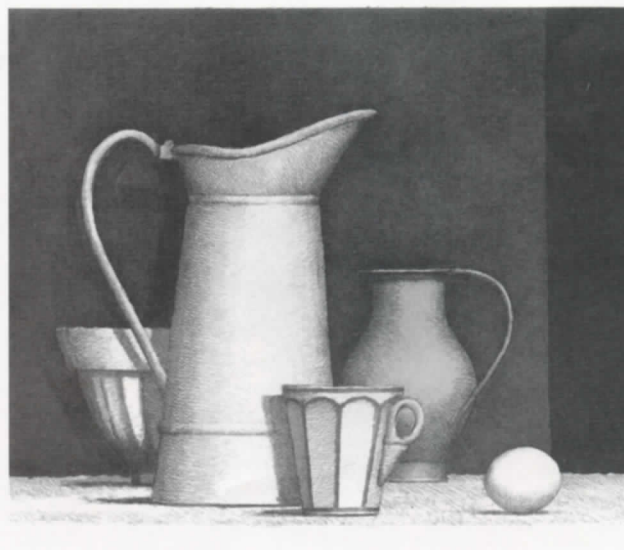
The print, *Piazza Rotonda*, is to him a departure in that it has deeper space within it than most of his work, and the objects are more separated. *Piazza Rotonda* is Bailey's first color print. However, he has worked enough with black and white etching to understand how subtle variations in biting time affect the quality of drawn marks. He builds his images in minuscule increments. After hours of his painstaking drawing and the printers' painstaking preparation, a plate may go in the acid for as little as thirty seconds. If that isn't long enough, all the work has to be redone. But if it is too long, the marks might be "too graphic," and Bailey scrapes them out of the copper and then all the work has to be redone.

In intaglio printing, unlike lithography where a roller is used, inking is done directly with the hands, so it's not difficult to apply different inks to different portions of the same plate. This kind of color printing is called *a là poupee*, "with the doll" in French, because the ink traditionally is pushed into small areas of the plate with a rag made into a simple doll-shape tied at the neck. After inking, the printer carefully wipes the surface clean with the palm of the hand, or with fingers if the space is tight. Usually printers try to leave a blank space of plate between images to

be inked in different colors, but if the artist doesn't mind colors running into one another, *a là poupee* printing can be used to print abutting images. In that case, a many-colored print can come from a single plate.

In *Piazza Rotonda*, Bailey wanted the colors distinct, so multiple plates were used along with *a là poupee* printing. Daria Sywulak, Bailey's printer, worked with him in planning how many plates to use, and on dispersing the colors among them. She knew how much space she needed around each image so that she could ink and wipe it without its color wandering into a nearby image. *Piazza Rotonda* uses nineteen different colors, printed from six plates.

Printed first is a plate inked entirely in raw sienna. It puts a slight film of color on the white eggs and the bowl, prints the rim and handle of the pitcher, and gives an almost-invisible tone under the red wall. Plate two is a line plate printed in burnt umber, with the coffee



*Torre Romeggio*, 1994. Aquatint with hard ground and soft ground etching. Paper size: 14½ x 15"; image size: 7 x 7½". Edition 50.

pot and table base inked in full strength color and the lines in the other objects inked in color that has been extended.

Plate three is mainly a line plate: the vase, candlestick, bowl, and pitcher are inked in different colors. The green trim

(continued on next page)



(Bailey continued)

on the mug in front of the pitcher is printed in the same color as the lines in the pitcher, since these two objects are too close together to allow inking them in different colors without blending. There are some aquatint tones on the third plate, too. They define one of the brown eggs and the rim of the table.

The fourth plate carries only the violet shadow on the lower part of the wall. Nothing else could be added because this shadow touches almost all the objects. The fifth plate is another object plate, this time holding tones rather than lines, a different color for each egg, vase, or bowl. The sixth and final plate prints the red ochre wall, and sienna and umber tones of the table top and table bottom. The top is separated from the wall by the row of objects and a band of violet behind, and it is separated from the table base by the rim, so three distinctly different colors could be inked on the plate.

In color printing with lithography, silk screen, or woodcut, each color is dried before printing another on top of it. All the prints from the red plate are

printed, then the blue plate is added to all of them, and so on. But in intaglio printing, which is done on damp paper, drying the prints between colors means the paper must be redampened. Its size will slightly fluctuate depending on how much water it takes on. Since accurate registration is almost impossible if the paper has been redampened, we print color prints all at once, adding plates in sequence and sending them back and forth through the press until we have the whole image.

Each time a print goes through the press, some of its ink comes off on the plate that is printing the next color. If a plate falls early in the printing sequence, it can lose quite a bit of density. Printers compensate for this by somewhat overetching images on plates they know will be printed early, but it is a difficult idea for an artist to grasp. He sees a proof of the fragment he has just drawn and says, "Oh, no—it's too dark!" But when the plates are all completed and the full print is pulled, it will be fine if the printer has guessed the acid-bite correctly. If not, some adjustments in

weight of color can be made by using transparent extender in the ink. There are many factors to consider. Color printing is complicated. For the artist, it takes a certain amount of faith.

In the three weeks Bailey spent in San Francisco working every day with us, he completed *Piazza Rotonda* and *Torre Romeggio*, and worked on a second black-and-white print yet to be finished and a third that may be abandoned. He is very self-critical and his printers thought it a miracle that he completed anything. On the last day, Sywulak asked him how many paintings he makes in a year. "Four or five," he replied, "and they are not very large."

Despite the work in them, Bailey's prints appear fresh and almost effortless to people not used to looking at prints. Bailey's prints share with his paintings a quality of looking back at us in a way that is self-contained but not self-protective, and to me they are very satisfying to the spirit.

—Kathan Brown

## WILLIAM BAILEY

**Born:** November 17, 1930, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

**Education:** University of Kansas, School of Fine Arts, 1948-51  
Yale University, School of Art, B.F.A., 1955  
Yale University, School of Art, M.F.A., 1957

### SELECTED ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

- 1956 Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont
- 1957, '58, '61 Kanegis Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts
- 1967 Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, Missouri
- 1968, '71, '74, '79, '82, '86, '89, '91 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York
- 1969 Nason College, Springvale, Maine
- 1972 Queens College, City University of New York, Flushing, New York
- Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia
- University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut
- 1973 Galleria il Fante de Spade, Rome
- Galleria Dei Lanzi, Milan
- Galleria La Parisina, Turin
- 1975 Polk Museum, Lakeland, Florida. Exhibition traveled to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida
- 1976 Dart Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- 1979 Fendrick Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 1980, '85, '93 Galleria il Gabbiano, Rome
- 1984 American Academy in Rome
- 1987 University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio
- 1988 John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, California
- Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island
- 1992, '94 André Emmerich Gallery, New York
- 1994 Betsy Senior Gallery (Prints), New York

### SELECTED COLLECTIONS:

- The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois
- Chemical Bank, New York
- Des Moines Art Center, Iowa
- The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
- Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Indiana
- J.B. Speed Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
- Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
- The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
- The New York Times, New York
- Ing. C. Olivetti & C., S.p.A., Ivrea, Italy
- Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts
- St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri
- Städtisches/Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, West Germany
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- Wichita Art Museum, Kansas
- Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

### AWARDS:

- 1955 Alice Kimball English Traveling Fellowship
- 1958 First Prize in Painting, Boston Arts Festival
- 1960 American Specialist Grant, travel in Southeast Asia
- 1965 Guggenheim Fellowship in Painting
- 1975 Igram-Merrill Foundation Grant for Painting
- 1976-7, '83-4 Visiting Artist, American Academy in Rome
- 1985 Yale Arts Medal for Distinguished Contribution in Painting
- 1986 Elected Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters
- 1987 Honorary Doctor of Humanities, University of Utah



William Bailey, *Piazza Rotonda*, 1994. Color aquatint with hard ground etching. Paper size: 28½ x 32½"; image size: 18¼ x 23¼". Edition 50.



## Notes

**John Baldessari** is showing prints at Blancpain Stepcynski in Geneva, Switzerland through March 18.

**Robert Mangold** has a retrospective at Annemarie Verna in Zurich, Switzerland through March 11.

**Judy Pfaff** is showing at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Massachusetts through March 5.

**Tim Rollins + K.O.S.** are exhibiting new work at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York through February 25.



William Bailey working in the San Francisco studio, 1994.

**Christopher Brown** has a survey exhibition *History and Memory* at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas through April 1995. The exhibition travels to the San Jose Museum of Art, The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu, the Palm Springs Desert Museum and the Norton Gallery in West Palm Beach, Florida.

**Robert Kushner** has an exhibition of new paintings at the David Floria Gallery in Aspen, Colorado through February 27.

## Calendar of Events and Exhibitions

Crown Point Press was chosen as one of the twelve galleries featured in U.S.A. at ARCO, and will be exhibiting at the

**ARCO '95 International Contemporary Art Fair.**

Parque Ferial Juan Carlos I, Madrid, Spain

February 8 - 14

Opening February 8, 4-10 PM

### In the San Francisco Gallery

February 23 - March 25

**Bottles and Eggs and Pitchers and Pie**, a group exhibition featuring new etchings by William Bailey and Wayne Thiebaud.



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