



Robert Bechtle, *Mississippi Street Intersection*, 2007. Color soft ground etching with aquatint. Paper size: 26 x 32½"; image size: 17¾ x 24¾". Edition 25. Printed by Emily York.

ROBERT BECHTLE

In 2005 the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art mounted a retrospective of the paintings of Robert Bechtle. It traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. In connection with that exhibition, Peter Schjeldahl wrote in the *New Yorker* that "life is incredibly complicated, and the proof is that when you confront any simple, stopped part of it you are stupefied."

Bechtle has lived all his life in the San Francisco Bay Area, and his retrospective stupefied many people with what the *Dallas Morning News* called "unpretentious and singularly uneventful paintings" by "one of the most durable talents of his generation and also one of the most intriguing." Suddenly everyone realized, as Kenneth Baker wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, that the "paintings are hand-crafted images informed by photography as a technology and a force of culture." *Artforum* called the show "a complete revelation," and the *Wall Street Journal* said it was "overwhelmingly beautiful." The

New Yorker, reviewing a subsequent Bechtle exhibition at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York, spoke of "hushed, sneakily powerful paintings of ultra-ordinary San Francisco streets." It seems that the reviewers agree that Bechtle's work is really good, but at the same time they are stumped by the subject matter. Could it be that the painted subject is not the point, that—like the best art of Bechtle's generation—the real subject is the viewer's experience? As Bechtle's paintings have developed over the years, more and more of their centers (like the centers of Zen gardens) are empty. Bechtle's world is at the edges. In contemplating his work, we rest in isolation in the center, then move toward the bright edges of ordinary scenes. From there, without even thinking much about it, we are back in our own lives, much refreshed.

Bechtle was born in San Francisco in . He is represented by the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York and Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco.

—Kathan Brown



Robert Bechtle, *20th Street VW*, 2007. Color direct gravure with spit bite aquatint. Paper size: 24¼ x 32¼"; image size: 16 x 24¾". Edition 25. Printed by Emily York.

Visit the Crown Point Press gallery to see our current exhibition featuring the two new prints by Robert Bechtle illustrated here, and *Urban Landscape*, a group show including prints by Iain Baxter, John Chiara, Tom Marioni, Ed Ruscha, and William T. Wiley, September 12 through October 28. Crown Point Press is at 20 Hawthorne Street, around the corner from the SFMOMA.

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