

# Overview



*Three Houses on Pennsylvania Avenue, 2011. Color soft ground etching with aquatint. 21½-x-31-inch image on 30½-x-39-inch sheet. Edition 40. Printed by Ianne Kjørlic.*

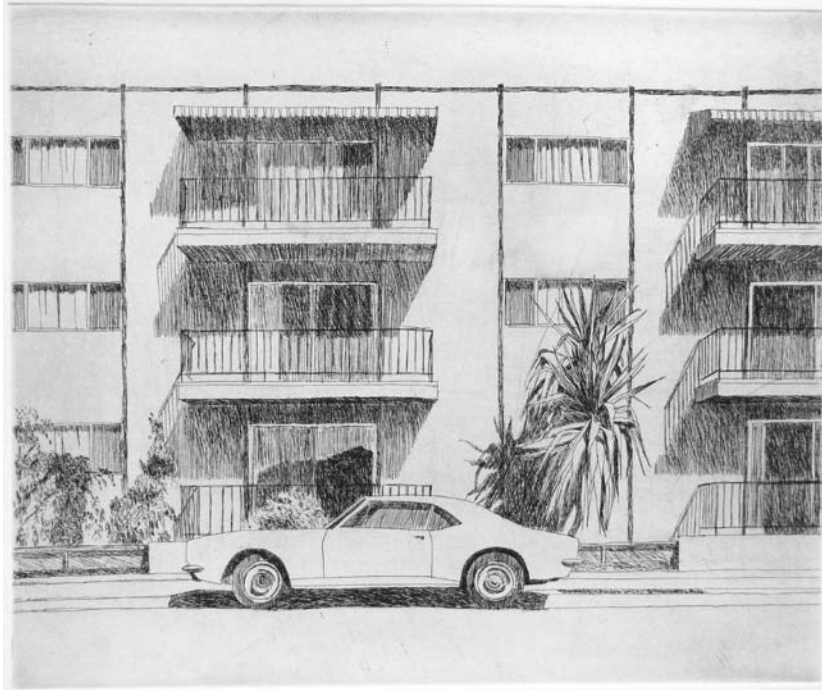
## ROBERT BECHTLE

It is mid-afternoon, and a hazy San Francisco sun shines full force on three houses on Pennsylvania Avenue. It is, perhaps, a Sunday. The residents are at home—each house has its vehicle parked outside. Inside, the people are probably napping. They have their curtains and shades drawn against the sunlight that makes the scene, from our point of view, so warm and real.

We can rest our eyes and minds here where everything is quiet, but at the same time we sense that in a moment someone will come down the stairs and get into the car or the station wagon to go to the grocery store or the park. Generally, Robert Bechtle's cityscapes have no people in them, but they do not seem unpeopled.

"Bechtle is a modern-day pointillist," a friend said to me. And, thinking of the sunshine in Seurat and Monet, the little flecks of light, I said, "Yes, you could say that, especially if you could see how these prints are made!"

Bechtle is on his feet leaning over his drawing for hours at a time without a break, without speaking, without even listening to music, concentrating, bracing his hand against a wooden bridge as he makes short strokes, accumulating marks that will print as fragments of light. He builds the picture slowly, drawing with pencils on textured paper that covers a wax-coated copper plate. The texture removes more or less of the soft wax ground depending on the pressure of his hand. Later we submerge the plate in a weak



*Alameda Camaro*, 1967. Hard ground etching. 7½-x-9-inch image on 14¼-x-15-inch sheet. Edition 25. All four black and white etchings printed by Kathan Brown/Janne Kjørlic.



*'60 T-Bird*, 1967. Hard ground etching. 7½-x-9-inch image on 14¼-x-15-inch sheet. Edition 25.



*View of Alameda*, 1967. Hard ground etching. 4¼-x-5-inch image on 11¼-x-11¼-inch sheet. Edition 25.

acid that bites the copper to record exactly that pressure, that accumulation of little marks that he has so carefully drawn. There are seven plates for this image, and we print them, each in a different color, one on top of the other.

*Three Houses on Pennsylvania Avenue*, drawn in soft ground, glowing with pointillist color, is brand new, finished in mid-April 2011. But what, you may ask, are these other prints, these four small black and white traditional line etchings? Check the date: 1967. Ianne Kjorlie, the lead printer for *Three Houses on Pennsylvania Avenue*, pointed out that 1967 was before she was born.

I started Crown Point Press in 1962, and by 1967 had published three books of etchings: Richard Diebenkorn's *41 Etchings Drypoints*, Wayne Thiebaud's *Delights*, and Beth van Hoesen's *The Nude Man*. On my invitation to Bechtle, he proposed *The Alameda Book*, with scenes from the small town near San Francisco where he grew up. The four images you see here are as far as we got with the project.

At the time, Bechtle was just beginning to find his mature style; it was the high time of pop art. These prints, he told me, and etching in general, were "too ye olde." I never forgot what he had said, but he forgot—I reminded him in 2004 when we held a small Bechtle print retrospective in our gallery. I had unearthed proofs of a couple of these unpublished images, and asked if we could use them in the show. He was delighted to do that, and couldn't believe he had rejected them. "I guess back then," he said, "we wanted everything to be brand new and terrific." He had kept a proof of *Burbank Street, Alameda* (which, fortunately, he had signed and dated) and I had '60 *T-Bird* and *View of Alameda*—I thought (and wrote in my introduction to the show) that there were only three images. We both wished we still had the plates. "Now," Bechtle said, "I see a lot of connections to what I have done since. But in 1967, I suppose it seemed crazy to be so old-fashioned."

Fast forward to 2011, with our country in a stubborn recession, sales down and costs up, especially costs of copper. We



*Burbank Street, Alameda*, 1967. Hard ground etching. 8-x-7-inch image on 14¾-x-13-inch sheet. Edition 25.

discovered we could sell our scrap copper for an unprecedented price per pound, so we cleaned out the basement and unwrapped every single plate that was in a great pile down there. That's when we found the plates for the four prints presented here. They had survived forty-four years and three moves, one of them during the panic of an earthquake.

Right now, for my bedtime reading, I'm working my way through a book called *Wisdom* by Stephen S. Hall. Hall says that the Renaissance restored wisdom's "secular importance," snatching it from "the realm of received goods" where the church had mired it in the Middle Ages. Creative achievements as diverse as the essays of Montaigne and the telescope of Galileo "turned wisdom into a high-end, artisanal craft, privately verified and ratified." By connecting to craft of this sort, we can, according to Hall, "discern, examine, and discover startling new truths about very familiar things." I couldn't resist quoting that bit of wisdom here, to end this discussion about the prints of Robert Bechtle, present and past.

—Kathan Brown

To see a video of Robert Bechtle creating *Three Houses on Pennsylvania Avenue*, go to [www.magical-secrets.com](http://www.magical-secrets.com) and click on the Artists Working tab.

# Crown Point Press

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Robert Bechtle in the Crown Point studio, 2011.

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May 18 - June 18, 2011

**Never Released Etchings by Wayne Thiebaud**  
May 18 - June 18, 2011

**Summer Choices:** a group show  
June 23 - September 2, 2011

**In Switzerland**  
Visit Crown Point Press at Art 42 Basel  
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**As a Seasons Club member,** you have through the end of August to purchase at half price any Crown Point Press print that was released in 2006 or earlier. The print choice must be made from our regular available inventory. Proofs, unique prints, portfolios, or sets of prints are not included in this offer.

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