

Art is a small thing, though an expensive one, compared to the media. It is a vibration in a museum; it deals with nuances that have no "objective" importance. It is not even a very good religion.

—Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*

In Robert Bechtle's first solo exhibition in the San Francisco Bay area in eighteen years, it appears he has abandoned that old-time photo-realism for something else. What that something is, is a little hard to pin down however, given that Bechtle still does parked cars, buildings, and stretches of pavement, still uses photographs, and still represents their content with a hard-edged faithfulness to realism. But the snapshots appear now to have become references rather than aspirations, so that his recent work comes off as having transcended gloss, achieving a penetrating kind of vision rather than one obsessed with surfaces. A sense of the artist's human—therefore fallible, subjective—reactions to what he sees has become ever so subtly manifest.

Photo-realism in its heyday was both an extension of Pop and a reaction against abstraction's abandonment of imagery, a democratization of expertise and a capitulation to the comforting recognizability of figuration. Photo-realist technique looked slick, infinitely seductive. But the content of its pictures was usually so painfully banal as to deprive viewers of any satisfaction or deepening curiosity after the initial encounter. As with much postmodern imagery, the hand of the artist was obscured or obliterated, a mechanical process inserted in place of skill in drawing. But part of photo-realism's fascination lay in the implicit question, "What kind of person goes to the trouble to render such boring, mass-produced material in such excruciating detail?" (The plausible answers always struck me as a little scary.) The point that anything can be made interesting if observed closely enough was often belied by artists' reliance on certain kinds of innately attractive subject matter: glass, chrome, swimming pools. The fascination with glitter evinced a submission on the part of painters to the aesthetics of advertising imagery, which seeks to persuade by virtue of enticement.

In Bechtle's latest oils, the mechanical-looking reduction of fields of color to flat,



Robert Bechtle, *Potrero Intersection—20th and Arkansas, 1990*, Oil on canvas, 40" x 58". Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco.

hard-edged zones of information has given way to a more considered evocation of color and space. The banished hand of the painter is back in all its hesitancy, and the results are tremendously engaging, even though some of these works communicate a sense of isolation that borders on loneliness. Though he has taken liberties with color—in general, to replicate the experience of color as sensory saturation—its character is no longer amplified, Pop-acrid. His portraits of buildings and streets in San Francisco, Oakland, and Alameda look and "feel" the way he has represented them, an accomplishment that may owe something to his study of Seurat. On close inspection, one sees the buildup of different weights of color out of a multitude of little marks, similar collections of colors appearing to be quite different depending on their ratios. Bechtle's evocation of pure light here is a feat of genuine virtuosity. This is not photographic light, it is *seen* light, strange in these years of visual mediation. Theoretically, the quasi-pointillist effect is analogous to color television and newspaper photography; however, it is useful to bear in mind that analogies have systems, not necessarily content, in common.

Apart from the main body of the show, which includes several large watercolors and a series of small, controlled charcoal drawings, is a collection of plein-air landscape studies. These in particular are engrossing in their simplicity and because they are a departure from Bechtle's usual reliance on the camera—but also, perhaps, because they are imperfect. Intensity of observation and the abandonment of self to the thing observed emanates from them, and where Bechtle stumbles it is because he is absorbed, disregarding performance. This absence of self-consciousness bordering on self-abnegation is antithetical to photography, in which the existence of the camera is almost always perceptible, even intrusive. Here, it is intentionally the work (and the lifetime of patient labor) that is important and not the artist's presence. In this contemporary climate of anti-elitism—often a cover for anti-intellectualism positing a casuistic tyranny of skill, and "subversion," which too easily becomes a cynical co-option of critical or economic power—it is a profound relief to be offered an artist's best efforts, rather than his rhetoric. (Paule Anglim, *San Francisco, May 1–June 1*)

Jennifer R. Crohn

Robert Bechtle

O.K. HARRIS

Gallery Paule Anglim

ARTNEWS

March 1993

In the late '60s and early '70s, Robert Bechtle was one of the original Photorealists in a group that also included Richard Estes, Malcolm Morley, and Chuck Close. Of all his peers, Bechtle seems to have changed the least over the years: his "just the facts, ma'am" attitude toward the photographic subject matter he dealt with (often cars) made for a rather high-gloss rigor mortis of the viewing eye, and it still can have the same effect today.

There have been some changes, though, over the years: the ordinary, everyday snapshot of his family posed against the family car has shifted radically in *Vincente Avenue Intersection*, to an oddly cropped view of a typical Oakland thoroughfare. We see a broad street leading up a hill, cars parked on either side, and a Sheeler-like line of telephone poles receding into the left distance. To the right are lines of stucco row



Robert Bechtle, *Vincente Avenue Intersection*, 1989, oil on linen, 48 by 69 inches. O.K. Harris.

houses, in shadow in the foreground and then illuminated by bright California light as they climb the hill and trail off into a dark sky looming above. The gloss is gone: Bechtle has moved into the nostalgic, all-American territory of Edward Hopper.

This new sense of warm California light informed almost all the work. In *Oakland Intersection: West and Fortieth*, we get a virtual portrait in sun and shadow of a white stucco, '40s Spanish-style house, complete with wind-tossed palm. Bechtle's new romance with sunshine and the increased elegance and ease of his more complicated compositions were a welcome relief from his earlier, Kodak-bright reportage. —Gerrit Henry

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Gallery Paule Anglim

SAN FRANCISCO

Robert Bechtle at Paule Anglim

Robert Bechtle's recent show of 13 charcoal drawings reveals the veteran realist to be in fine form. All made during the past two years, the images are familiar subjects from the Bechtle playbook—the largely uninhabited streets of San Francisco's less glamorous but characteristically hilly neighborhoods. Bechtle roots his works in the actual, and their matter-of-fact titles—*Covered Car—Missouri St.*; *Arkansas Street—Night*; *20th and Mississippi—Night*—

underscore that these are real places observed by a human eye and recorded by a human hand, even if they are captured initially by a camera. The titles also allow those who know San Francisco to identify the state-named streets as those of Potrero Hill, a recent battleground in the city's gentrification.

Although the human presence is absent in all but one drawing, it is implied. The automobile is man's surrogate in more than half the works, and the large, mute garage doors that dominate California's residential neighborhoods are prominent in a couple of others. The automobile, so often seen as a symbol of American mobility and thus freedom, plays a more complicated role in Bechtle's work. From his early celebratory canvases of shiny new cars to his more recent images of older, empty, even ominous-looking vehicles, he presents the car as a means for joy and release as well as a symbol of our loneliness and alienation from traditional forms of social interaction. But Bechtle has made that point before. Here, he uses the auto-



Robert Bechtle: *20th and Mississippi—Night*, 2001, charcoal on paper, 10 by 14 inches; at Paule Anglim.

mobile for something else. Four of the cars are cloaked with the covers that auto lovers use overnight or while they are away on trips. A fifth car, covered with snow in a Cambridge, Mass., front yard, is a witty pun on the California trope. But collectively, the cars—covered by canvas or snow—seemed shrouded, and they gave the show an elegiac tone.

Most of the drawings are nocturnes. Because of the dark-toned paper used in almost every drawing, even the few daytime images have a dark and meditative quality. Bechtle is a master of technique, and his use of charcoal on gray paper possesses the magic of perfectly realized images from the real world. The graininess of the charcoal dragged across the textured paper creates nuanced images reminiscent of Seurat. Bechtle has always been extremely sensitive to light in his work, and in much of it, you can almost time the moment the image was recorded. In nightscaapes, that is trickier. What shade of dark is midnight? What 3 A.M.? Only night-walkers and insomniacs can answer that.

—David Bonetti

Matters of Fact

How do you know what you know?
How do you know what you don't know?
How do you know what you think you know?

BY MICHAEL S. GREEN

Recently, I was asked to give the opening address at a conference on "The Future of the Automobile." The conference was held at a large hotel in a city I had never visited before. The hotel was a grand, old building with a high ceiling and a large chandelier. The room was filled with people from all over the world, and the atmosphere was one of excitement and anticipation. I was nervous, but I knew I had to give a speech that would inspire and inform. I had prepared a speech that I thought was perfect, but as I stood at the podium, I realized that I had forgotten the most important part of my speech. I had forgotten to mention the most important fact of all: that the future of the automobile is not in the hands of the government, but in the hands of the people. I had forgotten that the people are the ones who will decide what the future of the automobile is, and that they will do so in a way that is best for them. I had forgotten that the people are the ones who will create the future, and that they will do so in a way that is best for them. I had forgotten that the people are the ones who will decide what the future of the automobile is, and that they will do so in a way that is best for them. I had forgotten that the people are the ones who will create the future, and that they will do so in a way that is best for them.







The first step in the process is to identify the problem. This can be done by talking to the customer and asking them what the issue is. Once the problem is identified, the next step is to investigate the cause. This can be done by looking at the data and trying to find a pattern. Once the cause is identified, the next step is to develop a solution. This can be done by brainstorming ideas and then testing them. Once a solution is found, the next step is to implement it. This can be done by creating a plan and then following it. Finally, the last step is to evaluate the results. This can be done by comparing the results to the original problem and seeing if the solution worked.

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THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The New York Public Library, Astor Lenox and Tilden Foundations, is a public library system in New York City. It is one of the largest and oldest libraries in the world. The library's main building is located at 421 Fifth Avenue, and it has several other branches throughout the city. The library's collection includes books, periodicals, microfilm, and digital resources. It also provides a variety of services, including research assistance, reading programs, and community events.

The library's main building is a landmark of New York City architecture. It was designed by John Jacob Astor and is a prime example of Beaux-Arts architecture. The building's facade is made of granite and features a series of arches and columns. The library's collection is housed in several buildings, including the main building and the Tilden Building.



Interior view of the New York Public Library reading room.

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The first part of the article discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records in a business. It emphasizes that these records are essential for tracking income and expenses, which is crucial for tax purposes. The text also mentions that proper record-keeping can help in identifying areas where costs can be reduced, thereby increasing profitability. Additionally, it notes that these records are often required by government agencies and financial institutions, making them a necessary part of any business's administrative structure.

The second part of the article focuses on the role of technology in modern business operations. It highlights how digital tools and software can streamline various processes, from inventory management to customer relationship management. The text suggests that investing in technology can lead to significant efficiency gains and cost savings. Furthermore, it discusses the importance of data security and privacy in the digital age, as businesses must protect their sensitive information from cyber threats. The article concludes by encouraging business owners to stay updated on the latest technological advancements to remain competitive in the market.

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The design of this space is a perfect blend of modern and traditional elements. The use of natural materials like wood and stone adds a warm, organic feel to the minimalist aesthetic. The large windows allow for plenty of natural light, creating a bright and airy atmosphere.

The furniture is carefully selected to complement the overall design. The large, light-colored sofa provides a comfortable seating area, while the dark, minimalist table adds a touch of sophistication. The clean lines and neutral color palette create a sense of calm and order.

The overall design is a testament to the power of simplicity. By focusing on quality materials and clean lines, the space achieves a timeless and elegant look. The use of natural materials and large windows adds a sense of connection to the outdoors, making the interior feel like a natural extension of the environment.

The design is a perfect example of how to create a modern and sophisticated living space. The use of natural materials and clean lines creates a sense of calm and order, while the large windows and minimalist furniture add a touch of elegance and sophistication.

The New York Times

Robert Bechtle



*Gladstone Gallery
515 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through Feb. 22*

For decades, the painter Robert Bechtle has been making oddly cropped, resolutely banal streetscapes of his hometown, San Francisco. His detached, decentered photorealism is strangely compelling in a show of small watercolors and charcoal drawings; there's just enough of the artist's hand and eye in them that they aren't mistaken for the work of a Google Street View car.

Throughout, Mr. Bechtle manipulates light and simplifies forms so as to undercut the seeming randomness of his compositions. In “Six Cars on 20th Street,” the strangely squeezed horizon — just a strip of blue sky at the very top of the picture — is made even more remote and compressed by the glare of bright sun on the road that takes up most of the picture. The stripped-down facades of rowhouses in “Down Arkansas Street,” meanwhile, make San Francisco look more like Hopper’s New England.

In the drawings, textured paper adds an unexpected element of sensuality; “Twentieth Street Pastoral,” for instance, has a lushness befitting its title even though it shows just a single tree shading a parked car.

And the presence of a couple of self-portraits — that’s Mr. Bechtle, peering over his shoulder from the driver’s seat of his convertible in “Bob’s Sebring” — implies that although we may be in the Bay Area, we’re not quite in Silicon Valley. His photorealism might seem to indulge techno-utopian fantasies of driverless cars and automated landscapes, but it ultimately insists on the presence of the painter.

A version of this review appears in print on February 7, 2014, on page C27 of the New York edition with the headline: Robert Bechtle. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)