

ROBERT BECHTLE

Self-Portraits, 1964 - 2005

10 July through 7 August 2018

Anthony Meier Fine Arts is pleased to announce an exhibition of self-portraits by Robert Bechtle. *Robert Bechtle: Self-Portraits, 1964 – 2005* will juxtapose five images of the artist. Spanning a period of forty-one years, the selection represents a variety of mediums: oil on canvas, watercolor on paper, graphite and charcoal on paper.

An early pioneer of the Photorealist movement, Bechtle has long focused on scenes of everyday but intimate American life: streetscapes, backyards and interior views. Consistent with this everyday-life topic, the interjection of Bechtle's own image is a unifying theme revisited throughout the artist's career. As with any personal documentation, the passage of time across this presentation features prominently from one image to the next. Dark-haired Bechtle of the mid-60s gives way to lighter-haired Bechtle of the mid-80s gives way to white-bearded and bespectacled Bechtle of 2005. Honesty, not vanity, is paramount in Bechtle's photorealist domain.

In this selection, the common thread of "self" is accompanied in each case by a reflective surface – here a mirror, there a window. A symbol of and vessel for light and reflection, each such surface acts as a scope-expanding device while its borders provide a point of edit. Known for his methodically-framed compositions, this grouping of work is no exception, and here the artist has used these tools to simultaneously expand, frame and truncate his subject.

On view courtesy of SFMOMA, Bechtle's *Cookie Jar* is the exhibition's earliest example. The artist has edited his face from the image, using the edge of a beveled mirror as a decisive but organic frame. The ornately framed dresser-topping mirror is rendered in photorealist detail as are the items atop the dresser and the reflected self-image. In stark contrast is the treatment of the surrounding white wall. Mottled strokes of impressionist colors highlight the furniture-cast shadows, letting all else recede to the edges of the composition.

Of similar period but contrasting medium is *Grove Street (Night)*, 1965. This graphite drawing is framed edge-to-edge with the paned window of its immediate foreground. Again, Bechtle has employed the border of the window to define the boundaries of his own portrait. Taking the window's properties a step further, we see the house opposite reflected against the interior of the artist's own home – an intimate, though obscured, portrayal of his bookcase within.

Two self-portraits from the mid-1980s showcase streaming light from windows, placing the artist's aging face in shadow. *Broome Street Hoover* directs the viewer's eye to light, not shadow – a glowing heater, seemingly unnecessary in front of an open window; a patch of sunlight illuminating the edge of a classic vacuum cleaner. The shadowed and mottled white wall makes another appearance.

A 2005 charcoal self-portrait, *Potrero Night II*, shows an older Bechtle boldly confronting the viewer. Here, there is no immediate contender for initial attention beyond the artist's face. Set in front of a nighttime window, only the walls are reflected.

Robert Bechtle was born in 1932 in San Francisco. He continues to live and work in the Bay Area. Bechtle studied painting and graphic design at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, earning a BFA in 1954 and an MFA in 1958. A major retrospective exhibition of his work was organized by SFMOMA in 2004; it traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. His work has been included in numerous major group exhibitions internationally and is in the permanent collections of many museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.