

ARTFORUM

Ewan Gibbs
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
151 Third Street
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The not-unfounded stereotype of northern-California fog is well suited to Ewan Gibbs's modestly scaled, labor-intensive graphite drawings, which previously depicted famous buildings and anonymous hotel rooms. This exhibition comprises eighteen works, commissioned for SF MoMA on the occasion of its seventy-fifth anniversary, and are titled as a group San Francisco, 2009. They show tourist views—think snapshots from Flickr instead of postcard-perfect shots of Coit Tower and the Golden Gate Bridge—that subvert image conventions through their conceptual strategies. Gibbs constructs his works through the repeated inscription of a single mark. This method translates into thousands of tiny slashes or circles, notations borrowed from knitting patterns, which in turn form pale, monochromatic views of the streets of San Francisco. The British artist's visual tropes echo Photorealist strategies; the results look something like pint-size versions of early Chuck Close works crossed with Robert Bechtle's paintings of impassive Bay Area abodes.

Gibbs's quietly demanding output reveals itself slowly—most emphatically in his wan rendering of the Transamerica Pyramid, which is made nearly invisible by a blanket of fog. With a deft hand, the artist manages an impressive amount of tonal variation within his tight framework, yet more compelling is how he encapsulates issues of temporality in his compositions. While the photographic sources were culled from brief visits to San Francisco, Gibbs manages to transform travelogue into an extended poetic meditation.

