

# PHOTOGRAPHY & CONTEMPORARY COLLECTIONS

Evon Streetman

***Baby Gene Pool's First Photograph***

1983

Silver-dye bleach print (Cibachrome) with acrylic

23½ × 19 ⅜ in. (59.7 × 49.2 cm)

Museum purchase with funds provided by the Melvin and Lorna Rubin Fund

2008.10.1

Robert Fichter's drive toward a multimedia approach to image making was nurtured in his undergraduate studies at the University of Florida (BFA, 1963) where he worked especially closely with Jerry Uelsmann (photography), Ken Kerslake (printmaking), and Jack Nicholson (design). Fichter's experimental approach was reinforced by his subsequent work and experiences at the University of Indiana (MFA, 1966) studying under Uelsmann's teacher Henry Holmes Smith, and by Fichter's early museum and teaching jobs at the George Eastman House, the University of California, Los Angeles, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Florida State University, where he spent most of his teaching career.

The broad range of Fichter's work makes it difficult to categorize by medium, style, or subject. His imagery ranges from assembled photographic tableaux of ironic objects mimicking Old Master still lifes to cartoonlike drawings with obvious references to popular culture—all executed in a broad range of media, from straight photography to Polaroids, historic photographic processes, and just about any printmaking media he could find, including silkscreen, lithography, and intaglio.

*Baby Gene Pool's First Photograph* is a terrific demonstration of Robert Fichter's ongoing experimental approach and his refusal to be bound by traditional media categories. His recurring protagonist, Baby Gene Pool, is depicted in expressive, intensely colored lithographic drawing proudly displaying his "first photograph," an antique albumen print of a sharply rendered still life scene reminiscent of a nineteenth-century cabinet of curiosities. "Pretty impressive for a baby," a viewer might be expected to respond. This print's references to the differences between photography and other printmaking processes acknowledges and ridicules art historical boundaries with an ambiguous irony typical of much of Fichter's work. He enjoys breaking down the media borders, but also seems to be careful not to take himself—or the art world—too seriously.

