

We have pleasure in presenting the most recent work by the Californian artist John Baldessari. John Baldessari (born in National City, California in 1931, lives and works in Santa Monica, California), is one of the leading figures of today's American art scene. Following his radical renunciation of painting around 1970, he started working primarily with visual material and, until 1980, with texts from the mass media. The artist takes his images out of their contexts, elaborates them by means of retouching, painting over, contrasting and cutting. He has developed an unmistakable style, distinguished by the superimposition of photographs and painted areas, and his canvases also comprise printed reproductions. These are the means he uses in his ironic play with pop culture.

Baldessari has taught and influenced generations of artists. This year he is holding a retrospective in the Tate Modern in London; and exhibitions in LACMA in Los Angeles, MACBA, Barcelona and the Metropolitan Museum New York, are planned for next year. Impressive proof of Baldessari's influence on a generation of artists is currently being demonstrated in the retrospective *The Pictures Generation 1974-1984* in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. This year, John Baldessari will be awarded the Golden Lion for a Lifetime Achievement award at the Venice Biennale.

His most recent work consists primarily of film stills of faces and bodies that are largely covered over by layers of paint or collage or altered by the superimposition of paint over the foreheads and eyebrows. The fact that the faces are partially concealed makes them impossible to identify. The images are charged with the glamour of the advertising and film world. The frequently present element of humour in the compositions plays with the viewers' expectant attitude by allowing them free scope for association and interpretation and by offering a wide range of possible meanings. The black-and-white photographs are partially coloured, whereby the accentuated coloured facial features are particularly striking. Baldessari uses colours as a kind of colour code. For instance in *Raised Eyebrows / Furrowed Foreheads (with Apple)* a woman is shown about to bite into a red apple suggesting the associative connotation of red with danger. Or the pictures of the guitar player with a blue guitar in front of a blue background refers to the romantic mood of the music, whereas the photo placed higher up of a furrowed forehead and eyebrows more readily suggests a dissonant piece of music. Thus Baldessari reinterprets the fragments of the pictures according to his own ideas. At the same time, his collages plumb the depths of an in-between world, which we can only intuit, from stories with visible and invisible elements. [Text: Dominique von Burg]

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