

Sprüth Magers Berlin is delighted to present 'Hands And/Or Feet (Part Two)', an exhibition of new work by American artist John Baldessari. Widely considered one of the most influential artists of the last forty years and one of the founding fathers of conceptual art, Baldessari has with this new exhibition both returned to his characteristic strategy of utilising and embellishing found visual material and extended his interest in the physical form and social meaning of particular parts of the human body.

Each of the ten large-scale works is composed as a diptych of found photographs or media images including hands and/or feet. The instructive and amusing contrasts between the images are then reworked with the artist's typically vivid and witty tactic of over-painting and colouring-in particular elements of the images. Such multipart and multicoloured works have been a prominent feature of the artist's practice for two decades, and are rooted in Baldessari's intense fascination with language and image, and their relationship with one another. For Baldessari, sequences of images, like sequences of letters or words, confer narrative and communicate meaning. Exploring the processes behind the dynamics of creative expression and human understanding is the essential enquiry which animates the serious play at work in Baldessari's art.

Baldessari has said that he is 'more interested in things that have escaped attention', a statement which points to how and why the selected colouration and cropping of pre-existing visual material occurs as it does. For Baldessari, colours and shapes as well as images are codes, signifiers which inform how visual experiences are 'read', and what meanings can be derived from such experiences. Much of Baldessari's work has involved creatively and insistently exploring how mixing together different kinds of communication – pictorial, verbal, chromatic, physical – create differing modes of comprehension. A recurrent motif in Baldessari's art has been the obscuring of whole faces, which are commonly regarded as the aesthetic repository of human identity, and instead focussing on isolated bodily features – sometimes ears and noses or arms and legs, in this case hands and feet. This practice untaps and exploits the comic visual potential of the appendages and extremities of the human form, and probes the range of social associations and meanings they carry. The emphasis and interest on extremities is further heightened by the three-dimensionality of the works in 'Hands And/Or Feet (Part Two)', as they are in relief, an effect which also blends and blurs generic boundaries between photography, painting and sculpture. Why we look at things the way we do and derive particular understandings from certain visual situations is an important question that Baldessari's art asks, and these new works pose these questions anew with a distinctive vibrancy and insight.

John Baldessari, born 1931 in National City, California, lives and works in Santa Monica,

California. He studied at San Diego State College; U.C. Berkeley; UCLA; the Otis Art Institute and the Chouinard Art Institute. Baldessari has received honorary degrees from the National University of Ireland; San Diego State University; the Otis Art Institute and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2004. His awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship (1986); the Oskar Kokoschka Prize, Austria (1996); the Governor's Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts, California (1997); the Spectrum-International Award for Photography of the Foundation of Lower Saxony, Germany (1999) and the BACA International Award (2008). His work has been exhibited in the 47th (1997) and 53rd (2009) Venice Biennial; the Carnegie International (1985-86); the Whitney Biennial (1983) as well as Documenta V (1972) and VII (1982). In 2005 the artist had a retrospective in two parts at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien ('Works 1962-1984') and the Kunsthau Graz ('Works 1984-2005'). Recent exhibitions include a presentation at Kunstmuseum Krefeld, Museum Haus Lange (2009) and a major retrospective at Tate Modern in London which opened in October 2009 and will travel to MACBA, Barcelona; LACMA, Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York through 2011. Also in October 2009 Baldessari presented his first ever tableau vivant, 'Ear Sofa; Nose Sconces with Flowers (In Stage Setting)' at Sprüth Magers London. In June 2009 John Baldessari was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

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