

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to present in Berlin, with the solo exhibition *Double Feature*, a new work series by John Baldessari.

Ever since the middle of the 1960s, the works of American artist John Baldessari have developed into one of the most pioneering oeuvres of contemporary art. They serve as an important model for a young generation of artists and curators. His photo-collages, billboards, artist's books, performances, and films are to be assigned exclusively neither to Concept Art nor to Pop Art, but instead have always remained independent through their autonomy and unpredictability.

Baldessari's medium is above all the collage, and accordingly the combination of images and contents which traditionally do not belong together. Using as a basis his own archive of film stills, texts, photographs, and newspaper clippings – all of which relate to motifs from everyday reality, the mass media, advertisement, and film – Baldessari arranges montages of images and of image-texts which create new interconnections of meaning through the procedures of fading out and cross-fading or cutting out. By means of productive gaps between image and word, he focuses on the relationship between language and power, just as has been examined since the 1960s by the post-structuralists Roland Barthes and Gilles Deleuze. Thereby of major importance for Baldessari is the issue of emotionality: Visual jokes and plays on words are the means by which he disrupts the strict classification of sense and nonsense and sets in motion processes of critical thought with regard to society.

The focus on allegorical and iconographical traditions, characteristic as it is for Baldessari's artistic practice, is also recognizable in his new work-group *Double Feature*: What is significant of these image-text montages is the utilization of concrete pictorial motifs from the history of modern art from Henri Matisse, Kurt Schwitters, and Max Ernst, all the way to Francis Picabia. From these models, Baldessari extracts in his customary manner selected elements which are printed onto canvas and are individually overpainted by himself. This gives rise to hybrid works in which the sources of the motifs and the handwriting of the artist coexist in the painted flow of the surfaces. Oscillating between collage and painting, Baldessari's versions do not consist of decontextualized copies but instead present autonomous originals which repeat painting and its forms of appearance from a different perspective.

Baldessari combines these motifs with printed captions upon the canvas. There are quotes of gloomy titles of American film noir from the 1940s and 1950s such as *Blast of Silence*, *Dead Reckoning*, *Sudden Fear*, or *Deadline at Dawn*. During this era, the thrillers filmed in black-and-white were often low-budget productions. Characteristic for this genre are nightmarish stories which mirror the

abysses of existential and social crises.

The fascination with B-movies and nouvelle vague films is one of the constants running through Baldessari's oeuvre; he has taken their gestures, drama, and glamorous passion into a large number of compositions utilizing stills from unknown Hollywood motion pictures. Serving as an important source of inspiration in this context is Jean-Luc Godard's experimental handling of cinematic montage, which makes use of such techniques as leaps in time or space between individual film segments (jump cuts) and, by means of these distancing and distorting effects, destroy the film's power of illusion.

In Baldessari's new collages, the verbal combinations contrast with the motifs and summon up complex series of associations, inasmuch as two different areas are brought together: the works of avant-garde artists which today are considered to be high culture, and the American crime thrillers of the postwar era which are relegated to the status of B-movies. He thereby establishes subtle formal and contentual relationships between titles and pictures. The series gives rise to pictorial puzzles in which the extracted individual segments become something entirely different when inserted into a new picture. In this way the artist aims at cultural memory and engages in a play involving recognition of the contexts from which the elements derive. For Baldessari, images and words are of equal value, and with them he creates his own poetry whose language asserts itself over and beyond social value-systems and linguistic limitations.

John Baldessari (born 1931 in National City, California) lives and works in Santa Monica, California. His works were part of the 47th (1997) and 53rd (2009) Venice Biennials, the Carnegie International (1985-86), the Whitney Biennial (1983), as well as the Documenta V (1972) and VII (1982). In 2005, an extensive, two-part retrospective was dedicated to the artist at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien and at the Kunsthaus Graz. In June 2009, John Baldessari was awarded the Golden Lion at the 53rd Venice Biennial for his life work. During the same year, there opened at the Tate Modern in London (2009) his large retrospective Pure Beauty, which subsequently could be seen at the MACBA, Barcelona (2010), the LACMA, Los Angeles (2010), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2010/2011). Recently the artist has presented his works in solo exhibitions at the Fondazione Prada (2010) and at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2011).

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