

# JOHN BALDESSARI

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# JOHN BALDESSARI

with essays by

MARCIA TUCKER and ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN

and an interview by

NANCY DREW

THE NEW MUSEUM, New York

catalog co-published with UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES,  
Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio

## **JOHN BALDESSARI: WORK 1966–1980**

### THE NEW MUSEUM

Exhibition organized by Marcia Tucker  
Exhibition and catalog coordinated by Robin Dodds

Essay by Marcia Tucker  
Interview by Nancy Drew  
Selected Exhibition and Bibliography by  
Daniel Cameron and Lore Lennon  
Videotape and film programs  
organized by Patricia Brundage

### EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

The New Museum, New York  
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Part II: April 8–April 28, 1981  
  
The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio  
January 14–February 21, 1982  
  
Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas  
March 6–April 18, 1982

## **JOHN BALDESSARI: ART AS RIDDLE**

### UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES

Wright State University  
Dayton, Ohio

Exhibition organized by Robert Pincus-Witten  
Exhibition coordinated by Michael Jones, Director,  
and David Givler, Associate Director

Essay by Robert Pincus-Witten

University Art Galleries, Dayton, Ohio  
January 1982

Exhibition to circulate

THE NEW MUSEUM  
65 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10003

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"John Baldessari" interview © Nancy Drew

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## STATEMENT

**A** year ago, I first approached Robert Pincus-Witten with the proposal that he curate a limited retrospective exhibition for the University Art Galleries at Wright State University. I was interested in assembling an exhibition of modest size which could travel to smaller institutions whose programs are directed toward the examination of contemporary art and its attendant issues.

After some discussion, Dr. Pincus-Witten chose to organize an exhibit of the photographic works of John Baldessari. It was in his mind a project of timely importance as Baldessari's work had not up to that point been dealt with comprehensively in this country.

Once our project was begun, we became aware of The New Museum's project also well underway to assemble a larger scale retrospective of Baldessari's work. A series of communications and meetings followed in which various modes of collaboration were explored. The final decision was to publish jointly this document and to continue as originally planned with our respective exhibitions.

It is our hope that the presence of two differently scaled touring exhibitions will make John Baldessari's work accessible to a broader audience across the country, and that this catalog will provide a suitably extensive discussion of the work for some time to come.

—Michael Jones  
Director of the University Art Galleries  
Wright State University, Inc.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**T**he wit, intelligence, irreverence, and breadth of knowledge manifest in John Baldessari's work have made it important to many others, artists and public alike. This is the first museum exhibition, however, to show in depth the work Baldessari has done over the past fifteen years.

When The New Museum learned that an exhibition of Baldessari's photographic works was being planned at the University Art Galleries at Wright State University, the two organizations decided to join forces. While the scope and nature of our respective exhibitions differed, we felt that by jointly sponsoring the catalog, more information about Baldessari's work could be disseminated. It is our hope that different points of view, including Baldessari's own in the interview with Nancy Drew, will elucidate his work in the manner it deserves.

My thanks to Michael Jones, Director of the University Art Galleries at Wright State University, for his cooperation and assistance, and to Robert Pincus-Witten for his thoughtful essay on the photographic aspects of Baldessari's work; to Nancy Drew, for providing a lively insight into Baldessari's personal attitudes and reflections on his own work; to Lore Lennon and Dan Cameron, who each did extensive research and compiled the biographic and bibliographic documentation for the show; to Joan Greenfield, for her role in the design and production of this catalog; and to Tim Yohn, The New Museum's long-standing and long-suffering editor, for his careful and perceptive editing of the manuscripts. I very much appreciate the time and efforts of Dean McNeil and of Robin Dodds and Lynn Gumpert of The New Museum's curatorial staff, who read my manuscript with care and made many helpful suggestions; special thanks in this regard to Nina Garfinkel who typed the final draft of the essay and provided additional critical copyediting.

The organization of a retrospective exhibition of this kind is a long and complicated process. Without the tireless and inspired work of Robin Dodds, the exhibition's coordinator, it could not have taken place. Grateful thanks also to the entire staff of the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, and especially to Nick Sheidy, for making so much material available to us, and to Patricia Brundage, Director of Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., for her cheerful and knowledgeable assistance with the extensive video and film component of the exhibition. We are also very indebted to the individuals, galleries, and institutions who have generously lent their works for this exhibition and tour. Thanks also to Michael Findlay for providing early documentation of Baldessari's work, and to Lyn Blumenthal for lending me a transcript of the taped interview done by Video Data Bank in Chicago.

As always, I am especially glad to have had the support of our staff, volunteers, and interns during the preparation of the show; their extraordinary competence and skill, and their patience with my absence while writing allowed the luxury of thought to take precedence, briefly, over administrative priorities.

Most of all, however, I am grateful to John Baldessari for sharing his work with us, and for the many enjoyable hours spent exchanging ideas and information. His generosity, both intellectual and personal, is rare and deeply appreciated.

—Marcia Tucker  
Director of The New Museum



*I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971  
Lithograph  
22 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

Ken Feingold

# JOHN BALDESSARI: PURSUING THE UNPREDICTABLE

"Never neglect the obvious."—Dorothy Wald

“I will not make any more boring art,” John Baldessari wrote over and over again in a work done in 1971. The impulse for the piece, he says, came from a dissatisfaction with “the fallout of minimalism,” but its implications are far greater than its source. It is typical of Baldessari’s work, for not only is it extremely funny, but it is also a strategy, a set of conditions, a directive, a paradoxical statement, and a commentary on the art world with which it is involved. Like all his work to date, it addresses, on many complex levels, issues about art, language, information, games, and the world at large.

Asked to participate in an exhibition in Nova Scotia for which there were no funds available to cover the artist’s traveling expenses, Baldessari requested that people write that same sentence on the walls as many times as they wished. Although two similar pieces, a videotape and a lithograph, incorporated his own handwriting, Baldessari’s completed project for Nova Scotia was ultimately executed by others. This strategy recurs throughout his career in different forms. In fact, much of what Baldessari has done is dependent upon what friends, students, or studio assistants can or cannot do.

Though there is no “drawing” in the conventional sense in this work, it lacks the obscurity and self-consciousness of most conceptual art which uses only language. It is a pun on the thing it most resembles. But the best thing of all about this particular work is that, for the most part, it’s true. He does not make boring art.

This particular piece was presented in several forms, indicating that he doesn’t hesitate to use any media that interest him. Thus, his work consists of films, videotapes, prints, photographs, texts, drawings, found images, and combinations of these. An event or situation will be staged, then taped; photographs taken at random from the television will have a word or words assigned to them by someone else, providing the raw material for one or more future pieces; an action will be filmed and stills from it used in a different context; or the work of another artist will be utilized by Baldessari in a way which completely alters its original intention.

Baldessari’s work is at once misunderstood and enormously well-liked; in the first case because beneath the seeming simplicity of his use of images, words, and gestures lurks a Pandora’s box of difficult and provocative ideas, indicating the artist’s extensive reading and immersion in the philosophical currents of his time, and in the latter case because the work embraces the obvious and presents it to us in a new context, reflecting a wonderfully outrageous, yet subtle, sense of humor. Baldessari’s work actually makes us laugh, without in any way detracting from its serious concerns. The most important thing to him is, he says, that “I really care about meaning in art. I want things to look simple, but to raise issues, and to have more than one level of comprehension.” To this end, Baldessari’s work over the past decade and a half<sup>2</sup> can best be understood



in terms of overlapping areas of concern: the artist as teacher; the artist as strategist; the artist as storyteller; the artist as artist.

It is characteristically quirky of Baldessari that he wanted to be an art critic before he wanted to be an artist, and with this in mind started working toward an art history degree at Berkeley in 1954. Dissatisfied with what he was doing, he began to paint, influenced at first by Cézanne, Matisse, and Abstract Expressionism. Then, inspired by Dada and Surrealist literary and visual ideas, he incorporated photographs of demolished buildings and wall fragments containing letters and bits of words into his paintings. He also jotted down fragments of overheard conversations to use in his work, finding the fragments of more interest than the whole. He then made paintings out of aluminum scraps, which were bent to look like crumpled paper and scattered throughout the room on the floor. "I liked the whole idea of incompleteness, but you could really figure the whole thing out from one of the bits."

Eventually he found himself "getting tired of trying to make those things into art."<sup>3</sup> He decided instead to use the notes he'd made as his work. His ideas of art had seriously ruptured and expanded, he says, and he wanted to do more than just paint. "I got to a point where I was pretty bitter about art in general, and I figured 'Why not give people what they understand most, which is the written word and the photograph.' I just reasoned perversely: 'Why fight it? Why don't you just give them what they want?'"<sup>4</sup>

The first 45" x 59" work marking this transition was a series of standard canvases, each containing a photographic image and/or a lettered text.<sup>5</sup> According to his notes, "some of the photographs were originally taken for non-art use, some were taken to violate then-current photographic norms, and others were taken by pointing the camera blindly out the window while driving."<sup>6</sup> The only "art signal" Baldessari wanted was the canvas, but he had someone else build and prime them. He mostly used texts taken directly from art books, and had a sign painter letter the texts in the most straightforward way. The response to this work, he says, was not particularly good. At first, the only people who were interested were other artists. However, after being hired to teach at the University of California in San Diego, he was given a solo show in 1968 by Molly

*A Work with Only One Property*, 1966-68

Acrylic on canvas

59 x 45

Collection of The Grinstein Family,  
Los Angeles, California

*A Painting That Is Its Own Documentation*, 1966-68

Acrylic on canvas

68 x 56½

Collection of Molly Barnes, Los Angeles, California

*The Spectator Is Compelled...*, 1966-68

Acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas

59 x 45

Collection of Hans and Annelie Piotrowiak, Essen,  
West Germany

*Wrong*, 1966-68

Acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas

59 x 45

Collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art,  
Contemporary Art Council, New Talent Purchase  
Award

Barnes in Los Angeles. Another Los Angeles dealer, Nicholas Wilder, was supportive and put Baldessari in touch with Richard Bellamy in New York. Bellamy gave him a list of artists he thought Baldessari would enjoy meeting, among them Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler, and Mel Bochner. Consequently Baldessari began to feel somewhat less isolated. In New York, the only professional interest was shown by Michael Findlay, then director of the Richard Feigen Gallery. Baldessari was first included there in a three-person show in 1968, then given his first solo New York exhibition in 1970. Subsequently several European dealers became interested in his work, and until fairly recently, it was better known in Europe than in the United States.

The 1966–68 paintings were on canvas only because Baldessari didn't think he could work them into an art context otherwise. *The Commissioned Paintings* of that same period, however, were themselves derived from an art context, albeit a slightly different one. By visiting amateur art exhibitions, he found fourteen painters who agreed to do work on commission. A standard canvas with a delineated area within which the work was to be executed and about a dozen 35 millimeter slides of various objects were then delivered to each artist. He or she was asked to choose one of the slides and to paint as faithful a rendition of the image as possible. When completed, the words "A PAINTING BY....." were added by a sign painter, and the entries then exhibited in a more avant-garde context than the one to which the "Sunday painters" were accustomed. They were for Baldessari an important use of art to make art.

These very early works are consistent in organization and intent with many of Baldessari's interests in subsequent years. The source material used by the commissioned painters, for instance, was acquired by Baldessari's having someone wander and point to things of interest, and then having both the pointing finger and the object of focus photographed. One intention was to

*A Painting by Elmore Bourke from  
The Commissioned Paintings, 1969*

14 paintings, acrylic on canvas  
59 × 45 each

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*A Painting by Nancy Conger from  
The Commissioned Paintings, 1969*

14 paintings, acrylic on canvas  
59 × 45 each

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*A Painting by Hildegard Reiner from  
The Commissioned Paintings, 1969*

14 paintings, acrylic on canvas  
59 × 45 each

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

prompt the "Sunday painters" to use different subject matter than that which they might normally have chosen. The works were taken from one context and placed in another; the language and image were combined in one format; non-art images were used to make art that ironically didn't look like art; and, finally, the differences in each painter's style, highlighted as they were by a uniform format, automatically encouraged the viewer to compare each work to the others, thus making "esthetic" choices.

The spirit of play and gamesmanship in these works, as well as in the ones immediately following when he abandoned the use of the canvas altogether, suggest that Baldessari's interest at that time in the work of Duchamp may have even prompted the transition. When he first saw a body of Duchamp's work reproduced in 1959, he says:

It was as if I had come across a long-lost brother... all of a sudden I felt I had a home, that I wasn't so strange... It probably was partly to do with Duchamp's focus on language... I probably didn't understand it, though, at the time. I talked about getting away from art schools and leaving L.A. to work through a lot of things, to find out what I was about, rather than following certain models. And it came out that I was more interested in language than in painting.<sup>7</sup>

Also partly prompted by a long-term interest in the "kind of fragmentary nature" of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings, Baldessari began to isolate parts of things in his own work. He and another San Diego artist, George Nicolaides, used silver and black stickers to make a dotted line or boundary around the ghetto area of that city, documenting the project with photographs. When to Baldessari's surprise the piece was sold, he realized that the use of photographs was not inherently unacceptable, and that he was more interested in working out certain ideas than in making a product. He felt that "paintings take longer than photos," and made a final step away from the static object.

At this time Baldessari was close to several other artists living and working in San Diego, among them Richard Allen Morris, Don Dudley, Guy Williams, and Malcolm McClain. Don Brewer, then head of the La Jolla Museum, was extremely supportive, giving most of the artists teaching jobs and exhibitions at the museum. Although Baldessari did leave to work briefly in Los Angeles, he found the San Diego group more congenial and life there more conducive to making art, so he returned. At that time, in the 1960s, the painter Don Llewallen had come from Los Angeles to organize the extension program at the University of California in San Diego, and when an art department was finally founded there, Paul Brach became its first chairman. In 1970, Brach left to become Dean of the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, and invited Baldessari to join its faculty.

The move to Los Angeles paralleled a move away from painting ideas to other means which would convey pure information. Baldessari remembers having a fantasy of wanting to see all the paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art put together side by side like a continuous series of movie stills. He also became fascinated with what was *outside* the depicted image—an inversion of the art historian's traditional area of concern.

Even though interest in performance was rare on the West Coast, Baldessari toyed briefly with the possible esthetic use of biological systems and hydroponics as a way of moving outside traditional painting ideas. (He loved the thought of an artist going into an organ bank instead of an

art store for supplies, he says.) From there, he began to do sequential work, pieces without beginning, middle, or end, which could start or stop anywhere.

At U.C. San Diego, Baldessari had occasionally traded classes with the musician Pauline Oliveros, who had students tape sounds and noises and edit them instead of trying to learn musical notation; Baldessari felt his own use of the camera to be a "comparable way to learn about issues without having to learn scales."<sup>8</sup> At this same time, the poet David Antin became a friend, and was helpful because he came from a literary tradition but was also extremely knowledgeable about art. Baldessari found Antin "wonderful to talk to, and the first person I was around daily who liked the kind of work I did."

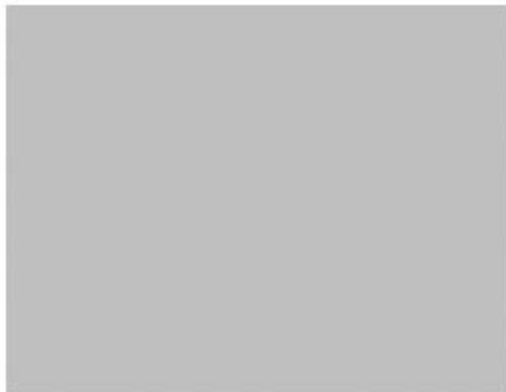
**B**aldessari has said that what he'd most like to do is sit and read all day; consequently, poetry, philosophy, linguistics, and anthropology are among the disciplines that have shaped his thinking. He feels, for example, that the work of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has been important to his own ideas because of the structural connection Lévi-Strauss made between things of a seemingly disparate nature. Finding Wittgenstein's work to be "a model for reductive thinking," Baldessari identifies with the philosopher's quest for clarity. At the other end of the spectrum, Baldessari also loves the extreme complexity of language, disguised as simplicity, as exemplified in the work of Lewis Carroll. Carroll's fantastic imagination, and his use of layered meaning so that any word could be made to mean anything he intended, appealed to Baldessari. Another model was the ideology of the Italian Futurists, who proclaimed the destruction of logic, the use of surprise, and the involvement of the spectator, and insisted that everything of any value is inherently theatrical.<sup>9</sup> The Italian Futurists also renounced "technique," emphasizing instead multiform, simultaneous, and interdisciplinary modes of presentation, that is,

lines written in free words, simultaneity, compenetration, the short acted-out poem,  
the dramatized sensation, comic dialogue, the negative act, the re-echoing line,  
"extralogical" discussion, synthetic deformation, the scientific outburst that clears the  
air.<sup>10</sup>

Fortunato Depero's *Notes on the Theatre* (c. 1916) stresses the elements of surprise and innovation, contrasts, tricks, unlikelihoods, exaggeration, jest, and paradox, insisting that only through the use of "variety, novelty, surprise and speed" will the theatre be able to sustain its interest.

Depero's emphasis on the importance of cinematography and its appropriation to the world of theatre, the presentation of extraordinarily inventive uses of color in panoramas and other events,<sup>11</sup> and the incorporation of "typographical dramas," "filmed dramas of objects," and "symphonies of gestures, events, colors, lines, etc."<sup>12</sup> are especially relevant to Baldessari's films and videotapes—both in their deadpan irreverence and their unusual structure. A good example of this is a 1971 black-and-white videotape entitled *I Am Making Art*, in which he moves different parts of his body slightly while saying, after each move, "I am making art." The statement, he says, "hovers between assertion and belief."<sup>13</sup> On one level, the piece spoofs the work of artists who, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, explored the use of their own bodies and gestures as an art medium. The endless repetition, awkwardness of the movements made by the artist, and the reiteration of the statement "I am making art" create a synthesis of gestural and linguistic modes which is both innovative (in the same way that the more "serious" work of his

*I Am Making Art*, 1972 (still)  
Black-and-white videotape with sound  
15 minutes



peers is innovative) and absurdly self-evident.

Futurist sensibility also suggested to Baldessari the possibility of describing a single occurrence taking place in extended time, a time made visible or palpable rather than remaining abstract. Almost all of his work has this temporal element, but it is most obvious in the film and video pieces, especially in such early works as *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* (1972). This videotape is based on the possibility, however remote, that plants, being living organisms, can also learn as we can by endless repetition of word and image. The simple actions recorded in short color films like *Water to Wine to Water* (1972–73) or *Easel Painting* (1972–73), which show the artist using elementary means of changing colors (in one a child's magic trick, in the other dipping his finger alternately into jars of yellow and green pigment), engage in the kind of thinking first espoused by the Futurists. At the same time, Baldessari was interested in other schools of thought—the work of the Symbolist poets, the Romantics, and the “decadent” English poets like Oscar Wilde, as well as such successors as John Crowe Ransom, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, and Hart Crane. His concern with poetry may be attributed to the fact that it, like art, is “without noise,” that is, it constitutes “a system which is pure, [in which] no unit ever goes wasted, however long, however loose, however tenuous may be the thread connecting it to one of the levels of the story.”<sup>14</sup> The influence of these poets, while not as obvious perhaps as that of the Futurists, is most apparent in the distillation of language that makes Baldessari's use of words both succinct and suggestive. Certain works, such as *Word Chain: Palm Tree (Cynthia's Story)* (1975), are part of a series in which Baldessari had different people construct associative word chains. The person would say the first thing that came to mind, then the list of words was given to someone else who was instructed to shoot a photograph of the object or situation. The words and photographs were then matched, with empty spaces left where the photographer could not find an appropriate image. In *David—One Day—60 Shots, Named and Alphabetized* (1976), Baldessari follows a friend through the events of a day, naming each shot according to the activity depicted, then placing them in alphabetical order. A poetic, descriptive mode results. A 1973 film, *Title*, similarly alternates and exchanges words and images, distilling both verbal and visual language into quintessential form, and creating a concise, candid, yet mysterious kind of poetry in the process.

It is probably the writings of the late Roland Barthes, however, that most shaped Baldessari's use of language. Its incorporation into his own work came about quite naturally:

Language is so common. I think you get through to more people through language than you get through to with images. I still think people are very word oriented. That seems to be common parlance, the token of the realm, so to speak... I mean art's a language too, but you don't normally go around drawing diagrams [to indicate that you] want a pound of steak.<sup>15</sup>

Like Barthes, Baldessari examines aspects of popular culture by probing beneath what most people take for granted in order to find the real meaning or value of the ordinary. (In *Mythologies* [1975], for example, Barthes tackles such phenomena as wrestling and striptease, the myth of Greta Garbo, or such varied objects as margarine, wine, detergent, toys, and cars.) Some of his theoretical writing about the nature of narrative indicates that he, like Baldessari, finds “the incessant play of potentials, the organizational complexity of narrative, capable as it is of integrating structurally both backwards and forwards,”<sup>16</sup> fascinating. The relationship of games to lan-



*Word Chain: Palm Tree (Cynthia's Story)*, 1975  
Black-and-white and color 35-mm contact prints  
on paper  
33 × 27  
Collection of Massimo Valsecchi, Milan, Italy

Nick Sheidy


guage, an essential component of Baldessari's work, was similarly a concern of Barthes', who points out that a game is itself a language, depending upon the same symbolic structure that one finds in language and narrative.<sup>17</sup>

Some of Baldessari's early films incorporated, literally as well as philosophically, the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course in General Linguistics*, first published in 1915, provides

*A Sentence of Thirteen Parts (With Twelve Alternate Verbs) Ending in FABLE*, 1977  
(detail)

Four fold-out series of 25 black-and-white  
photographs and printed words

3½ × 5¼



a number of pertinent observations about the nature and structure of language. In the spirit of Saussure's observation that "language never stops interpreting and decomposing its units,"<sup>18</sup> Baldessari uses random words and images as raw material, to be compiled later into fragments, sentences, and texts for other pieces. Furthermore, "each word," according to Saussure, "is like the center of a constellation; it is the point of convergence of an indefinite number of co-ordinated terms."<sup>19</sup> In *Fable—A Sentence of Thirteen Parts (with Twelve Alternate Verbs) Ending in FABLE* (1977), or the *Blasted Allegories* series (1978) which followed, one can clearly see how Baldessari uses arbitrarily selected words, combined in any one of a number of ways, to act as catalysts in this manner. In addition, texts from and about Saussure's writings, as well as those of Wittgenstein and Barthes, have been incorporated into several early films. One, called *About Saussure* (1973), has to do with typing a text with speed and understanding, an endeavor which fails; another, *Saussure Tear* (1971), uses a torn text by the writer, which is submerged in water. A pencil is used to try to join the two halves, to recreate syntax and allow meaning to emerge. Here, language is treated as an object, just as Saussure, by analyzing and dissecting language, also objectifies it.

Baldessari's sources over the years have remained for the most part literary. Most recently, they include the writings of Freud, Reich, Proust, and Bergson. Even those visual artists whose work he has been influenced by, like Duchamp, have had a strong verbal or linguistic component to their work. Movies and television have also been important to him in providing a different sense of temporal evolution and a ready-made repertoire of images and gestures. But above all, it is reading books, magazines, and newspapers, an important morning ritual for Baldessari, that provides the main impetus for his ideas. Bits and pieces of information are gathered and entered in notebooks where similarities are noted, comparisons made, parts of conversations recorded,

and ideas for future work jotted down. Sometimes Baldessari will misread a piece of information, but find it useful anyhow. He simply fills his head with as much information as possible, he says, reading shopping lists, advertisements, and junk mail, or looking at photographs from diverse sources. In each case he is looking for a word or image which coincides with something he has been thinking about, or he is trying to find common threads among series of recurring kinds of objects or events that interest him. Occasionally, he says, he has even made notes of all the things he does and doesn't want a piece to do, and uses these as a kind of checklist. Much of this kind of source material, he feels, is a strategy to get away from "making pictures."

Baldessari's working methods are equally compulsive. Someone once referred to him as a "nine-to-five artist" because of the consistency of his studio time and the fact that he feels it is important to be in the studio every day. "My mind doesn't shut off after 7:00," he says, "but I don't work just when I'm inspired to."

Baldessari's wide-ranging sources and his methods of utilizing information reflect more of a personal attitude than an esthetic ideology, and seem integral both to the person he is and the multifaceted and complex nature of the society in which we live.

**B**aldessari is always interested in how information is conveyed. Clearly, the verbal and visual means are the two modes most often used, in complementary ways, to transfer information. In this respect, teaching lessons and teaching itself have always been a source of pleasure to Baldessari. As mentioned before, the earliest "paintings" in the exhibition, dating from the mid-1960s, utilize passages taken directly from textbooks on making art. The didactic mode of these passages, delivered in such a deadpan manner (as in, for instance, *An Artist Is Not Merely the Slavish Announcer* [1966-68]), is coupled with photographic images that underline the absurdity of the rhetoric. These canvases, then, are extremely ironic commentaries on the process of teaching, making art, and conveying information, all of which are useless without the proper context.

Although Baldessari first taught in order to support himself, he found that he liked doing it and eventually ceased making a separation between communication through teaching and communication through his own work. "I found it very much the same. In one case I am there, and in the other case I am incognito, but I am getting essentially the same message out, I hope."<sup>20</sup>

In general, information that can be conveyed in the world is of two kinds, semantic and esthetic, both of which are relevant in Baldessari's work. According to information theory, the semantic aspect is logical, structured, interpretable, and translatable; it prepares actions, while the esthetic, untranslatable aspect shapes states of mind.<sup>21</sup> Semantic information can be transmitted to others by several means—writing, speech, sound, or pictures—whereas esthetic information has no such goal. "It does not have the character of intent; in fact, it determines internal states."<sup>22</sup> The two kinds of information, were they to exist in a pure state apart from each other, would represent theoretical extremes. But in reality they coexist, and every message has elements of both. The semantic part is predictable, in terms of messages, while the esthetic part remains unforeseeable. Baldessari's use of both kinds of information is sometimes startling, since most plastic art tends to be primarily of the esthetic (or what Oscar Wilde referred to as "quite useless"<sup>23</sup>) kind. Because Baldessari's work is so intelligible on the semantic level, it seems very much part of the everyday world. Thus a piece like *If It Is A.M., If It Is P.M.* (1972-73)

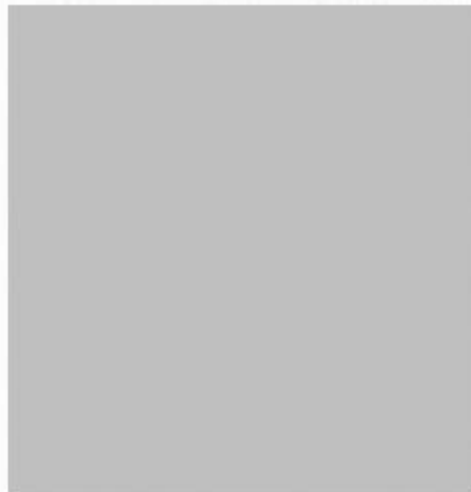
*An Artist Is Not Merely the Slavish Announcer...*

1966-68

Acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas

59 x 45

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York





simultaneously “makes sense” in terms of the activities it describes, and, by suggesting a series of activities taking place outside the frame of the work, introduces *purely* esthetic information as well. (This reference to events outside the picture plane proper is reminiscent of Baldessari’s early speculations about the non-visible activities in Old Master paintings.) There is a prosaic quality about the statements in the work:

If It is A.M., the man who lives in the house opposite this window will water his garden.  
If it is P.M., the couple living in the apartment next door will probably argue.

In Baldessari’s work, the constant tension between the two kinds of information—verbal and visual, written and spoken—results in an interplay between semantic and esthetic content, and may well be the source of its humor. In the videotape *Baldessari Sings Lewitt* (1972), he sets a series of numbered, complex statements by Sol Lewitt on the nature of conceptual art to such well-worn tunes as “Camptown Races” or “Some Enchanted Evening”. The results are hilarious; the “natural” priority of esthetic information in music is subverted by discourse deliberately inappropriate to the task at hand, and conversely Lewitt’s “semantic” information is subverted by Baldessari’s “esthetic.”

A different kind of interplay between the two kinds of information is found in Baldessari’s use of press photographs. In the traditional press picture, text and image coexist, yet remain separate. At the same time, this kind of photo eschews “artistry” in favor of objectivity.<sup>24</sup> The image is not an illustration of the text below it; instead, the text is used to make the image more immediate, to “load” and amplify it.<sup>25</sup> However, one kind of image, like poetry, is completely self-sufficient, and that is the “traumatic photograph (fires, shipwrecks, catastrophes, violent deaths, all captured ‘from life as lived’), [which] is the photograph about which there is nothing to say.”<sup>26</sup> Because such a preponderance of semantic information exists in the image, there is no room for anything else. When Baldessari thus uses a series of disaster photographs in *A Different Kind of Order (The Art Teacher Story)* (1972–73), the juxtaposition of such images with the accompanying text becomes amusing:

A friend of mine who taught painting had all his students stand on one foot (in front of their easels) while painting. He believed that if the student was physically off balance a new sense of order would emerge in their work.

In this work, the visual aspect is seemingly semantic, the verbal seemingly esthetic, reversing the usual procedure and bringing the two into collision. But the important point for Baldessari was that chaos is just a different kind of order.

From this kind of photographic work, Baldessari eventually expanded his use of media into film and video as a way of fusing words and images in real time.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he says, he

began to realize that the serial photographic things I was doing were pretty much like films. It seemed like film and video helped me begin to understand what was on my mind. It wasn’t that I was interested so much in film and video *per se* as that I needed them to help me figure out what I was thinking about—so I continue to work in all three media because I’m still really not clear what each has to offer.<sup>28</sup>

As Baldessari once stated at a conference entitled *The Future of Television*, “Video is just one

*If It Is A.M.; If It Is P.M.*, 1972–73 (detail)  
3 black-and-white photographs and ink on  
graph paper  
14 × 10¼ each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

Nick Sheidy

*A Different Kind of Order (The Thelonious Monk Story)*, 1972–73

6 black-and-white photographs and text  
11¼ × 14¾ each

Collection of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston;  
Museum Purchase with the Aid of Funds from  
the National Endowment for the Arts.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ORDER (THE THELONIOUS MONK STORY)

There's a story about Thelonious Monk going around his apartment tilting all the pictures hanging on the wall. It was his idea of teaching his wife a different kind of order. When she saw the pictures askew on the wall she would straighten them. And when Monk saw them straightened on the wall, he would tilt them. Until one day his wife left them hanging on the wall tilted.

more tool in the artist's toolbox... The case should not be 'I'm going to make a video piece,' but 'What I want to do can best be done with video.'<sup>29</sup> Because the temporal element in video is different than that of photographs, i.e., since it incorporates "real time," it can be extremely tedious to watch. According to David Antin, Baldessari's use of "inherent" time in his work means that whenever the task or situation is completed, the tape ends, and "whether they are interesting or not is largely a matter of judging the value of the task at hand."<sup>30</sup> Some of the tapes, like *Some Words I Mispronounce* (1973), are under a minute long, and scarcely boring. Others, such as *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, are a seemingly endless thirty minutes, largely due to repetition and redundancy (in human rather than plant terms). Baldessari, however, comments: "I remember that Sol Lewitt once phrased it very well for me when he said, 'Once you work through boredom, it gets pretty interesting.'"<sup>31</sup>

The kind of sequential imagery which Baldessari employs in photographs, film, and video partly accounts for their humor, which he says is not a deliberate attempt to be funny. The comic effect, according to Roland Barthes,

emerges, according to a familiar procedure, from the repetition and variation of attitudes. It can be noted in this connection that the single photograph, contrary to the drawing, is very rarely (that is, only with much difficulty) comic: the comic requires movement, which is to say repetition (easy in film) or typification (possible in drawing), both of these "connotations" being prohibited to the photograph.<sup>32</sup>

The humor in Baldessari's work is partly a result of the subjection of ordinary objects to art strategies, or art objects to ordinary strategies. In *Folding Hat*, a 1970 tape, for instance, he end-

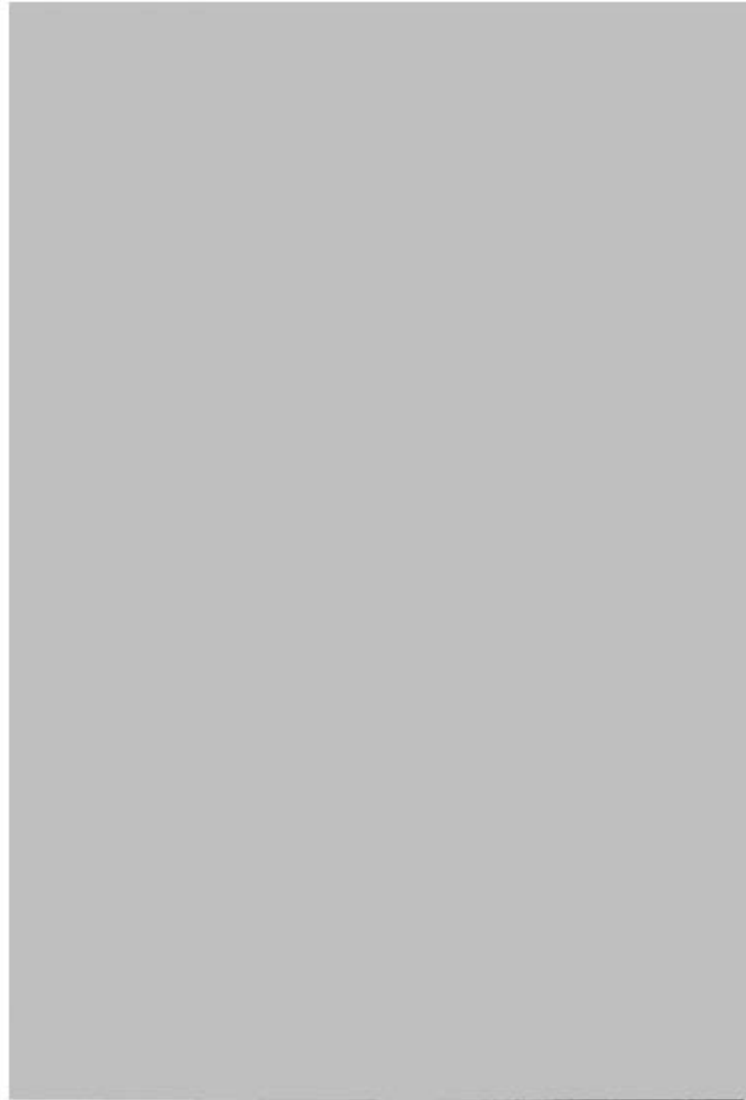
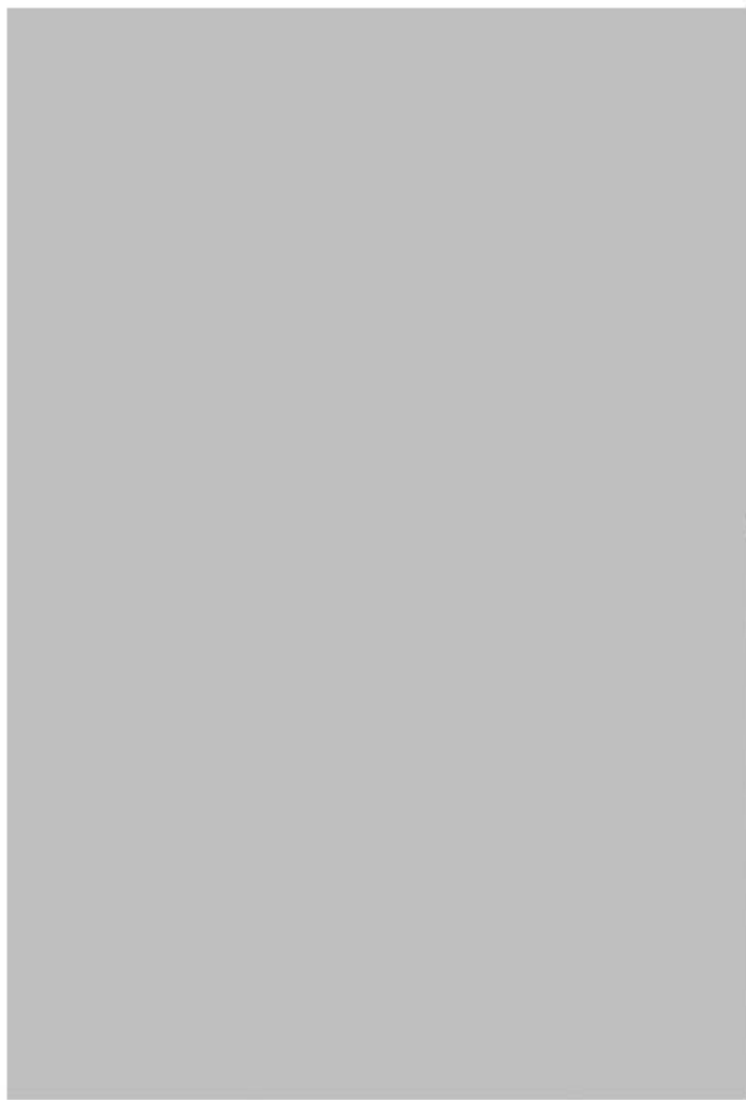
lessly folds a hat and whistles, so that object, sound, and gesture become imbued with meaning and take on artistic significance by means of focus and repetition. One small segment from the tape *The Way We Do Art Now and Other Sacred Tales* (1973) shows the artist taping one end of a stick and lifting it from the other end, while in *How Various People Spit Out Beans from How We Do Art Now* (1973) he observes how each body convulses in the process and how far each person can project the bean. In both, an ordinary object is placed in an esthetic context. Examples of the reverse of this procedure can be seen in *Baldessari Sings Lewitt*, where art statements are sung to popular tunes, and *New York City Postcard Painting* (1971), a Super-8 film loop in which various scenes of New York City are painted out with different colors; the latter, in Baldessari's words, acts as "a metaphor for art being more exciting than the mundaneness of city life."<sup>33</sup>

Baldessari's humor also derives from these strategies, many of which create unexpected and amusing juxtapositions of different elements in his work. His use of strategy to avoid "good taste," eliminate boredom (primarily his own in making the work), and bypass his own esthetic sensibility means that the context for the work is always changing; a new context provides some unexpectedly funny results. Just as the best humor is based on the unpredictable, the purpose of art, Baldessari has said, is to keep us perpetually off-balance.<sup>34</sup>

**T**he most common method used by Baldessari to keep himself and us "off-balance" is to incorporate accident and chance as source material for his work, in the tradition of John Cage. As early as 1966, he wanted to make work out of things that nobody else would think of making art of.<sup>35</sup> This impulse generated the first aluminum fragment pieces he made. Later, accident became a means of insuring that the outcome of a piece would remain unknown until it was finished. A chance word or overheard phrase could trigger an entire body of work; in the case of *Floating: Color* (1972), the word "defenestration" suggested the possibility of throwing something that was *not* an object out of the window. In his notes, Baldessari comments that


using color gave rise to a simple ordering system based on the color wheel, which was useful here and in later pieces because it was sequential yet brief in number. I wanted a form that was static but not limitless. Also, the form provided a way to avoid relational color choices, that is, color combinations based on intuitive process.<sup>36</sup>

Baldessari's use of chance to avoid composition or esthetic decisions had its prototype in an informal exhibition entitled *Pier 18* held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1971. The projects were photography-oriented, and each participating artist was asked to meet two photographers at a deserted pier at a specific time and to present them with a project. Baldessari simply asked them to try to photograph a ball, which he repeatedly bounced on the pier, so that it would appear in the center of the finished photograph. Consequently there was no opportunity to "compose" or to try to make a handsome picture. Many other works grew out of this strategy, such as *Trying to Roll a Hoop in a Perfect Circle*, *Throwing 4 Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line...*, and *Throwing 3 Balls in the Air to Get an Equilateral Triangle...* (all from 1972-73). The hoop piece consists of "the best sequence of 216 frames," while the throwing-balls pieces are "the best of 36 tries" because there are 36 shots in a roll of 35-millimeter film. A later work, *Strobe Series/Futurist: Trying to Get a Straight Line with a Finger* (1975), is based on the same



Ken Feingold

*Floating: Color*, 1972  
6 Type C prints  
11 x 14 each  
Collection of Mario Bertolini, Breno, Italy



*Throwing 4 Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line*  
(Best of 36 Tries), 1972-73

4 Type C prints  
13 ¼ x 20 each  
Collection of Dr. Paul M. Vanek, Ann Arbor,  
Michigan

*Pier 18*, 1971  
Black-and-white photographs  
8 x 10 each, installation dimensions variable  
Collection of the artist



Peter Tasis

Harry Schunk

principle, wherein chance is an integral part of the activity itself. The results are thus limited by the arbitrary rules of the game, in other words, the number of tries will be limited to the number of available shots on a single roll of film. In some of the later works, particularly the *Blasted Allegories* series, the images themselves have been obtained haphazardly by taking pictures of a television screen with an intervalometer. Such strategies were evolved, says Baldessari, because

I'm concerned with the formal and esthetic qualities to the point where I try to set up situations where I can't make any esthetic decisions about it and that's very hard. I realize that as you go on you get better and better at making things look good, and you have to set up stumbling blocks so that you can escape your own good taste, and even that creeps in a lot.<sup>37</sup>

Far from simply being an aleatory artist, Baldessari further keeps us off-balance by making an equal number of works based on concepts of choice and comparison, a diametrically opposed

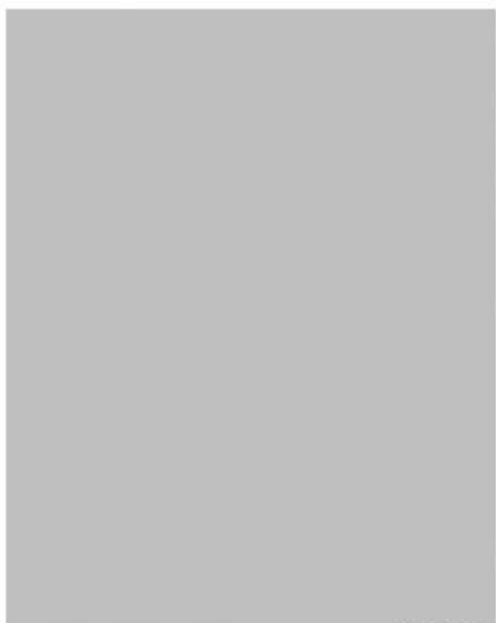
system to that of chance and accident. In the *Choosing* series (1971), for example, participants were asked to select, much in the manner of a game show, any three items (green beans, rhubarb, carrots, onions, beets, radishes, etc.) from a similar group. Baldessari would then choose one of the three by pointing to it, and a photograph would be taken. This single chosen item was then carried over to the next group, consisting of the selected item plus two new ones, and the entire process was repeated.

Many of Baldessari's videotapes are also based on the idea of making comparisons (and therefore, even unconsciously, choices), some of them minute and unlikely, as in *Examining Three 8d Nails* (from *The Way We Do Art Now...*). In this video segment, painstaking attention is paid to which nail has more rust, or which appears "cooler, more distant, less important" than the other two. The tape is funny because we tend not to compare common nails at all. On the other hand, *How Various People Spit Out Beans* forces comparison of an activity that has no reason for taking place at all other than for comparison, and it is the inappropriateness of the activity in relation to its function that makes it amusing. Both tapes highlight Baldessari's use of choosing and comparing, both on the part of the artist and the viewer, as strategies basic to both making art and to life in general.

An hour-long film called *Script* (1973-77) is Baldessari's most complex use of this strategy of choice. Ten very short, simple scripts for ten scenes are shown in printed form first. Seven couples, none of them professional actors, are given each of the scenes to act out in any way they wish. First, we see all ten scenes played consecutively by each of the seven couples, followed by each scene played, in turn, by all seven couples. Thus far, two sets of comparisons have been set up, the first consisting of choosing among all the scenes done by a single couple, the second consisting of choosing the favorite couple's version of each scene. Finally, when it seems that all possibilities for choice and comparison have been exhausted by repetition, Baldessari provides us with "the top ten shots" ranked from one to ten. His choices are clearly not the ones the viewer might have made, further emphasizing the intensely personal nature of selection and judgement-making.

Another Baldessari strategy is to set up rules for making work which defy those in existence and considered basic to making art. For instance, he has stated that he became interested in doing sequential work because he never believed that "any one thing was the final word. If one thing is happening here, what's happening there?" He says that he used to go around for days "trying to look between things instead of at things," an idea which resulted indirectly in such pieces as *Car Color Series: All Cars Parked on the West Side of Main Street...* (1976), where Baldessari photographed the center of the door of a parked car, presenting the photographs, like a color-sample chart, in the same order in which the cars were parked. Where a car wasn't parked, a blank space appears on the wall. "It's a matter of focus," he says. "If you believe your world is formed by what you look at, and you just don't look at the usual things, then your world will change."

To this end, defying the rules becomes a sort of "learning by doing" situation, in which Baldessari always asks, "What would happen if I did this?" or in which he tells someone else, "Try this and see what you get." Because he believes that "the only way you can make good art is to say what it means to be yourself,"<sup>38</sup> the genesis of a strategy which has to do with breaking existing rules derives from his feeling that



*Choosing: Rhubarb*, 1972 (detail)  
7 Type C prints and text  
11 x 14 each  
Private Collection

Ken Feingold



Ken Feingold

*Embed Series: Oiled Arm (Sinking Boat and Palms),*  
1974

2 black-and-white photographs (retouched)

16¾ × 23⅝ each


Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Manilow, Chicago,  
Illinois

*Embed Series: Oiled Arm (Sinking Boat and Palms),*  
1974 (detail)

2 black-and-white photographs (retouched)

16¾ × 23⅝ each

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Manilow, Chicago,  
Illinois



basically, I am perverse. Somebody tells me to do one thing, and I do the other thing... just out of spite. So the more pressure there would be to be serious in a conventional way the less I could be. I remember Charles Manson somewhere is quoted as saying during his trials that the only true sense is nonsense.<sup>39</sup>

Baldessari goes on to say that being difficult, in his work, is no longer something he avoids. He recalls reading that Kierkegaard, in a troubled moment, decided that what he really wanted to do in his life was to make things difficult for people. Baldessari says that after reading this he knew instantly that that was what he wanted too; the assumption here, however, is that difficulty induces learning.

One way of making things difficult, which stems in part from Baldessari's fascination with looking between instead of at things, is the use of a hidden, secret activity or image. One early series of portraits shows someone we assume to be Baldessari himself, hidden behind a series of hats held in one hand; another in the same series shows different friends whose faces are also hidden behind hats. *Secret Handshake* (1973) is a group of five vertically assembled photographs of different handshakes, the specific meaning of which remains unknown to us; and another piece shows Baldessari's face, retouched in the photographs so that his appearance is subtly changed, thereby constituting a disguise.

Another kind of hidden image can be seen in the *Embed Series* (1974), where images have messages (or, occasionally, other images) worked into them by airbrushing or double exposure. For the most part they cannot be seen unless the viewer is specifically looking for them, and even then some of the messages are extremely difficult to find. *French and German Hair* for instance, is so subtle that more than one critic thought the humor lay in the fact that the two images were actually identical. They were not aware that the word "French" is subtly, almost subliminally, embedded in one image, and the word "German" in the other. *Oiled Arm (Sinking Boat and Palms)* contains two images, a tiny boat in one photograph and a small stand of palm trees in the other. *Seeing Is Believing* shows three images of a cigar in an ashtray, and each of the three words arises in the smoke. In all of these pieces, Baldessari has played with various levels of invisibility, suggesting that embedded information might possibly be perceived and accepted on a subliminal rather than conscious level. Similarly, his *Pathetic Fallacy Series* (1975), done the following



*Embed Series: Cigar Dreams (Seeing Is Believing)*,  
1974  
3 black-and-white photographs (retouched)  
20 x 16 each  
Collection of International Museum of Photography  
at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York





Jon Abbott

*Pathetic Fallacy Series: Venial Tongue;*  
*Venal Tongue*, 1975  
2 black-and-white photographs  
16 x 20 each  
Collection of Dr. Jack E. Chachkes, New York

year, explores the possibility of ascribing human feelings to inanimate objects. The images (and occasionally colors alone) contain barely perceptible photographs of faces with specific expressions superimposed on them. Some, like *Venial Tongue*; *Venal Tongue*, are easy to see and funny because of their incongruity. Others, like *Suspicious Pink*; *Resigned Yellow* are perceptible only upon very close scrutiny.

Baldessari has explored a range of hidden images, from the very subtle to the blatantly obvious, as in two segments from *The Way We Make Art Now...* In one, following the phrase "What follows is what he liked to do best," Baldessari reads pages of a newspaper and drops them, one by one, on the floor. The narrative continues, "But he never talked about what he read. He had secrets." The other is a direct pun: the title of the piece is "A sentence with hidden meaning," and Baldessari writes the sentence so that the word "hidden" is off-screen, leaving only "A sentence with meaning" on the monitor.

Transposition from one context to another is a technique used by Baldessari in keeping with his attitude that when one system doesn't work, try another. Radically altering the context of something is a way of definitively changing the way we see things, but even more, according to the sociologist E.T. Hall,

contextual irrationality—using the logic of rules of one context in the place of another—is a common form of interpersonal manipulation and exploitation popular among intellectuals and academicians.<sup>40</sup>

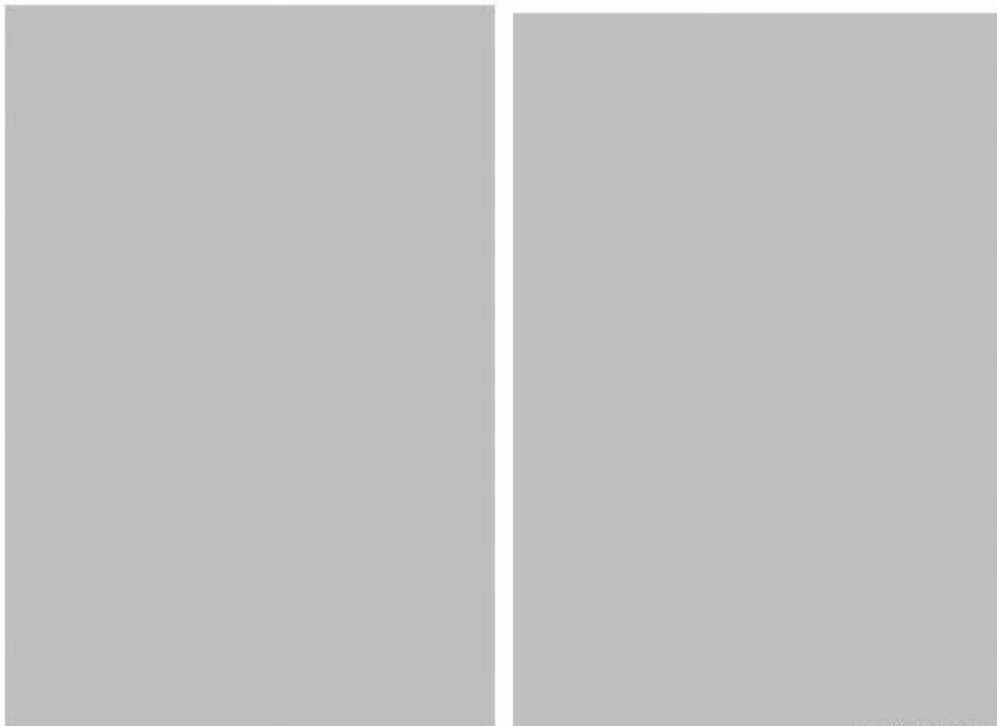
While Hall sees the act of changing contexts in a somewhat negative light, another sociologist, the late Ernst Becker, sees it as a creative device. A change in context creates surprise, and forces us to rethink many common assumptions. Says Becker, "The individual who can be count-

ed on to give us exactly that ceremonial response proper to each situation is one we call a crashing bore. [That person] doesn't inspire us to grow by coping with the unexpected."<sup>41</sup>

Many of the contextual changes in Baldessari's work involve taking an object from the everyday world and placing it in an art context. For instance, *Common Memory Colors: Flesh, White, Grey, Black, Sky, Grass, Sand* (1976), is based on Kodak's promotional material, which indicates that these are the photographic colors of which the general public is most critical. Baldessari therefore shot photos of the first instance of each color he encountered as he walked from his studio, thereby composing a color-sample chart, arranged in the order listed by Kodak, of the most ordinary and randomly located things.

In an earlier piece, *Police Drawing* (1971), he does the opposite, that is, he takes an art context and insinuates into it a situation from "real life." The premise of the piece, Baldessari says, was to transpose verbal and visual information with as little loss as possible, to "move information and ultimately make art by placing it in an art context." To this end, he visited a drawing class where the students didn't know him, stayed ten minutes, then left. The instructor then entered the class with a police artist, who drew Baldessari's "portrait" by means of verbal descriptions given by members of the class. Baldessari then had a photograph of himself taken in the pose approximating that in the drawing. The function of this kind of transposition, he says, was to get people to see things they normally don't.<sup>42</sup>

Just as Baldessari likes to defy the rules by changing contexts, he also uses the strategy of establishing rules, in this case non-art conditions, which operate as a methodology for making



*Police Drawing*, 1971 (details)  
Conte crayon on paper, black-and-white  
photograph, black-and-white videotape  
34 × 19, 8 × 10, 30 minutes, respectively  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Bevan Davies

*Blasted Allegories (Colorful Equation): Carefully Weighed Words with Grey Definition, 1978*

4 Type C prints, 1 black-and-white photograph, and pencil on board

15 × 24

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

work. The conditions are ones that are difficult, but not impossible, to fulfill. Sometimes the rules are for his own use, sometimes for use by others, and they range from very simple procedures such as trying to center the image of a bouncing ball (in the *Pier 18* piece) to the very complex structure of the *Blasted Allegories*. Here, the raw material—randomly shot television images of three kinds: black-and-white, full color, and single color (comprising the six hues of the spectrum)—was shown to friends who, along with the artist, assigned a word to each image. The photographs were then filed alphabetically, and used according to a different, given set of conditions for each piece. An example of one of these sets of conditions is as follows:

Black-and-white photos with words starting with color wheel initials (R, O, Y, G, B, V) in sequence, but starting with any color that makes sense as a sentence, are chosen. The color order ordains the syntax of the single color photos, but the photos used must make sense also as a sentence, plus using as a rule the added difficulty of each word having to



Jon Abbott

*Blasted Allegories (Colorful Sentence): ...*  
*Stern Stoic Streak (Y.O.R.V.B.G.), 1978*  
6 Type C prints, 6 black-and-white photographs,  
and pencil on board  
30½ × 40  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

start with the same letter and all the words having to be alphabetized ... I use the first images I find in my image dictionaries that fulfill the structure requirements, regardless of whether I personally care for either the image or the word.<sup>43</sup>

Other conditions Baldessari has set up are very simple, and are straightforward ways of acquiring images, such as *The Backs of Every Truck from San Diego to Santa Monica (One Shot)*, (1969). Another seemingly simple strategy is used in several tapes made using Ed Henderson, a friend, who is asked to describe the meaning of various photographs placed on the wall, to create movie scenarios from one still, or to provide suitable soundtracks for movie stills which are described to him but which he cannot actually see. In these tapes, Henderson's fertile imagination and his willingness to engage seriously in Baldessari's rules make the results more interesting than a literal or "accurate" interpretation of the images might have been.

A strategy addressing formal issues rather than narrative ones is employed in the *Top View Series: Where Things Are (Ken's and Shelley's Diagrams)* (1975), in which two people were shown photographs in which the spatial relationship between objects was ambiguous, and then were asked to draw a top-view diagram of where they thought the objects were in relation to each other. On the other hand, in *Six Colorful Stories (From the Emotional Spectrum)* (1977), a given set of conditions resulted in a purely narrative situation. Six different women were asked to tell a story, preferably a true one which they hadn't told before, and one which had a relationship to the color phrase being used. In each of the stories, *Caught Red-Handed*, *Thinking Orange*, *Apoplectic Violet*, *Catatonic Yellow*, *Green Horn*, and *Feeling Blue*, a woman, photographed center screen and cut off below the head, appears against a solid background of color. Her image seems to become objectified and intensified as the tales evolve, and each tale, in turn, acquires a meaning in relation to the color and the phraseology that it would not otherwise have were it a simple story.

Baldessari even provides strategies for the viewer in some of his pieces. In the *Stereogram Series* (1975), because the two drawings under each photograph are incomplete, the eye is required to combine two complementary outlines derived from a single image. In *Fable—A*

*Top View Series: Where Things Are (Ken's and Shelley's Diagrams)*, 1975  
2 collages, black-and-white photographs and ink  
16 x 20 each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



*Sentence of Thirteen Parts (With Twelve Alternate Verbs) Ending in FABLE* (1977), the viewer, unfolding and folding the cruciform parts of the book, can construct a variety of phrases and sentences, creating multiple meanings. In *Raw Prints* (1979), he uses a different color photograph for each of the six prints (based on the six colors of the color wheel), and selects one area of color and one line to disengage, enlarge, and place elsewhere on the paper. It is up to the viewer to match up the resultant abstract parts with the original photograph to understand their original context. Baldessari called these "raw" prints because he thought of them as works to be completed in the viewer's mind or left "raw" like unfinished furniture.

Certain pieces derive from the use of images as simple notational devices, for instance, a ball to indicate the notes of a musical score in *Throwing a Ball Once to Get Three Melodies and Fifteen Chords* (1975). The *Alignment Series* (1975) uses objects as centering devices. In *Palm Tree (For Charlemagne)* palm-tree trunks from various unrelated photographic sources are used to create the image of an enormous receding palm tree growing out of a musical instrument in the bottom photograph. Another in the same series, *Arrows Fly Like This, Flowers Grow Like This, Airplanes Park Like This*, groups identical photographs in the same configuration as the image itself—a curved trajectory for arrows, a cluster for flowers, a horizontal row for airplanes. A



Bevan Davies

*Stereogram Series: Split Drawings (For the Eye to Complete) from Various Photographs*, 1975  
6 black-and-white photographs  
16 x 20 each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Alignment Series: Arrows Fly Like This, Flowers Grow Like This, Airplanes Park Like This*, 1975  
24 black-and-white photographs  
3½ x 5 each  
Private Collection, Italy

*A Movie: Directional Piece Where People Are  
Looking, 1972-73*

28 black-and-white photographs and ink  
(unmounted)

3½ × 5 each; installation dimensions variable

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Binary Code Series: Woman with Cigarette.*

Yes No Yes No

Yes No No Yes, 1974

8 black-and-white photographs

9¾ × 13¾ each

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Binary Code Series: Orange Peel and Ties.*

Female Male Female Male

Female Male Male Female, 1974

8 Type C prints

6¾ × 10 each

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery



Nick Sheidy



Ken Feingold



Jon Abbott

Movie: *Directional Piece Where People Are Looking* (1972-73), is aligned according to the direction of each person's glance.

Another of Baldessari's primary interests has been the desire to create visual order through word order, and vice-versa. A piece consisting of thirty-seven identically sized photographs in a row, with several spaces between groups of pictures, is actually determined by using a sentence containing the entire alphabet in the most efficient way, hence the title—*Pangram Series* (1976). ("The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog" is the most common pangram, and one *not* used by Baldessari in this series.) The two pieces are *The Five Boxing Wizards Jump Quickly* and *Pack My Box With Five Dozen Liquor Jugs*, both of which use different arrangements of the same photographs, with "P" being represented by the image of a pipe, "A" an ashtray, "C" for coins, "K" a bunch of keys, and so on.

A very early example of the desire to create a visual system from word order is found in the *California Map Project/ Part I: California* (1969), done in collaboration with George Nicolaides. The state of California itself was used as though it were in fact a map, with each letter and symbol found on the map reproduced on the corresponding part of the landscape. The letters ranged from one inch to one hundred feet in size, and the materials included paint, cloth, rocks, dry pigment, logs, etc. Some of the letters were more clearly visible than others, and each was located as nearly as possible within the areas occupied by the letters on the map. The completed documentation in effect constitutes the imposition of visual order on an enormous area of land through spelling order. While language, by its very nature, "substitutes words for things,"<sup>44</sup> Baldessari perversely substitutes things for words.

His interest in language, which is always inseparable from visual elements in his work, makes sense when we examine exactly what the properties of language are, especially if one holds, with Wittgenstein, that "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world."<sup>45</sup> A broad definition maintains that

language is both a system of grammar and human behavior which can be analyzed according to theories of interaction, play, and games. It also can be viewed as a shared system of rules and conventions mutually intelligible to all members of a particular community, yet a system which nevertheless offers freedom and creativity in its use.<sup>46</sup>

In Baldessari's work, language is literally used as a manipulative tool, as in the tape *Insincerely Promising a Cat a Carrot* (from *The Way We Make Art Now ...*), in which Baldessari seductively dangles a carrot in front of an indifferent cat's nose, and makes verbal promises to it to no avail. He also uses language figuratively, as a way of altering reality. In another episode from *The Way We Make Art Now ...*, a suitcase is pictured on the screen while Baldessari meticulously describes a completely different object. It takes us longer than we might expect to acknowledge that what is being described is entirely different from what we are seeing, a measure of the power of words. "Seeing is believing" doesn't always hold true.

Language can be spoken or written, each having its own functions and problems. Baldessari uses written language in several of his early films and tapes, particularly the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure. In the film version of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* (1971), the recorded process of covering three pages with the sentence defies the statement itself. In *Haste Makes Waste* (1973), Baldessari attempts to type the sentence over and over, increasing both speed and

*California Map Project/Part I: California, 1969*  
(detail)  
11 Type R prints and text  
8 x 10  
Collection of Dr. Hubert Burda, Offenburg,  
West Germany



accuracy, a literal translation of the sentence he is typing. It is a perfect demonstration of Barthes' contention that

the mistakes that may be made in typing out a manuscript are so many meaningful incidents, incidents which by analogy help to shed light on the attitude it is necessary to adopt with regard to meaning when commenting on a text.<sup>47</sup>

Assumptions we make about spoken language, especially pronunciation, are subverted in *Some Words I Mispronounce* (from *The Way We Make Art Now ...*), a sequence in which Baldessari writes out, in silence, a half-dozen words without ever saying them aloud. *You Tell Me What I Do*, a segment from the same tape, shows a page from a book on stage dialect from which Baldessari attempts to read the phrase "You tell me what I do" aloud in a Chinese dialect, adhering to the printed instructions for musical inflections. In Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* there is a passage which might well have served as the impetus for the piece:

... countless languages and families of languages are not related. A good example is Chinese with respect to the Indo-European languages. The fact that they differ does not mean that that cannot be compared, for comparison is always possible and useful.<sup>48</sup>

It is precisely this kind of unlikely comparison that makes the piece amusing; the fundamental tie between teaching and speech, speech being the perfect didactic tool, is also emphasized in this tape. This kind of linguistic word play, in which the rules of grammar and pronunciation are subjected to a different context, is reminiscent of the kind of word play characteristic of Lewis Carroll. In his work, only partial nonsense is employed; *Jabberwocky*, for instance, adheres closely to the rules of grammar while substituting different components than the ones we ordinarily employ. Consequently, we are still able to understand the poem's meaning, since the general framework of the grammar remains the same.<sup>49</sup> Verbal language, like visual language, allows creative freedom because of its flexibility. The question is how much distortion or transposition can be exercised without losing meaning entirely.

Language is always learned with an accompanying gestural system, acquired unconsciously,<sup>50</sup> and this system is also grist for Baldessari's mill. His *Italian Tape* (1974), was suggested by a book that the artist found in Rome, containing Italian hand gestures with corresponding English translations. In the video, the gestures are made by manipulating a small, two-dimensional puppet, jointed at shoulders, elbows, and wrists. English and Italian translations of a hypothetical conversation between an American artist and an Italian critic are punctuated by the image of the puppet's changing gestures, in rhythm to the background music of sentimental ballads sung by a popular Italian singer.

*I Am Making Art* is similarly about gestures, but this time the artist's own. Because they are meaningless in terms of language, it is only the verbal statement "I am making art," repeated with every move, that gives the gestures credibility. He also shows us the absurdity of language when he reads aloud a poem by Sylvia Plath in which the image of a mattress is used metaphorically, and a moment later enacts the metaphor literally by lying down on the floor and pulling the mattress over himself—a gesture which is meaningless except in relation to the language of poetry, that is, to purely esthetic information.

By far Baldessari's favorite use of language, however, has to do with what are known as

*You Tell Me What I Do*, from *The Way We Do Art  
Now and Other Sacred Tales*, 1973  
Black-and-white videotape  
45 seconds  
Courtesy of Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films,  
Inc., New York

"gnomic expressions," a group of verbalisms that includes riddles, proverbs, puns, aphorisms, maxims, parables, and so on.<sup>51</sup> Gnostic expressions represent the most creative use of human language, one which is apparent even in very early childhood.<sup>52</sup> Characteristic of these expressions is: (1) that they deal with very basic truths, giving advice and life strategies concerning health, love, wealth, goodness, and so forth; (2) that they employ metaphor as a primary means of stating such truths; (3) that they use such linguistic devices as alliteration, rhyme, and assonance; (4) that the impersonal form is used throughout, so that the identity of the narrator remains ambiguous; and (5) that the verb is almost always in the present tense, lending the expression a feeling of universal application. Gnostic expressions therefore represent a particular manipulation of language best suited to teaching, conveying wisdom, and expressing a philosophy.<sup>53</sup> Since Baldessari considers teaching and making art part of the same mode of exchanging information, this extensive use of the gnostic expression in his work seems particularly apt. *The Way We Make Art Now....*, for instance, contains an unanswered riddle which constitutes an entire segment. A voice asks, "What is it that never was or never will be?" and is answered with silence. A saying which seems to be a maxim—"It is cruel to put a dog on a mirror"—is followed by the image of a puppy placed on a mirror. A tape recorder appears on the monitor as a voice asks, "What is the meaning of this image?" No answer is forthcoming.

Of all the gnostic expressions, Baldessari has used the parable most extensively. With its impersonal and omniscient quality and its "moral" clearly stated at the end, the parable is the most succinct expression of his interest in this kind of language. While he has examined language in its component parts, its structure, and its condensed or poetic form, it is in storytelling, the most expanded use of language, that he seems to find most enjoyment. The origin of Baldessari's use of the story in his work comes from teaching, from trying to convey

*Ingres from Ingres and Other Parables*, 1971  
10 black-and-white photographs and 10 texts  
8 x 10 each  
Collection of Angelo Baldassarre, Bari, Italy

#### INGRES

This is the story of a little known painting by Ingres. Its first owner took good care of it, but as things go, he eventually had to sell it. Succeeding owners were not so cautious about its welfare and did not take as good care of it as the first owner. That is, the second owner let the painting's condition slip a bit. Maybe it all began by letting it hang crookedly on the wall, not dusting it, maybe it fell to the floor a few times when somebody slammed the door too hard. Anyway the third owner received the Ingres with some scratches (not really tears), and the canvas buckled in one corner—paint fading here and there. Owners that followed had it retouched and so on, but the repairs never matched and the decline had begun. The painting looked pretty sad. But what was important was the documentation—the idea of Ingres; not the substance. And the records were always well-kept. A clear lineage, a good genealogy. It was an Ingres certainly, even though the painting by this time was not much.

The other day it was auctioned off. Time had not been kind to the Ingres. All that was left was one nail. Maybe the nail was of the original, maybe it was used in repairs, or maybe Ingres himself had used it to hang the painting. It was all of the Ingres that remained. In fact, it was believed to be the only Ingres nail ever offered in public sale.

Moral: If you have the idea in your head, the work is as good as done.



## ART HISTORY

A young artist had just finished art school. He asked his instructor what he should do next. "Go to New York," the instructor replied, "and take slides of your work around to all the galleries and ask them if they will exhibit your work." Which the artist did.

He went to gallery after gallery with his slides. Each director picked up his slides one by one, held each up to the light the better to see it, and squinted his eyes as he looked. "You're too provincial an artist," they all said. "You are not in the mainstream." "We're looking for Art History."

He tried. He moved to New York. He painted tirelessly, seldom sleeping. He went to museum and gallery openings, studio parties, and artists' bars. He talked to every person having anything to do with art; travelled and thought and read constantly about art. He collapsed.

He took his slides around to galleries a second time. "Ah," the gallery directors said this time, "finally you are historical."

Moral: Historical mispronounced sounds like hysterical.

*Art History from Ingres and Other Parables*, 1971  
10 black-and-white photographs and 10 texts  
8 x 10 each  
Collection of Angelo Baldassare, Bari, Italy

*The Wait from Ingres and Other Parables*, 1971  
10 black-and-white photographs and 10 texts  
8 x 10 each  
Collection of Angelo Baldassarre, Bari, Italy



## THE WAIT

Once there was an artist who everybody thought was very good. He had a few doubts about this, but it was true—he was smitten with the idea of art. So he painted. And painted. Soon someone said that he should have a show. "Not yet," he said, and went back to work.

He entered his works in local competitions now and then. The local library showed one of his paintings and the art critic of the town paper mentioned his name. A relative said his paintings looked like a linoleum floor and asked if he could draw. He knew that he was slowly becoming an artist.

"You should show your works in a one-man show." "No," he said, "not yet," and went back to work. Fellow art students rose to fame: they sold, they had shows, people talked, they moved to big cities. "Come," they said. "No, not yet," he replied.

Soon his work had authority, had insight, had maturity. Should he show, he thought. No, he answered, though rewards beckoned.

One morning he walked into his studio and it was clear. His work was pivotal, even seminal. The time had come for a show.

He showed and nothing happened.

Moral: Artists come and go.

information in different ways. As he puts it, "A good teacher doesn't give up—if you can't get something across one way, you try another." He began to read the Bible to use as a teaching device, and became fascinated with the way Jesus always got points across indirectly. Thus, Baldessari says, the catchphrase "Tell stories like Jesus," an entry in his notebooks, ultimately prompted a series of parables about artists and the contemporary art world, as well as a group of stories about humorous and telling incidents concerning the work of Renoir, Cezanne, and Picasso. However, the best-known of his storytelling works, *Ingres and Other Parables* (1971), came about specifically, he says, "because when I taught in junior college, we'd sit in the office and try not to be bored. I'd tell stories. One day I made up a story about Ingres. If you read it, there's a pun at the end; they were the only Ingres nails ("hang nails") that existed." Baldessari felt on one level that the parable was the best teaching strategem because, he says, "the minute you start telling a story the interest level of your audience picks up."<sup>54</sup> The other appealing aspect of storytelling is that the narrator, particularly in the fable or parable form of a story, is omniscient,

an apparently impersonal consciousness that tells the story from a superior point of view, that of God: the narrator is at once inside his characters (since he knows everything that goes on in them) and outside them (since he never identifies with any one more than another).<sup>55</sup>

Baldessari can therefore remove himself from the art-world content of his narratives, yet as an artist maintain his position as a knowledgeable insider, telling tales on his own milieu.

Stories like *Rolling Tire* (1972) take their narrative elements directly from the newspaper, while the accompanying photographs were created rather than "found." This work was one of his first to use the idea of violence, an idea which later, in the *Violent Space Series* (1976), was expressed in more formal rather than narrative terms. *A Different Kind of Order (The Art Teacher Story)* and, from the same series, *The Thelonius Monk Story*, as well as *The Mondrian Story* and *The Pencil Story* (all 1972-73) are fairly straightforward texts with accompanying photographs,

*Rolling: Tire*, 1972

5 black-and-white photographs and text

16 x 24 each

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

#### ROLLING: TIRE

A free-rolling truck tire struck and killed a pedestrian in Delano, according to the California Highway Patrol. As Francisco Ramirez, 30, drove north on California 99, a tire came off his truck, crossed the north and southbound lanes, and hit Don Edison Yarbrough, 21, of Denton, Texas, the CHP said. Yarbrough was reported dead at the scene.



Jon Abbott

*Violent Space Series: Five Vignetted Portraits of Stress Situations*, 1976

6 black-and-white photographs on board  
11 × 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Nick Sheidy

*Violent Space Series: Nine Feet (Of Victim and Crowd) Arranged by Position in Scene*, 1976

7 black-and-white photographs on board  
24 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 36 $\frac{1}{2}$   
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

like *Ingres and Other Parables*; their chronological development follows that of traditional storytelling in the same way that *Six Colorful Stories* and *Three Feathers and Other Fairy Tales* (1973) emphasize story chronology in "real time" through the use of video.

*If It Is A.M.* ... slightly alters the narrative approach by providing two possibilities for any given image, each of which has a suggested (though not explicit) story which accompanies it. In other works, Baldessari further alters traditional narrative in novel and interesting ways. The time required to tell a story, for instance, and the time in which the event actually took place may be (and usually are) quite different. Whereas ordinarily we take the order of occurrence to be the model



*The Pencil Story*, 1972–73  
2 Type R prints and white pencil on board  
22 x 27¼  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Nicola Bulgari, New York

Nick Sheidy

for the order of the telling,<sup>56</sup> in some of Baldessari's treatments it is difficult to discover at all what the order of occurrence is. For example, in *Walking Forward—Running Past* (1971), sequential photographs of the artist doing those two things are tacked onto a wall, filling the video frame, but his position spatially and temporally is ambiguous. Here, the order of occurrence in visual terms is similar to what might occur in storytelling, when we have no indication of the causal order of events which might determine the order of occurrence.

Spatial deployment can ordinarily indicate chronology, as in a comic strip, for instance, where there is a clear reading from left to right.<sup>57</sup> We tend to think of the evolution of time as one of the distinguishing factors of narrative, but in fact this is not so, since any picture will imply a past and a future; "a picture of a forest tells implicitly of trees growing from seedlings and shedding leaves; and a picture of a house implies that trees were cut for it and that its roof will soon leak."<sup>58</sup> Baldessari uses this characteristic of the single image in *Ed Henderson Reconstructs Movie Scenarios* by asking Henderson to reconstruct a chronological narrative from a single, obscure movie still which has no context.

If the act of telling, as well as what is actually told, doesn't need to take time in order to constitute a narrative, then a narrative which is reordered, or which lacks chronological structure, can still be a narrative. The *degree* of reordering, rather than the fact of reordering, is what

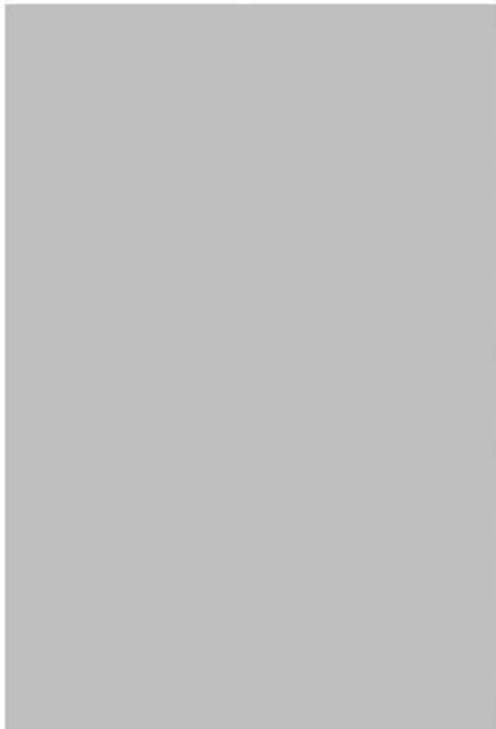
determines when a story changes and becomes instead a study, an analysis, an essay, or an exposition.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Baldessari's *Script*, which has no chronology, is both a study and an analysis of how different couples interpret a particular narrative. Here, esthetic demands completely supersede chronology in ordering the overall narrative.

In *Title* the component parts of a film are presented individually as isolated titles, images, sounds, and then combined to a point where they stop just short of becoming intelligible as a story. *Story with 24 Versions* (1974) uses four identical photographs of scenes, each titled with a simple descriptive sentence, to form all possible syntactical combinations of those units; therefore a different story results from each ordering. *Movie Storyboard: Norma's Story* (1974) reassembles storyboards from commercial movie scripts to form a new story, but leaves pictorial and verbal holes where there is no suitable image or script to fit the new narrative. In *Violent Series: Story Outline (A Story That Ends Up Mostly in Bed)* (1976), narrative is created by using television images, each labeled with a word according to the activity or object depicted (in this case, all having overtones of violence), and then ordered so that the words form a simple story. This one "ends up mostly in bed," a pun on the fact that the last two images each show someone in bed. When Baldessari plays with the elements of a story in these ways, new meaning is created apart from that which already exists in the basic narrative. This is because

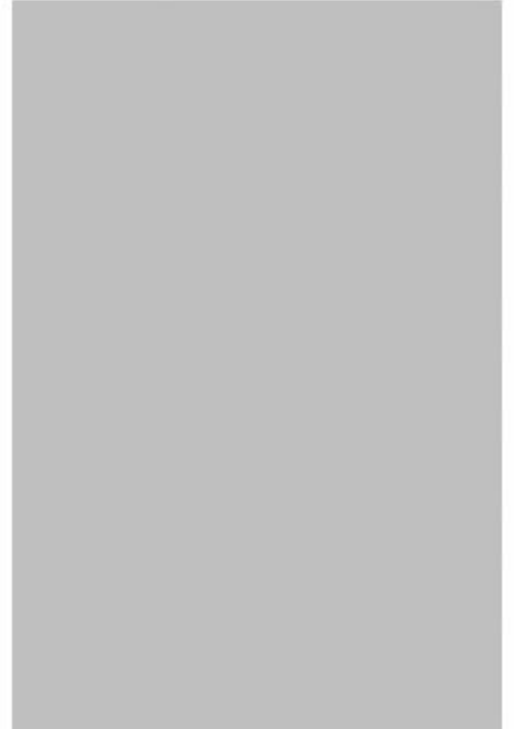
although every narrative will survive some reordering, and some narratives will survive any reordering, not every narrative will survive every reordering. . . . World structure is

*Story with 24 Versions*, 1974 (detail)  
24 panels of 4 black-and-white photographs and  
pencil on storyboard-layout paper  
16¾ × 11⅞ each  
Collection of the artist


*Story with 24 Versions*, 1974 (detail)  
24 panels of 4 black-and-white photographs and  
pencil on storyboard-layout paper  
16¾ × 11⅞ each  
Collection of the artist



Ken Feingold



Ken Feingold



*Movie Storyboard: Norma's  
Story, 1974*

5 panels, black-and-white  
photographs and typed text  
on storyboard-layout paper

One  $8\frac{1}{8} \times 20\frac{3}{4}$ , four  $8\frac{1}{8} \times$   
 $29\frac{1}{8}$  each

Collection of the artist

*Movie Storyboard: Norma's  
Story, 1974 (detail)*

5 panels, black-and-white  
photographs and typed text  
on storyboard-layout paper

One  $8\frac{1}{8} \times 20\frac{3}{4}$ , four  $8\frac{1}{8} \times$   
 $29\frac{1}{8}$  each

Collection of the artist

Ken Feingold

*Violent Series: Story Outline (A Story That Ends Up  
Mostly In Bed), 1976*

8 black-and-white contact prints and acetate ink  
 $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{4}$

Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Wick Staley



*Fugitive Essay (With Zebra)*, 1980

2 black-and-white photographs and 1 Type C print  
12¼ × 72¼ (left), 23¼ × 60¼ (center),  
7¼ × 7¼ (right)

Installation dimensions: approximately 9'6" × 35'5"  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Fugitive Essay (With Zebra)*, 1980 (detail)

2 black-and-white photographs and 1 Type C print  
12¼ × 72¼ (left), 23¼ × 60¼ (center),  
7¼ × 7¼ (right)

Installation dimensions: approximately 9'6" × 35'5"  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Jon Abbott

*Three Metaphorical Measurements Done at InK., Zurich, September 1979*, 1979

Installation with black-and-white photographs,  
pencil lines, and painted lettering

Left wall: 9½ × 11 each (fish tail and head)

Center wall: 9½ × 13¼ (road)

Right wall: 9½ × 22 each (mountain and ship)

Room size: 36½' × 22' × 15'



Eeva-Inkeri

heavily dependent on order of elements and on comparative weight of kinds; and reordering and weight shifting are among the most powerful processes used in making and remaking facts and worlds.<sup>60</sup>

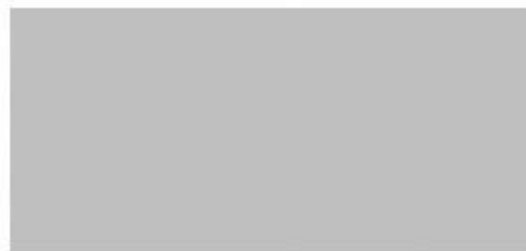
*Fugitive Essays* (1980), Baldessari's most recent body of work to date, is perhaps his most poetic and complex use of narrative thus far, and does not contain any words at all. Each piece consists of a three-part photographic wall installation. Baldessari explains the title *Fugitive Essays* as equivalent to "escape attempts," or essays about escape. In an explanatory text written to provide some clues to the work, he calls it "a tribute to the Fugitive Poets as regionalists, traditionalists, classicists, and their quarrel with emotion in art," whose sensibility he opposes to that of "the Imagists," standing for "the present, alive, revolutionary impulse, unexpressed possibilities." The two modes, suggesting the differences between the semantic and esthetic kinds of information discussed earlier, are metaphorically visualized in the shape and placement of the three component parts of each work. An irregular shape is placed close to the ceiling of a room on a diagonal, with the black-and-white subject matter filling the entire frame and determining its shape. The bottom piece lies parallel to the floor, is large and geometrically or regularly shaped. Here, the subject matter is determined by the shape of the frame rather than vice-versa, so that the spaciousness of the image in its format is classicizing. The black-and-white, confined image of the irregular, close-to-the-ceiling component has more to do with what is chaotic, indeterminate, and irrational.

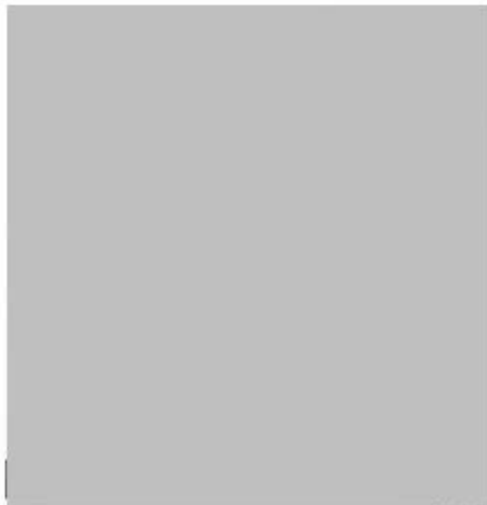
In the center of these extremes is the third component, placed at eye level, of ordinary size and scale. It contains what Baldessari describes as classic, salon-type photography and subject matter. Each of the three images is individually suggestive but also implies connections among them, and a narrative can be created simply by the process of association. As visual metaphors, they join

dissimilars not so much to let us perceive in them some previously hidden similarity but to create something altogether new. As C. Day Lewis claims, "we find poetic truth struck out by the collision rather than the collusion of images."<sup>61</sup>



Bevan Davies





Nick Sheidy

*Baudelaire Meets Poe*, 1980

2 black-and-white photographs and 1 Type C print  
9 × 57½ (left); 24 × 24 (center); 32 × 30 (right)  
Installation dimensions: 9½' × 9½'  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Everything Is Purged...*, 1966–68

Acrylic on canvas  
59 × 45  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Painting For Kubler*, 1966–68

Acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas  
68 × 56½  
Collection of Stuart and Judith Spence,  
South Pasadena, California

These recent works by Baldessari, which seem the most enigmatic because they contain a preponderance of esthetic rather than semantic information, were inspired by a phrase he wrote in his notebook just after completing the extremely complex and visually dense *Blasted Allegories*, which dealt with the structure of language itself. He drew a big apple in the notebook and wrote beneath it, "LARGE SIMPLE THINGS."

An essential aspect of Baldessari's work and one most immediately apparent to the viewer is that his is an art about art. Like verbal language, visual language has the capacity to comment about itself. Just as, in Barthes' words, "narration can only receive its meaning from the world which makes use of it,"<sup>62</sup> so too does Baldessari's work specifically address the audience that will see it—mostly critics, art students, other artists, and knowledgeable and interested viewers. Because his work operates simultaneously on this specific level as well as on a more profound and general one, much of its humor derives from doing these two things at once.

For most people, art is irrelevant or trivial, and issues that are crucial to the art student, for instance, may be laughable to the general public. The texts lettered on Baldessari's early pieces, for example, in *Everything Is Purged...* (1966–68), have a didactic pomposity which in itself is the subject matter, and the humor, of the work. A passage from George Kubler's *The Shape of Time*, first published in 1962, is used (in only minutely altered form) as the painting itself. Although the book was an influential one for many artists during the late 1960s and early 1970s, out of context the quote pinpoints the absurdity and non-functional quality of formal esthetic thought without reference to a real object or event.

There is, however, a school of thought which maintains that in a work of art, purity, pursuit of presence, and lack of reference to anything outside itself are the proper goals.<sup>63</sup> Admittedly, noth-



Jon Abbott

John Thomas

ing can exist without some reference to the world outside itself, although ornament and decoration sometimes come close to achieving this kind of self-sufficiency. Baldessari's early painting *Pure Beauty* (1966-68) is a wonderful spoof on the impossibility of having a work of art exist in and of itself; by acknowledging the obvious, Baldessari makes something that does, indeed consist of PURE BEAUTY, which "has only one quality," that of art.

*The Way We Make Art Now* ... is also a spoof on current art attitudes, and stretches the definition of what can be considered art. Because the late 1960s and early 1970s were periods of innovation, using the human body as art, making process equivalent to product, utilizing philosophical language alone as a work of art, eliminating all elements except gesture from a work, using new, non-art materials, and so on, Baldessari questions that very sense of originality or exploration by taking it to its limits. By taping a stick at one end, then picking it up at the other, he is both questioning and spoofing what constitutes art. Similarly, in the tape *I Am Making Art*, we are left with a question rather than an answer; is he, in fact, doing what he says he is?

In this spirit, Baldessari uses the formal problems indigenous to making art as subject matter. The most common "art" theme in his work has to do with color, and many of his pieces use the color wheel as a formal base, like *Common Memory Colors* or *Six Colorful Inside Jobs* (1977), a film in which the ordinary becomes outrageously artful. For this, Baldessari hired a housepainter to paint a white cubicle a different color every day. Filmed from above and shown at fast speed, the activity of painting the space, sometimes first in outline, then each wall in turn, and finally the floor (the painter exits from a hidden door just beside the last corner, out of which he literally paints himself), makes a mundane activity seem replete with meaning by giving it a new spatial and temporal dimension. The overlapping of the colors, the wonderfully quixotic, Chaplinesque movements of the painter, the way the space changes according to each color used, and the natural and unconscious selection by the viewer of a favorite color all make the film lively, esthetically rich, and very far removed from the original activity in its "pure" form. As Baldessari said recently, "I'm less interested in what is art than what is not art ... It's the secondary thing that interests me ... how you move stuff into the area of art that's not there."<sup>64</sup> Baldessari manages to combine art and non-art elements while keeping their identities separate. The *Strobe Series/Futurist* (1975) contrasts the extraordinary elegance of frozen movement in time-lapse photographs with inordinately mundane objects and activities. *Trying to Get a Straight Line with a Finger*, for example, or *Game for Two People and Two Ping Pong Balls*... create extremely beautiful, classical photographs from invented activities, while *Passing the Buck* and *Pulling Leg* use visual puns to create the activity.

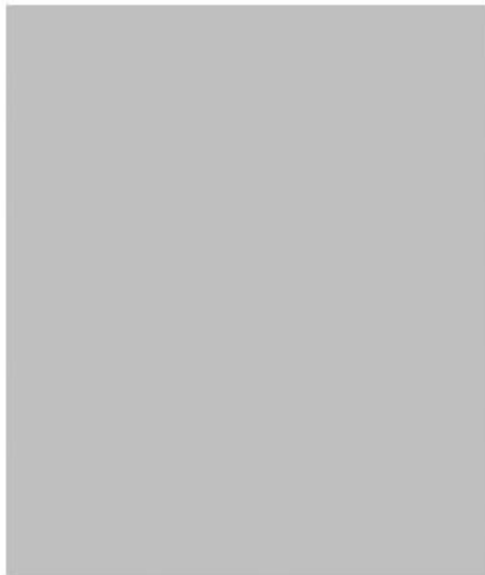


David Lubarsky  
*Pure Beauty*, 1966-68  
Acrylic on canvas  
56½ x 68  
Collection of Ed Kienholz, Hope, Idaho



*Strobe Series/Futurist: Trying to Get a Straight Line with a Finger*  
4 black-and-white photographs  
16 x 20 each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Thaumatrope Series: Horse with Two Riders*  
(*Double Thaumatrope*), 1975  
3 black-and-white photographs  
11 x 14 each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Nick Sheidy

*Thaumatrope Series: Two Gangsters (One with*  
*Scar and Gun)*, 1975  
3 black-and-white photographs  
2 16 x 20 each, 1 5 x 7  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery



Nick Sheidy



Nick Sheidy

*Repair/Retouch Series: An Allegory About*  
*Wholeness (Plate and Man with Crutches)*, 1976  
4 black-and-white photographs (retouched)  
7 1/4 x 11 1/8 each  
Collection of Lila and Gilbert Silverman

*Retouch Series: Rubin's Effect. Four Faces: Two*  
*New Vases (Male, Female/Liza Minnelli Pair)*,  
1976  
2 black-and-white photographs  
13 x 19 1/8 each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Nick Sheidy



Nick Sheidy

*Alignment Series: Measuring a Chair with a Coffee Cup (Top-Bottom)*, 1975  
2 black-and-white photographs  
11 × 13 $\frac{1}{8}$  each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Nick Sheidy

*Kissing Series: Susan. Nose Touching Palm Frond (Centered)*, 1975  
3 black-and-white photographs  
8 × 8 each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

The *Thaumatrope Series* (1975) is about taking things apart rather than putting them together, since a thaumatrope consists of disconnected images which when twirled will combine visually to produce a single picture. Sometimes Baldessari has used images of intense activity which involve violence or balance, like gangsters or acrobats. Disassembled, the images become funny because their meaning is entirely dependent upon their relationship. Taking things apart and putting them together, two of the integral aspects of making art, is also the focus of the *Repair/Retouch Series* (1976). In one, a legless man and a broken plate are juxtaposed with their "repaired" equivalents. In another, a vase appears between two profiles, a Rubin's effect (heightened by airbrushing) playing on the dynamics of positive and negative space, a concept basic to any beginning art class. The *Alignment Series: Measuring a Chair with a Coffee Cup (Top-Bottom)* (1975) is a variation of the old-fashioned technique of using a brush or one's thumb held at arm's length in order to measure the scale of a painted image in relation to its real counterpart. The *Kissing Series* (1975) is based on Baldessari's recollection that "an art professor once told me that in composition, elements should either overlap or there should be some space between them; that it produced discomfort when things were tangential. He called this phenomena "kissing." Baldessari's entire series is predicated therefore on doing the wrong thing.

A group of works based on the juxtaposition of violent images and formal art problems has produced several examples of extreme disjunction between art and artifice. One of the most incongruous of these is *Violent Space Series: Two Figures Throwing Victim in Sack Into Sea (With*



Jon Abbott

*Violent Space Series: Two Figures Throwing Victim in Sack Into Sea (With Relation to Edges) Six Possibilities*, 1976

6 black-and-white photographs on board  
6½ × 9½ each; 35¼ × 30 overall  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Violent Space Series: Two Stares Making a Point but Blocked by a Plane (For Malevitch)*, 1976

Black-and-white photograph with collage  
24¼ × 36  
Courtesy of James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, California

*Relation to Edges*) (1976), in which the picture plane and the framing edge, those proverbial guardians of proper form, play havoc with the informational content of the image. In another work from the same series, *Two Stares Making a Point but Blocked by a Plane (For Malevitch)* (1976), a large, off-balance white square completely subverts the content of the original photograph and creates a new hybrid, which doesn't fit any known category of information.

These works deal with the element of space. Others, for instance *Concerning Diachronic/Synchronic Time: Above, On, Under (With Mermaid)* (1976), deal with the element of time, in this case by implying that artificial objects change into natural objects with the passage of time, which is measured here by the crossing of a speedboat from left to right. One other piece, *Photos That Belong Together (New York Times Pair)* (1976), is a kind of modern *trompe l'oeil*, since it would appear to the casual viewer, knowing we are looking at a work of art, that the photographs belong together by virtue of their compositional similarity. In fact, they belong together because in each one a tiny piece of paper can be found, their halves matching up in the two works.

Of this series of art-related pieces, one of the funniest is a segment from *The Way We Make Art Now ...* called "*The Birth of Abstract Art*." A crudely drawn image of a horse's head appears on the screen as Baldessari describes a painter who is having difficulty realistically depicting the foam on a horse's mouth. In frustration, the painter throws a paint-filled sponge at the horse's head, accidentally effecting a perfect representation of foam, and establishing, Baldessari says, the first abstract art. In this particular segment, Baldessari seems to have combined his interest in storytelling, didacticism and teaching, and verbal and visual information, and made a piece which is at once an art about art and an art about life, as well as a warmly satirical commentary on both.



Bevan Davies


*Concerning Diachronic/Synchronic Time:  
Above, On, Under (With Mermaid)*, 1976  
6 black-and-white photographs  
9 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{1}{8}$   
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York



Nick Sheidy

*Photos That Belong Together (New York Times  
Pair)*, 1976  
2 black-and-white photographs  
9 x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$  each  
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York





One of Baldessari's earliest works, *Semi-Close-Up of Girl by Geranium* (1966–1968), has always been an extremely important piece for him. It was taken, he says, directly from a film script by D.W. Griffiths, and consists of a canvas upon which a descriptive and visually evocative text is printed. One of the reasons the work may have been seminal for Baldessari is that of all his early paintings, this one incorporates an idea from a discipline other than, but loosely related to, painting itself. In so doing, he has presented a visual idea which incorporates time, space, movement, character, focus, activity, a relationship between person and object, and the use of one art form to create another. Typical of most of his subsequent work, this painting has a strong narrative dimension, with the narrator's identity remaining neutral and objective. The painting is both humorous and mysterious, using only written language to describe an event or situation which is visually and psychologically complex. And in so doing, the work refers to a life outside of art, to a world of ordinary, everyday objects and activities.

Baldessari's work has no particular ideological base in that over the past fifteen years or so it has made use of everything it needed or wanted to, no matter what area it was from. In his work the use of multiple sources, the combination of the sacred and the profane, the ordinary and the extraordinary, makes us particularly aware of the ever-changing interplay between daily life and the world of art. His work clearly expresses the idea that

neither a life perfected as art nor an art perfected as life seems possible for us; both lead to death. Life as art allows neither change nor growth; art as life conveys no meaning. Our world lies between the two extremes. In effect we shift back and forth along the metaphoric bridge; our life is modelled upon our art, and our art is modelled upon our life. In this way we maintain ourselves in a state of doubt; we seek knowledge by means of experience, we discover new truths.<sup>65</sup>

John Baldessari's pervasive curiosity, his pursuit of the unpredictable, his mistrust of the easy solution, and his willingness to use anything and everything in an attempt to go beyond what is already known to him make for a body of work that speaks to us in a way which is immediate and fresh. Baldessari's work and the sensibility which prompts it help us to appropriate the world at large for ourselves, and teach us never to neglect the obvious.

—Marcia Tucker

#### NOTES

1. All quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from interviews with the artist in Los Angeles and New York in the fall of 1980.
2. Moira Roth, "A Conversation with John Baldessari," held in Santa Monica, California, on January 6, 1973, unpublished, unpaginated.
3. In the *Cremation Piece* done for the *Software* exhibition at The Jewish Museum, New York, in September 1970, Baldessari destroyed all the work he had done between May 1953 and March 1966 that was in his possession as of July 24, 1970.
4. Lyn Blumenthal and Nancy Bowen, transcript of videotape interview held in the artist's studio in Los Angeles, in August 1979, for the series "On Art and Artists" (Video Data Bank/The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago), unpublished, p. 2.
5. The longest dimension of the canvas was equal to the diagonal of Baldessari's van doors when opened; this was how he arrived at the "standard size" of the work.

John Thomas

*Semi-Close-Up Of Girl By Geranium*...., 1966–68  
Acrylic on canvas  
59 x 45  
Collection of Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel,  
Basel, Switzerland

6. From the artist's notes for a catalog to be published for the forthcoming exhibition at the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands, scheduled to open May 15, 1981.
7. Roth, *op. cit.*, n.p.
8. Blumenthal and Bowen, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
9. Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. New York, 1971), p. 199.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 207-210.
12. Fortunato Depero, "The Futuristic Cinema," 1916, reprinted in Kirby, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
13. Excerpted from Baldessari's notes (see note 6).
14. Roland Barthes, trans. Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text*, (Hill & Wang, Inc., New York, 1977), pp. 89-90.
15. Daniel McMullin, "An Interview with John Baldessari," *Artists News* (Topanga, Canada), October-November 1980, p. 10.
16. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
18. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (McGraw Hill Publishers, New York, 1966), p. 169.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
20. Roth, *op. cit.*, n.p.
21. Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1968), p. 128.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.
24. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
27. James Huginin, "A Talk with John Baldessari," *Photography and Language* (Camerawork Press, San Francisco, 1977), n.p.
28. Patricia Failing, "John Baldessari: Taking Visual Notes," *The Oregonian (Northwest Magazine)*, February 5, 1978, p. 11.
29. David Ross, "Introduction," *Southland Video Anthology*, (Longbeach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California, 1975), n.p.
30. David Antin, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent" *Artforum*, December 1975, p. 39.
31. Roth, *op. cit.*, n.p.
32. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
33. From Baldessari's notes (see note 6).
34. Blumenthal and Bowen, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
35. Marilyn Hagberg, "Neglected, Under-Rated, Intellectual Baldessari," *San Diego Magazine*, January 1966, pp. 66-68, 101.
36. From Baldessari's notes (see note 6).
37. Failing, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
38. McMullin, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
39. Roth, *op. cit.*, n.p.
40. Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1977), p. 217.
41. Ernst Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (The Free Press, New York, 1971), p. 105.
42. Dan Schmidt, "Ambivalent Images Make a Strong Show," *The Oregonian (Northwest Magazine)*, February 5, 1978, p. 12.
43. From Baldessari's notes (see note 6).
44. James J. Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1966), p. 281.
45. Peter Farb, *What Happens When People Talk* (Bantam Books, New York, 1973), p. 192.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
47. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

48. Saussure, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
49. Farb, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
54. Hugunin, *op. cit.*, n.p.
55. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
56. Nelson Goodman, "Twisted Tales; or, Story, Study, and Symphony," *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1980, p. 104.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
61. Karsten Harries, "Metaphor and Transcendence," *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1978, p. 73.
62. Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
63. Harries, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
64. Hagberg, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
65. Richard Schiff, "Art and Life," *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1978, p. 122.

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# SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1960 La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California.
- 1962 Southwestern College, Chula Vista, California.
- 1964 Southwestern College, Chula Vista, California.
- 1966 La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California.
- 1968 Molly Barnes Gallery, Los Angeles, California.
- 1970 Eugenia Butler Gallery, Los Angeles, California  
Richard Feigen Gallery, New York.
- 1971 Art and Project, Amsterdam, Netherlands.  
Galerie Konrad Fischer, Dusseldorf, West Germany.  
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- 1972 Art and Project, Amsterdam, Netherlands.  
Galeria Toselli, Milan, Italy.  
Galerie MTL, Brussels, Belgium.  
Jack Wendler Gallery, London, England.
- 1973 Galleria Schema, Florence, Italy.  
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France.  
Konrad Fischer Gallery, Dusseldorf, West Germany.  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
- 1974 Art and Project/Galerie MTL, Antwerp, Belgium.  
Galeria Toselli, Milan, Italy.  
Galerie Skulima, Berlin, West Germany.  
Jack Wendler Gallery, London, England.
- 1975 Felix Handschin Gallery, Basel, Switzerland.  
Galerie MTL, Brussels, Belgium.  
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France.  
Lucio Amelio, Naples, Italy.  
Modern Art Agency, Naples, Italy.  
Samangallery, Genoa, Italy.  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- The Kitchen, New York (video).
- University of California at Irvine, Irvine, California.
- 1976 Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.  
Cirrus Editions, Los Angeles, California.  
James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, California.  
Ewing Gallery and George Paton Gallery, Victoria, Australia.  
Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.  
University of Akron, Akron, Ohio.
- 1977 Foundation for Art Resources, Fox Venice Theatre, Venice, California (films).  
Galeria Massimo Valsecchi, Milan, Italy.  
Matrix Gallery, Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut.  
Julian Pretto Gallery, New York.  
Robert Self Gallery, London, England.
- 1978 Artists Space, New York (films).  
Pacific Film Archives, Berkeley, California (films).  
Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon.  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York.  
Theatre Vanguard, Los Angeles, California (films).  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (films).
- 1979 InK, Halle für internationale neue Kunst, Zurich, Switzerland.  
Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
- 1980 Sonnabend Gallery, New York.  
Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands.
- GROUP EXHIBITIONS
- 1958 "Artists of the San Gabriel Valley," Pasadena Museum of Art, Pasadena, California.
- 1960 "Artists of Los Angeles County and Vicinity," Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles, California.
- "The Uncommon Denominator: Thirteen San Diego Painters," La Jolla Art Center, La Jolla, California.
- 1961 "San Francisco Annual," San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California.
- 1962 "Denver Annual," "Denver Museum of Art, Denver, Colorado.  
"Richmond Annual," Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California.  
"San Francisco Annual," San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California.  
"Seven Artists," San Diego State College, San Diego, California.
- 1963 "Houston Annual: Western States," Houston Museum of Art, Houston, Texas.  
"Long Beach Annual," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California.  
"Phelan Award Exhibition," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.  
"Phoenix Annual," Phoenix Museum of Art, Phoenix, Arizona.  
"Tucson Annual: The Southwest," Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, Arizona.
- 1965 "Aspects of California Painting," La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California.  
"Invitational: Sculpture," San Diego State College, San Diego, California.  
"Long Beach Annual," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California.  
"University of California Extension Art Faculty Show," La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California.
- 1967 "Small Images," Los Angeles State College, Los Angeles, California.
- 1968 "Four Artists," Richard Feigen Gallery, New York.  
"New Work/Southern California," University of California at San Diego, San Diego, California.  
"University of California San Diego Faculty," Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, California.
- 1969 "Annual Exhibition of Painting," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.  
"Art by Telephone," Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois.

- "California Artists," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California.
- "Conceptual Art," Eugenia Butler Gallery, Los Angeles, California.
- "557,087," Worlds Fair—Seattle Pavilion, Seattle, Washington.
- "From Down South," Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, California.
- "Konzeption-Conception," Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, Germany.
- "Language III," Dwan Gallery, New York.
- "Pop Art Redefined," Hayward Gallery, London, England.
- "The Second City: Los Angeles Artists," Reese-Palley Gallery, San Francisco, California.
- "Space," California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, California.
- "Two Artists," Chapman College, Los Angeles, California.
- 1970 "Art in the Mind," Allen Memorial Art Gallery, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.
- "Conceptual Art/Arte Povera/Land Art," Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin, Italy.
- "Information," The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- "955,000: Conceptual Art," Vancouver Museum of Art, Vancouver, Canada.
- "Nirvana," Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, Kyoto, Japan.
- "Recorded Activities," Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- "Software," The Jewish Museum, New York.
- 1971 Galerie Im Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria.
- Galerie 16, Kyoto, Japan.
- "Lithography Workshop, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design," National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (traveled to The Museum of Modern Art, New York).
- "Pier 18," The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- "Prospect '71: Projection, Film, Video, Diaries, Photoprojects," Kunsthalles, Dusseldorf, Germany.
- "Systems Art," El Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires and El Centro de Arte y Comunicacion, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- "The Vanishing Edge," Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Harbor, California.
- 1972 "Art Systems," International Artistic Encounter, Pamplona, Spain.
- "Aspects," Sixth International Theatre Festival, Belgrade, Yugoslavia.
- "California Prints," The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- "Documenta 5," Kassel, West Germany.
- "First 8mm International Film Festival," Nova Scotia College of Art and Design/National Film Board Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- "First National Videotape Festival," Minnesota College of Art and Design, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- "Five Artists," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas.
- "Four Los Angeles Artists," San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California.
- "420 West Broadway at the Spoleto Festival," Spoleto, Italy.
- "Konzept-Kunst," Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland.
- "Southern California Attitudes 1972," Pasadena Museum of Art, Pasadena, California.
- "St. Jude Video Invitational," de Sausset Art Gallery and Museum, University of Santa Clara, California (traveled to Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York).
- "Thirteen Artists Chosen for Documenta," Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
- "Venice Biennale," Venice, Italy.
- "Videotapes," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas.
- "Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1973 "Circuit: New Works on Videotape," Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York (traveled to Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California).
- "Contemporanea," Rome, Italy.
- "Festival d'automne a Paris," Musee Galliera, Paris.
- Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France.
- Galeria Forma, Genoa, Italy.
- "International Manifestation t-5," Zagreb, Yugoslavia.
- "Kunstmarkt," Cologne, Germany (films).
- "Prospect '73," Kunsthalles, Dusseldorf, West Germany.
- "Summer Group Exhibition," Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
- Sperone/Fischer Gallery, Rome, Italy.
- "Story," John Gibson Gallery, New York.
- 1974 "Annual," Chicago Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois.
- "Art Now," Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C.
- "Art on Paper," Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina.
- Cannaviello Studio d'Arte, Rome, Italy.
- "Collectors' Video," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.
- "Demonstrative Fotografie," Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg, West Germany.
- Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel Switzerland (films).
- Galerie MTL, Antwerp, Belgium.
- Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands.
- "Photokina," World Fair of Photography, Kunsthalle, Cologne, Germany.
- "Projekt '74," Cologne, Germany.
- "Some Recent American Art," circulated by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in Australia.
- "Southland Video Anthology," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California.
- "Summer Group Exhibition," Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
- 1975 "Americans in Florence/Europeans in Florence: Art/Tapes/22," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California.
- "First New York City Postcard Show," Contemporary Arts Gallery, New York University, New York.
- Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, Missouri.
- "Locate/Order/Measure," Fine Arts Gallery, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.
- "New Media," Konsthall, Malmo, Sweden.
- Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.
- "(photo)(photo)?... (photo)?" University of Maryland Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland.
- "Projects: Video," The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- Sarah Lawrence College Art Gallery, Bronxville, New York.
- "The Extended Document," International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.
- "Videotapes," Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, Rome, Italy.

- "Videotapes," Serpentine Gallery, London, England.
- 1976 "American Artists: A New Decade," Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, Michigan.  
Camerawork Gallery, San Francisco, California (films).  
Galerije Grada Zagreba, Zagreb, Yugoslavia.  
Galeria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Parma Italy.  
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel.  
La Mammelle Art Center, San Francisco, California.  
"Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California.  
"Pan Pacific Biennale," Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.  
"Rooms," Institute for Art and Urban Resources, P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York.  
"Serial Photography," Broxton Gallery, Los Angeles, California.  
"Video," Gallery D, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California.  
"Videotapes: Center Focus," 111 Wacker Gallery, Chicago.
- 1977 Aktionsgalerie, Bern.  
Castelli Graphics, New York (films).  
"Contemporary American Photographic Works," Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas.  
Fine Arts Gallery, California State University in Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California (films).  
"Happy New Art," Students Cultural Center, Beograd, Yugoslavia.  
Thomas Lewallen Gallery, Los Angeles, California (films).
- "Los Angeles: Selections from the Art Lending Service," The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
"Off The Wall," University of Western Florida, Pensacola, Florida.  
"Photography as Means," Center for Photographic Art, La Jolla, California.  
"Time," Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.  
"Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.  
"Words," Whitney Museum Downtown Branch, New York.
- 1978 "American Narrative/Story Art: 1967-1977," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas (traveled to University Art Museum, Berkeley, California).  
"Art About Art," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.  
"Artworks and Bookworks," Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.  
"A Selection of Conceptual Works by Eight Americans," Julian Pretto Gallery, New York.  
"Film/Video Works '76-'78," Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, New York.  
"Kirklands International Photographic Exhibition," Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, England.  
"Narration," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts.  
"Sez Who? Language as Image," Peter M. David Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota.  
"Summer Group Exhibition," Sonnabend Gallery, New York.  
"Wit and Wisdom: Works by Baldessari, Hudson, Levine and Oppenheim," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1979 "Works from the Collection of Dorothy and Herbert Vogel," University of Michigan Museum of Art, Lansing, Michigan.  
"Altered Photography," Institute for Art and Urban Resources, P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York.  
"Attitudes," Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California.  
"Concept, Narrative, Document, Recent Photographic Works from the Morton Neumann Family Collection," Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois.  
"Narrative Art," Dartmouth College Museum and Galleries, Hopkins Center, Hanover, New Hampshire.  
"New Aspects of Self in American Photography," Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.  
"Text-Photo-Geschichten," Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany.  
"Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.  
"Word/Object/Image," Rosa Esman Gallery, New York.  
"Words," Museum Bochum-Kunst-sammlung, Bochum, Germany.
- 1980 "Contemporary Art in Southern California," The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia.  
"Pier and Ocean," Arts Council of Great Britain, London, England.  
"The Photograph Transformed," Touchstone Gallery, New York.  
"Visual Articulation of Idea," Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York.  
"Words and Numbers," Summit Art Center, Summit, New Jersey.

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