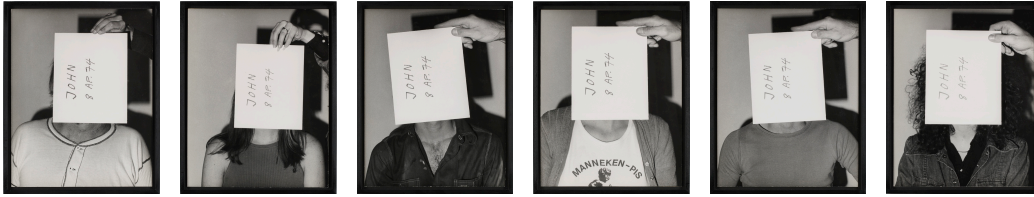


JOHN BALDESSARI



For the last five decades, John Baldessari has constantly reinvented himself, working in a variety of media and forms including painting, photography, printmaking, books, sculpture, and exhibition design. Baldessari’s text and image paintings from the mid-1960s are widely recognized as among the earliest examples of Conceptual Art. However, the year 1970 was a turning point in the artist’s career. Combining photography and language in fragmented compositions that often eluded narrative, he turned a new direction. That same year, he began teaching the legendary “Post-studio Art” class at CalArts. The next decade would prove to be an extremely fruitful period for Baldessari, both as an artist and as a teacher. He made more than sixty films and videos. Along with Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci he pioneered the use of video. He had a total of ten shows in New York including his first solo show in the city, twenty-six shows in Europe, and four in LA; he participated in two major group shows, “Information” at MoMA and “Software” at the Jewish Museum. The work of the 1970s also paved the way for the 1980s film-still works, which are considered pivotal to the development of Appropriation Art and other practices that address the social and cultural impact of mass media.

With the presentation of seminal works such as *Untitled (Directional Piece)* and *Strobe Series*, the selection underlines the playfulness, experimentation, and innovation that defined this fruitful period. Already well-known for displacing the familiar with the unexpected, and including surprising spaces and gaps, with *Untitled (Directional Piece)* Baldessari challenges the viewer’s inclination to extract narrative implied not only by the painted red arrows but also ordinarily by any sequential arrangement of images. “Children learn the game of life from adults, who think they’re going somewhere,” he once remarked, “and in fact are going nowhere, just keeping moving.” (Quoted in C. van Bruggen, *John Baldessari*, Rizzoli: New York, 1990, p.160.)

Strobe Series/Futurist Works comprises a group of humorous evocations of Futurism’s painterly representations of dynamic movement, while also referencing the 19th-century invention of time-lapse photography. Baldessari, however, made use of mundane objects and activities. The fleeting has been as attractive to Baldessari as marginal objects accidentally caught in one’s field of perception. “I have a whole file of photographs labeled ‘ephemeral’ that is divided into subcategories such as smoke, fire, water, feathers, explosions, and so on. ... I like to make ephemeral stuff important.” (Ibid, p. 166)

Baldessari differs from other Conceptual artists in his humor and commitment to the visual image. Tirelessly mining the archives of art history and the mass media for over five decades, he has dramatized the ordinary and allowed multiple meanings to proliferate beneath the apparent simplicity of his words and images.