

# SPRÜTH MAGERS

## John Baldessari

Since the mid-1960s, the works of John Baldessari have developed into one of the most trailblazing oeuvres of contemporary art, and as one of the pioneers of American Concept Art, he continues to exercise a formative influence on young generations of artists right down to today. His photo collages, billboards, artist's books, performances, and films cannot be exactly classified as either Concept Art or Pop Art but, with their independent status, have instead always remained somewhere in between. Baldessari's medium is above all the collage, and accordingly involves merging images and contents which traditionally do not belong together. He pursued this practice with the termination of his focus on painting; the definitive break dates to 1970 with the Cremation Project, in which all of his pictures were burned as a conceptional art project. Previously, he had already begun the production of serial works which combined image and text, such as the Commissioned Paintings (1969) and later the Goya Series (1977). He works here with the productive blank spaces between image and text and turns his attention to language as a powerful conveyor of meaning, as was investigated in another manner by the poststructuralists Roland Barthes and Gilles Deleuze. As a basic source, Baldessari uses an extensive archive of film stills, photographs, and newspaper clippings—all of which relate to motifs from everyday reality, the mass media, advertisement, and film—to arrange montages of images and of image-texts which create new interconnections of meaning through the procedures of cross-fading and cutting out. In addition to examining the visual languages of Surrealism and Dada, the artist has focused intensively on such cinematic genres as B-movies and Nouvelle Vague films, which is characteristic of his recent work-group Double Feature (2011). Serving as an important source of inspiration is Jean-Luc Godard's experimental handling of cinematic montage, which uses such techniques as leaps in time or space between individual film segments (jump cuts) to destroy a film's power of illusion. Baldessari thereby investigates the potential of the single image and the manner in which it can evoke narrative sequences. He took up the question of how much information is required in a picture in order to convey narrative contents in the series of Dot Paintings (1985), in which he covered the faces of photographically depicted individuals with spots of paint in the primary colors of yellow, red, and blue. Emotionality is always important in Baldessari's works: Visual jokes and wordplay are the stylistic means with which he disrupts the classification of sense and nonsense, and sets in motion alternative thought-processes concerning society.

John Baldessari (\*1931 in National City, California) lives and works in Santa Monica, California. His works were part of the 47th (1997) and 53rd Venice Biennials (2009), the Carnegie International (1985-86), the Whitney Biennial (1983, 2009), as well as the Documenta V (1972) and VII (1982). In 2005, an extensive, two-part retrospective was dedicated to the artist *A Different Kind of Order (Arbeiten. 1962–1984)* at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien and *Life's Balance - Werke 84–04* at the Kunsthaus Graz. Baldessari's large retrospective *Pure Beauty* opened in 2009 at the TATE Modern, London, and subsequently traveled to the MACBA, Barcelona (2010), the LACMA, Los Angeles (2010), and the MoMA, New York (2010/2011). Recent solo exhibitions include *The Giacometti Variations* at the Fondazione Prada (2010) and *Your Name in Lights* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2011), *John Baldessari 1+1=1* at the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture,

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Moscow (2013) and *John Baldessari* at the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (Winter 2015/16). At the 53rd Venice Biennial (2009) John Baldessari was awarded with the Golden Lion for life time achievement and is the recipient of the Kaiserring of the City Goslar in 2012. John Baldessari received the National Medal of Arts by the United States Congress in 2015.