

John Baldessari

Sculptures

September 11–October 24, 2026

Public Reception: September 10, 6–8pm

Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles

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John Baldessari is renowned for his brilliant visual experiments with language, photography, and painting spanning from the 1960s to 2020. Less explored is the artist's creative use of three-dimensional space, whether by deploying patterned wallpapers, working in bas-relief, or creating captivating sculptures and installations. Sprüth Magers is pleased to present an exhibition at the Los Angeles gallery devoted to the sculptural impulse in Baldessari's work, featuring projects that have been brought together for the first time to explore how the artist played with space and scale to dramatic effect.

Already in the 1980s, the artist expanded the physical bounds of his two-dimensional practice with his composite photoworks, in which multiple framed elements spread imagery in configurations across the gallery walls. In the mid-1990s, while producing bas-relief paper prints with the LA print workshop Mixografia, Baldessari remarked: "Sculpture has always scared me. Face your fears. For me sculpture's the final frontier. I've never done it. I'm just trying to edge into it backwards." In 1997–98, he produced a series of colorful wallpapers imprinted with idiosyncratic objects, including *Wallpaper for RMS W VU (Ear/Pretzel - Pink)*, and hung large, unique black-and-white photographs of lamps and plants on top of them. Recreated here for the first time, this pairing extended Baldessari's play with language and form across the gallery walls, as well as generated optical effects of depth and recession.

By the 2000s, the artist had moved headlong into working three-dimensionally. The exhibition includes some of his first sculptures, including *Beethoven's Trumpet (with Ear) Opus #127, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135* (2007), an interactive work reproducing the eponymous composer's listening device and a massive, oversized ear. Inspired by a visit to Beethoven's home in Bonn, Germany, the sculpture plays fragments of his late string quartets – considered some of his most radical pieces and created when he was fully deaf – when approached and triggered by a visitor's voice. Not only does the work fill the exhibition space with embodied, sculptural form, it also charges it with sound.

Body parts were a quintessential feature throughout Baldessari's oeuvre, whether through their omission, as with his celebrated dots covering figures' faces, or through their fragmentation. Shapely, sensory, and ultimately funny, they offered the artist a shorthand to examine how we experience the world and make meaning. With *Ear Sofa; and Nose Sconces with Flowers* (2009), Baldessari isolated key parts of the face in order to recontextualize them both linguistically and spatially through absurdist juxtapositions. An olfactory organ is turned upside-down as a vessel

for flowers; an ear is transformed into an unusual resting spot.

In the major installation *Brain/Cloud (Two Views): with Palm Tree and Seascapes*, also from 2009, a massive white brain sculpture emerges from a plane of bright blue. Stretching across an adjacent wall is a serene seascape with one lone palm tree, its static, photographic flatness offering a counterpoint to the bulbous form nearby. The polyurethane brain, pillowy and surrounded by azure skies, morphs visually into a cloud, conjuring more wordplay and figures of speech from “brain fog” to “head in the clouds.” Meanwhile, an image of the viewer, captured by a closed-circuit television camera, appears on the opposite wall and calls attention to the experience of viewing and being viewed. Baldessari’s sculptural tableaux encourage viewers to move physically, and intellectually, around their different parts and wholes, using simple spatial maneuvers to generate complex interpretive chain reactions.

Keeping with the bodily themes, for the series *Raised Eyebrows/Furrowed Foreheads* (2008–09) Baldessari taps into the sensuality of the eye – the supposed window to the soul – and exploits the expressive, humorous nature of the eyebrow and forehead. Like many of his works, the series begins with found film stills and photographs, which the artist fragments and manipulates. Using an array of vivid colors and levels of bas-relief, Baldessari accentuates the lines and creases of various faces, as well as their emotional charge. *Eyebrow* (2009) pares this gesture down even further and adds an amusing accent to whatever settings and architecture it is installed around.

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In the 2010s, the final decade of his life, Baldessari embarked on a group of freestanding sculptures that brought his work fully into three dimensions. Fabricated from painted polyurethane and metal, among other materials, these works present realistic depictions of animals and objects that nonetheless traffic in the artist’s characteristic wittiness and irreverence. *Camel (Albino) Contemplating Needle (Large)* (2013) is installed outside, greeting gallery visitors with its cool, white fiberglass skin, piercing blue eyes, and the metallic sheen of its oversized needle. *Fake Carrot* (2015) is suspended from the ceiling like a comical pendulum, and the exaggerated height of *Penguin* (2018) mimics the artist’s own unusually large stature.

More than just visually appealing, these works give physical form to the verbal, visual and aesthetic strategies that Baldessari explored for decades in a range of mediums. They engage us physically while disrupting how we view and understand images and objects, leaving a visceral impression that also revels in drama and delight.

John Baldessari (1931–2020) lived and worked in Venice, California. *John Baldessari: The End of the Line* is on view at Pérez Art Museum Miami through May 9, 2027. Other selected solo exhibitions include Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (2025–26), Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice, Italy (2025), Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2024), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2020), Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach (2019), Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2017), Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2015), Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow (2013), Fondazione Prada, Milan (2010), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2011), Tate Modern, London (2009), Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona (2010), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2010), and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2010–11). Selected group exhibitions include the 53rd La Biennale di Venezia (2009), at which he was honored with the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement, Whitney Biennial (2009, 1983), Documenta V and VII (1972, 1982), and the Carnegie International (1985–86).

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