

SPRÜTH MAGERS

John Baldessari

24/02/2016 – 09/04/2016

Over the past 50 years, no one has come to epitomise the visual arts in Los Angeles more than John Baldessari. With his vibrant wit and his vast and unclassifiable oeuvre, which includes painting, photography, sculpture and video, he has become a hugely influential artist, while his generosity and brilliance as a teacher has made him a beloved figure among generations of students. Sprüth Magers has been exhibiting John Baldessari for almost 30 years, and we are delighted to open our Los Angeles gallery with one of the west coast's greatest living artists.

From his earliest text paintings in the late 1960s to his recent 'storyboard paintings', John Baldessari has always revelled in the playful dislocation between text and image. His most recent body of work, a series of paintings made over the past year, further expands this distinct Baldessari mode.

Featuring banal found photographs, altered with his trademark blocks of rich colour, accompanied by equally banal snippets of text that appear like captions beneath the images, the new paintings present the viewer with a pleasing conundrum. Text and image are sutured together on the picture plane, yet the viewer will struggle to find any useful correspondence between them. In *Ben's Jacket Drapes...*, we see, from behind, a woman reclining in a chair situated on blacked-out beach, while she seems to gaze out at a tropical seascape in the background. The text reads "BEN'S JACKET DRAPES PERFECTLY OVER HIS SHOULDERS". The arresting disjunction between text and image opens up an enormous gulf for the viewer's imagination. The picture breaks off from one space into another, with the text offering its own distinct image, creating a double register not unlike counterpoint in a musical composition. The words are unlikely to reflect the thoughts of the woman lounging on the beach, or mean much else for that matter, and yet they are unavoidable, occupying the base of the picture as if they must signify something. The resulting combination of word and image generates a radically anarchic pictorial space.

Baldessari often takes on ideas about authorship and creativity as his subject matter. Who is the author of these deadpan texts and should the viewer succumb to the temptation to relate them directly to the image? In another work, *Hey Glen You Want To...*, we read "HEY GLEN YOU WANT TO COME OVER HERE FOR A MINUTE?" The image is a light brown silhouette of an overnight bag on a sky-blue background, and we might be half tempted here to think of the text as a playful threat, or an invitation, the bag a prop in this mini narrative. Yet the picture never resolves, never settles into a lucid relationship, and thus invites the viewer to contribute to the meaning of the work. And it is this good-humoured generosity, fuelled by the artist's formal daring and ingenious wit, that has made Baldessari such a vital figure in contemporary art.

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John Baldessari (1931, National City, California) lives and works in Santa Monica, California. His works were part of the 47th (1997) and 53rd (2009) Venice Biennials, the Carnegie International (1985-86), the Whitney Biennial (1983), as well as documenta V (1972) and VII (1982). In 2005, an extensive, two-part retrospective was dedicated to the artist at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien and at the Kunsthaus Graz. His large retrospective *Pure Beauty* opened 2009 at the Tate Modern in London, and subsequently was on view at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2010), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2010), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2010/2011). Recently the artist has presented his works in solo exhibitions at the Fondazione Prada, Milan (2010) the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2011) and the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2015/16). In June 2009, John Baldessari was awarded the *Golden Lion* at the 53rd Venice Biennial and 2012 the *Kaiserring* of the city of Goslar for his lifetime achievement. In 2015, he was awarded *The National Medal of Arts* from the National Endowment of the Arts.

Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

For more information and press enquiries, please contact Anna Helwing (anna@spruethmagers.com).

Opening reception: February 23, 2016, 6 - 8 pm

Opening hours: Tue – Sat, 10 am – 6 pm