



John Baldessari  
French Horn Player (with Three Contexts-One Uncoded), 1994  
5 color screenprint construction  
27 1/2" x 42" (152.4 x 55.9 cm)  
Edition of 45

John Baldessari  
30 Years at Gemini G.E.L.

On View August 3<sup>rd</sup>  
By Appointment

Gemini G.E.L. is pleased to present an exhibition celebrating 30 years of collaboration with Los Angeles-based artist John Baldessari. The show will feature highlights from every Baldessari series published by Gemini, from the early 1990s series *A French Horn Player, A Square Blue Moon, and Other Subjects* to his most recent *EMOJI* series. Artworks created for benefit exhibitions and non-profit causes will also be presented. Baldessari created over 90 editions with Gemini, and this exhibition pays tribute to our beloved friend and an artist whose work will continue to inspire future generations of artists, historians and enthusiasts.

The first print that John Baldessari made at Gemini was a 3-color lithograph begun in 1990 and published in 1991. Titled *Man with Snake*, the work nicely showcases Baldessari's iconic use of imagery from film, movie posters, or advertisements, as well as his signature "dots" that cover faces and figures and serve to reduce subjects to a generic type. We see these movie images, colored dots and masks of color again in a selection of works from the *French Horn Player* series, 1994. Baldessari used a code for the different colors: red signals danger, green represents safety, yellow symbolizes chaos, chance, or insanity, and blue indicates calm and perfection. In *Two Bowlers (with Questioning Person)*, *Keys (with Intrusion)*, *One and Three Persons*, and *Two Sunsets (One with Square Blue Moon)*, Baldessari crops the images to obscure identification of the source material. Juxtaposing the different scenes, now stripped of their original purpose, the resulting artwork carries new meaning and interpretations.

The complete *Person with Guitar* series is on view in the upstairs gallery in Gemini's Frank Gehry building, bringing all six works together for the first time since their publication in 2005. While the imagery in this series relates to old magazines from the artist's youth that were printed in black and white, in a larger context there is a connection to Renaissance and Baroque paintings of musicians and their instruments, such as Caravaggio's and Frans Hals' works, both titled *The Lute Player*, from 1596 and 1623 respectively. Baldessari's *Guitars* relate to "vanitas" paintings of hedonistic scenes: people eating, drinking, and being merry, as a celebration and also cautionary tale about the transience of life. The works also reference more modern paintings like Picasso's *The Old Guitarist*, and rock 'n' roll photography.

Like the *Person with Guitar* series, Baldessari's *Noses and Ears, Etc.* series from 2006 are not traditional "prints," but editions made with stacked layers of Sintra panels to create multi-level cutouts and relief-like depth. In each, some parts of the face are depicted in color, while others are in black and white. By isolating one feature and masking another, Baldessari's disparate elements transform the traditional portrait into a new type of abstraction.

Also on view is the complete set of *Eight Soups*, a playful nod to Matisse's 1912 painting *Goldfish and Sculpture*, in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. With text below each image that names a different soup (Tomato Soup, Pea Soup, Corn Soup, Black Bean Soup, etc.), and with similar dimensions, they also reference Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup prints.

The *Foot and Stocking* series is a light and comical portrayal of another familiar body part and continues to push the boundaries of printmaking. In 2010, using photographs taken of the bare right foot of several of his studio staff members, Baldessari reworked and slightly abstracted the image to transform a foot into what one might read as a portrait. The foot in the finished print was covered with a nylon black fabric except for the big toe, like a toe pushing a hole through an old sock. A screenprinted image of a toenail was adhered to a colored background, and then a clear varnish added to make the nail shine, almost like nail polish.

The exhibition features several examples from Baldessari's most recent series created after 2014. In works from *The News* series, 2014, the artist created the imagery by mining newspapers every morning for compelling images and pairing them with his own descriptions of other photographs from

the same paper. He then manipulated the images and combined them with text in the artist's signature Sans Serif font to create unexpected, evocative narratives and social commentary. Works from the *Hands & Feet* series, 2017, direct the viewer's attention at the gestures being made by various hands and feet which – voluntary and subconsciously – convey as much as verbal or written language. Baldessari has stated, “For me there is an image junk pile, and I’m a scavenger. Images are like random words that one might cull from a dictionary, and I’m trying to put them back together in some way, reassembling them.”

In a work depicting fashion icon *Karl Lagerfeld*, Baldessari was inspired by an image of the designer from the Fall 2014 Chanel show, where Lagerfeld recreated a supermarket complete with Chanel-branded food packaging and shopping baskets. Lagerfeld was inspired by Pop art's cheeky conflation of high and low, and Baldessari slyly intervenes and inverts this strategy.

Like the *Eight Soups* series that pays homage to Matisse, Baldessari created a series of screenprints in 2016 that pay homage to Cezanne's Impressionist paintings of his wife Hortense. *Madame Cezanne's Hairdos* follow Baldessari's principle of encouraging the viewer “to look at something by eliminating other information.” Facial features are removed, as details and colors of the painting are flattened into a reduced color palette. Beneath each such reduction the name of a shape (e.g. “cone,” “pyramid,” “cube”) conveys depth and volume, and creates tension next to abstract shapes that reference but do not directly capture 3-dimensional objects.

In the most recent body of work published by Gemini, Baldessari's *Emoji Series* reevaluates the ubiquitous, seeming innocuous emoticons that we use in everyday conversation. The artist matched nine food emojis with unexpected words and short phrases, drawing our attention to issues of context and cultural specificity. Playing upon the popularity of these 21st century images, this new body of work fits well within Baldessari's long tradition of pairing images and texts to bring attention to language and the way we communicate.

In addition to all of these works, the exhibition also includes several works that were created to benefit charitable causes: Obama's Presidential campaign in 2008 and 2012, a fundraiser for the L.A. County Museum of Art.

John Baldessari was born in National City, California in 1931 and died this year at the age of 88. He taught at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, CA from 1970 - 1988 and the University of California at Los Angeles from 1996 - 2007. Baldessari's artwork has been featured in more than 200 solo exhibitions and in over 1000 group exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe. His awards and honors include the 2014 National Medal of Arts Award, an award from the International Print Center New York in 2016, memberships in the American Academy of Arts and Letters and in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Americans for the Arts Lifetime Achievement Award, the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, the BACA International 2008, the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement, awarded by La Biennale di Venezia and the City of Goslar Kaiserring in 2012. He has received honorary degrees from the National University of Ireland, San Diego State University, Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, and California College of the Arts. Recent projects include Learning to Read with John Baldessari, a major survey of



the artist's work at Museo Jumex in Mexico City from 2017 and 2018, exhibitions at Spruth Magers Gallery Los Angeles in 2016, the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, Germany in 2015, Marian Goodman Gallery London in 2015, an exhibition at the Garage Center of Contemporary Culture (Moscow, Russia) in 2013 and the 2009-2010 retrospective John Baldessari: Pure Beauty that was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Tate Modern, and traveled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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