

PRESS RELEASE

JOHN BALDESSARI. THE STÄDEL PAINTINGS

5 NOVEMBER 2015 TO 24 JANUARY 2016

Press preview: Wednesday, 4 November 2015, 11 am
Städel Museum, exhibition annex

Frankfurt am Main, 28 September 2015. “200 Years Städel”, the bicentennial celebrations of Frankfurt’s Städel Museum, are culminating with a solo exhibition of works by the internationally renowned American artist John Baldessari (b. 1931) taking place from 5 November 2015 to 24 January 2016. For “John Baldessari. The Städel Paintings”, the artist – one of the most influential alive today – executed a total of sixteen new pieces related explicitly to the Städel Museum collection, which spans seven hundred years of European art. A number of very different works from the Städel holdings – masterpieces, but also unusual finds in the storage depots, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, Agnolo Bronzino, Dirck van Baburen, Bartolomeo Veneto, Justus Juncker, Erró, Maria Lassnig and others – served him as visual material for his large-scale collages. Taking these selected works as his point of departure, the artist explores the relationship between painting and photography, but also that between image and language. In the process he not only isolates specific details of the Städel paintings but also partially overpaints those details and combines them with texts formally reminiscent of excerpts from Hollywood film scripts to create large horizontally or vertically divided diptychs. The result is a suspenseful and complex consonance/dissonance that queries old and new art alike and breaks with established patterns of perception. The catalogue being published in German and English to accompany the show broadens the spectrum further and places Baldessari’s most recent workgroup in the context of the extremely diverse oeuvre of this prominent pioneer of American concept art.

“I couldn’t imagine a better way of bringing the Städel’s two-hundredth anniversary year to a close. The fact that John Baldessari – a true icon of the contemporary art world – has devoted himself to our collection on such a profound level underscores

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the international appeal of the Städel and its programme. We are extremely proud to have this opportunity to show Baldessari's new works at the Städel Museum", comments Städel director Max Hollein.

It was in the late 1960s that John Baldessari (born in National City, California in 1931) began addressing himself to the conflation of image and text so characteristic of his art. In 1970 he decided to burn a substantial proportion of his œuvre – all of the paintings in his possession executed between 1953 and 1966 – in a symbolically charged action he titled the "Cremation Project". What followed this radical gesture, however, was not the end of his artistic activity, but on the contrary a fresh start in his intense pictorial production. For his art Baldessari draws on contemporary American mass culture but also on the canon of art history. In his works he responds to artistic strategies of the Classical Modern period such as montage or the integration of everyday elements, and combines them with themes introduced by the post-war avant-gardes, for example the discourses on consumption or the media. He uses found footage from films and other mass media, which he combines anew and in part subjects to painterly processing. In addition to image and language, Baldessari also already began at an early stage to link painting and photography by experimenting with photo emulsion on canvas. With his interdisciplinary approach as well as his merging of widely differing motifs, media and materials, he creates entirely new contexts of meaning. Among other distinctions, John Baldessari has been awarded the Golden Lion of the 53rd Venice Biennale and, in 2012, the Kaiserring, the art prize of the city of Goslar.

"Baldessari's Städel Paintings bear witness to a sense of both respect and irony towards the history of painting, as well as to that different, better world promised us by painting over centuries – and at the same time they cannot but mistrust that promise", observes Martin Engler, curator of the exhibition and head of the Städel Museum's contemporary art collection.

With the workgroup of the sixteen diptychs to be shown at the Städel Museum in the framework of "John Baldessari: The Städel Paintings", the artist negotiates fundamental issues related to the execution and reception, value and valuation of art. The collage *Movie Scripts / Art: Hang in there* (2014) shows a section of Agnolo Bronzino's (1503–1572) *Portrait of a Lady with a Lapdog* (1537–1540), a key work of the Städel Museum's Old Masters collection. Apart from the lady's hands, all we see

is part of the little dog sitting on her lap. Monochrome overpainting covers small areas, which thus represent an abstract counterpart to the illusionary space created by Bronzino's composition. The brief text appearing underneath in screenplay style revolves around a fictional auction at Sotheby's in New York. The two protagonists, Arthur and Hans, are sitting in the VIP lounge and competing for a work; Arthur has just bid 1.2 million dollars. Hans hesitates for a moment and asks the person accompanying him for advice. She reminds him that he already owns a yacht in which he could hang the painting.

For *Movie Scripts / Art: I wouldn't even try* (2014) Baldessari used a fragment from *Ideal Portrait of a Courtesan as Flora* (ca. 1520) by Bartolomeo Veneto (1502–1531). The film script text in the left-hand half of the picture is about a couple travelling by car in the vicinity of Albuquerque, New Mexico. They drive towards a huge billboard. The short description of the image on the billboard seems to be directly related to a detail of the Veneto work. In the conversation, the woman in the car remarks that she wishes she could also paint like that, but she wouldn't even dare to try. The man replies outright: "I'm thinking about it, baby!" Clichés about art, quality and craftsmanship here encounter a symbol of everyday American culture and the widespread assumption that art is based solely on expertise and artistic skill.

Like these two works, the entire series takes a critical and pointed look at the institutions and mechanisms of the 'art operating system'. In the process, it reflects on the complex and often absurd excesses in the contemporary art world and its market.

Edited by Martin Engler and published by the Hirmer Verlag, the catalogue accompanying the exhibition – "John Baldessari: The Städel Paintings" – places the series on view in the Städel in the context of Baldessari's overall multifaceted oeuvre while at the same time shedding light on decisive art-historical and institutional references. The publication introduces this outstanding exponent of concept and media art as a key figure representing an important chapter in recent art history.

With this show of current works by John Baldessari based on the Städel collection, the Frankfurt museum is also inquiring into the present status of painting. At the end of its bicentennial year, the Städel – as a "painting museum" – thus builds a bridge from the past to the immediate present and takes a suspenseful look ahead to the future.



JOHN BALDESSARI. THE STÄDEL PAINTINGS

Curator: Dr. Martin Engler (head of the collection of contemporary art, Städel Museum)

Exhibition dates: 5 November 2015 to 24 January 2016

Press preview: Wednesday, 4 November 2015, 11 am

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de, info@staedelmuseum.de,
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Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thu, Fri 10 am – 9 pm, closed Mondays

Special opening hours: 3 Oct. 2015, 10 am – 6 pm, 24 Dec. 2015 closed, 25, 26 and 28 Dec. 2015
10 am – 6 pm, 31 Dec. 2015 closed, 1 Jan. 2016 11 am – 6 pm, 4 Jan. 2016 10 am – 6 pm

Admission: 14 EUR, reduced 12 EUR, family ticket 24 EUR; admission free for children to the age of 12; groups (minimum 10 persons): reduced admission fee per person. Groups are required to book in advance by contacting us at +49(0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de.

Advance ticket sales online at: tickets.staedelmuseum.de

Catalogue: The exhibition catalogue, published by Hirmer Verlag and edited by Martin Engler, contains contributions by Jana Baumann, Martin Engler, David Salle, Philipp Kaiser; German/English, 184 pp., 34,90 EUR (museum edition).

Social media: The Städel Museum is communicating the exhibition on the social media with the hashtags #baldessari and #staedel.

General guided tours of the exhibition (included in admission fee): Thu 7 pm; Sun 2 pm

Special guided tours on request, please contact: +49(0)69-605098-200,
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Further events and activities: www.staedelmuseum.de

Media partners: Andy Warhol's *INTERVIEW* magazine, Verkehrsgesellschaft Frankfurt am Main