

**Born**

1931, National City, CA

Education

BA, MA, San Diego State College,
San Diego, CA
Otis Art Institute; Chouinard Art Institute
Honorary doctorates from several institutions

Lives and Works

Santa Monica, CA

About the Artist

Synthesizing **photomontage**, painting, and language, Baldessari's deadpan visual **juxtapositions** equate images with words and illuminate, confound, and challenge meaning. He upends commonly held expectations of how images function, often by drawing the viewer's attention to minor details, absences, or the spaces between things. By placing colorful dots over faces, obscuring portions of scenes, or juxtaposing stock photographs with quixotic phrases, he injects humor and dissonance into **vernacular** imagery. For most of his career John Baldessari has also been a teacher. While some of the strategies he deploys in his work—experimentation, rule-based systems, and working within and against arbitrarily imposed limits to find new solutions to problems—share similarities with pedagogical methods, they are also intrinsic to his particular world view and philosophy.

Teaching Connections**Media and Materials**

collage, installation, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

appropriation, collections, **juxtaposition**, popular culture, text & image

Related Artists

Ellen Gallagher, Arturo Herrera, Raymond Pettibon, Cindy Sherman, Fred Wilson

Don't look at things. Look between two things and see what you notice.

DISCUSS**Before Viewing**

■ What are the qualities or characteristics that define something as art, versus something that is not art? How and why are these definitions established?

■ How can artists guide or even control the way audiences see and experience their work?

While Viewing

■ Baldessari says that art is about making a choice. Pause the segment on a particular image and describe the choices Baldessari has made. Discuss how these choices contribute to your interpretation of the work.

■ Baldessari is interested in the things that people don't call art, and wonders what he can do to change their minds. Take note of the ways in which Baldessari transforms things that are not considered art (found images, ideas, text) into art.

After Viewing

■ What do you think Baldessari means when he describes his system for making art as a coral around his idea. How does Baldessari's work and working process reflect constraint as well as artistic freedom?

■ Choose a work by Baldessari and talk about the process of looking at it. What images or ideas do you notice first, second, third? How does your eye travel around these images? What has Baldessari prioritized, and why? How has the artist controlled the viewer's vision?

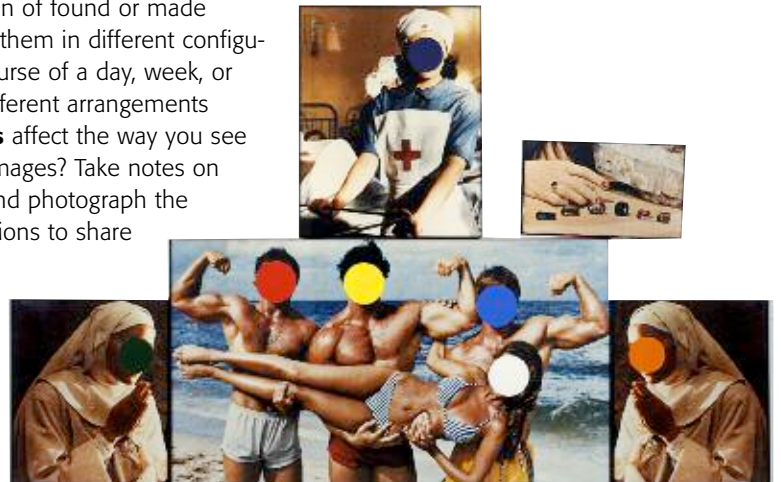
CREATE

■ Baldessari talks about text and image as interchangeable forms of language and describes the process of making his **photomontages** as building a poem from words, but with images. Create a poem out of images, and an image out of words, based on a single theme, word, or idea.

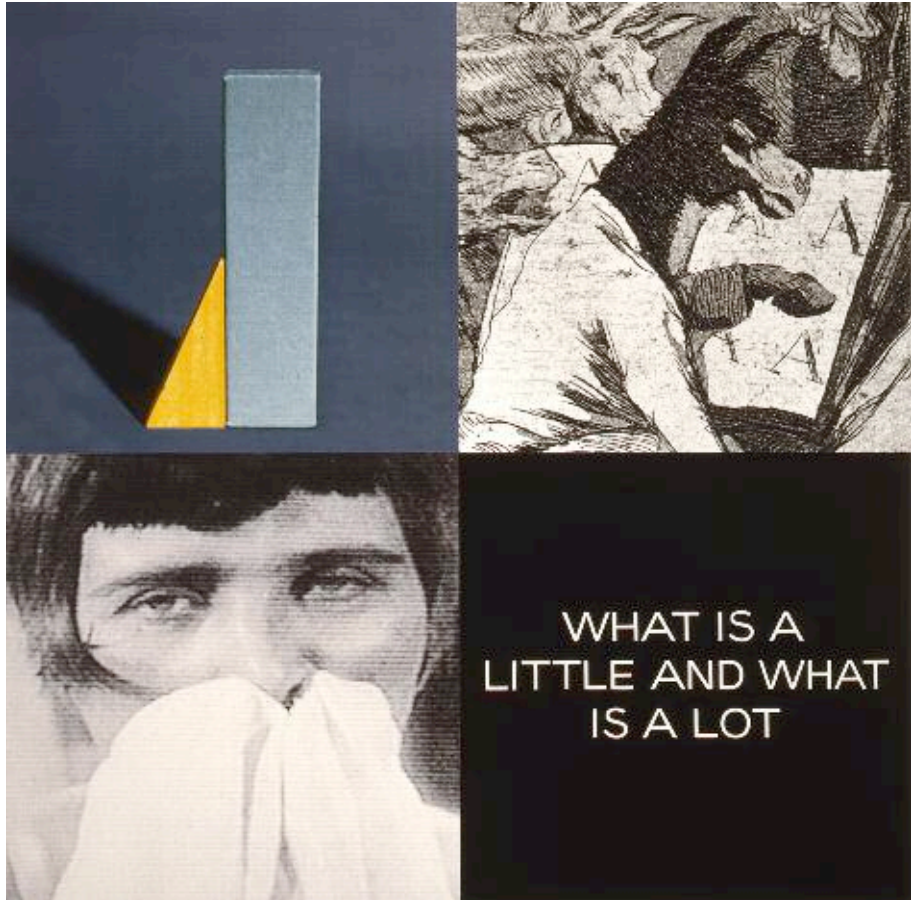
■ Create a collection of found or made images. Rearrange them in different configurations over the course of a day, week, or month. How do different arrangements and **juxtapositions** affect the way you see and interpret the images? Take notes on your discoveries, and photograph the different configurations to share with others in an exhibition.



Two Person Fight (One Orange): With Spectator, 2004. Three-dimensional digital archival print with acrylic paint on Sintra, Dibond, and Gatorfoam panels, 84 x 79 inches. © John Baldessari, courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



Beach Scene/Nuns/Nurse (with Choices), 1991. Black-and-white photographs, acrylic paint, 91½ x 144 inches. © John Baldessari, courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



Tetrad Series: WHAT IS A LITTLE AND WHAT IS A LOT, 1999. Digital printing, hand lettering and acrylic paint on canvas, 94 x 94 inches. © John Baldessari, courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



Tetrad Series: UNNOTICED AMONG LARGER THINGS, 1999. Digital printing, hand lettering and acrylic paint on canvas, 94 x 94 inches. © John Baldessari, courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.