
John K. Grande

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See table of contents

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Concertual art ideas are pervasive in John Baldessari’s art, from his videos, to his photographs, to his hybrid photo-painted works. Presented by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Tate Modern in London, and following on from the Hirshhorn Museum’s “2007 Ways of Seeing” show, “Pure Beauty” puts another feather in John Baldessari’s cap as a West Coast progenitor of all that conceptual art was, is, or can be. His blending of photography, performance, video, and painting treads the edgy border between visual and textual with a natural affinity. Seen cumulatively, these 120 works, dating from 1962 to 2010, use image as text, and vice versa, with a witty vernacular feel for the moment. The show are Baldessari’s brightest, most engaging photoworks, such as (1972), in which he captures a red-coloured treetops, and any variety of small details that, though whimsical, is always accessible, and as dry as semi-desert air. As he mapped out visual concepts, Baldessari pioneered conceptual bias like a master. His photogra-
phy reifies the inbuilt insecurity that West Coast artists felt, regarding the origins of avant-gardism and the prima teca of contemporary art. But how subtle and ingeniously is Baldessari’s sense of how contexts can shift and, hence, of how art can acquire new meanings, and of how life invades art. Bringing its enigmatic, mercurial essence into the equation is exactly what Baldessari’s witty, ironi-
