



Lot 103 John Baldessari

1931 – 2020 American

I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art

lithograph on paper

signed, editioned 19/50 and dated 1971

22 1/2 x 30 1/8 in, 57.2 x 76.5 cm

ESTIMATE: \$30,000 - \$40,000

LITERATURE

Sharon Coplan Hurowitz, *John Baldessari: A Catalogue Raisonné of Prints and Multiples, 1971-2007*, 2009, reproduced page 53

Anne Whitelaw et al., *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*, 2010, essay by Jayne Wark, reproduced page 344

John Baldessari, *Editions*, <http://www.baldessari.org/editions/ga05sk1i662u12u48ka4rfu2tl7fa7>

Patrick Pardo and Robert Dean, *John Baldessari Catalogue Raisonné Volume One: 1956-1974*, 2012, installation of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* at Mezzanine Gallery (1971), reproduced pages 170 and 171, catalogue #1971.8

Bruce Barber, *Conceptual Art: The NSCAD Connection 1967-1973*, Anna Leonowens Gallery, 2001, installation of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* at Mezzanine Gallery (1971), reproduced page 30

John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, single-channel video, February 1971, reproduced [here](#).

Tate, *John Baldessari - Pure Beauty*, Tate, Feb 19, 2017, clip of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* video (1971), reproduced [here](#).

John Baldessari: Pure Beauty, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009, stills of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* video (1971), reproduced page 76

ESSAY

John Baldessari was a leading figure in the twentieth century Conceptual art movement, and his extensive body of work resists easy categorization. From photo-text canvases and single-channel videos to instruction-based games, printed artist books, and price-stickered photomontages using the printed media fragments of pop culture, the breadth of Baldessari's artistic output is remarkably inclusive and marked by elements of exploration, disruption, humour, juxtaposition and play. Throughout his career, Baldessari sought to create an "artless art," — his term for art that is stripped of the inherent traditional preconceptions regarding aesthetic, content, process, material and presentation. This 1971 lithograph *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* is a key example of Baldessari's early experimentation with the conceptual process, and it is also a seminal work in the history of Conceptual art.

In early 1971, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) invited Baldessari to exhibit his work at their Mezzanine Gallery – however, he was unable to attend in person as NSCAD could not fund his travel expenses. At the time, NSCAD was one of the primary Canadian institutions focused on Conceptual art, and had recently launched its printmaking program the Lithography Workshop, which offered visiting artists the opportunity to produce a limited run of 50 prints to generate revenue for both the artist and the school. In response to the invite, Baldessari offered an idea in lieu of his presence. In a letter, he loosely outlined his idea for a "Punishment Piece" that would require surrogates in his place. Participants were asked to write the statement "I will not make any more boring art" from floor to ceiling. He requested that this action take place every day through the length of the exhibit. He sent along his own handwritten page as an example, from which the students produced the iconic print that would come to define the artist as a fundamental figure in the Conceptual art world. Baldessari also documented his own version of the exercise in a 13 minute single-channel videotape, in which he repeatedly writes the phrase. Despite his physical absence at NSCAD, Baldessari still found a way to manifest his presence through his conceptual ideation, and sparked significant interest in the language-based performance pieces that would go on to characterize much of his career.

Emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Conceptual art sought to demystify the aesthetically pleasing art of Modernism, and to find a new, rational, and democratic approach to art-making. Where Modernist art venerated the art object and the mythical artist figure, Conceptual art sought to prioritize the idea over the canvas and creator. However, in the process of distancing itself from Modernism, the creations of Conceptual art risked verging into a sparse, fragmented, administrative and often visually dull territory,

which could ultimately work against their goal of engaging the wider public. Critiques of crossing this threshold into the realm of boredom was precisely the sentiment that Baldessari echoed in his lithograph. As he had burned most of his early artworks from 1953 to 1966, the phrase “I will not make any more boring art” was a reprimand to himself and the broader Conceptual art community. Baldessari also invoked the classic schoolroom punishment of writing lines on a chalkboard. By taking up this exercise he also drew on the educational system’s own disciplinary models to critique the stifling and suppressive atmosphere of art institutions for young creators. By asking students to repeatedly write on the walls of the gallery, he defiled the sacred white cube and poked fun at the elitist spaces of the art establishment. As a long-time educator, having held professorships at the University of California, San Diego and the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, Baldessari actively worked against archaic educational structures in favour of experimentation, play and spontaneity.

Despite its disciplinary tone, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* is not entirely punitive; it is also comically defiant. The performance at NSCAD, the accompanying video of Baldessari writing lines, and the lithograph itself, are all ironically quite boring. Baldessari purposefully emphasized the dullness and repetition of ordinary, banal tasks and highlights their inherent humour and even absurdity in his signature deadpan tone. Baldessari’s *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, is an exaggeration of structures and rules within systems of learning and the art world, and rather than make something “interesting,” he immerses the student surrogates at NSCAD and the spectators into the “boring,” and in turn, serves up a brilliantly complex and comical example of Conceptual Art at its finest. Baldessari resisted claims that he actively aimed to produce humour in his works, yet he is beloved for his sardonic and cheeky tone, and how deftly he manages the tension between critique and play, humour and absurdity. By taking up the visual language and gesture of boredom, Baldessari’s innovative performance piece, this lithograph, and his artistic legacy are anything but.