ARTIST’S CHOICE: JOHN BALDESSARI
March 17 - May 10, 1994

An exhibition conceived and installed by American artist John Baldessari is the fourth in The Museum of Modern Art’s series of ARTIST’S CHOICE exhibitions. On view from March 17 through May 10, 1994, ARTIST’S CHOICE: JOHN BALDESSARI features an original work that the artist has created from objects in the Museum’s collection, and explores the ways in which we look at both familiar and less familiar art.

Made possible by a generous grant from The Charles A. Dana Foundation, ARTIST’S CHOICE highlights the role of the Museum’s collection as a source for contemporary artists. The series is organized in collaboration with Kirk Varnedoe, chief curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

For this exhibition, Baldessari has chosen approximately thirty paintings, prints, drawings, film stills, and photographs to use in the creation of his new work (see attached list). Using enlarged photographic reproductions of the pieces, he has selected often unexpected details from them -- for example, the bananas from De Chirico’s Melancholy of Departure (1914), the mouth of de Kooning’s Woman, I (1950-52), and a square of grass from Wyeth’s Christina’s World (1948) -- and assembled them into a collage measuring over fifteen-feet long and eight-feet high. By combining what seem to be arbitrary details and odd shapes, frequently altering their relative
scale and placing them in startling juxtapositions, Baldessari both shows us what we may have overlooked in the works, and demonstrates how such fragments can spur surprising new meanings.

Baldessari's piece, titled *e.g. Grass, Water Heater, Mouths, & etc. (for John Graham)*, consists of black-and-white and color photographs and oil stain. It is installed with six of the original works on which it is based; the details the artist selected from these six works are demarcated by a framing projector. Installed on a low ledge are sixteen-by-twenty-inch photographs of the remaining works, from which the relevant details have been excised, leaving a white shape in their place.

As have other ARTIST'S CHOICE exhibitions, this show emphasizes the ways that the Museum's collection can inspire contemporary creativity. In the brochure accompanying the exhibition, Kirk Varnedoe says that Baldessari's work "is a particularly vivid demonstration of a crucial way in which modern art has evolved and continues to evolve -- not as a linear baton-race of movements and isms, but through hybrids, mutations, and unpredictable recombinations that are first produced by individual sensibilities and then attract -- as Baldessari's work clearly has -- new 'schools' around them."

In an interview with Mr. Varnedoe, the artist has said that he wanted the exhibition "to provide the ambiance for people to . . . wonder about why I chose this detail or this shape out of this painting rather than that one. And if that happens, if it gets people to start to develop a visual vocabulary, then I think it's been a successful project."

John Baldessari is best known for his Conceptual works that focus on the processes of choice and selection, and that employ a wide range of

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nontraditional mediums. Born in 1931 in National City, California, he received his B.A. (1953) and his M.A. (1957) from San Diego State College, and lives in Santa Monica, California, and in New York City.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact Allison Louis, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.
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Exhibition Checklist

Original works on view

Giorgio de Chirico. *Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure).* 1914. Oil on canvas.
John Graham. *Harlequin (Self Portrait).* c. 1944. Oil and pencil on canvas.

Photographic reproductions on view

Artist unknown. *Exquisite Corpse.* Photograph from the Painting and Sculpture archive.
Burt Gillett. Film still from *Three Little Pigs.* 1933.
Leo McCarey. Film still from *Ruggles of Red Gap.* 1935.
Charles Sheeler. *Bucks County Barn.* 1932. Oil and gesso on composition board.
Georges-Pierre Seurat. *At the Concert Européen.* c.1887. Conté crayon on paper.