

a high partition and then down to the floor to create an expanse of meandering vertical lines. The work seems to defy gravity until you walk around the wall and see how loops of thread form a counterbalance on the other side. *Upload (Gramercy)*, 2005-06, is also made from a single thread attached to the wall in a large flat tangle of swooping Pollock-like skeins.

It is difficult to figure out how this complex thread work was made. A similar "how did he do that?" response is generated by *Global Culture (RED)*, 2004-05, which, like Spitzer's more expansive installations, involves technology and machinery. On a large red table, the top of which continually tilts and pivots, is a leather soccer ball that rolls around without ever falling to the floor. This balancing act provokes a sense of anticipation and fascination. Yet it's important not to miss that *Global Culture*, like the other works presented here, is essentially a traditional sculpture, a work concerned with gravity, process and the relationship between object and base, albeit subjected to Spitzer's characteristic irony and humor.

—Saul Ostrow

John Baldessari at Marian Goodman

A progenitor of the ever-more-visible practice of painting on photographs, John Baldessari has made hybrids of the two forms since the "Violent Space" series of the late 1970s, altering enlargements of movie stills with collage and acrylics. In synch with the Deconstruction of the day, this intervention refuted the idea of one true reading. The artist suggests that within these patently artificial, culturally loaded images, multiple narratives are embedded. He disrupts the viewer's habits of visual consumption through the selective deletion of details, whether primary, peripheral or both. His aversion to categories has led him to assert that, far from being a combination of painting and photography, his work is neither, and, in its flatness, scanability and mischievous reduction of pictorial experience to information, it draws significantly upon graphic-design conventions.

In recent years the artist has further resisted categorization by introducing sculptural space in the form of bas-relief. This strategy informs the 19 pieces, all dated 2006, in "Noses and Ears, Etc., Part Two." (Part One

was seen last year at Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art in Lisbon.) They are commanding in scale—the smaller dimension of most is about 6 feet—and include elements about an inch thick that are recessed from the picture's surface or attached to it.

Notwithstanding this sculptural aspect, Baldessari's new direction is reductivist: these works hinge on interactions among a smaller number of pictorial components than in his previous work. In the older work, major narrative information in the enlarged film stills was covered up, and peripheral information left in. Here much peripheral information is also deleted, leaving only a vestige of the original. In all but two, everything but his selected details is replaced by a solid area of black or white, but a generalized memory of cinematic tension persists. They are more overtly whimsical, with less sense of menace or dread than before, owing partly to a palette of primaries and secondaries that is more appropriate to the 1960s than the noirish look that Baldessari has made his signature. They also eschew text (except for incidental detail in some of the source photos), as well as the polyptych structure he has often relied upon. In *Four (Red, Black, Blue, Yellow) Faces, Cowboy Hats, and Prison Bars*, the faces, featureless but for noses, float like balloons behind a grid of jailhouse bars. In another work, a violet face threatens a blue face with a photographic pistol. Their pink noses interact like a Josef Albers color study.

A blue, upward-angled face-shape outfitted with a photographic nose hovers above a pile of rope on a black ground; another piece includes head, hands and a huge, slimy fish. Surrounded by sunny yellow, the faces in *Two (Red) Faces with Noses and Ear and (Blue) Hand and Foodstuffs* move in for a kiss in the vicinity of the makings of a homey meal. Visuality eclipses linguistic niceties in one of the smallest, least didactic, most complex works in the show, *Two (Bluegreen) Faces with Noses and Ears, One (Yellowgreen) Face with Nose and Three Hands and Accordion*. Unaccounted for in the title is the hot pink ground, against which the greens buzz, jazzily. Harsh lighting on the chanteuse and her accompanist suggests a low-budget, low-ceilinged coffeehouse, and the play of actual and depicted shadows confounds and conflates

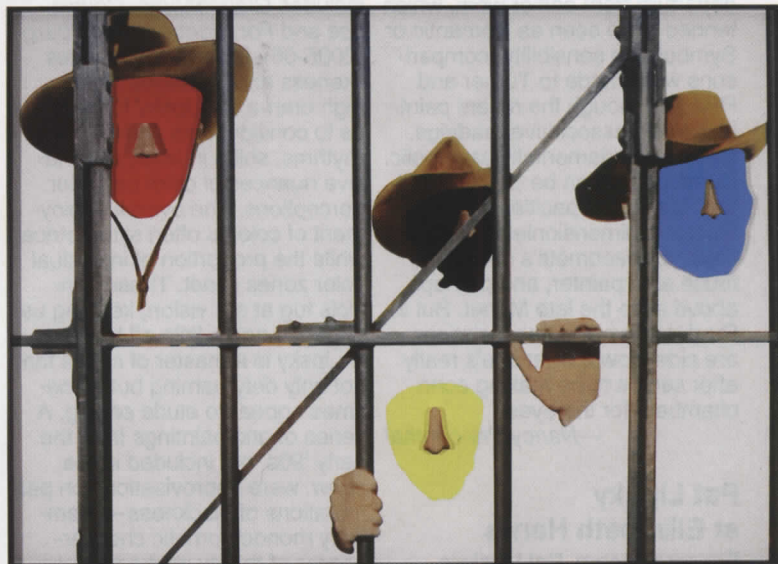
modes of representation. Works like this are chromatically predicated, spatially complex and materially plastic. We do not expect such painterliness from this erstwhile Conceptualist. To find something fresh, even lively, amid the fragmentary photographic flotsam of a culture awash in images is Baldessari's ongoing achievement.

—Stephen Maine

Rebecca Purdum at Jack Tilton

Faced with the buoyant but impenetrable clouds of color in Rebecca Purdum's new paintings, our eyes work like headlights in fog, vainly probing for clarity. Purdum applies oil paint with gloved fingers, as she has for 20 years, generally laying it down in

unstable air currents, though they also evoke physiological phenomena: pesky floaters, or the wobbly, drifting events that result from staring at a bright light. The slightly bigger *Static* (2005) has a marine palette, but its vertical orientation and all-around border of discontinuous, dark, stitchlike marks discourage a spatial reading, returning vision to its own perplexities. Optical complications become the more or less explicit subject in paintings like the hypnotic *Passenger (Diptych)*, 2003, dominated by a broad, cavernous area that spreads across both panels and emits a kind of ruddy glow. Impossible to reproduce and difficult to come to terms with even in person, the surface of this work, scumbled and dry as a forest floor in autumn, draws the



John Baldessari: *Four (Red, Black, Blue, Yellow) Faces, Cowboy Hats, and Prison Bars*, 2006, 3-D digital photographic prints and acrylic paint, 71½ by 100 by 4 inches; at Marian Goodman.

slightly drier and more discrete strokes across the center of the canvas. At the edges, the paint often thickens or darkens, or is smeared slightly, in an effect that simulates the losses of acuity and perceived color at the periphery of the visual field. In other ways, too, these paintings seem to both represent and induce particular conditions of sight—snow blindness, night vision, the ordinary difficulty of making things out at a distance or in diminishing light.

Some of the paintings also suggest landscapes, including the preternaturally luminous *Just Above* (2005, 84 inches square), a sun-shot field of apple green in which stray darker marks dance lightly, like leaves held aloft by

viewer in close for a promised focal resolution that never arrives; orientation, in Purdum's work, is endlessly, teasingly, almost sensually deferred, just as a sense of materiality never coheres, despite her haptic process.

The theater of perception is pictured almost literally as a proscenium in the 8-foot-wide *Auspices (Diptych)*, 2005, where what could be softly lit flies and wings frame a deep smoky-blue stage. In the small, darkly ecstatic *Firmament (Triptych)*, 2002, a Ryder-ish nocturne that suggests a sea at moonrise, a silvery cloud hovers above an implied horizon, ringed by a corona of blazing black, uncharacteristically distinct fingerprints. At the other end of