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In many cases, the text fragments used in these paintings themselves take the form of instructions – instructions which, once transferred to the canvas, seem to be directed to the person viewing the work. For example, *Composing on a Canvas* instructs the viewer to study paintings in a systematic fashion:

Study the composition of paintings. Ask yourself questions when standing in front of a well-composed picture. What format is used? What is the proportion of width to height?

and so on. In other works, Baldessari presents a textual analogy of a “compelling” painting – “The spectator is compelled to look directly down the road and into the middle of the picture” – or of a minimal, reductionist painting: “A work with only one property.” The last example suggests that Baldessari’s objective was highly paradoxical: a painting executed as the material evidence of a concept that amounts to the negation of the painting.

John Baldessari instructed his public in a disturbing, ironic manner. Lawrence Weiner probably overlooked that possibility when he dismissed the instructional form. Nonetheless, Baldessari’s paintings are no less serious as art proposals than the linguistic constructions by Weiner. What the two artists have in common is that their obsession with making – the manual processing of physical material – is still framed by a given medium: either painting or sculpture. There was evidently a tendency in 1960s conceptual art to develop a radical method by which a credible result could still be achieved within traditional art media, instead of rejecting those media altogether. This method often involved a proposal in the form of a descriptive text referring to the handling of materials or objects. Whereas Weiner used this form to renounce his authority as an artist, while still being able to make art, Baldessari used it to reformulate his artistic authority, namely as a strategist who organised others to do the work for him. (He similarly engaged a number of amateur painters for his 1965 *Commissioned Paintings*.)

Some artists working in this period gave instructions to themselves, but essentially with the same goal: to salvage the idea

## Camiel van Winkel // **During the Exhibition the Gallery will Be Closed** Contemporary Art and the Paradoxes of Conceptualism

In this collection of essays, Amsterdam art historian and critic Camiel van Winkel digs up the conceptual roots of contemporary art, design and photography to argue that the art of today is, as a whole, “post-conceptual.” Focusing on the conceptual artists of the years 1965–1975, van Winkel examines how the art of that era continues to inform the art world today. Highly polemical and very readable, *During the Exhibition the Gallery Will Be Closed* looks at the cultural dominance of information in art discourse, the professionalization of artistic practices, the debate over “good design” in art and the role institutions play in art theory. It is an essential collection for any understanding of that idea, belief and desire we today call “the artist.”

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