

REVIEW



# Untold Truths

BY MICHELLE WEIDMAN

## “Light Years: Conceptual Art and Photography” at the Art Institute of Chicago

When photography developed into a mainstream process to gather and record information, the understanding of how much truth it could register in the 1860s photographer William H. Warner tried to convince Scotland Yard that he could catch a killer by photographing the eyes of the dead.

A century later, when artists primarily interested in ideas based on the belief in the objective nature of photography, as well as an excess of privilege afforded to artistic production, developed their tactics against these excesses that they developed their tactics.

“Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph 1964-1977” at the Art Institute of Chicago through March 11 registers the conceptual art and maturation of photography through its contentious adoption and development within an artistic context.

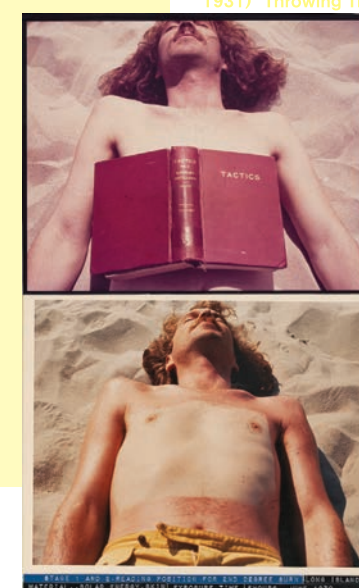
John Baldessari’s “An Artist is Not Merely the Slavish Announcer of a Series of Facts, Case the Camera has Accepted and Mechanically Recorded,” located just inside the entrance of the exhibition, ushers in to the show’s framework chronologically and thematically. Made between 1966 and 1968 the piece consists of the title stenciled below a black and white photograph of a remarkably mundane street scene.

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(TOP) John Baldessari (American, born 1931) “Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line (Best of Thirty-Six Attempts)” (1973) Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago. (LEFT) Dennis Oppenheim (American, 1938-2011) “Stage 1 and 2. Reading Position for 2nd Degree Burn Long Island, N.Y. Maternal... Solar Energy. Skin Exposure Time. 5 Hours June” (1970, 1970) Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection.

primary practices including but not limited to Social Practice and Relational Aesthetics. The continued relevancy of much of the work is a testament to the value of the exhibition but also to the perpetuation of artistic excess. In other words, if the exhibition is a representation of social standards, we may no longer entertain the belief that photography can record the last moments of a life in the eyes of the dead, but we still do believe in the sanctity of artistic thought and production.