



***Specimen (After Dürer)*, John Baldessari**

Specimen (After Dürer)

John Baldessari

American, 2000

Ink-jet on canvas with UV coating,
mounted on fiberglass composite panel
with stainless-steel T-pin
2000.37

*“Perhaps you can project yourself into
the position of the bug and imagine
yourself in some other world, being
pinned to the wall as a specimen.”*

—John Baldessari

Questions for Teaching

How is this image similar to Albrecht
Dürer’s drawing *Stag Beetle*? How is it
different? (Find Dürer’s *Stag Beetle* at:
[http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/
artObjectDetails?artobj=25](http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=25))

The Dürer drawing is about one quarter
of the size of a regular 8 ½ x 11-inch
piece of paper. (Note: Teachers can fold
an 8 ½ x 11-inch sheet of paper into four
quarters to provide students with a
visual reference.) Look at the people in
the image, how would you compare
them to the size of John Baldessari’s
beetle? Why do you think he made it so big? What details do you notice? Do you notice any
details here that you didn’t notice in the drawing by Dürer?

Baldessari is very interested in the classification of things and collections of the natural world. He titled his work *Specimen (After Dürer)*. What do you think this title means?

Baldessari made this artwork in 2000. How do you think bugs are viewed today, compared to 500 years ago, when Dürer made his work? Why do people collect bugs and insects today? What types of things do you collect?

Museums are places that collect and display art and artifacts from different cultures. What kinds of museums have you been to? How did they display the works of art and/or artifacts? (Answers may include hanging painting by cables or strings, or displayed in cases). How has Baldessari chosen to display his work? (He has hung it by putting a huge push-pin that holds the painting to the wall at a skewed angle).



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John Baldessari is known for being very interested in chance. What are some games of chance? (Answers may include flipping a coin, throwing dice, etc.). How has his display of the artwork—the way it is hung—give the impression that the work got there by chance?

Background Information

Baldessari selected Albrecht Dürer's diminutive drawing, *Stag Beetle* (1505), as the starting point for his project. Working from a transparency of the small drawing, Baldessari created a 14 ½ x 11 ½-foot enlargement of the image on canvas. *Specimen (After Dürer)* is mounted to the wall with a gigantic metal T-pin placed at a precarious angle. Stabbed through the back of the beetle, the pin appears to have put an end to the critter's trek across the canvas.

About the Artist

John Baldessari (born June 17 1931, National City, California, USA, lives and works in Santa Monica, California)

"I'm really interested in what conceptual leaps people can make from one bit of information to another and how they can fill the space."

For more than five decades, Baldessari has been known for working in a variety of media and forms including painting, photography, video art, sculpture, and exhibition design.

John Baldessari gained distinction in the late 1960s by combining **pop art's** use of mass media imagery with **conceptual art's** use of written text. Early in his career, Baldessari began incorporating images and text used by the movie and advertising industries into his photo-based art. He appropriated pictures and movie stills—editing, cropping, and **juxtaposing** them—in conjunction with written texts. The resulting fusion of photography and language often provides a plurality of meanings beyond the associations suggested by the isolated scenes alone. His layered, often humorous and ironic **compositions**, carry different undertones and nuances, showing how relative meaning can be. Throughout his long and celebrated career, Baldessari has continued to amusingly engage with and critique **popular culture**, and over time he has increased the scale and visual impact of his work, as can be seen in *Specimen (After Dürer)*.