

GB Prints 1965–78

This career-spanning selection of prints follows George Baldessin's figures and portraits as they assume, by the mid-1960s, more portrait-like demeanours¹ while his appreciation of Japanese prints start to appear in his work².

Over this period, figures and portraits transitioned from bulbous biomorphs to a more seductive aesthetic while retaining awkward, sometimes garbled features unsteadily constrained by dark interiors. While these structures gradually took over the artist's work's various aspects and supports, this selection focuses on portraiture and figure in print, both etching, aquatint, and lithography.

The performative motifs of the circus and theatre are relegated to mere hints, as most identifiable decor is engulfed by shadows. This reframing naturally brings the portraiture to the forefront, its intense contrast obviously associated with the monochromatic contrasts of artificially lit, mid-century photography — Warhol's foil wrapped factory on 16mm film, Bergman's close-ups, Fellini's studio recreation of Rome nightlife. Main figures squirm like specimens under single light sources, while the background – which the spectator's senses, along with the very techniques employed, try to pull back to a simpler, graphic, geometric base – retains impossibly subtle undertones, both in texture and structure, creating a tension that directs the eye away from the subject, more out of mysterious attraction to the unknown than out of modesty towards or sympathy for the tortured subject.

This tension also speaks to the fact that Baldessin considered the inked-up plate, an intermediate, unfinished, technical state, as an accomplishment, a "sculptural object in itself"³. Could this account for the shift the spectator's eye senses? If so, the artist's "uncanny ability to understand the limitations and restrictions of the various disciplines imposed by this very exciting print medium."⁴

The present selection stems from a desire to reconcile the cold honesty of the performative limelight with the timeless aesthetic sensibilities of the artist who, in hindsight, tight roped over chasms throughout his career, carrying a youthful spirit of generosity, energy, and delight.

¹ Harriet Edquist, *Paradox & Persuasion*, p. 93

² cf. *ibid*

³ *ibid*, p. 119

⁴ Michael Shannon, quoted in *ibid*