

Exquisite L.A.

Los Angeles: the seductress that likes to put her hand up my skirt. There is something about L.A.'s contradictory undulations that allude to the body: the ocean perimeter, the growing, shrinking river, the dry hills and shady canyons. Like our own casing, it is an impeccable, flawed specimen—an often delicate, sometimes brutal map of an exquisite shape.

Angelenos like to complain about the city's geographical separation, but almost as a function of its sprawl, the city creates an environment in which we desire to interweave more closely. We fight the disconnect. The art world, like other tight-knit creative groups, is one that relies strongly on connections. Influence follows the river of history, winding its way through centuries of movements and communities.

Intrigued by the Surrealist fascination with Consequences (an old parlor game dating back to Georgian-era Britain), and fueled by a desire to forge connections, I have long dreamt of playing my own version with L.A. artists as the subject. In Consequences, collectively assembled works are made from words or images where each section is concealed from the next participant. The final piece is an amalgam of the individual parts.

The nonsensical French sentence, *le cadaver exquis boira le vin nouveau* (the exquisite corpse will drink the new wine), is the genesis of the name Exquisite Corpse, and supposedly the result of the first game the Surrealists played. These text-based exercises played perfectly into their mission to disconnect from the conscious mind, employ chance and invoke the uncanny.

Exquisite L.A. draws on this history to create a communal portrait of the current Los Angeles art world. The project consists of photographic portraits of artists taken in their studio. Each artist introduces the next with text that accompanies the photographs, outlining their connection to or interest in the artist that follows them in the series. We want this to be an ongoing story of L.A.—its twists and turns, side streets, and freeways. We hope this project will go on to have several volumes, with different starting points, creating a larger map of connections and full circles. Starting with this issue of *Carla*, we will present three artists per quarterly issue, completing 12 portraits over the course of a year.

I asked my husband Joe Pugliese, an established editorial portrait photographer, to be my partner in this project because I wanted the imagery to be rooted in classical portraiture, which strives to capture the essence and emotion of the subject. I did not want to capture the artist in the backdrop of their work, but rather to isolate them from it; their individual gaze, pose, or gesture becoming a continuous visual marker for the Exquisite Corpse.

When I started thinking about a possible first artist, I went back and forth between distancing myself from the subject and choosing someone that made sense to me in the context of the project. In doing this, I moved away from the automatic reaction that is ultimately required in a game that originated from a group of close friends. Yet, an Exquisite Corpse is not an exercise of distance; the process of the game is meant to be automatic, not labored over. When I reacted swiftly, I always came back to Fay Ray, an artist that I have worked with through my space, Marine Projects, but who has also become a close friend and daily inspiration.

Even before I was certain of my choice, I thought it was important to begin this story with a female artist, because the original Surrealist group was predominantly male. For me, Ray looks at Surrealism from a feminist perspective. In her collages and photography, she mines Surrealism's methods of production, but questions masculine traditions and the idea of femininity in relation to cultural hierarchies. There is use of the body as a stand-in for states of consciousness, perhaps even for psychological and physical freedom. There are dreams, but this is not the psychic automatism of Surrealism. Here there is cathartic gravitas.

In Ray's sculptures, there is falling, there is surrender, there is weight. We see a questioning of devotion. There is no blind faith to a particular culture or to a particular period of time, but there is passion and ritual. Most of all, there is confession. Ray's world is one of object-fetishism and female identity. Her surfaces are cool and monotone, but they sing with heat, with shadows of the figure, of mortality.

Exquisite L.A. is a blueprint of a collective shape. And Ray's work is part of that; it is an arm, a leg, a toe. It explores female experience; it is the feminine form moving through shared space.

And what of the Exquisite Corpse? The name itself is seductive. The idea of a corpse being exquisite speaks to our fear of death, of death as the ultimate annihilating perfection. Where do you begin and I end? This narrative will take on a life, and ultimately death, of its own. Like the exquisiteness of existence, it has both infinite possibility and ultimate finality wrapped up in the surface of our skin.

Claressinka Anderson
Portraits by Joe Pugliese

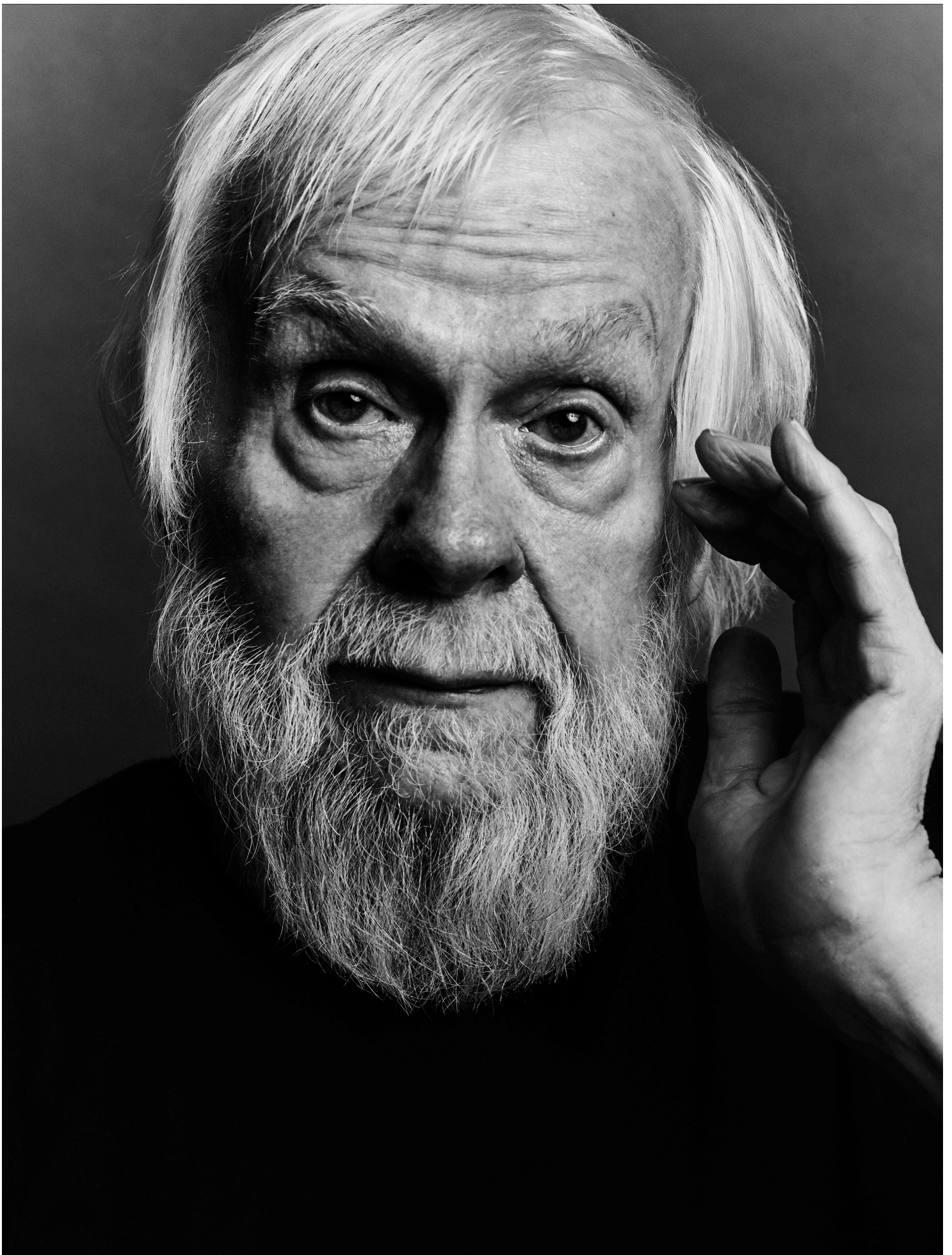
Fay Ray on John Baldessari

John is the last artist I assisted before focusing more on my own work. He helped me complete the final part of the bridge between life as an art student and one as a working artist. I watched him synthesize material fast and negotiate business, politics, and practice, always keeping the betterment and perpetuity of art in the front of his mind. I've never met anyone more dedicated to art's past and present than he.



John Baldessari on Claire Kennedy

I chose Claire because I find her works very minimal but very elegant and I like them as art. Her work approaches an ideal of mine: the depiction of a single line.



Claire Kennedy on Analia Saban

I have known Analia for about five years. I met her through John Baldessari. We connected over our love for books. I will never forget the first time I saw her work on his studio walls. It resonated deeply with me. So much of what she does has to do with artistic process and materials. Her work asks questions. It dismantles and reconstitutes. The breadth of media she has worked with in her career has been an inspiration to me in my work.

