From the series, San Quentin Point, 1983
as John Baldessari and Bernd and Hilla Becher. Baldessari
uses the camera simply because it is a convenient and
expedient medium of expression; the Bechers' photogra-
phs are typological documents of water towers and
other strictly industrial
European structures.
In one of his earliest
series, The New Industrial
Parks Near Irvine, California
(1975), Baltz emphasizes
minimalist art qualities of
pedestrian architecture. In
stark, frontal photographs he
explores the relationships of
the geometric structural
components of the buildings.
The photographs also serve as
characteristically understated
comments on the commercialization of
the commercialization of
the commercialization of
the commercialization of
the commercialization of
the former Irvine Ranch, one of
the largest and most fertile
tracts of land in Southern
California.
Recognizing the descriptive
limitations of the single
photographic image, Baltz
assembles his photographs in
series—the 51 prints in the
Industrial Parks portfolio
constitute one work whose
effect depends on the
viewer's cumulative expe-
rience of the whole series.
The largest work Baltz has
made to date is Park City, a
portfolio documenting the
development of the nation's
largest ski resort in 102
8x10 inch black-and-white
prints. Baltz spent over two
years on this ambitious pro-
ject, beginning with shots of
the bleak, mine-scarred land
and closing with interior
views of the shabbily con-
structed houses and condos
awaiting occupation by vaca-
tioners. Though Baltz's
style is, as always, deadpan,
the message is clear. The
images speak of a peculiarly
modern attitude toward the
landscape—landscape as real
estate. (Ed Ruscha dealt
with similar ideas in some of
his early books, such as Real
Estate Opportunities and Nine
Swimming Pools.)
During the time Baltz was
photographing San Quentin
Point (1982-83), it was one of
the last undeveloped Bay-
front sections of Marin
County. (It has since
undergone commercial
development.) In 59 richly
detailed photographs, of
which 43 are on view, Baltz
depicts the neglected terrain
in which leaves, earth, and
rocks intermingle with tire
tracks, bottles, paper and
other debris recording the
uncaring human use of the
area. Baltz says he was
attracted to the site in part
because its previous use as a
quarry often resulted in con-
fusion between man-made and
natural elements. Whereas
most of Baltz's earlier work
was photographed at eye level
to approximate normal view-
ing, in the majority of the
San Quentin Point photo-
graphs, he aimed the lens
straight down so that the
ground fills the frame. The
sense of specific place is,
therefore, less important
than it was in such earlier
series as Industrial Parks,
Nevada and Park City. In
fact, images similar to those
in the San Quentin Point
series might also be found in
other locations. Baltz has
stated that here, for the
first time, he invites an
emotional response and inter-
pretation that goes beyond
the facts of the subject
matter. The images take on a
metaphoric function—the
decay, neglect, and entropy
depicted in the photographs
convey an elegiac mood, a
sense of the mortality of all
living things.
Baltz was born in 1945 in
Newport Beach, California and
has lived in Sausalito,
California since 1975. He
received a B.F.A. from the
San Francisco Art Institute
in 1969 and an M.F.A. from
Claremont Graduate School,
California, in 1971. Baltz
has been the recipient of two
National Endowment for the
Arts Fellowships (1973 and
1976) and a John Simon
Guggenheim Foundation
Fellowship (1976), as well as
a U.S.-U.K. Bicentennial
Exchange Fellowship in 1980.
In addition to making
photographs, Baltz has taught
at various California
institutions, including
Claremont Graduate School,
California Institute of the
Arts, and UC Riverside. His
photographs are in many
public collections, among
them the Center for Creative
Photography, University of
Arizona; the La Jolla Museum
of Contemporary Art,
California; the Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York; The
Museum of Modern Art, New
York; the Philadelphia Museum
of Art; and the University
Art Museum, UC Berkeley.
Constance Lewallen

Work in MATRIX:
San Quentin Point, 1983,
43 8 x 10" gelatin silver
photographs. Collection UAM,
anonymous gift in memory of
Laurine Howard Cox.
Selected one-person exhibitions:

Selected group exhibitions:

Selected bibliography by the artist:
The New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California. (New York: Castelli Graphics, 1974.)
Nevada. (New York: Castelli Graphics, 1978.)

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):
Murray, Joan. "Lewis Baltz's Formalism," Artweek, Aug. 27, '77.

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