

Pagel, David. "Realism and Imagination Coexist in 'Drawing V.'" *Los Angeles Times*, 25 August 2000, p. F24.

How to Read Them?: Despite the prevalence of printed words and bland, black-and-white images, "Library" is a surprisingly divisive exhibition. At Margo Leavin Gallery, some of the best works in the 18-artist show counsel viewers to stop reading. Others intone that reading is everything. And still others stake out a relativist position, sensibly asserting that reading and looking are complementary endeavors, each as useful as the other in coming to understand the world.

John Baldessari's 8-by-10-foot diptych began as a pair of photographs, each depicting a slightly open book that stands upright as if guarding some invisible realm of

knowledge. However, both images have been almost completely covered with a hastily smeared blob of white paint.

Recalling the goopy fluid typists use to correct mistakes, Baldessari's abstract additions suggest that words only take you so far: When it comes to visual art, knowledge enters the picture by other means, whose silence does not imply any lack of sophistication. Fine pieces by **Delia Brown**, **Sarah Charlesworth** and **Giulio Paolini** flesh out this proposition, outlining various differences between seeing and reading.

In contrast, **Joseph Kosuth's** metal plaques, on which heavy-duty philosophical claims have been etched, sound like the Bible read by a pompous orator. But unlike the Gospel of John, in which "the word" merely occupies the beginning of the world, in Kosuth's art it is everything—the beginning, middle and end of all forms of thinking. A second piece juxtaposes a quote from Heidegger with a "Calvin and Hobbes" comic strip, to indict viewers for having short attention spans.

David Bunn's books, made from outdated card catalogs, and **Sherrie Levine's** photographs of Atget's photographs of Parisian libraries exploit short attention spans to bring a touch of humor to Kosuth's solemnity. But behind their superficial playfulness, they adhere to his narrow-minded claims with the fervor of acolytes.

Alexis Smith's even-handed pieces from the late 1970s put things into perspective by letting words and pictures rub shoulders until sparks fly in the mind's eye. A simple drawing, titled "Her sins were scarlet but her books were

read," demonstrates that while what we read may color what we do, reading is not the same as doing.

Likewise, a long, horizontal Smith collage uses Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" as a plain-spoken foundation for Pop art, in which ordinary things embody extraordinary meanings. Smart works by **Amy Adler**, **John Cage**, **Larry Johnson** and **Allen Ruppersberg** follow suit, using words and images to form wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts.

● *Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., (310) 273-0603, through Aug. 31. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*