

Meliksetian MB Briggs

BOMB

Art : Editor's Choice
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Bas Jan Ader's Please Don't Leave Me & In
Search of the Miraculous: Bas Jan Ader
Discovery File
by Nato Thompson



Poster by Bas Jan Ader for "Implosion," his 1967 MFA exhibition at Claremont College. Ader later titled the photo in the poster *The Artist Contemplating the Forces of Nature*. Courtesy of the Bas Jan Ader Estate

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Swallowed by the ocean in 1975 at age 33, the artist Bas Jan Ader emerges in the 21st century as a popular sensation, and it is not surprising. Almost dangerous in its level of seduction, Ader's work and life merged tragically in the second part of his trilogy *In Search of the Miraculous*, as he sailed off the coast of Cape Cod in a 14-foot boat, never to be seen again. The oeuvre he left behind is currently circulating in a retrospective organized by the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

As with any artist who passes away too soon, the interest in anything Ader only intensifies. By the time this BOMB issue reaches newsstands, four new books on Bas Jan Ader will have been released in the past year.

The catalogue *Bas Jan Ader Please Don't Leave Me*, the first monograph on the artist, presents every piece of work he produced (including versions and works-in-progress). Given a relatively limited span of production (1967–75), the intentions of the artist in many works remain unclear. All the better. Ader produced a peculiar brand of romantic conceptualism augmented perfectly, though terribly, by his demise. Starting with his 1965 graduate exhibition at Claremont College, *Implosion: The artist contemplating the forces of nature*, whose promotional poster depicts the artist seated in a chair on a roof, smoking a cigar with cartoon clouds behind him, Ader reveals an ongoing interest in conceptual gestures with narrative components—often involving a precarious subjection to gravity. This continues

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with his famous fall pieces, in which he plummets sadly (yet hilariously) out of trees onto sidewalks. And of course, there is his most popular work, *I'm too sad to tell you* (1971), a film showing the artist weeping inconsolably. Ader's entire output shares a haiku-like air of melancholy, and it is a pleasure to finally see all the works together.



Bas Jan Ader, *Broken Fall* (Geometric; Blue-Yellow-Red), Westkapelle, Holland, 1971, c-print, 10 ¾ x 11".
Courtesy of the Bas Jan Ader Estate

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Bas Jan Ader, Broken Fall (Geometric), Westkapelle, Holland, 1971, c-print, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Courtesy of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

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For those seduced by the obsessive mystery of Bas Jan Ader comes the publication of *In Search of the Miraculous: Bas Jan Ader Discovery File*. Bound in black tape, like a photocopied college reader, this confounding volume reproduces the entire police report connected with the 1976 discovery (150 miles off the coast of Ireland) and almost immediate theft (from a Spanish port) of Ader's boat, *Ocean Wave*. The contents of Ader's wallet are here—including business cards, his UC Irvine faculty card, and scraps of classified ads—as are numerous legal documents concerning his disappearance, and maps diagramming the scene of the missing boat. Best perused like a crime novel, the file becomes yet another part of the ongoing work and enigma that was the life of Bas Jan Ader.

—Nato Thompson