

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Contemporary Art Daily

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Bas Jan Ader at Meliksetian | Briggs



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Artist: Bas Jan Ader

Venue: Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles

Exhibition Title: Water's Edge

Date: June 8 – July 27, 2019

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Images courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles

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Press Release:

Anna Meliksetian and Michael Briggs are pleased to present *Water's Edge*, the second exhibition in the gallery of the work of Bas Jan Ader. From Bas Jan Ader's childhood in Holland learning to sail on the Eems-Dollard Estuary, playing truant from school to go out on the sea with the local prawn fisherman as a teen, wearing only clothing of a particular shade of ocean blue, through his many seminal and highly influential art works to his final fateful ocean voyage at the age of 33, water has been a leitmotif throughout his life. *Water's Edge* explores how this is manifest literally and metaphorically in art works Ader made in the period between 1970 and 1972.

Ader's overarching and most significant concern during this period was the notion of the Fall where, as Ader has stated, "gravity made itself master over me." While the embodiment of these philosophical ideas in the art works runs through nearly the entire exhibition, it is notable that the actions are situated alongside bodies of water, from the Pacific coast in Los Angeles, to the canals and rivers of Amsterdam, to the oceanside of Sweden. The Fall, for Ader the philosophical problem of free will and determinism, whether it is the literal physical fall of body to earth or the metaphorical fall of mankind (Ader's parents were pastors) is made apparent throughout these works, but the notion of falling also asserts itself in the element of water, the waterfall, the falling of tears on the artist's face and his disappearance into the water after falling into the canal as seen at the end of *Fall 2, Amsterdam*. These works are juxtaposed in the exhibition with works evoking the 19th century tradition of the sublime, the contemplative and philosophical Romantic artist gazing out to sea and to the vastness of nature in the various *Study for Farewell to faraway friends*, 1971 photos and then again in front of the crashing sea and rocky landscape in *The elements*, 1971.

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In the performance work *The boy who fell over Niagara Falls, 1972*, the artist reads a text from the March 1972 issue of the then popular magazine *Reader's Digest* recounting the true story of a young boy's accidental plunge over the edge of the 175 foot high roaring waterfall and his miraculous survival. As Ader reads the text in a flat, affectless voice, he slowly and methodically sips from a glass of water and the performance concludes when the glass is empty. The work was performed by Ader three times publicly at Cal Arts, Valencia, California, at art & project, Amsterdam, and at Kabinett für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremehaven as well as privately at the home of artist William Leavitt, as in the video work shown.

The vintage photos exhibited alongside the video are from the final performance of the work at the Kabinett in Germany, which was notable as Ader added for the first and only time a final element, whereby upon finishing the glass of water after the word "death" in the text, thus ending the performance, he left the room crying with tears falling down his face. A counter point prefiguring this action are the photos hung opposite in the gallery, two works from the small photographic series entitled *Study for I'm too sad to tell you, 1971* made alongside the seminal film work in the year prior showing the artist in tears. The Kabinett photos are also notable as they are the last work Ader made that reveal his face, despite the artist himself being a protagonist in subsequent works. The Niagara Falls story itself, the survival of the young boy in overwhelming and dire circumstances, what could be considered a miracle, hopeful and inspiring, cheating fate and overcoming destiny, foreshadows Ader's trans-Atlantic sailing voyage at its beginning, part of what ultimately became his final art work in 1975, the uncompleted grand trilogy *In search of the miraculous*.

The work of Bas Jan Ader (1942 – missing at sea 1975) has been featured in many institutional solo exhibitions including the Stedelijk

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Museum, Amsterdam, the Kunsthalle Basel, the Camden Art Center, London, the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea / CGAC, Santiago Compostela, Spain and the Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna / MAMBO, Italy as well as the Venice and Sao Paulo Biennials in 2017 and 2012 respectively. Recent group exhibitions include shows at Los Angeles County Museum of Art / LACMA, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte, Turin and the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, among many others.

In summer 2019, Ader's work can be seen in the major three person exhibition *Disappearing – California c. 1970: Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein* curated by Philipp Kaiser, at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. A catalog by Prestel is available.

Other current exhibitions Summer 2019 include *Poetics of Emotion*, La Caixa Forum, Zaragoza Spain, *After Leaving | Before Arriving*, Kaunas Biennial, Kaunas, Lithuania, *Durch die Blume | Florale Metamorphosen*, Kunstverein Heilbronn, Heilbronn, Germany, and *A Vision for Painting*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France among others.

The artist's work is included in important public collections such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Berkeley Museum of Art, Berkeley, California among others, as well as foundations like the Museo Jumex, Mexico City, the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris and the Collezione La Gaia, Piedmont, Italy.

[Link: Bas Jan Ader at Meliksetian | Briggs](#)

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