

Meliksetian MB Briggs

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ARTS ENTERTAINMENT VISUAL ARTS

Fort Worth Modern exhibition highlights '70s-era artists obsessed with disappearing

Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein all shared an interest in vanishing.



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By Dan Singer

You can't see it in the short film of him tumbling off a roof in suburban California, but there's a mattress hidden in the bushes to break Bas Jan Ader's fall. "It was a calculated risk," said Alexander Dumbadze, an art history professor at George Washington University who's set to lecture on Ader's work plus that of the artist's contemporaries Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein at the Modern on Thursday, May 23. Working in Southern California in the '70s, all three artists had their minds on visibility and what it means to disappear.



A still shows Bas Jan Ader mid-tumble in his 1970 short film "Fall 1." (Bas Jan Ader)

A collection of their work titled "**Disappearing — California, c. 1970**" is on display now through Aug. 11 at the Modern. It includes films, photos, large-scale installation pieces and even some of the items the artists used to pull off their disappearing acts, like the tarp that covered Burden while he lay motionless on La Cienega Boulevard, a busy north-south LA thoroughfare, flanked by traffic flares for 15 minutes in his piece

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"Deadman." Police showed up and arrested him for causing a false emergency, but a judge later dismissed the case. It was a disappearance made glaringly visible.



Films by Bas Jan Ader and Jack Goldstein are projected at a current exhibition at the Modern titled "Disappearing — California, c. 1970." (Bas Jan Ader and Jack Goldstein)

Isolated from the performances in which they originally appeared, props like Burden's become artifacts, proof of what the artists managed to pull off. In some cases, their stunts had real consequences. After setting sail off the East Coast in a tiny sailboat in 1975 for a piece he called "In search of the miraculous," Ader was never heard from again.

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After setting sail off the coast of Massachusetts in 1975, Bas Jan Ader was never seen again. (Bas Jan Ader)

The Modern exhibition gives clues about what it was like to attempt such daring performances. Dumbadze, the art historian, said Ader faced west toward the LA skyline during his fall. That's one thing we don't see in his film; our angle is the opposite, looking straight at him, to the east.

Details

Disappearing - California c. 1970. through Aug. 11, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 3200 Darnell St., themodern.org