

Meliksetian MB Briggs



From left: Bas Jan Ader, *Study for Farewell to faraway friends*, 1971, color vintage print 3.5 x 3.5 in. (image size), unique © The Estate of Bas Jan Ader / Mary Sue Ader Andersen, 2019 / The Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles; Cody Treppe, *By Any Possibility*, 2019, installation view at Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles. Courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles. Photograph by Michael Underwood.

CONCEPTUAL CONSORTS

Partners in life and art, Anna Meliksetian and Michael Briggs will bring works by Bas Jan Ader and Cody Treppe to the Dallas Art Fair.

INTERVIEW BY ANDREA KARNES

Anna Meliksetian and Michael Briggs met over art—Briggs working at a Los Angeles gallery; Meliksetian cultivating her emerging gallery. In 2012, a year after they were married, they established their own gallery, Meliksetian Briggs.

Andrea Karnes, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth's senior curator, visits with the venerated dealers.

Andrea Karnes (AK): *How did you come together as founders/partners? Did you have similar backgrounds?*

Michael Briggs (MB): We met at Bergamot Station, an art center in Los Angeles, where we both worked. I started my career in London in 1999 working at White Cube after I got my master's degree, and moved to Los Angeles in 2008. I worked as the director of Patrick Painter Gallery, and at the time we worked with many key Los Angeles artists, like Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw, and Larry Johnson, as well as influential Europeans like Albert Oehlen and Glenn Brown—so it was a very good introduction to the LA art world.

Anna Meliksetian (AM): My father owned an art-and-antique gallery in Beverly Hills, and I literally grew up in the business, working at my dad's gallery after school, starting when I was nine years old. After I finished my graduate studies in art history, I worked in a variety of roles, including at an auction house, as an art critic, and as a professor of art history before opening my own gallery in 2009. Michael and I curated our first show together at my gallery in 2010, which included seminal Los Angeles artists like Shaw and Llyn Foulkes along with a number of younger emerging artists.

AK: *Your gallery has an impressive roster of artists who work within conceptualism but are widely varied in terms of practices and mediums of choice. What are some of the overarching ideological interests among these artists that align them with each other?*

MB: The program is rooted in conceptualism and specifically a number of artists who came out of the California scene starting in the 1970s, in combination with some European approaches. Bas Jan Ader, an early practitioner of very idea-driven work, is a cornerstone of the gallery. As well, John Miller and Meg Cranston are two important artists in the program who came out of the very conceptually focused and influential California Institute of the Arts environment in the '70s and '80s. Cody Treppe, who we are showing at the Dallas Art Fair, is a more recent graduate of that program, finishing in 2010.

AM: We complement this approach with works by European artists—for instance, British artists that came out of the Young British Artists movement of the 1990s, itself rooted in a new generation's conception of conceptual ideas—like Angus Fairhurst and Mustafa Hulusi, who could technically be considered post-YBA but had a similar approach to art making. Also Germans like Johannes Wohnseifer, who combines elements of pop, minimal, and conceptual approaches.

AK: *What are some gallery exhibitions that you consider defining for Meliksetian Briggs?*

AM: Some very important exhibitions in the gallery included a 2019 exhibition of Bas Jan Ader's works, which was incredibly well received, reviewed in numerous major publications like *Artforum*

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FAIR TRADE

and the *Los Angeles Times*, and visited by a wide audience. Our 2014 show of the artist's work, curated by Spanish curator Pedro de Llano, curator of the artist's Spanish retrospective, was very important as well. We exhibited a previously unseen group of Jack Goldstein text works for the first time ever in 2017, and a 'lost' group of paintings from the 1980s by John Miller in 2014, many of which have since been exhibited in major museum shows. Both artists are key influences on many of the artists we work with. Todd Gray's exhibition *Portraits* renewed interest in his work—two works were acquired by museums and one of the works was included in the 2019 Whitney Biennial. John Miller and Viennese artist Richard Hoeck's collaborative installation *Mannequin Death* in 2017 was a key show. The work was subsequently featured in the 2018 Sao Paolo Biennial, and the video was recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. We were very proud to do a mini retrospective of Angus Fairhurst's painting, photo, and video works in 2016, as Angus was a friend of Michael's who, sadly, took his own life in 2008.

AK: You are bringing the works of Bas Jan Ader and Cody Trepte to the Dallas Art Fair. Ader was included in the exhibition *Disappearing*, which the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth hosted in the spring of 2019, and Trepte is a Texan, so there is a Texas connection for both. What are some other relationships between the two that make them a good pair for your booth?

MB: Neither Trepte nor Ader sacrifice aesthetics in pursuit of conceptual rigor. On the contrary, they make art that is philosophically compelling yet poetic and beautiful. Connections between the two artists include the use of language in their work, the medium of photography, repetition, and the serial image. Both artists were deeply influenced by 20th-century philosophy, specifically concepts of predetermination, and philosophers like Camus in Ader's case and Wittgenstein in the case of Trepte.

AK: Could you name a couple of key points you would give to fairgoers about Ader and Trepte?

MB: While always incredibly influential with art-world insiders—critics, curators, museums, collectors, and other artists—Ader's work has been gaining a broader audience in recent years. Despite being nearly 50 years old, the work remains incredibly relevant to many collectors, and unlike some conceptual art, the beauty and lyricism of the work really move people on a personal level rather than simply an intellectual one. The Dallas Art Fair will be a great opportunity to acquire rare, vintage, and important works from a limited and shrinking oeuvre.

After a highly successful solo show at the gallery this past autumn, where we placed many of Trepte's works in exceptional collections, the Dallas Art Fair will also be a great opportunity to experience and acquire his works in the early stages of a very promising career. **P**



ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER:

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth senior curator Andrea Karnes was instrumental in facilitating the exhibition, *Disappearing California*, which included works by Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader, who vanished crossing the Atlantic in his sailboat. Karnes organized and curated *Laurie Simmons Big Camera/Little Camera*; *KAWS: WHERE THE END STARTS*; and *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic*.

Above left: Cody Trepte, *Remainder*, 2015, installation view at Meliksetian|Briggs, Los Angeles. Courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles. Photograph by Evan Bedford. Above right: Bas Jan Ader, *Nightfall*, 1971, still from black-and-white 16mm film, silent, duration, 4' 16", Edition of 3. © The Estate of Bas Jan Ader / Mary Sue Ader Andersen, 2019 / The Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles.