

Meliksetian MB Briggs

# MOUSSE

EXHIBITIONS

## Bas Jan Ader at Metro Pictures, New York

June 2016



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Metro Pictures opens a survey show of photographs, films, and installation works by the renowned Dutch / Los Angeles artist Bas Jan Ader.

Included are complete sets of the original test photographs Ader made for his book "Fall I and II," along with the working photographs for several other important works of the early 1970s that have not been previously exhibited.



Ader's well-documented story is so compelling that his poignant art is fused into the narrative of his history. In 1963 Ader moved from Amsterdam to Los Angeles where he was associated with a group of artists whose work would define an important strain of conceptual art distinct to the West Coast. There he produced a small but extraordinarily affecting body of artworks prior to 1975, when he disappeared at sea while sailing the Atlantic alone as the second part of his trilogy "In Search of the Miraculous." The first part, included in the exhibition, comprises 18 black-and-white photographs of the artist walking through Los Angeles at night. The third part was to be an exhibition at the Groeningen Museum after arriving in Europe.

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Bas Jan Ader's art had the same effect, beauty and pathos when it was exhibited more than 40 years ago, without knowing his family history or the dramatic and mysterious circumstances surrounding his disappearance.

At the time Ader was working there was little awareness of the parallel between his art and his haunting family history. Later his work was revealed to be unexpectedly autobiographical, and sometimes abstractly illustrative of the factual and emotional narrative that governed his life. In the dual slide projection "Untitled (Swedish Fall)" Ader stands straight and thin amid a forest of similarly tall trees in one image, and in the second he lies collapsed on the ground in the same wooded scene with fallen trees lying around him. When Ader was 2 years old his father, a celebrated member of the resistance during Nazi occupation, was captured, imprisoned and later taken to the woods where he and six other prisoners were shot, and their bodies left on the ground as an example to the townspeople.

The power of Ader's narrative explains the potency of his statement and imbues his elegant and painfully beautiful work with seriousness. Merging a conceptual framework with an aspect of Hollywood film romance, mystery and slapstick humor, his themes of sailing, the sea, falling, drowning, failing, gravity, doom, form a singular position that has never been so beautifully and courageously attempted. Ader intended his works to propose philosophical concerns like the notion of free will, which is explored in the films and performances in which falling, metaphorically and physically, is depicted in both inanimate objects and the artist's own body. Referring to "Fall I and II," Ader said, "... When I fell off the roof of my house or into a canal, it was because gravity made itself master over me."

at Metro Pictures, New York  
until 5 August 2016