

The name on my building's doorbell has faded. You can still make it out if you squint, tilt your head slightly and believe in ghosts. But couriers don't do that. They call me from the pavement downstairs, annoyed, out of breath. "Sir, where are you?" Where, indeed.

The first time it happened, I rushed down to meet them, apologizing for the smudged lettering as if it were a character flaw. But after the third or fourth time, something shifted. I let it ring out. Left the food cooling in the vestibule. Started feeling a thrill, a twitch of joy. I had disappeared. Right here, in the middle of Athens.

One courier got particularly frustrated. He rang every bell in the building before calling me again. "Your name is not there, sir. You do not exist," he said, half-joking, half-exasperated. Another demanded, "Why don't you fix it?" as if it were a criminal offense. The most dramatic of all stood outside holding my groceries like an offering, whispering into the phone: "Sir... it's like you've been erased." Inside, I smiled. There was something delicious about being unlisted, unfindable. Urban ghosthood in its purest, strangest form.

I often think of Bas Jan Ader, my favourite artist, who made disappearance feel like poetry. Ader spent much of his brief career falling: from rooftops, into canals, off bicycles. His performances were absurd yet strangely tender—tiny, controlled failures offered up to the world.

And then came the ultimate vanishing act: his attempt to cross the Atlantic alone in a 12ft boat in 1975. *In Search of the Miraculous*, he called it. Was it a performance? A dare? A pil-

UNLISTED

grimage? We'll never know, because he never returned. His empty boat was found off the coast of Ireland, battered but eerily intact, like a stage without its performer.

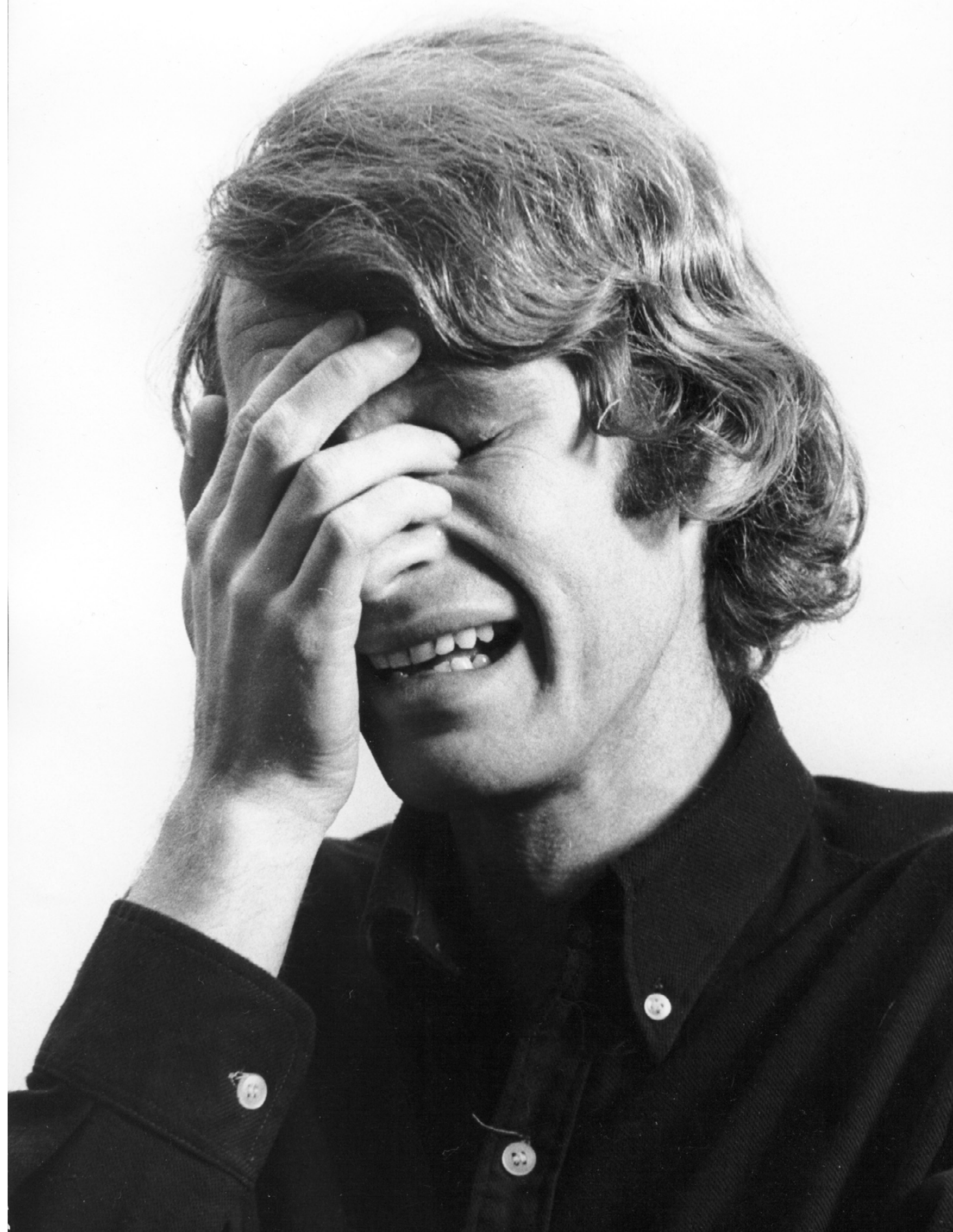
I sometimes imagine him setting out that day. Did the ocean look different, knowing it might swallow him whole? Was there a moment when he hesitated? Did he whisper his name one last time before the wind took it? Or maybe he understood something most of us don't: that the act of leaving was enough.

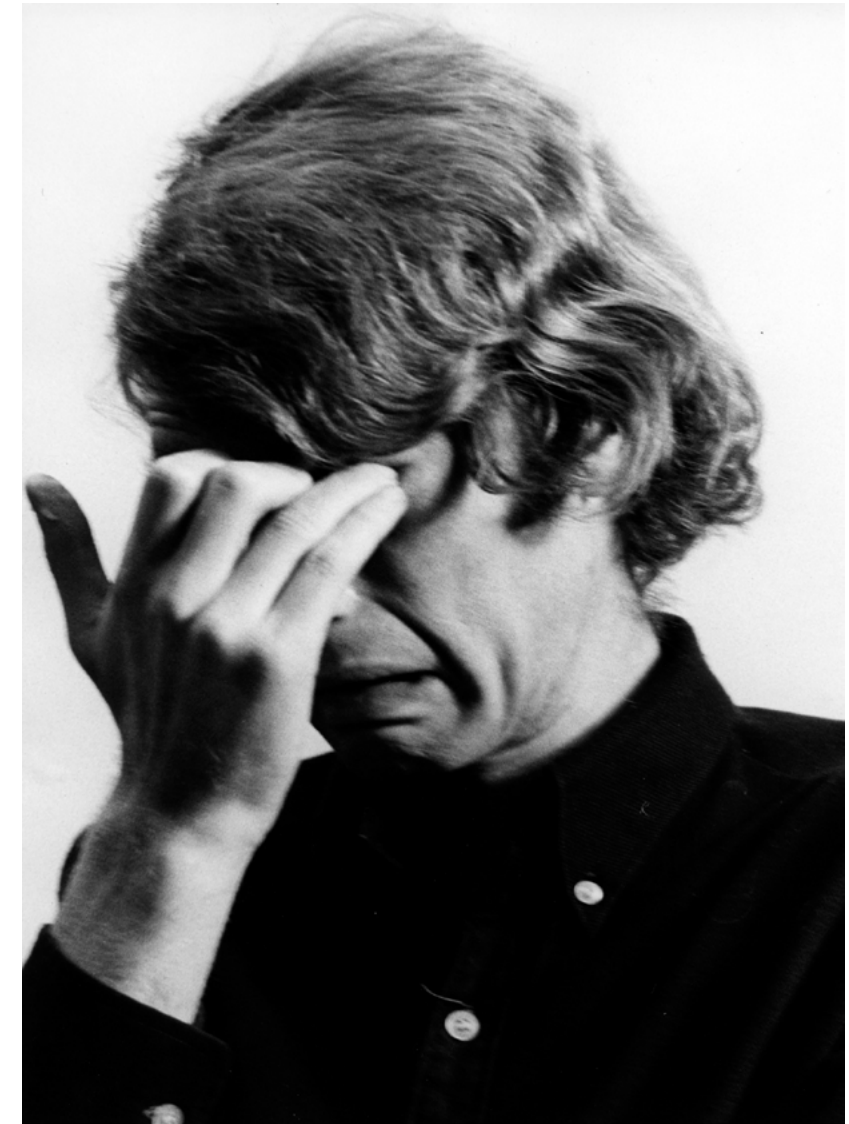
I used to watch his videos obsessively. *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*—just his face, crying, nothing explained. *Fall*—him tipping his chair backward from a rooftop, crashing out of frame. They're funny and devastating all at once. He was always flirting with the edge, the moment before impact, the possibility of vanishing completely.

There's something seductive about retreating from the visible grid—not in a tragic, headline-making way, but in the slow fade, like a photograph left in the sun. Chris Burden did it when he vanished for three days, letting the art world panic. Lee Lozano when she quit it altogether. Agnes Martin when she drove into the desert to collaborate only with silence.

When I was younger, I thought fulfilment meant accumulation: recognition, milestones, the architectural skyline of an ambitious life. Now I think it's more about subtraction. Not the house you build, but what you quietly remove from it. The stripped walls. The blank calendar. The nameplate left to fade until no one can read it.

BY NICOLAS VAMVOUKLIS





BAS JAN ADER
STUDY FOR I'M TOO SAD TO TELL YOU, 1971
 SILVER GELATIN PRINT
 9 X 6 3/4 IN / 22.9 X 17.2 CM

My phone buzzes again. Another delivery. Another voice, already flustered. “Sir, I’m outside number 12, but... you’re not there?” I let the pause hang. He sounds as if he’s reporting a paranormal sighting. Somewhere in the background, a motorbike revs and a dog barks. “Stay where you are,” I tell him, like a rescue mission is underway.

I take the stairs slowly, imagining the moment I will reappear. There’s something theatrical about it, like Bas Jan Ader’s little falls or his final, great departure. A private curtain call, just for me.

Because what is home, really? Is it this rented apartment with its mismatched mugs and peeling paint? Is it the friends I send memes to at 2am? Is it the places where my name still carries weight—or the ones where no one knows it at all?

I used to think home was a destination. A city, a person, a final version of myself waiting at the end of some effortful journey. But lately, I’m beginning to think it’s more of an echo, a resonance. Something that hums softly when I stop performing, when I allow myself to vanish a bit and become lighter.

Another courier story: one, a young guy with a tattoo of an angel on his forearm, refused to leave until he “located” me. He roamed the block in widening circles, phone pressed to his ear, muttering my name like a spell. “I’ll find you,” he promised. I almost wanted to let him keep searching, but guilt won.

When I finally stepped out of the gate, he looked startled, like I’d materialised out of nowhere. “You live here?” he asked. I nodded. He shook his head in disbelief, handed me the parcel, and muttered, “We thought this address was abandoned for years.” Upstairs, I set the box aside and look out the window. The sun is dipping behind the buildings. Everything is golden and grainy, like an old film reel unspooling slowly.



Sometimes I think about the pressure to be permanently visible, to brand and broadcast every part of ourselves. And I wonder if fulfilment isn’t the opposite: choosing the conditions of your appearance. Deciding which doors will open, and when, and for whom.

When the world insists on constant exposure, there’s something quietly radical about making yourself hard to find. Letting your name fade from the directory and seeing who notices. Still, I admit: there’s a comfort in being found, too.

That night, I go downstairs with a black permanent marker. Slowly, carefully, I write my name again on the doorbell. I press hard, each letter thick and unmistakable, the squeak of the marker loud in the quiet stairwell. I step back and admire it, the sharp black ink against the faded metal plate. Not for the couriers. Not even for the neighbours. Just for myself. A reminder that I can disappear when I want, but I can also choose to return, fully visible, on my own terms.



BAS JAN ADER
LAUNCH OF THE OCEAN WAVE, CHATHAM HARBOR, MASSACHUSETTS, 1975
COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH (OR BLACK AND WHITE AS THE CASE MAY BE)
PHOTO: MARY SUE ADER ANDERSEN

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