

Meliksetian MB Briggs

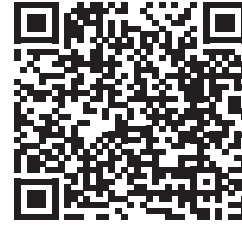
Bas Jan Ader

AWT FOCUS: WHAT IS REAL?

Curated by Adam Szymczyk

November 5–9

Okura Museum of Art, Tokyo



Meliksetian | Briggs is pleased to announce the inclusion of works by **Bas Jan Ader** in the exhibition *AWT Focus: What is Real?*, curated by Adam Szymczyk at the Okura Museum of Art, Tokyo. *AWT Focus* is Art Week Tokyo's centerpiece special platform. The exhibition invites a guest curator to experiment with new narratives of modern and contemporary art through works drawn from Art Week Tokyo's participating galleries. Art Week Tokyo is organized by Japan Contemporary Art Platform in collaboration with Art | Basel, with support from Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs.

The exhibition features two works chosen by Szymczyk: the film *Nightfall*, 1971, and the photo work *I'm too sad to tell you*, 1971 / 2024. It is a selling exhibition, and the works are for sale.

Nightfall, 1971, is a key film in Bas Jan Ader's oeuvre, one of the works addressing the theme of "the fall," marked by precarious performances that combine conceptual rigor, humor, and romantic pathos. Shot on 16mm in the artist's garage-studio, this four-minute work exemplifies Ader's recurring obsession with falling - not merely as physical descent, but as a metaphysical surrender to gravity's inexorable logic. *Nightfall* emerges as a focused study of deliberate failure, where the artist's body becomes both instrument and casualty in an act of erasure.

The film opens with Ader standing upright behind a slab of concrete, illuminated by two tangled clusters of bare bulbs laid out on the floor. Ader labors to hoist the heavy, cumbersome slab above his head, his posture a taut arc of exertion. The camera, fixed and unyielding, captures the mounting tension: muscles strain, breath labors, and the weight teeters on the precipice of control. Inevitably, the slab slips, plummeting to crush one light source in a shatter of glass and filament. Semi-obscured now in flickering half-shadows, Ader persists, repeating the Sisyphean lift. The second drop seals the ritual: the remaining bulbs explode, plunging the frame, as well as the viewer's perceptual field, into absolute darkness. As critic Alexander Dumbadze notes, "the film quickly fades to black, leaving the fate of Ader and the ramifications of his actions shrouded in suspense."

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Bas Jan Ader's *I'm Too Sad to Tell You* is a poignant and deeply introspective photographic work that captures the artist in a raw, emotional moment of vulnerability. The title suggests a struggle to articulate or even fully comprehend the pain he is experiencing. The photograph shows the artist sitting in front of a neutral, unobtrusive background, his face partially obscured by his hands as tears run down his face. His expression is one of profound sorrow, evoking a sense of emotional isolation and desolation. The simple yet striking composition amplifies the intensity of the moment, highlighting Ader's personal anguish while maintaining universal resonance. This work is the first in a series of high-quality artist editions, a multiple of the photographic piece with text in an edition of 75.

This year's edition of *AWT Focus* is curated by Adam Szymczyk, a curator, author, and editor based in Zurich who was previously the artistic director of documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel from 2014 to 2017 and the director and chief curator of Kunsthalle Basel from 2003 to 2014. *What Is Real?* brings together some 100 works by 60 artists representing diverse generations and geographies. Featuring paintings, sculptures, photographs, videos, and more, the exhibition revisits the predigital imaging of the 20th and early 21st centuries to see how artists' responses to the reality of human experience have shifted over time and to understand how we might collectively approach a coming epoch in which powerful new technologies have the capacity to reshape our perceptions of what is real and what is not. *AWT Focus* is hosted by the Okura Museum of Art, which was founded in 1917 as Japan's first private art museum. Szymczyk will incorporate the historic building into the display through an exhibition design conceived in collaboration with architect Hiroyuki Kimura.

Bas Jan Ader (b. 1942, Winschoten, The Netherlands) received his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles (1965) and his Master of Fine Arts at the Claremont Graduate School and University Center, Claremont, CA (1967). The artist was lost at sea in 1975 during the middle part of what was to be his grand trilogy of works *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Recent institutional exhibitions featuring the artist's work include *Lafayette Anticipations*, Paris; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague, The Netherlands; La Caixa Forum, Barcelona; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy; as well as *Viva Arte Viva*, the 57th International Art Exhibition at the Biennale di Venezia / Venice Biennale; and *Universes in Universe* at the 30th São Paulo Biennial, to name a few.

In 2019, Ader's work was featured in a major three-person exhibition *Disappearing - California c. 1970: Bas Jan Ader / Chris Burden / Jack Goldstein* at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (catalog). In 2025, a major retrospective of the artist's work, the most extensive to date, entitled *I'm searching...*, curated by Dr. Brigitte Kölle, took place at the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany. A comprehensive catalog is now available.

The artist's work is included in important public collections such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York City; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA, among others.

Meliksetian | Briggs is the exclusive representative of the Estate of Bas Jan Ader.