

Press release | 16 December 2024

BAS JAN ADER I'm searching...

11 April to 24 August 2025

Press conference: Thursday, 10 April 2025, 11 a.m.

Opening: Thursday, 10 April 2025, 7 p.m.

Exactly 50 years after his ominous disappearance at sea, the Hamburger Kunsthalle is mounting a large-scale exhibition of the fascinating work of Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975). Ader is regarded as a seminal figure for subsequent generations of artists – a so-called artists' artist. Legendary among insiders, his 16mm films, slide installations, photographs and videos can now be discovered by a wider audience in an exceptional solo exhibition, along with extensive documentary material. Marking the 50th anniversary of the artist's disappearance, the show offers a rare opportunity to experience a large selection of the artist's works.

Bas Jan Ader's oeuvre can be described as at once melancholy and absurd, emotional and conceptual, simple yet complex. He made a profession out of the theme of falling as a symbol of failure, exploring this subject in diverse photographic series and his famous 16mm films. The moment of loss of control became for him a conscious decision. Failure was merely an inevitable life experience. Ader continually sought to localise the human being existentially, setting out in quest of the hidden and the miraculous, all the while accepting the risk of bodily harm and ultimately his life. In 1963, Bas Jan Ader moved to Los Angeles, where he and his wife, Mary Sue, established a second home. As part of an artistic trilogy entitled »In Search of the Miraculous«, Ader set off in 1975, at the age of 33, in a small sailing boat from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on a solo crossing of the Atlantic, heading for Falmouth in Great Britain. He would never reach his destination. Months later, the boat was found off the Irish coast, but Ader remained missing. With his disappearance at sea, the artist's yearning, romantic search for the miraculous became a parable of human vulnerability and failure.

Works were loaned for the exhibition by the Bas Jan Ader Estate, by American lenders, and by collections in Holland, Belgium, France and Germany.

Curator: Dr. Brigitte Kölle

Research Assistant: Julia Kersting

Sponsored by:

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Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975)
Please Don't Leave Me, 1969,
gelatin silver print, edition of 3
The Estate of Bas Jan Ader / Mary
Sue Ader Andersen / VG Bild-Kunst,
Bonn 2024. Courtesy of Meliksetian /
Briggs, Dallas

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