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Wei, Lilly. "After the Falls: Bas Jan Ader at Metro Pictures, New York," *ArtNews.com* (July 14, 2016).

ARTNEWS



Bas Jan Ader, *Fall I, Los Angeles* (Book Set), 1970, set of ten black and white vintage prints, 3½ x 5 inches.

This moving, elegantly orchestrated exhibition of work by the Dutch-born, Los Angeles–based artist Bas Jan Ader (1942–75) is a lens trained on the California of the late 1960s through the mid-'70s, when the state was still a place for cultural renegades. The intimate scale of the work and its casual production stand as antidotes to the pervasive, large-is-more aesthetic of today's increasingly commercialized artworks. While this presentation is not exactly spare, it is also not fulsome, even though it shows the artist's output in its near entirety. It includes a few restaged installations, several photographic series, and a compendium of videos that features *Fall I, Los Angeles*, in which Ader slowly rolls down the roof of his house into some bushes, *Fall II (Amsterdam)*, where he rides a bicycle into a canal (both 1970), and *I'm Too Sad to Tell You* (1970), a close-up of Ader's face as he bitterly weeps real or fictive tears (arguably his best-known film).

On July 9, 1975, the conceptual artist—whose mediums were photography, film, and performance art—embarked on a solo voyage across the North Atlantic to continue work on his project *In Search of the Miraculous*. The first part, on view here, is a poignant series of photographs that follow him—a barely visible speck—over a long night's journey through L.A., the pictures inscribed with the lyrics from the 1957 pop song "Searchin'" by the Coasters. Ader was 33 at the time and never to be seen again. It was a life and death destined for myth.

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Installation view of Bas Jan Ader's 2016 solo exhibition, at Metro Pictures, New York.

While that is indeed one reason for his renown, the other is the work itself, which held close to the bone of his life and which continues to ask big, compelling questions. What is the relationship of art to life and what is the nature and purpose of representation? What is free will and what is determinism? Falling and failure are themes encountered throughout his practice, part silent-film pratfalls, part physics, part moral philosophy influenced by, among others, Hegel, Kant, Camus. Much has also been made about the impact on him of the death of his heroic father, a minister who was executed by the Nazis for aiding Jews during World War II.

“Please Don’t Leave Me” is written in a bold but somewhat shaky script on the far wall of the gallery, greeting the viewer upon entering. However, it seems double-edged, a kind of double bind in retrospect: who left/is leaving whom?