

Press release | 9 April 2025

## 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 disappearance at sea, the Hamburger Kunsthalle is mounting a retrospective 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, along with never-before-seen early works and documentary material can now be discovered by a wider audience in an exceptional and extensive retrospective.

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.

The **publication** accompanying the exhibition (in English, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne) combines reprints of important contributions to the research, texts offering new findings, published here for the first time, insightful conversations with those who knew the artist as well as previously unpublished images. The book is available in the museum shop for 39.80 euros or can be ordered online at [www.freunde-der-kunsthalle.de](http://www.freunde-der-kunsthalle.de).

Curator: Dr. Brigitte Kölle

Research Assistant: Julia Kersting



**Bas Jan Ader** (1942–1975)

*In search of the miraculous (One night in Los Angeles)* [detail], 1973  
18 gelatin silver prints, handwriting in white ink, each 20.3 x 25.4 cm  
Private collection, New York  
© The Estate of Bas Jan Ader / Mary Sue Ader Andersen / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025. Courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Dallas

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We would also like to thank the private patrons:

Angelika and Jens Kellinghusen, Christine and Heinz Lehmann

Haspa-Galerie:

The Hamburger Sparkasse has been committed to supporting the Hamburger Kunsthalles for many years. As a token of gratitude for this generous support, the 2nd storey of the Galerie der Gegenwart, where the exhibition is being shown, is named the »Haspa-Galerie«.