

# BAS JAN ADER

## THE BOY WHO FELL OVER NIAGARA FALLS

GRIMM Amsterdam to stage the first performance of Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader's *The Boy Who Fell Over Niagara Falls* (1972) in 46 years at Amsterdam's Spring Performance Festival, March 24 2018.

**Bas Jan Ader** (1942 - 1975) was an artist working with performance, conceptual art, film and photography. Born in the Netherlands he spent the last years of his life living in Los Angeles. Since his death at sea –while attempting to sail across the Atlantic in the smallest sailing boat– his work has garnered a mythical status. He is widely recognised by today's leading thinkers, artists, filmmakers, critics and poets as among the most influential and poignant artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

"Honeycutt grabbed Roger's arm, fighting to hold the boy's head out of the water. But the furious currents tore them apart. The rapids wrenched Roger down, spun him around. Then all at once he was free, thrust out over the edge of the falls, dropping through space."

– from *The Boy Who Fell Over Niagara Falls*, 1972

Only once performed at Amsterdam's Art and Project Gallery in April 1972, *The Boy Who Fell Over Niagara Falls* is profoundly touching yet also humorous and gripping. Whilst performing it, Ader sat in a comfy chair by a table lamp reading aloud a true story from the Reader's Digest about a captain and a seven year old boy in a boat, caught by the current and whom fall over the Niagara Falls; the captain dies and the boy survives. As he performed the piece (originally twice daily, sitting in the gallery), Ader sipped absentmindedly from a glass of water on a small table next to him. The glass sat extremely close to the edge of the table: as the boat fell, so did the glass; both stories simultaneously reaching their watery climax.

As with so many of his works, this performance sees Ader himself as both subject and object of the story, director and actor in his own production. In the short films, photographs, slides and performances which comprise his remarkably short career as an active artist (1970-1975), Ader cast himself a handsome, mute, vulnerable presence as the protagonist in scenes that are simultaneously melodramatic, funny and strangely opaque. Ader was part of a generation of artists such as Jack Goldstein, Chris Burden and William Levitt, who radically rethought the object of art



**Bas Jan Ader** performing *The Boy Who Fell Over Niagara Falls* (1972).  
Courtesy The Estate of Bas Jan Ader.

in the late '60s and '70s, seeking to connect with the social and political developments of their decade and make their work more responsive to the world around them

Bas Jan Ader was born in 1942 in Winschoten, The Netherlands and lived in Los Angeles for the last twelve years of his life. Ader's work has been shown extensively internationally and has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Bo-logna, IT (2013); Museo de Arte Zapopan, Guadalajara, MX (2011); Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, SP (2010); Kunsthalle Basel, CH (2007); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, NL (2006); Camden Arts Center, London, UK (2006); Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, MX (2004); Portikus, Frankfurt, DE (2003); Munchen Kunstverein, Munich, DE (2000), which travelled to Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, CH and Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, DE.

Major group shows include GRIMM, Amsterdam, NL (2015); Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, DE (2015); Palais des Beaux Arts, Paris, FR (2015); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR (2014); Palais De Tokyo, Paris, FR (2014); Kunsthalle Bern, CH (2013); Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, DE (2013); 30th São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo, BR (2012); The Art Institute of Chicago, US (2011); The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, US (2011); Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2010); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, US (2009); Museum Ludwig, Cologne, DE (2005); Tate Modern, London, UK (2005); Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, FR (2002). His work is held in the collections of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, NL; Museum of Modern Art, New York, US and The Art Institute of Chicago, US amongst others.

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**GRIMM**