

**Quotations of Bas Jan Ader**  
Comments by Bill Leavitt



Leavitt and Ader sailing near Los Angeles

*It's not just a feeling, it's a philosophy.*  
(A line from a favorite song of B.J.A.)

*I want to do a piece where I go to the Alps and talk to a mountain. The mountain will talk of things which are necessary and always true, and I shall talk of things which are sometimes, accidentally true.*

**Bas Jan had a great enthusiasm for philosophy, and he wanted to create an art that had no artifice, an art that was based on absolute and irrefutable truths like those of mathematics. He had 'no truck' as he would say, with a lie that told the truth. His work however arrived at something quite opposite of this absolute. He arrived at poetic recognition of the Sisyphean struggle entailed in achieving such a goal. I think his despair over this inevitability drove him to solipsistic works wherein he asserted irrefutably ideas like 'All my clothes' or 'I'm too sad to tell you.'**

*Thelonious Monk. We have to see him. I saw him in New York and... Listen to that. It sounds so beautifully screwed-up on purpose.*

*Do you know that scene in 'Bank Dick' where W.C. Fields tells his son-in-law that the signal they are going to use is like this?' (B.J.A demonstrates how Fields holds his hand against his chest, palm down and makes a wagging motion like a penguin spreading its flippers.)*

As well as his desire for concrete truth, he had a corresponding attraction to the imperfect, the broken, the mistaken, and the misunderstood. That his father died a martyred hero in WW II had something to do with this. His father was the absolute ideal that existed powerfully in his imagination, but there was however, no balancing image of a fallible human being by which he could gauge himself, and he therefore could only participate with a handicap in the natural process of the son striving to surpass the father. In what I think is one of his best works, 'The boy who fell over Niagara Falls,' he reads the story of this mishap as it is printed in a popular magazine, while he himself drinks a glass of water slowly, sip by sip. To me he is saying that only through distanced words and gentle action can he evoke the poignancy of this lack, and that his relationship to heroism must be metaphoric.

*Do you know something? Tequila, if it's good, and if you've had enough of it, tastes almost like the gin Genever that we have in Holland.*

*Who will fight the bear? No one? Then the bear has won.*

---

Bill Leavitt is a theater artist, musician and painter who has performed and exhibited work in Los Angeles since 1970.