

# R a k e

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On the 9th of July 1975, Artists Bas Jan Ader set sail from Chatham in Massachusetts in a small one man boat. His aim? A performance art work named 'In Search of the Miraculous'. It was during this period of his life that he was most productive and this climatic work would ultimately result in his death- whether by accident or deliberate. But the question remains open as to the purpose of this work and the reason for his death, and whilst many believe this to be a tragic accident from the result of an ongoing series of works in retaliation to the war and a reaction to his father's death and his mother's passion for the fusion of science and religion, it could instead be argued that this was Bas Jan Ader's personal and emotional reaction to his life in America. Coincidentally, philosopher Jean Baudrillard travelled to and was inspired by his journey through America, in 1970- the same year Ader's work kickstarted into the 5 year body of work he became known for.

In order to understand his thought process, artist Jonathan Collins has attempted to produce an ongoing body of work comprising a variety of media including sculpture, performance and written work. One of these works is 'Rake', a sculptural tool produced for Dr Francesco Proto. This sculpture is comprised of an old rake that has then been altered using a lathe. The alteration has added style, a basic pattern along the shaft of the rake, and while this adds form it eliminates function as it makes the rake more brittle and uncomfortable to use.

This is not the first time that Collins has produced work in this way, in 2015 he produced a short video of an everyday coffee table, the mdf legs had been turned on a lathe to become incredibly thin. Weight was then added until the legs began to buckle and eventually snap. This work 'Table Break' looked at the notion of 'form over function' an ongoing theme throughout his earlier work. And it is with this concept that we begin to establish the very early stages of an otherwise much larger subject matter, and it starts with a system of objects.

The rake therefore takes on a new demeanor, a 'Society of the Spectacle' situation in the object breaks down through reproduction and becomes something new. It goes from being a rake to being art. But this is no Duchamp 'Fountain', this is a purposeful act, an object that has been transformed into art work rather than merely used. So what impact could this have on society, how can an object becoming art make any difference?

Well this is something that Duchamp explored- 'Fountain' turned the system of objects on its head, and created artwork from the found object, or in other words a reproduction of an object into art. But this is not a stand alone piece, other artists such as Joseph Kosuth with one and three chairs examined reproduction through the image of a chair, definition of chair and the actual chair, in his work 'One and Three Chairs'. In this we can see that the reproduction of the chair through its meaning can be interpreted and reinterpreted.

Without the need to digress, it is this concept that the work of Bas Jan Ader is built upon. Was his work a reaction to objects, did he feel so much apart of the system that he felt a society of the spectacle relationship with America in which he had become owned by objects or the system? Indeed it would appear possible- his major works began in 1970 and it was during this time that he purchased his first home, owned a car, had a job, got married bought a dog... And it is now that we can see how Bas Jan Ader felt, so engrossed by the system (one which at the time was being affected by the hike in inflation under president Nixon). As a result Ader would have prospered while the world around him did not, and through this we can imagine how Ader must have felt, reaping the rewards of an the 1960's 'great society' throughout America and now settling into his American dream lifestyle.

It is through this mindset that we can experience Ader's work in true light. He produced fall videos, the first of which from the roof of his house, one with all of his possessions scattered on the roof. Some argue that this is a reaction and exploration the gravity, but this is no longer the Ader that whilst living in Europe remaining isolated to the ideas of the war. Instead this is the new fresh Ader, one that has tasted success and is reacting to it.

In many respects the rake is the building block for this concept, by transforming his body into art work, Ader commits himself to the system in his expressive work which ultimately results in him dying in his final piece, could this too have been a reaction to the system, indeed if that may be the case, this would revolutionize his work and open up the possibility of him being the first martyr to the Jean Baudrillard concept of the the system, and therefore a way of exploring the psychological impact of this through art. And like Ader, the Rake is doing the same, challenging these early day concepts, and exploring the boundary between object and art, and pushing to understand and make sense of the 'the system'.

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