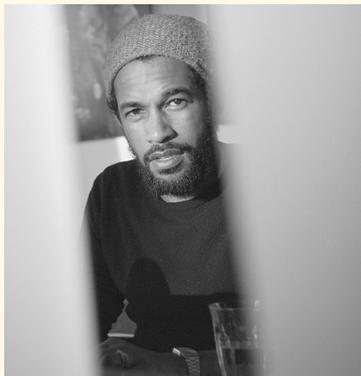


# Martijn Blekendaal about THE MAN WHO LOOKED BEYOND THE HORIZON



Director Martijn Blekendaal (©Finbarr Wilbrink)

40 years ago, Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader decided to cross the Atlantic in a tiny sailing boat. Nine months later his boat was found off the coast of England. Without Bas Jan. Why did Ader venture into such a daring voyage and how did he overcome his fear?

Martijn Blekendaal describes himself as “a real chicken-shit”. In his doc-

umentary THE MAN WHO LOOKED BEYOND THE HORIZON he admires the courage and guts of Bas Jan Ader. The result is an exceptionally funny, inspiring and wildly associative rollercoaster. After the screening you might wonder: what the hell have I been watching? But at the JEF festival, where THE MAN WHO LOOKED BEHIND THE HORIZON received the Best Short Film Award from the children’s jury, the kids mainly wanted to know from Blekendaal whether he really is such a scaredy-cat.

Martijn Blekendaal: I am afraid of the dark, I am afraid whenever I cannot stand in a pool, I am afraid of heights and I particularly struggle with a fear of failure. You don’t just overcome such fears, but nowadays I know better how to handle them.

**If one man should be able to do it, you are the one, but still I don’t think you can: explain to us exactly what this film is about.**

Blekendaal: That question has been haunting me since the first time I

told people about my plan. I couldn’t answer it back then and I still can’t. I want to reveal the mystery behind the disappearance of Bas Jan Ader. But the film is about so much more: about making a film, about how to tell a story, it is also a whodunit, an ode to Ader’s work, an attempt to turn my destructive fear of failure into something more constructive, etc.

**In that case, just tell us what brought you in the footsteps of Bas Jan Ader.**

Blekendaal: I saw his films at an exhibition and realised how he is a source of inspiration for many artists. After his disappearance people went looking for him and that mystery is still being fed constantly. There are a lot of loose ends and tracks that lead nowhere. That is why the end of the film was not to be an end, but a new beginning. I started the project three years ago, but due to legal reasons it was put on hold for a year and a half.

**But all the time you kept thinking about it.**

Blekendaal: If you can’t work on a pro-

ject, you can still think about it. On holiday in England I took the opportunity to look into the Land’s End police archives. When I saw a lonely caravan standing on a deserted coastal strip, I went knocking. Normally I would just pass by, but now I thought: imagine Bas Jan might be living in that caravan. It makes no sense, but I did it anyway. This way I collected visual material and information. I haven’t solved Bas Jan’s mystery, but it kept me busy all the time.

**Nevertheless in the film you claim that “Bas Jan remains a stranger to me” after all.**

Blekendaal: I tried to get closer to him, but I never got to know him any better. I think that was Bas Jan’s conscious choice. I contacted his wife, Mary Sue Andersen-Ader, with whom he lived in Los Angeles. A few months later she invited me there where she showed me around the city, visiting places where they had lived together and we went looking for his notebooks in the garage. Mary Sue said things like: he was so funny, he had such beautiful eyes... and that is



all true, but that's not how you get to know anyone better. I don't even know his voice - he only gave an interview once. Even to Mary Sue, he had told her very little about his background.

**The film starts very categorically with an (unhappy) ending. While "The End" appears on the screen, you complete a story before you even started it.**

Blekendaal: This makes clear that I am not going to solve the mystery, I have no answers. I knew there would be no ending, so I decided to start with one. I have read many DaVinci Code-like books that teach you the narrative tricks to keep a story exciting, like ending scenes with a cliffhanger.

**You make a nice comparison in the film to describe your feeling of fear: like waking up from a nightmare with a fear that you only know about and that nobody else has seen.**

Blekendaal: As a child I woke up from nightmares that were extremely abstract. At night I told my mother what I had seen: red stripes and blue squares, and strangely enough all that was very frightening. How could she understand? By morning I had forgotten everything, the only thing I remembered was that I had been so

scared and that nobody understood me.

**Also the horizon frightens you.**

Blekendaal: Mary Sue had exactly the same. She drove me through Los Angeles, where many straight roads cross a hilltop, and you don't see what's behind it. Those cars disappearing, like on a ski jump, we both found that image extremely terrifying.

**Are you surprised that THE MAN WHO LOOKED BEYOND THE HORIZON goes down so well with children?**

Blekendaal: Once I had to watch 30 youth documentaries for a jury assignment and I noticed that all of them were about children. I wondered what a youth documentary would look like if it didn't have a child in it. That's what I'm trying out with THE MAN WHO LOOKED BEYOND THE HORIZON. The film is part of a TV research project on new kinds of youth documentaries.

**That is why you can deviate from the usual 15' format.**

Blekendaal: The consequence is that the broadcaster now has a problem finding a slot to programme a 26 minute film. It makes no sense to force



every maker into the same format; some stories just cannot be told that way. I am very grateful to my producer Willemijn Cerutti. She realised that this format was the right one, and never tried to squeeze me into the usual TV formats.

**I think you're a great storyteller: your voice-over sounds delightful.**

Blekendaal: I've been searching for the right tone for a long time, as that was very important to me. After all, what I do is explaining conceptual art to children! For the English voice-over I hired an actor. That adds a very different tone to the international

version. It sounds almost like a Hollywood movie.

**Do you already have another project in the pipeline?**

Blekendaal: I am planning a series of six documentaries about mysterious artists such as Banksy, aiming at a teenage audience. You know... the ones that are so hard to reach on television.

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Gert Hermans