

## THE MADLAB MANIFESTO.

### Introduction

The art of the artist manifesto is one that has enjoyed a rich, varied and in many cases controversial history. It is a history that has its roots long before the term 'artist manifesto' was ever coined, in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels' *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. This, the original manifesto came from the need to liberate the proletariat, free Europe's peasants from serfdom and the idea that a society where every one had equal social and political rights would be best suited to the modern world. Although the context of the artist manifesto is very different to that of a political one, they serve the same purpose. One could argue that the function of any manifesto is to write down or orate the ideas, hopes and goals of a group or individual and share them with a wider audience in order to inform them of and rouse them to the cause. It is for this reason that the *Communist Manifesto* is the template on which many artist manifestos are based.

The dawn of the artist manifesto was on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1909 when F. T. Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* was published in the French news paper *Le Figaro*. This inflammatory piece of rhetoric created by an equally inflammatory man, proved to be fuse for an explosive age of changing art and anticipated a century accelerating faster than any that had preceded it. The *Manifesto of Futurism* was the first of hundreds of artist manifestos published by different artist groups around the world and through out the Twentieth century. The artist manifesto is a real art, often their authors are better remembered for the manifestos they wrote than any other work of art, literature or music they may have created. The manifesto was a way of imagining a utopian world, filled with the ideals of the artist and a passionate request for any body of a similar disposition to join the artist's cause. This is not say that all artist manifestos are the same, there are infinite variations, both in terms of their style and the goals laid out by the artist, however, their function in most cases is the same.

In recent times there has been a decline in artist manifestos. These days they are few and far between and although one is occasionally published, they lack the enthusiasm of those composed at the turn of the last century. I believe there is good reason for this. It is my impression that this decline comes from the idea that art has changed. Today the focus has shifted to economics rather than revolution and the artist as an individual rather than the artist as part of a group or movement. This brings me to my point. A couple of years ago, some artist friends and I created our own group which we called the Madlab. The idea of the Madlab came through a project we were involved in, in which we were encouraged to experiment without focusing on an end result. This proved to be the genesis. We realised that this idea did not just refer to the project we were working on, but could in fact be applied to our artistic practices as a whole. We decided to form our group based on the idea of the artist as explorer or mad scientist who's art focused on constant and ever changing experimentation. It was a way of liberating our selves and our art from the rules and constraints imposed by the art world we found surrounding us. Our work, both group and individual tries to emphasise the process, the result is considered as no more than a part of the development. We decided that the best way to illustrate our intentions would be through publishing our own artist manifesto and in doing so, inform a wider audience of the interests and goals of the Madlab. This thesis is my attempt at writing the *Madlab Manifesto*.

At this point I should say that I am not trying to write a strictly academic paper, rather I am going to try and compose my thesis as a kind of journey, charting my way around the subject of the artist manifesto. I will research how artists from the past went about composing and writing their manifestos. I will look at the form, the way in which they were written and the context in which their authors found them selves. Using this research I will keep a diary in which I will discuss my readings in order to see in what way they could be relevant to the *Madlab Manifesto*. In writing this manifesto, I will try create a dialogue between the Madlab and the pioneering artists and thinkers whose manifestos established the foundations upon which much of art today is based.

Monday the 21<sup>st</sup> September

I am sitting inside at the dining table with an empty cafetière and a cold cup of coffee, trying to

consolidate my ideas and thoughts on writing an artist manifesto. The possibilities seem almost infinite, which creates a bit of a problem. How do I come up with an original voice for laying out my ideas? I have already made a first draft. It is a guideline to help me through the process of writing, although at this stage the statements feel a little lame.

To my right is a notepad on which I have made a list of the functions of an artist manifesto. Phrases such as; 'A social critique on the status quo' and 'Laying out the Ideas and Goals of a new movement', written in red biro jump from the page. As of yet I have no idea of how to formulate these sentences into relevant and coherent prose.

Tuesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September

I am sitting at the table again. Beside me, "*100 Artists' Manifesto's from the Futurists to the Stuckists*", a book written by art historian Alexander Danchev. This book will be my road map; it will guide me through this thesis. I have taken time to read through some of the artist's manifestos I feel could be relevant to my writing. Also on the table beside me are several index cards which I have used to write down quotes I feel could be useful. What strikes me is how different the artist manifesto can be, not just in the goals set out by the artist but also in the style of writing, the lay out of the text and the outlining of ideas.

We have F.T Marinetti the father of the artist manifesto, hell bent on destroying the old world to replace it with his world full of new Futurist ideals. In Marinetti's vision, classical notions of beauty, academics, literature and even the church are washed away to be replaced by a new notion of beauty: 'A roaring motor car, which seems to race on like machine gun fire is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace.'<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, we have Claes Oldenburg the Pop artist and his manifesto *I am for an Art*. Oldenburg is more democratic in his approach. He does not want to destroy the world, he wants to glorify the tiny unnoticed details in it. His art celebrates 'Things lost or thrown away.' Oldenburg wants to guide us, to help us to see things we pay little or no attention to. 'I am for an art that joggles like everyone's knees, when the bus traverses an excavation.'<sup>2</sup>

So far the artist manifesto that has struck the biggest chord with me is the *Dada Manifesto* written by the 'Capo of Dadaism' Tristan Tzara. Though Dada by its very definition is nonsensical and ludicrous, much of what Tzara writes in his manifesto makes sense to me. Dada as described by Tzara is all about the impulse, the joy of creation and the abolition of logic. He is the champion of the random idea; 'Dada; absolute and unquestioning faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity.'<sup>3</sup> It is the idea of the artist creating for his own sake. 'Art is a private affair, the artist produces it for himself.'<sup>4</sup> The Dadaists insatiable curiosity for the irrational was a reaction to the horrors of the First World War. How was it possible to look at the world in a rational way they mused, after the systematic killing of millions of young men in such a brutal and impersonal way. Although our incentive is somewhat less dramatic, I think many of Dada's ideas and goals hold true for the Madlab. The Madlab advocates constant and ever changing experimentation. Nothing is more important than the curiosity of the artist. Even if the ideas are ludicrous and irrational, it is the impulse that must be followed for the sake of the knowledge of the Artist. 'There is literature that does not reach the voracious mass. It is the work of creators, issued from a real necessity in the author, produced for himself.'<sup>5</sup> In the Madlab every path must be explored for as Tristan Tzara himself says: 'There is no ultimate truth.'<sup>6</sup>

The idea of art as experiment is not one that is exclusive to the Dadas or the Madlab. It is an idea that has preoccupied artist through out the Twentieth Century, perhaps most notably in the teachings at *Black Mountain college* in North Carolina. Black Mountain, founded by academic John Andrew Rice, was an institution where students were encouraged to participate in many different subjects including literature, fine art, contemporary dance and natural and social sciences. Students were also expected to participate in general activities such as maintenance and farming, which were essential to the running of the college. The Black Mountain college was a Mecca for European artist escaping persecution during the second world war and it's alumni and teachers include some of the most experimental artists and thinkers from the latter half of the Twentieth Century, among them

John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and even Albert Einstein to name just a few. John Andrew Rice wanted to set up a progressive place of learning where individual creativity took precedence; 'Our central and consistent effort now is to teach method not content, to emphasise process not result.'<sup>7</sup> Through this method of teaching the students of Black Mountain collage learned to think creatively and independently, their knowledge was based on experience, experimentation and learning through doing. Black Mountain College was wildly out of step with most artistic institutions at the time, which still focused on teaching art in a traditional academic way, the exception of course being the Bauhaus which had been dissolved by the Nazi's in 1933 and from which many of Black Mountain's participants came.

Although the *Black Mountain College* was closed in 1957, I feel that this spirit of artistic freedom and experimental collaboration lives on in the Madlab. We too want to create a forum for the sharing of ideas. We are not trying to inform a certain style or way of working, rather we are building a platform where people from different disciplines can come together to be influenced and inspired by one another.

The success of *Black Mountain college* had a lot to do with the fact that it was set up at a crucial time. The coming together of Europe's most radical thinkers in the virtual utopia that was post-war America had a lot to do with the influence this free thinking, radical approach to the teaching and creation of art had on artist during the second half of the twentieth century. We are lucky in this way too. The Madlab is created in a time when our attempt to shift the function of art, from a serious systematic process to one of experimental freedom, coupled with our access to platforms like the internet mean that we can share our ideas and influence millions of like minded thinkers around the world almost instantly.

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1.45PM

I have spent the morning reading a discussion between the philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their book *Towards a new Manifesto*. Even though the two are discussing the politics of Marxism and talking about how to re write the Communist Manifesto and even though the discussion is taking place in 1956, a lot of what they say seems to be relevant to my research on how to go about writing the *Madlab Manifesto*. What I am especially interested in, is their thoughts on progress and what drives people to work.

Theodor Adorno argues that the concept of work is based on an ideology. 'Even if man really enjoys work, subjective happiness remains ideology.'<sup>8</sup> Max Horkheimer disagrees, he says that we only idealise the concept of work because it gives us purpose in life and we enjoy it. 'Man is only worth something as long as he works. This is where the concept of freedom comes in.'<sup>9</sup> I would say that for the artist, the joy of work comes from an intrinsic curiosity. Unlike work in the conventional sense of the word, where one is productive in order to make money and become a contributing part of society, I do not think art is born out of a social pressure. Rather art is created through some unknown drive with in the artist. It is perhaps something which has no logical explanation or definition. It is instinctive. As Adorno puts it; 'There is something like dianoetic virtue- devoting the self to something for its own sake.'<sup>10</sup>

As a member of the Madlab, the artist's goal should be to experiment endlessly never stopping, always pushing their art to the limits of what is possible. It is only through radical experimentation that artists are able to push their work into the realm of the unknown. By this I mean that the artist is always trying to look at or think about a subject from a new angle, in order to find and highlight some hitherto unknown fact or observation. It is this that drives development in art. We can take as an example Pablo Picasso's work *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from 1907. Although the painting's subject matter is fairly traditional, at the time of its creation this work was hugely experimental, different from anything that had ever been created before and viewed by many as ugly and even obscene. It is now celebrated as one of the most important paintings of art history and has influenced countless artist throughout the last century. It is only because Picasso followed his curiosity, because he dared to push the boundaries of what at the time was considered art and through his need to fulfil a creative impulse, that this pivotal piece of art was made possible.

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 7.41PM

I am sitting at a very different table. It is the table of a working studio. Surrounding me are hundreds of fragile glass objects, the creations of the craftsmen who work here. Reading further through *Towards a new Manifesto*, I come to a section on the difference between theory and practice. This is a subject which I find interesting, because it is one which I come across often in every day life. Adorno and Horkheimer discuss how theory relates to practice. 'Thinking is a form of behaviour that in a curious way has taken on the appearance of something in which human activity is not involved.'<sup>11</sup> Adorno is saying that theory often becomes so abstract that it is estranged from practice. Horkheimer tells him that good theory serves practice; 'Theory that wishes to be sufficient only unto itself is bad theory.'<sup>12</sup> In the Madlab theory is born out of practice. Our theory, as in the case of this manifesto, exists in order to try to understand the reason for the creation of our art. If there was no impulse to be creative we would have nothing to theorise about.

There are examples of principles that are taken for granted by art historians and art theorists today, that only came about through the artists need to solve a creative problem. Take Filippo Brunelleschi's invention of linear perspective. Perspective is a concept we take for granted these days. One can imagine with little difficulty that two lines meeting at the horizon create the illusion of perspective. This has much to do with the invention of photography, viewing an image seen from a single point. Paintings made in perspective looked strange to people of the Fifteenth Century, the forms in the foreground looked far to big in proportion to those further back. In his experiments, Brunelleschi used a mirror to project an image of Florence Cathedral baptistery seen from a fixed point. As British Pop artist David Hockney explains in his book *Secret Knowledge*; 'Using the mirror [Brunelleschi] could only produce a small picture, but by extending the lines Brunelleschi could create what all artists wanted; a bigger space and a bigger picture!'<sup>13</sup> Linear perspective is a principle which can be explained easily by mathematical geometry today, however, I believe it was not until Brunelleschi actually made his drawing of Florence Cathedral baptistery that the principle was discovered. Brunelleschi's creative impulse spawned the academic theory.

Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 11.20AM

Perhaps it is the fact that it is Friday today and a good friend is coming to visit this weekend, or maybe I am just on my game this morning, which ever one it is things seem off to a good start. I have carried on reading *Towards a new Manifesto*, a book documenting Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's conversations on the re writing of the Communist Manifesto. The chapter I am reading is called 'No Utopianism'. The two philosophers seem to be of the opinion that in order to create a fair society, the idea is not to try and create an idealised utopian world of the future but rather to rely on strategies which have been proved successful by events in history. In a practical sense this seems a good strategy, as Horkheimer says; 'Reality should be measured against criteria whose capacity for fulfilment can be demonstrated in a number of pre existing, concrete developments in historical reality.'<sup>14</sup> However, I do not think that this is the function of a manifesto. I think the manifesto should be a utopian vision, the bringing forth of ideas for how to create an idealised world. We do not live in such a world, concrete developments in historical reality have never led to a true Utopia. Instinctively I feel that this can never be reached if we rely only on the past for inspiration. In my opinion the very idea of the artist manifesto comes from the need with in the artist to instigate change. So through the manifesto, the artist creates an idealised, utopian vision of the future in order to seduce his or her contemporaries in to joining the cause. There must always be elements of reality and truth within this artist's vision, however, as Werner Herzog writes in his manifesto *The Minnesota Declaration*; 'There is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylisation.'<sup>15</sup>

I think an artist manifesto should be shocking; it should give hope. It should be a rallying cry, to change the world from how it is now to how we would like it to be. In the words of F.T Marinetti; 'Nothing can equal the splendour of the sun's red sword slicing through our millennial darkness for

the very first time!<sup>16</sup> Suddenly those phrases written in red biro are starting to make sense. The intentions of the artist manifesto do lie in 'Laying out the Ideas and Goals for a new movement', breaking from convention in order to try and form a new reality.

Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1.28PM

As their discussions draw to a close the two philosophers become some what melancholic. 'If you produce revolutionary writings in a non-revolutionary situation without engaging with the positive aspects of culture it always seems somehow hopeless.'<sup>17</sup> says Horkheimer. He seems to wonder whether it is worth writing a manifesto, if there is a lack of need for it or when no one will listen. Adorno tells us that 'The horror is that for the first time we live in a world in which we can no longer imagine a better one.'<sup>18</sup> Adorno, talking in the mid fifties, was of course speaking about the affects of Fascism, the horrors of the Second World War and the very immanent threat of nuclear annihilation. He says that the horrors experienced during their time have desensitised humanity to such an extent that to imagine a Utopia is not only irrational, it is impossible. In a strange way this idea resonates with in the art world today. People are always talking about the end of art, the fact that no new advances are possible because no one has the power to shock or be shocked. To this I say; it is no longer the role of the artist solely to shock. I agree that most extremes in art have already been reached, one could even say that the 'new' has been exhausted. Take *Piss Christ* a work by the American artist Andres Serrano. *Piss Christ* is a photograph of a crucifix suspended in a vessel of urine. I am not saying that this is not an interesting work, the highly controversial photograph is in fact very beautiful and deals with the contrasting themes of attraction when first seeing the image, and repulsion when one realises how it is made. The point that I am trying to make is that it seems almost impossible for an artist to go to a further extreme in terms of shocking an audience. Through works such as *Piss Christ* we have become desensitised. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, I think this is exactly the time to write a manifesto. I want to make people aware of how the focus and the role of art has changed.

It seems to me that we are coming to a point where the lack of boundaries means that art history, in a traditional sense, is becoming harder to define. However, in my opinion the history of art is not simply characterised by the breaking of boundaries or by its linearity as a single narrative, it is more subjective than that. We must begin to recognise art as something far more fundamental. To me art history is and should be recognised as, a record of an individual's experience, a personal, subjective take on the world that is saved for posterity and it is this idea that the *Madlab Manifesto* will celebrate. In the words of art theorist and resident of *Black Mountain college*, John Dewey: 'Art is a mode of prediction not found in charts and statistics, and it insinuates possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration.'<sup>19</sup> I think it is for this reason that art cannot die. There will always be art, as there has always been in some form or another, as long as there is passion and curiosity within the artist and a public or audience open and willing to share and experience it. Art is not a faze or a fashion, it is a need, a way of life. As Gilbert and George put it in their manifesto *What Our Art Means* from 1970: 'We want to spill our blood, brains and seed in our life-search for new meanings and purpose to give to life.'<sup>20</sup>

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> of September

Yet again I find myself sitting at a different table. This time it is the table in my new studio space, a little empty now but soon to be filled with the remnants of Madlab experimentation. I have been in correspondence with my good friend and fellow Madlab member Nathan Favot. We have had many discussions in the past on how to go about writing a manifesto and he has sent me some of the notes that he made during our conversations. In the notes there are several points which I have not yet explored in my research and which, reading over them again seem a vital part of what the Madlab is.

The most important point is that the Madlab is not an individual practice but rather a group. The manifesto is not a formula for creating a certain style of work, it is a set of guidelines to capture the spirit of the Madlab. This is not to say that members of the Madlab must only focus on group projects, rather the exchange of ideas within the group is essential for the progress of the individual. For this reason the manifesto should be addressed to 'The group' rather than to 'The artist.'

Another point that Nathan raises is the idea of amalgamation and change. All that is defined as true at a given point, is certain to be disproved by further experimentation. The result of a project is only a point of transition into another one.

The idea of a manifesto that focuses on the attitude of the artist rather than the work created, once again reminds me of Dada. As Robert Short writes in his book *Dada and Surrealism*, 'Dada was not some new "ism" seeking its place amongst the movements of modern art, rather Dada was a frame of mind.' The Dadas celebrated the chaos and entropy in the universe, 'for the Dadas reality was absurd and chaotic.' The Dadas also believed that as their approach remained honest and their curiosity genuine they could 'keep faith with the prevailing chaos.'<sup>21</sup>

As the Dadas before us, we in the Madlab enjoy the chaos of life and art. We too keep faith that as long as our approach is honest and our curiosity true, one can find order in absurdity. As Nathan writes; 'The Madlab celebrates the non-sense of existence, full with the possibilities of life.'

We in the Madlab are of the opinion, that life is taken far too seriously. I do not mean that we do not fully engage with life but rather that we try to celebrate the mistakes, the fluctuations and the spontaneity which today's society tries so hard to avoid. We try not to categorise our lives or split each task or event into an individual goal, rather we try to run with life and engage fully with its random chaotic course. I think it is a similar thought to that of George Maciunas when he wrote in the *Fluxus Manifesto* of 1963, that for the Fluxus artists, art was the 'Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a moving stream.'<sup>22</sup>

### Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> of October

Following naturally on from the Dadas I have begun reading Andre Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* from 1924. He begins by telling his reader that the only time man is truly free from constraint is during childhood. 'Children set off each day without a care in the world.'<sup>23</sup> Breton feels that as one grows up the cares and responsibilities in life and our need to make sense of what surrounds us, limits our capacity for creativity. 'Our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known.'<sup>24</sup> The Surrealist solution to this problem was to tap into the subconscious through their dreams. 'Why should I not grant in dreams what I occasionally refuse reality?' Heavily influenced by breakthroughs in psychotherapy and books like *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud, the surrealists felt that by unlocking the subconscious, they could unlock all the covert desires and dirty secrets every individual within society, including themselves was hiding. This fascination with the subconscious fed their creativity. They even set up *The Bureau of Surrealist Research*, an office where the public could relieve themselves of their inner most burdens, which the Surrealists would then use as a source of inspiration. (The relevance of the *Bureau of Surrealist Research* is questionable, however, as very few members of the public felt the urge to confess their inner most burdens to a complete stranger).

Like the Surrealists before us, we in the Madlab want to tap into the subconscious in order to free ourselves from the constraints of reality. We too do this in order to surpass the things we encounter in our daily lives that inhibit us; social pressures, insecurities and the need within us to please others. Where we differ, is in the reason for doing this. The Surrealists used the subconscious in order to critique social value. In the Madlab we rely on the stream of consciousness, the free flow of random ideas and constant experimentation to liberate us from the constraints of what is known. It is the childish delight in the unknown or the subconscious that drive our creations forward. It is through our trust in these that we know that genuine curiosity, however random or irrational, will always lead to something interesting.

### Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> of October

Back in the glass studio. There are more similarities between the Madlab and the Surrealists than I had originally anticipated. What strikes me as I finish reading Andre Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* is that, as in the case of the Madlab, the creative spark comes first. 'The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard.'<sup>25</sup> The Surrealists understood that organised thought inhibits true creativity. Art for them was not a vehicle for logical expression but rather; 'A monologue unencumbered by the slightest inhibition.' I like the idea of letting my subconscious flow. I think it is important not to let rational judgement and the need to understand the unknown get in the way of the creative process. As Breton says; 'I am in no hurry to understand my self.'<sup>26</sup>

I realise that at this time I am repeating some of the points I have already made, however this is not necessarily a bad thing. My research is showing me that our pre occupation, is one that is mirrored by that of many artists from the past. I have already quoted the opinion of Max Horkheimer when he tells us that; 'If you produce revolutionary writings in a non-revolutionary situation it always seems somehow hopeless'<sup>27</sup>, however, I feel this is a revolutionary situation. It seems to me, that at this point a great deal of art has become systematic, a self conscious need for rational understanding, has eclipsed the instinctive, prolific urge. I get the impression that the stress is often on the logical development of the work, before the creative impulse. One example of this systematic approach could be the emphasis on economics in much of the art world today, where art is created based on its value as a commodity rather than it's emotional, creative or experimental value.

Probably the best example of this is Damien Hirst's record breaking Sotheby's auction during which the artist managed to raise almost two hundred million dollars in just one day. Although this might be seen by some as a victory for the artist, the fact that the economic value of Hirst's work has been in steep decline since the auction, proves that the intrinsic value of an art work is not linked to its value as a commodity. Art seen from an economic perspective is what Andre Breton might describe as; 'The imagination exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of arbitrary utility.'<sup>28</sup> Like the Surrealists, the Dadaists and Futurists before us, the Madlab advocates the freedom of random creative expression, before economic or strictly logical analysis.

### Monday 5<sup>th</sup> of October

I have come across a manifesto which on the face of it seems to echo many of the objectives of the Madlab. The Stuckists 'Champion process over cleverness.' It is a movement that rose up to take a stand against the elitist art world of Britain in the 1990's. The name 'The Stuckists' is a reference to Tracy Emin's comments on her ex-boyfriend and writer of the *Stuckist manifesto* Charles Thomson, when she told him "you are stuck!"

There are many good points with in the *Stuckist Manifesto*. I agree when they tell us that 'what once was a searching and provocative process (as Dadaism) has given way to trite and cleverness for commercial exploitation.' I think that the Stuckists came at a time when there was a crisis in art, they were aware that a major overhaul of artistic values was needed, 'The Stuckists champion process over cleverness.'<sup>29</sup>

Although I am in full agreement with the Stuckists views on the state of the art world and the view that change is needed, there is one major flaw in their philosophy and with this their integrity falls apart. 'Artists who do not paint are not artists.'<sup>30</sup> I think that this statement is weak, they are far too specific. With this sentence the narrow mindedness they accuse their contemporaries of possessing applies to them in exactly the same way. How can one possibly solve a problem in this way? There is definitely a point in saying that the art world has become saturated by economics, that the point of art and what it stands for is moving in the wrong direction. However, one cannot claim that there is only one solution to this problem and that any one who does not follow this idea is not an artist. Reading the *Stuckist manifesto* has made me realise that it is important not to be to specific in laying out one's goals. Although one must have radical ideas and plans in forming and writing a manifesto,

it is important that these goals are encompassing enough that one does not become bigoted. The Madlab does not wish to glorify or disgrace any form of art be it conceptual or otherwise. We are not trying to change the form of art, rather we want to inform a attitude towards the way in which the artist approaches his, her or their work.

#### Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> of October 11.00AM

It has been just over two weeks since I started my research in the hope of gaining some insight into the art of the artist Manifesto. I am sitting at exactly the same table as on the first day and next to me are the same cafetière and cold cup of coffee. Although this scene is almost the same, what has changed in the last couple of weeks is my understanding of the role of an artist's manifesto. For this reason, I feel that I should make a quick summery of all my research so far before continuing.

When I begun my research I knew roughly the function of the artist manifesto, however I had no idea how to begin to apply this to that of the Madlab. I now know that there is no set formula for writing a manifesto, they can be very different, not just in their style of writing but also in the ideas they suggest and in the goals they set out to for fill. The goal of this manifesto is to capture the spirit of the Madlab. This lies in the idea that the artist should always be pushing the boundaries of what is creatively possible. The artist should never be afraid to fail as failures can be very interesting and should indulge in constant and ever changing experimentation. My research has also shown me that the artist manifesto should not be a description of reality, rather it is a tool or a set of instructions that strive to achieve a utopian vision; it is a rallying cry.

What I have found most interesting, is that as well as points to include in the Madlab manifesto, I have also found elements in the manifestos I have read, with which I disagree. I think one area in which some authors of these manifestos go wrong, is the detail in which they lay out their ideas. This was most apparent when the Stuckist's told us that 'Artists who do not paint are not artists.' The point is that it is crucial that the artist manifesto is encompassing enough to include artists from many different disciplines. The *Madlab manifesto* does not wish to instruct its members on how they should make their work, rather it is a platform for the exchange of ideas which is essential to the group.

The last point that I wish to touch on before continuing with my research, is the idea that the truth is temporal. What holds true now will not be the same in a year, a month or even a day. I guess that this is the reason why many of the artists who put out manifestos do not publish only one but many over several years. They accept that we do not live in a purely logical world where things change only in a practical way, but rather we live in an ever changing irrational world, where ideas and theories are refined and renewed and their writings must reflect this.

#### Friday 9<sup>th</sup> of October

Hanging over the desk in my room is an old worn A4 photocopy. On this sheet of paper *10 Rules for Students and Teachers* laid out by John Cage. I was given these ten rules in my Basic Year and over time they have helped me transform my self and my work, from immature reactionary art student into infinitely curious and confident artist. John Cage's rules are very simple, non specific and designed in such a way that any art student will find them useful.

Although every rule is helpful in one way or another, there are a few which I have underlined and which have helped me more specifically. The first of these reads 'Rule 6: Nothing is a mistake.'

When I begun my art education I was an undeveloped artist, technically skilled but with little knowledge of concept or experimentation. Coming to the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, an art school famous for its highly conceptual approach was naturally quite a shock. I struggled to keep up with my class mates due mainly to the fact that I put far too much effort into each work and was frightened to experiment in case I made a mistake and it went wrong. Learning that even mistakes could be very interesting, was perhaps the first step in my development. The idea that not every piece of work I made had to be a master piece and knowing that every thing was a step in my development was very liberating. My function as an artist was suddenly to record life in its chaotic entropy. In the words of Black Mountain Collage alumni Josef Albers; 'The main interest is not the

result but the process of growth.<sup>31</sup>

Another of the underlined sentences reads 'Rule 9: Be happy whenever you can manage it. Enjoy yourself. It is lighter than you think.'<sup>32</sup> Although this rule does not refer directly to the work of the artist, it informs the attitude the artist must take and is therefore crucial to the development of the artist. The idea that 'it is lighter than you think' is also very liberating. I feel it is similar to what Andre Breton tells us when he writes 'Children set off each day without a care in the world.'

Certainly in the case of the Madlab, but doubtless in the case of many artists, we approach our work very much like children. This is not to say that we approach our work without consideration or thought, rather we approach it with out the concern of failure, knowing that if we just continue something of interest is bound to come along.

I realise that this may seem a little off track, what do John Cage's '10 Rules for Students and Teachers' have to do with writing an Artist Manifesto? Up until now I have focused my attention on the function of the artist manifesto, what the reason for writing one is. I have answered some of the questions written in red biro such as 'What is the reason for an artist manifesto?' and 'Why the need for change?' Now I think it is time to focus my research on such questions as; 'A manifesto must be persuasive how is this achieved?' This is where John Cage's rules come in. They are full of rhetoric designed to help the art student maximise his or her potential. In the next phase of my research, I will look at how artist in history have used rhetoric in their manifestos and the techniques they have found to try and inform contemporaries of their intentions. I hope that in doing so I will be able to create my own persuasive narrative, in order to inform contemporaries of the existence and intentions of the Madlab.

#### Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> of October

So now to find the right words to give the *Madlab manifesto* the evocative persuasive power it will need in order for it to be controversial and rousing. It is a little daunting having to think of the right rhetoric to encourage people to join our cause. What makes it difficult is that there are many varying factors, which include, the audience I am addressing and the time and context I am writing in. I think an easy example to begin with is one I have already briefly mentioned; Claes Oldenburg's manifesto *I Am for an Art*:

'I am for art that is smoked, like a cigarette, smells, like a pair of shoes.

I am for art that flaps like a flag, or helps blow noses, like a handkerchief.'<sup>33</sup>

The first thing one notices is that the language is very democratic. The examples Oldenburg uses are diverse and many, and help the reader to realise that his art is all inclusive. There is no bias in his work, anything can be an inspiration to him. The idea of democracy in art is one that was relevant to the context in which Oldenburg was writing. As a pioneering Pop artist he and his contemporaries were trying to show that a cigarette or a handkerchief were subjects just as relevant as any that were fashionable at the time.

The second thing to notice as one reads through Oldenburg's manifesto is the repetition of pros. The title and phrase 'I am for an art' is repeated again and again and again. This repetition is very evocative; it has the effect of stimulating the reader's imagination. The language is exciting, it is a call to arms rousing the reader to join Oldenburg's cause. I think repetition is a very good literary tool. It implies passion and commitment. Claes Oldenburg takes repetition to the extreme, however, the effect it has is hypnotic and by the time we get to the end we are thoroughly convinced.

#### Monday the 12<sup>th</sup> of October

It is exactly three weeks since I began researching in the hope of gaining insight into how to go about writing the *Madlab Manifesto*. I find myself yet again sitting at the dining table, the empty cafetière and cold cup of coffee beside me. The last few days have been a bit of a struggle in my research, I have been focused on other things, but today I am fully motivated.

In my reading I have come to the conclusion that perhaps the most important literary tool that is used in the writing of an artist manifesto, is the authors power to be controversial. I do not mean

that this is done merely in order to shock, but rather it is done in order to illustrate the seriousness of the artist's intentions. The use of strong evocative language is an element of every manifesto, the exception perhaps being that of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and is used to stimulate and rouse the radicals and revolutionaries into action. For the best example it is advisable to turn back to the original artist manifesto, *The Foundation of Futurism* by F.T.Marinetti. 'Let's leave wisdom behind as if it were a hideous shell.'<sup>34</sup> Statements like this must have been deeply shocking to the art establishment of 1909, however they were instrumental in ushering in perhaps the most radical century in the history of art. It is the poetry in the language that gives it so much power, a rhythm reflecting the machine age which Marinetti felt was essential to the birth of his new artistic movement.

The idea of a controversial piece of writing is indeed very valuable, however, it must be attractive in the way it does this. One manifesto that clearly embodies this enthusiasm for the new and daring, is that of pioneering documentary film maker Dziga Vertov, responsible for the film *Man with a Movie Camera*. In *WE: Variant of a Manifesto* from 1922, Vertov proclaims; 'We seek our own material, our own metre and rhythm.'<sup>35</sup> He is calling people who share his interest in the new, people who want to break away from the conventional to rally to his cause. This is what I would like to do in the *Madlab Manifesto*. We want to alert people to the idea that art can be free, that anything one does as long as it has integrity and an honest approach, will result in something interesting and of artistic value. I will of course have to find an emotive way of putting this. Part of what makes Vertov's pros attractive is the language, the use and order of the words and the rhythm they create, all of which enhance the meaning of the sentence. There is also an enthusiasm in the language, we get the idea that the author believes whole heartedly in his intentions; 'Hurrah for dynamic geometry, the race of points, lines, planes, volumes.'<sup>36</sup> It is emphatic, the use of repetition giving a feeling of speed, as if Vertov can hardly contain his excitement at the idea of what he aims to achieve.

Saturday the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 11.00AM

At the dining table again. It has been some time since I have written anything. There is one topic which I have only briefly discussed in my writing so far and it is perhaps the most relevant of all to the Madlab. This is the concept of Play. In my experience, 'Play' and 'Fun' are dirty words in the Art world. If they are used, they are all to often hidden in Irony or skepticism. Take the famously elusive street artist Banksy. He is renowned for creating playfully satirical artworks such as his mural of two British policemen entwined in a loving embrace. Though his works are interesting and provocative, they are so numerous and reproduced that they soon become tiresome. I feel the reason for this is that once one gets past the irony, there is not all that much more to the art work. What was once radical and thought provoking becomes nothing more than a worn out cliché. What I am trying to say is that for a work of art to be interesting in the long term it must be more than just playfully ironic.

A work that is perhaps the exception to this rule is *Santa Claus*, a giant metal dwarf holding a butt plug. Made by the American artist Paul McCarthy in 2001, this sculpture stands on a public square in Rotterdam's city centre and although this seemed to many wildly inappropriate and the work was viewed as indecent, it has come to be one of the city's most celebrated landmarks. *Santa Claus* is fun, people climb its curves and sit on it. It is also quite beautiful for where people have stood or sat on it repeatedly, the dull brown colour has worn away to reveal the shiny bronze beneath. Here is a sculpture, which in many ways is ironic. It could even be said to mock 'high art' by combining sculpture using a traditional material, with symbols associated with low culture and cheap eroticism. And yet through its integration into a public space, it has actually become fun. It is an example of an art work which has taken on a life of its own, one which is different perhaps to the one the artist first intended. As Marcel Duchamp the father of conceptual art puts it; 'The artist produces nothing until the onlooker has said, "You have produced something marvellous." The onlooker has the last word on it.'<sup>37</sup>

As we in the Madlab advocate fun and play we also like the idea of neoteny in art. Neoteny roughly

translates as; 'the retention of childish traits during adulthood' and it is this childish pleasure that we want to re introduce into the art world. I believe human beings are designed to Play, it is in our DNA. Play is not merely an activity engaged in by children to pass the time. It has in fact been proved to be hugely beneficial to the development of adults as well as children and we in the Madlab take full advantage of this.

Another common misconception is that play is the opposite of work, this is not true. As Steve Keil, a Bulgarian business man and a leading expert on play tells us; 'We develop better decision-making abilities if we play more.'<sup>38</sup> Play makes us more open to ideas. It is through trial and error, through experimentation and a childlike desire and intrigue that we try to develop our work. Another clear example of this is the work of the land artist Andy Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy creates sculptures and installations using materials found in the land. In *Rivers and Tides*, a documentary that follows the artist as he travels through nature and makes his works, we see the concept of play very clearly. The materials Goldsworthy uses are unpredictable. Ice melts, stones fall and most of his sculptures and installations are destined to fall apart or decay, in some cases before the work is even complete. This liberates the artist. The idea that his works are only transitory means that he is open to constant and endless experimentation, he is always testing and pushing his materials to their limits. Seeing Andy Goldsworthy work is very much like watching a child at play, he learns and develops through doing, with every mistake or failure the artist claims he gets to know his subject and materials better, just as children do. This is exactly what the Madlab is all about. We try to harness our natural instinct towards play in order to develop our work and ideas, and gain insight and understanding into why it is that human beings have such a strong need to create.

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> of November

I now come to a critical point; the point at which I must stop my research and actually try to pen the *Madlab Manifesto*. I feel confident that the research I have done, coupled with the ideas I have and the conclusions I have drawn are enough of a base to be able to put our plans and ideas into action. And so with out further ado; *THE MADLAB MANIFESTO*.

## *THE MADLAB MANIFESTO.*

*MAD adj. Mentally disturbed*

*LAB n. 1. scientific experiments  
2. productive activity*

*MADLAB 1. 'Mentally disturbed scientific experiments'  
2. 'Mentally disturbed productive activity'*

We present to the world our Manifesto. THE MADLAB MANIFESTO.

In this Manifesto we do not wish to exclude, but rather we wish to include all those who recognise them selves in the points raised here today. It is not intended as a formula for the creation of a certain style, subject or use of material in the work, rather it is a set of guide lines to capture the spirit of the MADLAB. For this reason, the Manifesto shall be addressed to the GROUP rather than to the INDIVIDUAL.

The MADLAB is created in the spirit of collaboration. It is a platform for the exchange of THOUGHTS and IDEAS. Members are defined by their commitment to the MADLAB. Across the sea, across the mountains and across the world the groups' links remain UNBREAKABLE.

We in the MADLAB wish to inform a new ATTITUDE towards the way in which the ARTIST approaches his, her or their WORK. We want to LIBERATE art from the constraints of the art world. The MADLAB advocates the FREEDOM of random creative expression before ACADEMIC logical analysis. For too long we have witnessed artists of our time tempted by ECONOMICS rather than the need to further DEVELOP our knowledge of what the meaning of art is and what it can be.

We rely on the STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS and the free flow of random ideas to liberate us from the CONSTRAINTS of the known. We in the MADLAB consider our selves EXPLORERS. Constant EXPERIMENTATION is key! The result of any project is a point of TRANSITION into another one. We consider our development as an artistic PRACTICE rather than a set of individual works.

With in the MADLAB the focus must be on the PROCESS. The artist must be open to CHANGE and ADAPTATION, he or she or they must be willing to 'KILL their DARLINGS' in order for their work and APPROACH to remain interesting. Have no fear, for this ATTITUDE always leads to or results in something INTERESTING.

We, the ASPIRING young artists, have become DESENSITISED. Our idea of what art is has become to SATURATED. As artist we no longer have to power to SHOCK or be SHOCKED. We in the MADLAB realise that the FUNCTION of art has changed. We ask our selves, why is art so IMPORTANT? There are many answers to this question, however, there is one answer which echoes our cause. Art is a way to SUBJECTIVELY record HISTORY.

The MADLAB celebrates the non sense of EXISTENCE, full with the POSSIBILITIES of LIFE. In

the MADLAB being an artist means creating a PROBLEM and spending time SOLVING it.

We in the MADLAB want to RE-INVIGORATE the art world. The art world feels the need to be SERIOUS. FUN and PLAY, dirty words in the artist's dictionary, are both ESSENTIAL to the MADLAB MENTALITY. We rely on the idea of NEOTENY, the retention of CHILDISH traits during ADULTHOOD. Humans are designed to play, it has been proven to help with our ability to ORGANISE and THINK creatively and we in the MADLAB take full ADVANTAGE of this.

We ENCOURAGE learning through DOING. We enjoy the lack of CONTROL, the idea of TRIAL and ERROR. The MADLAB values self EXPRESSION, self EXPLORATION and self CONFIDENCE.

We in the MADLAB must also learn to be HUMBLE. The artist or artists must be self REFLECTIVE and willing to CHANGE or ADAPT to the needs of the work. We must be OPEN. The MADLAB is a space to share THOUGHTS and IDEAS. This is not to say that the artist has to rely on the CRITIQUE of others, rather in VOICING one's ideas out loud and SHARING thoughts with OTHERS the artist may well find new INSIGHTS that he, she or they may not have been AWARE of with out them.

Finally, we in the MADLAB consider ENTHUSIASM the key to SUCCESS. We must always have a KEEN, OBSESSIVE interest in what we are DOING. If the work is un FULFILLING it is not worth DOING. There is always another UNKNOWN path which will offer INTRIGUE in a way that is both INTERESTING and UNEXPECTED.

DO NOT FEAR FOR WITH THE PLANS AND IDEAS WE HAVE LAID OUT IN THIS, THE MADLAB MANIFESTO, ONE WILL ALWAYS BE ABLE TO FIND INTEREST, POSSIBILITY AND JOY IN ONES CREATIONS.

MADLAB!

Post script:

Robert Riphagen:

'For me, being a Madlabber means that I am ready to kill and die for my art, anytime anywhere!'

Patrick Hamilton:

'Madlab is all about that in between, the push and shove of working in a group, letting an idea go like a gremlin in a pool too see what havoc it wreaks.'

Nathan Favot:

'Madlab is the feeling of a group that could not express its feeling with meaning or a fixed voice. Sudden collective impulse, it is an answer to this stupidity of flow surrounding us. Now we are free to express our nonsense above all over a cause that is autonomous from the reality where we came from. Madlab will never be defined as absolute and each voice as soon as it accept its triviality will carry the torch.'

Anton Lyngdal:

'Madlab: Friends, subterranean art crew, we find our best art by discovering the materials through time. Loyalty. I can write these words right!'

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