

A MANIFESTO

Wouter Van Loo



Dear artist,
Dear Wouter,

My sincere thanks for your message. I received a hundred different ideas from you, in the form of collages, that challenge me to reflect on the position of art, artists and art professionals in our (political) society. Knowing that several other pen pals received these statements from you as a letter (or maybe a threat note), it seemed obvious to respond in an epistolary form myself.

In an art context it is called a collage; when you get it in your mailbox, it becomes a threat note. It must be quite the drudgery, to select, cut, and paste each letter, a hundred times over. Your message is clearly being handled with care. It reminds me of the relationship between art and craft – and how the visibility of craft skills in an artwork can be cause for wonder and praise. The exactness of your work is rooted in your background as a jewelry artist and sculptor. It's stronger than you: the delicate precision and aesthetic satisfaction form a contrast to the danger, intensity and anarchy of a threat note. That is precisely where the issue lies: there is an inherent tension in how these collages function as images. This is important because it attracts and holds our gaze.

The aesthetic tension helps to question certain things. The substantive boundary between a threat note and a collage depends on the context. Is the artist an outlaw, a peril, a terrifying renegade? Do the artists have a moral obligation to legitimize themselves in the face of a social, political or economic context? Or of their own professional field? Does the artist have a responsibility to reflect on the usefulness, value and position of art? In this series of collages, you seem to want to take on that responsibility. Because one thing is clear: these assembled slogans do not pretend to be unequivocal statements, or to proclaim the truth, but rather position themselves as question marks; propositions opening up reflection and dialogue.

A threatening attitude is also defensive. Punk is resistance. Although you first started working on them in 2014, the collages only really took shape in 2019, partly as a reaction against the cultural struggle and the (pseudo-)policy of the N-VA and minister Jambon in the field of culture. Communication between the field and the administration is an insidious and growing problem in Flanders. It's something that both of us, and many others, worry about. One could say that policy and the art field have different interests. Distrust and distance grow as new budget cuts come along and policymakers seem to lack any involvement in their decisions and communication. The art field feels more and more cornered by the increasing battle for dwindling financial resources, by an apparent unwillingness and inaccessibility, by the continuous demand for legitimacy. That invites some activism. So why not respond threateningly? But can art put pressure on structures at all, when they need reflection or change? And is that a responsibility that an artist can or must take on?

The monumentality of the physical, exhibited works as a whole translates the weight of the content. One hundred large-format framed collages, with their deep black background: perhaps they also emanate a certain formal threat, or perhaps they just play with the gravity of your intention. If it's framed, if it's big, if it hangs against the wall of an art space... is it art, by definition? It doesn't escape me that the collages, both in their function of threat note and of artistic-philosophical discourse, do display a certain level of (self-)mockery.

Your ego as an artist is absent in this work, because within the context of a threat note, the total anonymity of the maker is a core condition. This gives the collages an extra universal dimension, and here too, a critical underlayer can be felt. Has the cult of the individual outgrown itself? Is the name a brand, as capitalist-driven communication strategies, which somehow also found their way into art and culture, would like us to believe? Is art a ladder, a competition for the best, the

most expensive, the most mediatized? Or has the era of the individual artist come to an end in this time of crisis, and has the realm of generosity and equality dawned?

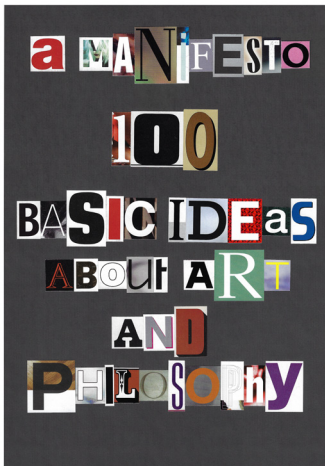
You bundle these hundred collages under the title 'A Manifesto'. Historically, a manifesto comes from a person or a group, who write down their own truth and send it out into the world. Usually it is a reaction against the prevailing mainstream ideas or established values. I am thinking, for example, of André Breton's 'Surrealist Manifesto' (1924) or Tristan Tzara's 'Dada Manifesto' (1918, but it was actually preceded by an earlier 'Dada Manifesto', by Hugo Ball; action-reaction-action). Each published manifesto is of course different, but it is often a statement about what art is according to the author(s), and a product of their time.

A manifesto establishes a certain vision: the proposed innovation is the only correct way to progress. I prefer to see a good work of art as an open door. In their multiplicity, and occasionally in their intrinsic contradiction, your collages plead for nuance, perspective, ambiguity. There is not one truth, but there is a need for a conversation about truth, value, form and content. What is the status of a published collage? In this case, as for most manifestos, it means an externalization and consolidation of the kind of conversations that typically take place in specific circles, between like-minded people and usually in a rather social context (at an opening or in a bar, sometimes there is little difference); but from which many insights are distilled. By positing and publishing an 'oral tradition' in theses, you send out a signal. Words can also be actions. Conversation can also be a form of activism, or activation, when attempts to silence art, in all its power, are omnipresent.

Looking forward to your response and a possible continuation of our conversation.

With kindest regards,
Tamara Beheydt

List of works



A Manifesto, 2020
Framed collages on paper
297 x 420 mm

Series of 102 original collages to be purchased as one,
reproductions can be purchased separately.



This is not a Bomb this is Art, 2022
24 cart gold
13 x 13 x 19 mm
Unique, signed on box with collage

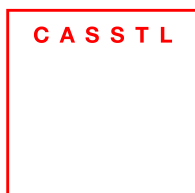
CASSTL edition



This is not a Bomb this is Art, 2022
Sterling silver
13 x 13 x 19 mm

Cast of *This is not a Bomb this is Art, 24 carat gold version.*
Edition of 9 and signed and numbered on box

Wednesday, May 17 - Sunday, May 21



2023

Braziliëstraat 27, 2000 Antwerp - Belgium