



100 Artists'  
Manifestos  
From the Futurists  
to the Stuckists  
Selected by Alex Danchev

MODERN CLASSICS



## M81 Mierle Laderman Ukeles

### *Maintenance Art Manifesto (1969)*

Composed in October 1969, originally in two parts, the first entitled 'Ideas' (printed here), the second a description of a proposed exhibition. In conformity with these ideas, as part of an all-female travelling exhibition of avant-garde artists organized by Lucy Lippard, 'c.7,500' (1973), at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, Ukeles performed a number of actions that became an important early work of what was known as Institutional Critique: she scrubbed the museum steps, polished museum display cases and locked the offices of museum workers.

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES (born 1939) is Artist in Residence in the Department of Sanitation, New York City, a position entirely in keeping with her principles and practice as a Maintenance artist, a term she coined. 'After the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?' Maintenance art was informed by feminist politics – the politics of 'women's lib' (liberation), in contemporary parlance. The manifesto established a pithy and witty distinction between 'development' and 'maintenance'. Development was 'pure individual creation'; maintenance was 'keep the dust off the pure individual creation'. Development was an excitement; maintenance was a drag ('it takes all the fucking time, literally'). Needless to say, development was male and maintenance female – except that, in the circumstances prevailing at the time, it did need saying; and it needed saying in these terms in order to be heard.

Ukeles recalls writing the manifesto 'in a cold fury'. The impetus behind it was a cumulation of things, and experiences, triggered possibly by the experience of having her first baby the previous year, or rather by the response she encountered. She was an artist and an intellectual; suddenly she found that, as a mother, people had nothing to say to her.

‘They didn’t say, “How is it, to create life? How can you describe this amazing thing?” . . . It was like I was mute, there was no language. This is 1968, there was no valuing of “maintenance” in Western culture. Capitalism is like that. The people who were taking care and keeping the wheels of society turning were mute, and I didn’t like it! . . . So I sat down and I said, “If I am an artist, and if I am the boss of my art, then I name Maintenance art.” And really, it was like a survival strategy, because I felt like “how do I keep going?” I am this maintenance worker, I am this artist – I mean this is early feminism, very rigid, I was divided into two. Half of my week I was a mother, and the other half an artist. But I thought to myself, ‘this is ridiculous, I am the one’ . . . It wasn’t just, “How am I feeling today?” It was saying, “OK folks, we have hit a certain point here, and from now on art has changed. Why? Because I say so.”’

Seldom has the urge to manifesto been more compellingly expressed.

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## Ideas

### A. *The Death Instinct and The Life Instinct.*

*The Death Instinct:* separation, individuality, Avant-Garde par excellence; to follow one’s own part to death – do your own thing, dynamic change.  
*The Life Instinct:* unification, the eternal return, the perpetuation and maintenance of the species, survival systems and operation, equilibrium.

### B. *Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance.*

The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

*Development:* pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement; flight or fleeing.

*Maintenance:* Keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight;

Show your work – show it again

## Maintenance Art Manifesto

Keep the contemporary art museum groovy

Keep the home fires burning

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change. Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

*C. Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time, literally; the mind boggles and chafes at the boredom; the culture confers lousy status and minimum wages on maintenance jobs; housewives = no pay.*

Clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor, wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby's diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out – don't put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no socks, pay your bills, don't litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store. I'm out of perfume, say it again – he doesn't understand, seal it again – it leaks, go to work, the art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.

D Art:

Everything I say is Art is Art, Everything I do is Art is Art. 'We have no Art, we try to do everything well.' (Balinese saying à la [Marshall] McLuhan and [Buckminster] Fuller.)

Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities and maintenance materials.

*E. The exhibition of Maintenance Art, 'CARE,' would zero in on maintenance, exhibit it, and yield, by utter opposition, a clarity of issues.*

**'The Manifesto is  
remarkable for its  
imaginative power ...  
it is the first great  
modernist work of art'**

Marshall Berman

In this remarkable collection of 100 manifestos from the last 100 years, Alex Danchev presents a cacophony of voices from such diverse movements as Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Feminism, Communism, Destructivism, Vorticism, Stridentism, Cannibalism and Stuckism, taking in along the way film, architecture, fashion and cookery.

Artists' manifestos are nothing if not revolutionary. They are outlandish, outrageous and frequently offensive. They combine wit, wisdom and world-shaking demands. This collection gathers together an international array of artists of every stripe, including Kandinsky, Mayakovsky, Rodchenko, Le Corbusier, Picabia, Dalí, Oldenburg, Vertov, Baseliitz, Kitaj, Murakami, and Gilbert and George, together with their allies and collaborators - such figures as Marinetti, Apollinaire, Breton, Trotsky, Guy Debord and Rem Koolhaas.

'This ingenious anthology ... is an inspiring book'  
Stuart Kelly, *Scotland on Sunday*.

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over the past century'  
John Gray, *Literary Review*

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