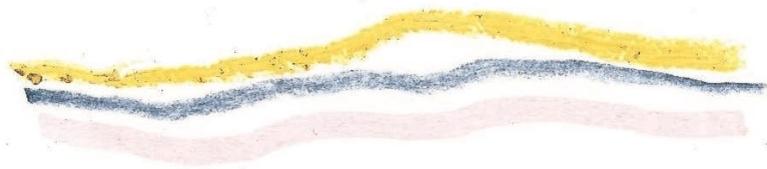


A PLAYFUL
MANIFESTO

A Playful Manifesto

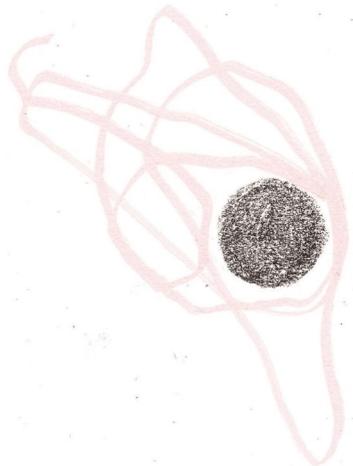
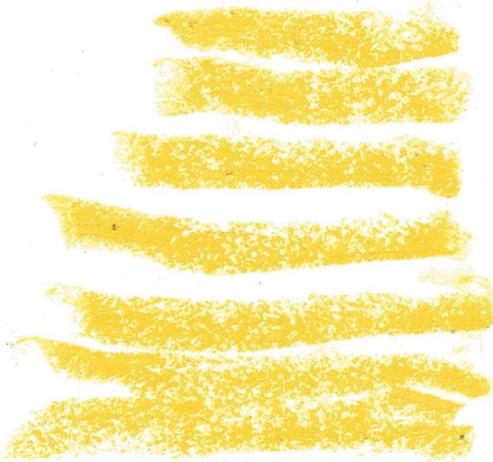
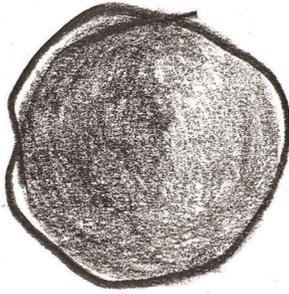


Words and Drawings by Max Alexander



This is a manifesto that begins but will never end. This is a translation of my world to yours. This is a celebration of existence; mine, yours and theirs. This is a public display of affection for each and every creature. This is a protest of the notion that there is any correct way to live. This is a public display of rejection of the idea that one's usefulness is a measure of their humanity. This is a love letter to joy to sadness to fear and discovery.

But, most of all, this is a call to play.



Being

Within any finite set of criteria there exist infinite ways of being.

In play we discover these, play is a state where we explore all our possible selves, and how we relate to our bodies, our minds, the spaces we occupy, other beings and all their possible selves.

We learn to construct spaces. We build, we destroy, we rebuild. Again and again and again.

As we do this, we start to see what our niche might look like. Our niche is the space we occupy in the world. Think of yourself as being wrapped up in an invisible cocoon. If it's the wrong shape, size, texture or weight, if it just doesn't fit you somehow then it will feel like it's holding you back, or down. But, if it does fit, if the colour, the shape, the feel, the everything, all line up with exactly who and what you are then that cocoon feels like it's holding you up or even just holding you. That's what your niche is, that's what it can do for you.

We can create our niche, but first we'll find ourselves squished into one we didn't create; A Standard Pre-Approved Niche. A Standard Pre-Approved Niche exists before you do; it is often picked out for you by those who have invested their comfort in your conformity. You're not given control or choice over this but if it works for you, if it fits comfortably enough, you might never give it much thought. But some people, probably most, won't fit in A Standard Pre-Approved Niche and that's because people like them didn't get to help imagine that Standard Pre-Approved Niche in the first place. This can make existing feel a lot like fighting.

When we play, we get to wriggle out of that cocoon, that Standard Pre-Approved Niche, in safety. We can try new ones on, we borrow, share, swap, maybe steal a little, cut up, mix, construct and just feel how it all feels. No pressure, no right, no wrong. Just you, me and all our possibilities. That's how we begin to understand what's ours, what our niche should look like.

When we create that Niche, that niche that fits, that holds us, we create a space in which we can exist content and true. It gives us a way to move through the world, if not with ease, then at least with understanding and patience for ourselves.



Radical

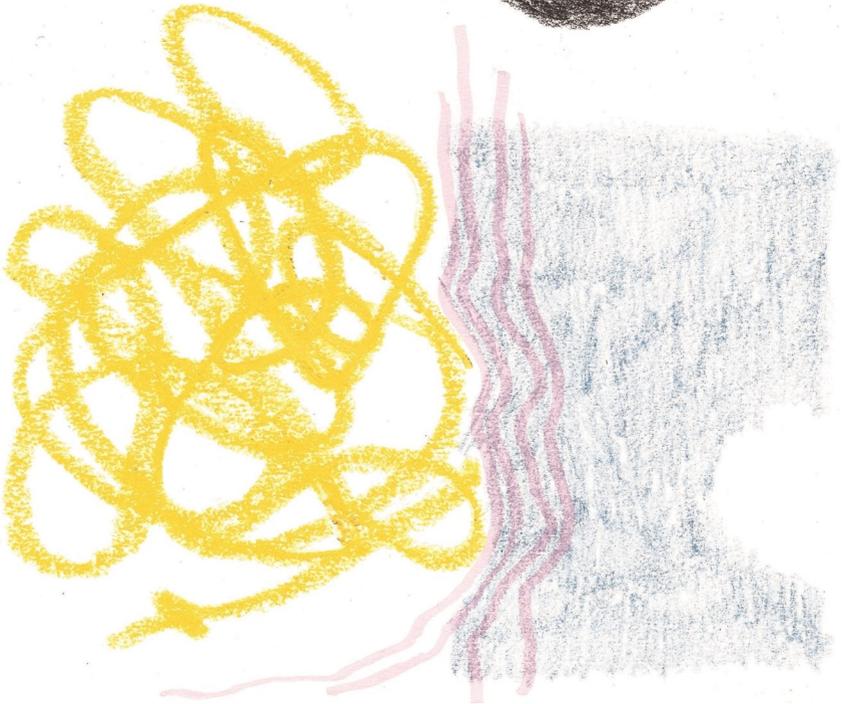
Playing is a radical act. To play you must give yourself time and permission. This shouldn't be difficult, but it is because we get all tied up and weighed down in ideas about how we don't deserve or need these things.

We live in a world where our value is so often defined by what we 'produce' or 'contribute'. But we are so much more than that. Our productivity or our ability to be deemed useful by someone else is secondary. It doesn't define us or determine our worth, but we are tricked into believing it does. The more we start to believe this the less we play. Our time doesn't belong to us anymore it belongs to ideas that we might not even believe in. Ideas like; more is always better; things are more important than people; some people deserve security and comfort more than others and money is more real, more valuable than kindness, wonder and community.

Play is what we do when we're not trying to achieve anything. That statement shouldn't make you feel uncomfortable, it shouldn't make you angry or indignant. But it might. Part of the trap of the idea that our value equals our productivity is that we learn to see everything we do through a lens of achievement.

We always need to be getting better, getting smarter, getting fitter, getting richer. We turn into people who can never be good enough. We lose so much, and we grieve for that loss without even knowing what it is. We can't always be striving for better or more, sometimes we just need to be. Playing is a way of taking back what we lose to these ideas that take over our lives.

Play is always a process and that's where the magic and beauty of it lies. It allows us to escape the aims and objectives, the need for constant achievement, the need to prove our worth and pressure to turn ourselves into products for others to use. So letting yourself play is a radical act, it's a protest, it's refusing to be ground down and giving yourself time and permission to be.



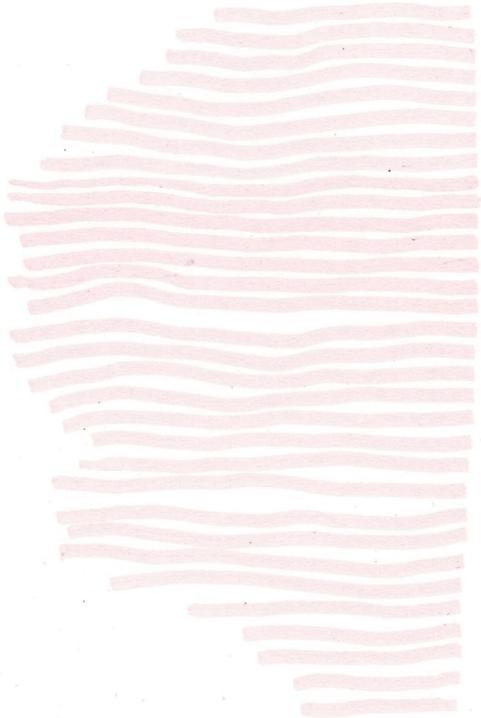
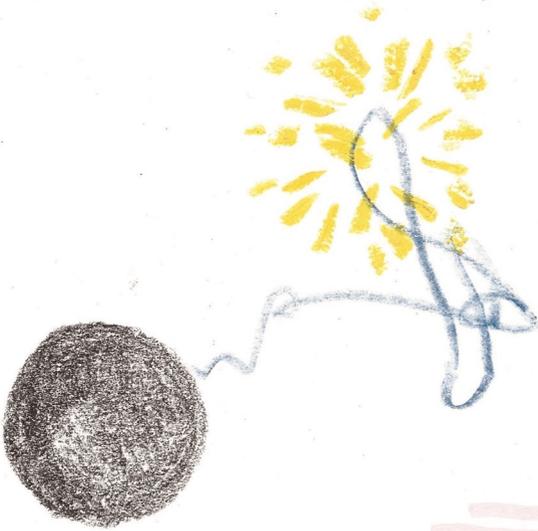
Compassionate

To give ourselves the permission to play we must recognise the inherent value we carry as individuals. A value that is not linked to what we say or do but simply exists. And so; play is an act of compassion.

You can't fail at play. We need space in our lives for things we can't fail at, things we can't judge ourselves on.

We feel frustration as the person we are at the core, the things we know and understand to be beautiful and true, get lost in our quest to achieve. A gap forms between 'what we want to do' and 'how we are doing it'. The gap widens as we focus our energies more on achieving things, reaching the next goal, next level, next anything and less on what we sense, feel, share and do. The frustration builds as this causes us to compromise, to stretch and bend in ways that feel not quite right. So that even when what you are trying to do is done it feels hollow and you're compelled to jump straight to the next thing.

When we play we close the gap between "what we are trying to do" and "how we are doing it" because they become the same thing. Because of this we become perhaps the most authentic version of ourselves. This nurtures us, this is compassion.



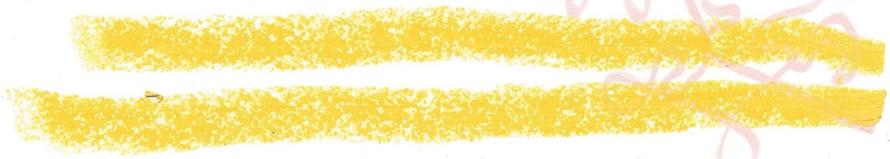
Chaos

We are always closer to chaos than we think we are. A sense of order can never be entirely concrete. But this doesn't mean we need to be scared all the time. Play accepts chaos, it cycles between chaos and order. The transitions fuel the process. Play never ends it just enters new phases.

Our reaction to chaos is often to try and exert control. We build up whole systems of living and understanding the world based around trying to control it, control people. We limit ourselves to false binaries. To 'us and them', 'body and mind', 'man and woman', 'human and animal', 'adult and child', 'ugly and beautiful' 'worthwhile and useless', 'good and evil'. We rely on these distinctions to make the world less confusing, less chaotic but in doing so we lose the beauty and nuance of humanity. No lines can be drawn through this galaxy of ideas and being.

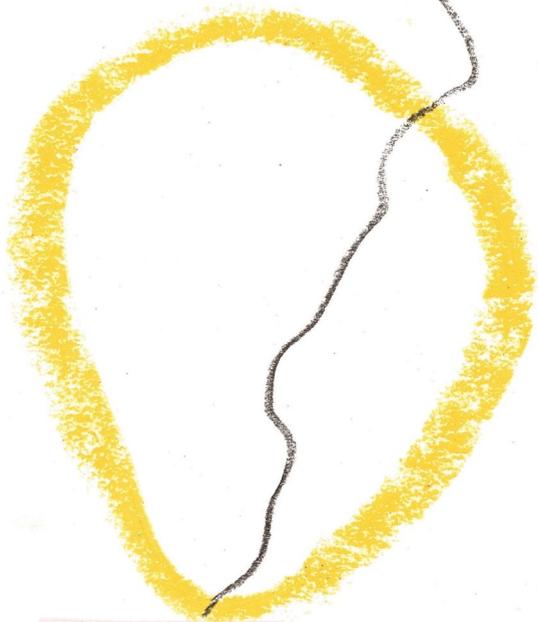
Embracing this as an adult is tricky because "successful" has become synonymous with "in control." But if you played as a child you must have trusted the process once, the cycle of chaos and order, of understanding and confusion. Playing as an adult can help us feel safe to trust in that process again.

Let life be complicated, let people be confusing, let yourself be okay with not understanding everything. Let yourself play.



Justified

We have this need to convince ourselves that play is important because otherwise we don't consider it worthwhile. So many of our public conversations about play centre on legitimising it: as learning, as exercise, as anything other than just play. And of course, play is a part of learning, play is important in our neurological, emotional, social development, play does enhance the health of children and adults in various different ways. But even if it didn't do all these things, even without the data, the scientists, the attainment and wellbeing tick boxes, the inhuman paperwork, play would still matter. Play would still be a human necessity. Otherwise it would have been wiped out years ago. We need play but we don't need to justify it. Play justifies itself.



Joyful

A playful life is one that moves away from seeking happiness and towards experiencing joy. In a playful life all emotions are valid and all people valuable.

Play is being and becoming

Play is radical

Play is compassionate

Play is chaos and order and everything in between

Play is justified

Play is joy

Play is messy, risky and fun.

Play is colour, light and sound.

Play is taking space, creating space, sharing space

Play is facing your boundaries and fears.

Play is being with nature

Play is being inside your body and inside your head

Play is being together, being alone and being alone together

Play is free but not always easy

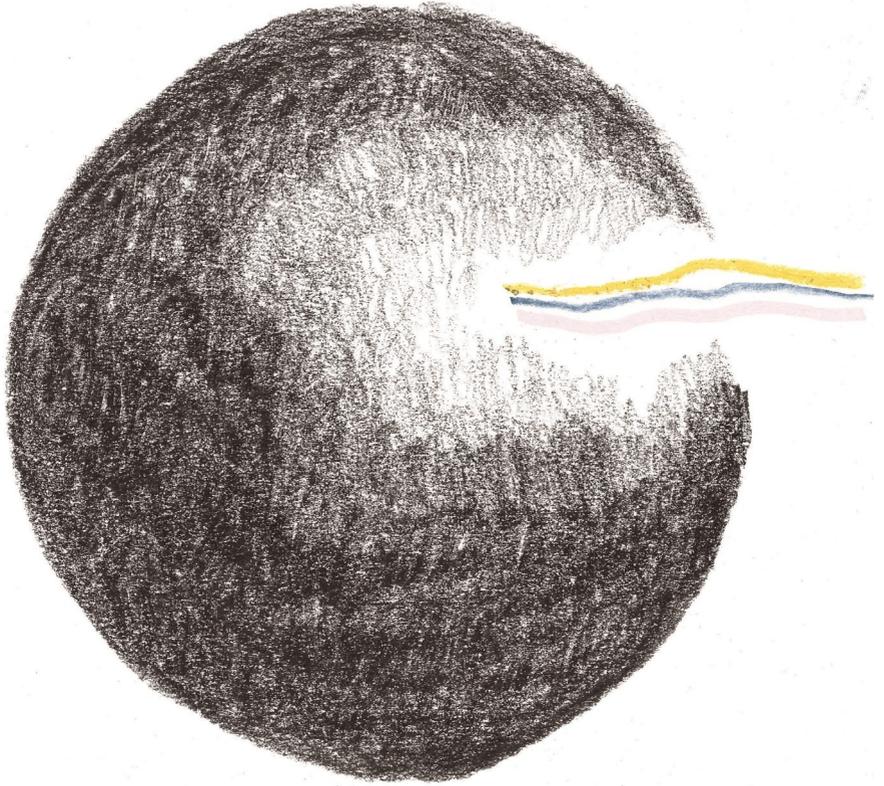
Play is yours and mine and ours.



Play is

Play is

Play is



www.playradical.com