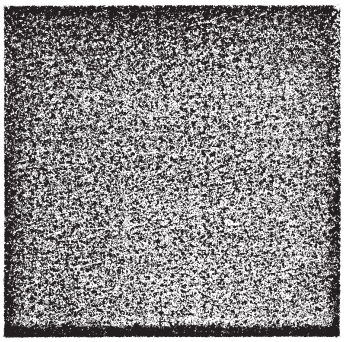
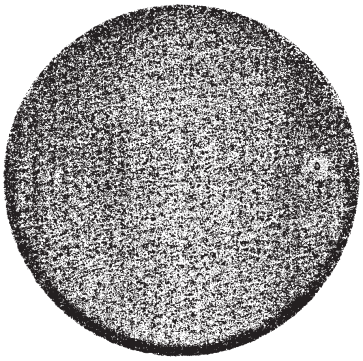
A design manifesto

Inspired by Bruce Mau's 'Incomplete manifesto for growth' in his monograph *Life style*, I wrote my own manifesto in 2001 when I was about to graduate from art school. Designers have long struggled with the paradox of being intuitive and rational. Here, I intend to embrace and celebrate this paradox. This version has been slightly edited and modified. (KEITH TAM 2001, 2013)



Rational



Intuitive

Control
Use rational thinking to ground your work; this gives work credibility. Make function your priority over form.

Follow rules
Follow rules that are tried and true. Learn from the past. Why reinvent the wheel when there is no need to? Don't 'experiment' just because it's cool.

Design for the public
Help make the world a more accessible and understandable place through design. Design things that people don't notice but help them immensely.

Design is a science
Design is a science that involves the study of human behaviours. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we know our audience and users.

Do not follow trends
Look at the project at hand and use an approach that fits. Trends are style-based, not idea-based. A style is never a solution; it is superficial.

Put things in order
Make your communication clear and easily understandable. Some things call for structure and order. Consider how you want be understood according to the purpose and audience.

Be objective and unbiased
Always strife to communicate in the most unbiased, transparent and objective way. Honesty and integrity are to be revered.

Make deadlines, and know when to stop
Deadlines and pressure can enhance the creative process, and prompt you to places that you wouldn't go otherwise. It is important to know when to stop in your creative process and complete the project on time.

Loose control
Let things happen by sheer chance. Remember that we can never be in total control as designers. Chance makes the work (and the world) more interesting.

Trust your emotions
If something moves you then it must have some value in it. Things that move people have souls. Always strife for making things that have souls.

Admit that you like things that are beautiful
A lot of things about design cannot be rationally justified. Sometimes something works simply because it is subjectively beautiful. Design is very much about making beautiful things.

Design is an art
Express yourself with design. There is no such thing as total objectivity. Do not remove your own self from your design work. Hear your own voice in your work.

Design for yourself
Take time to design for yourself. Initiate your own projects, ignore clients and markets. Have no expectations. Create your own content. Allow time to reflect and experiment.

Break rules and experiment
Just play, do things that don't make sense, or downright ugly. You might discover something of value.

Don't be too strategic
The design process should be organic, or cyclical. Don't be too goal-oriented. Too many expectations tend to ruin the process. Let the process drive the work.

Embrace chaos, ambiguity and imperfections
Our world is chaotic. Chaos allows us room to discover. Ambiguity makes us wonder and provides room to think. Imperfections is a part of being human.