

Hi.

I'm Ian. I'm from New Zealand.

I've been commissioned by Vasco Futscher to write this press release for the exhibition of the Swiss artist Tobias Madison. It's not what I usually do, but I couldn't turn Vasco down. And anyways, a bit of change is always welcome. I run an ethical real estate operation in Lisbon, Paris and Buenos Aires. We offer a kind of blockchain-based worldwide community in which young artists own a share in a property until, well... Gentrification happens anyways... But maybe I'll start from the beginning:

On the 13th of March 2024 I was screening the film Titane by the French director Julia Ducounau in the basement of a property that my organisation recently had had acquired. The evening was neat. A lot of people had shown up and I was generally in a good mood. On the screen the female protagonist was ripping the piercing out of a sex worker's nipple and I noticed a young British man seated on my right, pumping his fist in the air and yelling something like: „French People Rule“. I smirked and glanced over to the man on my right, whom I had noticed earlier. He was handsome and boyish, in a Michael Cera kind of way. His complete disinterest in the movie was attractive and when he got up from his chair with an ambivalent shrug I decided that I was gonna wait for approximately fifteen seconds and then excuse myself from the screening too. In the corner of my eye I saw him climb up the stairs. I got up and followed him, navigating the smoke filled basement. Up the stairs where the sodium-vapour lamps from outside flooded the warehouse with it's orange golden haze.

I found the man outside, crouched over a Siamese cat. He appeared to be playing a game that involved the cat clawing the neon-green string on a keychain. Mentally I tried to decide whether I should approach him as an artist or as a real estate developer, both of which come with their own sets of body language and linguistic particularities. The thought to just lift him up and slam him on the hood of the car, my hand grabbing his crotch and my tongue stuck deeply down his throat also crossed my mind. But it was hard to make out whether he was a homosexual or just pretending to be one.

As if struck by some premonition the man got up, turned around, reached out his hand and introduced himself with: „Hi, I'm Tobias Madison“.

From here on things get a bit blurry. But if my recollections are right two women and a man appeared from behind a car that was parked there, more or less at the same time. I think they came from behind a Red VW Passat. One of the women reached out her hand and said, with a French accent: „Hi, I'm Marie Matusz“. Then the guy, who I was sure I had seen at the neighbourhood grocery store before, reached out his hand and said: „Hi, I'm Vasco Futscher“. And finally the other woman, her voice timid, greeted me with: „Hi. I'm Africa“. She didn't bother to give her last name. I quickly assessed the group and opted for artist. We all chatted for a while and I shared my joint with them. I have to say that Tobias Madison struck me as quite unpleasant and just generally really uncomfortable to be around. His breath smelled of Vegan Ice Cream, Sage and Sichuan Peppercorn. And he seemed to have trouble looking anyone into the eyes while talking to them.

For whatever reason I ended up hanging out all night with this group of Bohemians. We retired to the basement studio of Vasco. His gorgeous ceramics were displayed on a lush bookshelf, reeking of Old World Intellect. A wooden board with paint spills, propped up on two sawhorses, served as an improvised table. We drank wine and talked until the early hours of the morning. Tobias Madison was doing drugs... A lot of drugs... Like... More drugs than I have ever seen anybody do. And I'm from New Zealand.

Vasco was just genuinely a sweetheart and a great conversationalist. His knowledge spun from Portuguese mid-century furniture design to the closing arguments in the prosecution of Gilles de Rais, who apparently was the greatest child murderer of all times - at least in numbers. Marie was delightful with all her witty comments. And hilariously funny. She was really tuning into the Lives of Angels record that I had suggested we put on, impromptu analysing the lyrics for deeper meaning. And Africa... I could have fallen in love with her mind right there if I hadn't decided to allow myself to be only attracted to the male sex when I was eleven years old.

We were in the midst of a really interesting conversation about a new farming technique that simulates an indigenous biodiversity on a hexagonal grid when, with a grunt, Tobias Madison leaned aggressively onto my body, lost balance and fell flat onto the table board. The whole structure gave in and collapsed. I looked down at his sweaty body laying there, between spilled red wine and improvised ash trays. His hand appeared to be yearning for a small plastic device and was desperately stretching out towards it. When his fingers reached the object Tobias Madison grasped it and pulled it towards himself, simultaneously curling into a ball as if to protect a treasure from imaginary enemies. He looked like that retarded creature in the Lord of the Rings.

Vasco, Marie and Africa helped their friend get up from his miserable position. Without offering any sort of apology Tobias Madison grabbed a chair and started inspecting the little plastic device that had caused his neurochemically distorted head to topple over. It was an apparatus that, with the help of a pistol grip, could imprint small letters onto a black plastic sticker band that seemingly was rolled up inside of the machine. A labelling device of sorts. Tobias Madison sat there like a monkey who had just stolen a digital camera, unsure as to the purpose of his bounty. He shook it and then held it against his ear like one would with a seashell, to hear the illusion of the ocean. The device gave off repetitive clicking noises as Tobias Madison squeezed down on the trigger of the attached pistol grip, marvelling at the plastic strip that grew in length in mechanic little steps. He looked utterly pathetic.

After a period of genuine observation Tobias Madison had figured out that he could change the letters that the machine prints by turning an attached wheel. The rest of us tried to return to our conversation. But the clicking sounds emanating from the device, alternating gasps and giggles and the like made it impossible to hold on to a clear thought. These were almost Neandertalian expressions of joy and awe at the ability to record a doubtlessly primitive semiotic chain. And so we just sat there, mesmerised by this creature who, with drool dripping from his mouth, tried to give form to whatever deranged thought was going through his head. After every click the moment was pregnant with anticipation as Tobias Madison, twisting the wheel with his amphibian fingers, entered a state of deep concentration which sole purpose it must have been not to forget the letter he had punched onto the plastic strip

a second before. A childhood memory flashed up in front of my eyes: Me and my little brother sitting in the bush, watching a Kiwi desperately trying to open a walnut with its long beak.

After what seemed like an eternity Tobias Madison held up a strip of black plastic, with the kind of satisfied grin that babies have on their faces after they defecated. Marie Matusz grabbed the strip and read it out loud: NOBODY WANTS TO SEE A MOVIE WITH TOBIAS MADISON IN IT. She started laughing in an entirely uncontrolled manner. Africa chimed in too, and I couldn't stop staring at her nostrils that inflated and deflated like a beached sea creature played at double speed. Vasco jumped up from his chair, opened a large drawer, grabbed a passe-partout and ripped the plastic strip from Tobias Madison's hands. On the floor he lifted the protection foil that made the back of the strip sticky and placed it neatly into the center of the passe-partout. I was perplexed. Was he suggesting that this statement which' sole purpose had been a petty and entirely transparent cry for attention could somehow pass as an artwork?

Tobias Madison got up and fumbled a plastic bag out of the pocket of his jeans. With the help of his credit card he cut sixteen lines of cocaine, each about six centimetres long. They were arranged in four groups of four. Rolling up a five Euro bill he proceeded to snort all of them, four at a time, a split second break as he moved from one grouping to the next. He did not look up once. Upon finishing his gaze focused on some invisible point in the distance that only he could see. But then he sat back down and once again turned his attention to the apparatus. All of us had watched this little interlude in the same way one watches a person getting off the bus or tapping their credit card at the supermarket cashier. It just happened.

Marie was in the middle of telling us the story of her grandmother who had spent her life painting elaborate copies of Van Gogh, Vermeer, Manet and Picasso and then, in a heart-breaking turn of events lost all of them to a fire, when Tobias Madison with an agonising and prolonged moan held up another plastic strip. This one read: I NEED TO HAVE SEX WITH SOMEONE WITH BLUE EYES SO THAT MY BABY CAN HAVE BLUE EYES.

Again the plastic strip was immediately framed, this time accompanied by loud cheers of appreciation escaping the mouths of my new bohemian friends. „That is so...” Africa struggled for a moment to find the right word. „...smart”. I couldn't contain my uncomfortable laughter. Why would they pay any attention to this deeply anti-social person? Let alone encourage him to continue with his deranged behaviour. Were they playing an elaborate joke on him? I looked once more at Tobias Madison, his head tilted in an uncomfortable manner, teething biting down on his tongue. I tried to remember my first impression of him, if only to reassure myself that this creature was in fact a human being. The fact that a few hours ago I had contemplated raping him now deeply disgusted me. „C'est génial!”, ushered from Marie's lips interrupted my shame. Her excitement seemed genuine. Vasco had in the meantime taken a cross-legged seat in front of Tobias Madison, who had returned to punching more language garbage into his little machine.

Vasco's eyes gleamed with excitement as Tobias Madison held up another plastic strip, like Moses had done so with a stone tablet, more than two thousand years ago. This one read: GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS. LOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOONG GIRLS. Marie was not that impressed and shrugged in disbelief: „Come on, that's too easy, everybody likes girls with long legs.” But

Tobias Madison shook his head: „Not long legs. - LOOOOOOOOOOO...” His arms stretched out slowly into the vertical, like an eagle, spreading his wings. His eyes projected a pure and unshakable conviction: „... OOOOOOOOONG GIRLS.”

Everyone gasped for air. Their minds were blown. Their eyes were glazed over with the kind of serene tranquility that people have at the end of yoga classes. No one moved or even drew a breath, as if they were collectively pretending that they were in a movie onto which God had pressed pause, bringing everything to a halt. An image sculpted in time.

It took me a moment to name the feeling that was piercing inside of me, hollowing me out. I felt abandoned like an infant born into a desert wasteland, no mother in sight. It was loneliness. Supreme and soul-shattering loneliness.

I had somehow tricked my mind into thinking that I enjoyed the company of these people over the last hours only to come to the sudden realisation that I had in fact absolutely nothing in common with them. They genuinely believed that Tobias Madison somehow had insights into some sort of mystical truth inherent in language. They had been fooled into a cult-like appreciation of a false prophet. They were victims. Victims of a total charlatanry. And I certainly wasn't going to be one. So I grabbed my jacket and made for the stairs.

A tortured, low pitched sound, like a collapsed lung. Tobias Madison's body had interrupted the silence and was now twisting in contortions, arms flapping and flailing manically like an octopus with a brain aneurysm. His grotesque motions made very little sense to me and I was just gonna leave. But then the little lever in my head that reads „moral consciousness” was pressed and I reassessed the situation. Was he perhaps affected by a mental illness? I couldn't tell, but I had to make sure. He groaned again and the plastic device, to which had been clinging this whole time, dropped onto to the floor. I felt pity and wanted to relieve him from his agony and so I made a step forward to help him pick up the plastic device. But Tobias Madison growled and flashed his teeth at me, foaming from a seemingly rabies-infected mouth. I carefully stepped backwards, staring blankly into his eyes, never losing contact. There was absolutely nothing there.

Tobias Madison had calmed down as soon as the device was back in his hands. He was once again punching letters into a new plastic strip. Marie and Africa had taken a cross-legged seat in front of Tobias Madison, next to Vasco. I decided to do the same. Tobias Madison's clicking now had calmer rhythm, more crackling of a record player than agitated symphony. But his face somehow conserved the intense energy that had dominated the room some minutes ago, his features displaying in rapid succession the kind of deformations and uncontrolled mannerism that one usually only finds in a person that is affected by Down's syndrome. Disturbed and uncertain I looked at Vasco, Marie and Africa. There was a warmth emanating from them that immediately calmed me down. Empathy. Genuine love for their friend. I tried to at least pretend to send the same kind of energy into the space, if only to feel closer to them. And it worked. There was a feeling that all barriers separating us from each other were collapsing and thought just flowed effortlessly between us. Unconstrained by the burden of translation into language. Words just came to me, but as shapes and colours that nevertheless carried their originating intention. And so much more.

Tobias Madison sat across from me, smiling in a somewhat deranged manner, as if existing besides himself and at the core of his very being at the same time. A click of the machine and the outlines of these two simultaneously existing Tobias Madisons reacted as a resonance body, vibrating and articulating a visual interpretation of the sound waves. But with a slight delay from each other. There were two states of being, separated from each other by time. And both states appeared to be true, creating in their difference from each other not disbelief but ... I struggled back then to find a word for something that is truer than truth and I still do today. Tobias Madison opened his mouth, his second presence followed and a green orb bubbled from their mouth, moving gently into the midst of us all where it floated. Its surface was that of magma, smoke, watercolours, milk in tea. Another click of the machine and the bubble bursted. Tobias Madison had returned to being a singular being. I tried to remember my first interaction with him, only a few hours ago. I tried to recall our initial conversation but no matter how hard I tried my thoughts were immediately overwritten by an immediate and eternal-seeming essence of now-ness, as if past and future bore no relevance at all. Or rather as if they didn't exist at all.

There was only Tobias Madison and the clicking of the truth machine.

My thoughts abruptly turned back to the paranoid. Did he suffer from a mental illness? Or was he the messiah? Was there a difference? I tried to sort my thoughts out. But everything seemed incredibly complicated. If he did suffer from a mental illness then perhaps Vasco, Marie and Africa had not played a joke on him but in fact were loving and supportive friends to this neurodivergent being. They had encouraged him to, despite his mental limitations, give expression to his thoughts and feelings. Perhaps his incredibly high drug intake had been a complex prescribed medication plan that would grant him the kind of closeness to other human beings that his illness prevented. And how horrible had I been to Tobias Madison? I had judged this poor man, measuring him by the standards of a polite society that he inevitably could never be a full participant of. I had inflicted violence onto him. And isn't that exactly is the violence that we all inflict on others on a daily basis? Isn't the vilest of all brutal transgressions that we will always only be ourselves and never the other? I had a sudden urge to apologise but how could I possibly apologise? I thought that perhaps if I would somehow find a way to make Tobias Madison understand how deeply remorseful I was that it could serve as an apology to everyone else who was not Tobias Madison. But who was I fooling? Not a lifetime of devotion to Tobias Madison would be enough to forgive my cardinal sin - My existence.

Another plastic strip was spewed out. This one was in French and even though it didn't speak the language I understood nevertheless and the essence of the saying flowed into our trance, holding each other's hands and humming in a low pitched frequency. We were now all in a place outside of time. There was no longer any direction, there was only truth. Eternity seemed to build up like a wave and come crashing down, the water folding into endlessly stretched out sheets and building up again.

And then another plastic strip was snapped from the machine. It felt like an umbilical cord that I was attached to was cut. I shook my head and looked at the plastic strip It read: WATERLILIES. Tobias Madison handed it to Vasco for framing and got up. Everyone giggled as they stared at the considerably smaller plastic strip. I felt excluded. I didn't get it.

When Tobias Madison returned from the bathroom I decided I was just gonna ask him: „What does it mean?“ He towered above me standing, a smirk in his face. Taking a drag from his cigarette and combing his hair back he talked all of a sudden like a normal person: „You know... It's a kind of joke about expectations and reality. People essentially all want something beautiful from art, like Monet's waterlilies. But they are too embarrassed to admit to it. Too many people equate a simple beauty with stupidity. I like Monet's waterlilies. And hence: Waterlilies. I don't know.“

I left without saying a word.

Look. I'm by no means an expert on contemporary art. But this „artwork“ that Tobias Madison created that night is complete and utter shit. It's plainly said: Nothing.

Back on the street I walked until I could find an ATM. In five separate transactions I withdrew one thousand Euros. Then I walked some more until I spotted a homeless man who had built himself a simple dwelling out of cardboard and a piece of fabric draped over a shopping cart. I shook him and held the thousand Euros in front of his face. There was a quiet understanding between the two of us. The man climbed out of his sleeping bag and pocketed the bills in a secret bag under his belt. Then he stood in front of me, expressionless.

My first punch broke his Maxilla. I could feel it crashing under my fingers. My second punch ripped through his ramus and a thin river of blood started to flow over his lips. My third punch collapsed his sphenoid bone. Then I stopped counting.

I was really surprised when Vasco Futscher reached out to me and asked if I could write the press release for this exhibition. He told me that he, Marie and Africa all couldn't quite remember what had happened during that night and that they were hoping that I could recall and say a few things about the artworks. He also said that they all remembered me as a very sharp, intuitive and generous thinker, which of course flattered me.

I told Vasco that I found Tobias Madison genuinely to be a bullshit artist, a great pretender and also an absolutely despicable human being. And that I had nothing positive to say about his artwork and most certainly wasn't going to be the hypocrite that would give the work a proper art-historical and contextual framing, even if they paid me for it. And that they maybe better ask someone else, should they want that. But Vasco Futscher told me that they all weren't really friends with Tobias Madison anymore and had decided to just put on the show with his artworks to turn a quick profit. And to get rid of the works, because they somehow haunted them. So I agreed.

I hope this was helpful for anyone at this exhibition, and if not... Well... I don't know what to say. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Ian

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian". The letter "I" is tall and has a long horizontal stroke extending to the left. The "a" is written in a cursive style with a loop at the top and a tail that goes under the "n". The "n" is also cursive with a small loop at the top and a tail that goes under the "a".