Portfolio

Maartje Sanders

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Updated in October '26

Biography

Maartje Sanders is a visual artist and cognitive neuroscientist. In the summer of 2026, she graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, alongside completing her Master's in Cognitive Neuroscience at Radboud University in Nijmegen, where she currently lives and works. Drawing on this combination, she explores how we experience ourselves, our bodies, and the world around us. Her work often begins with perception: the mechanisms through which our brains turn what we perceive into a reality.

Artist Statement

When you know the rules, you're able to break them.

Through the soft shadows of my lashes, I see my thoughts flickering. I feel them flowing across my skin. In my practice, I try to observe the inner rules through which my senses generate reality. I begin to unpick that fabric, thread by thread. In the gaps, my fantasies get air to breathe and grow like a garden. A landscape I move through slowly and attentively, like a naturalist in search of birds.

My sculptures, video's and texts are landmarks within this internal geography. They bear witness to what might otherwise disappear: minuscule, fleeting visions that rarely survive outside the self. Through them, I reconsider how I remember, how I think about thinking, how I think about seeing, how I think about knowing.

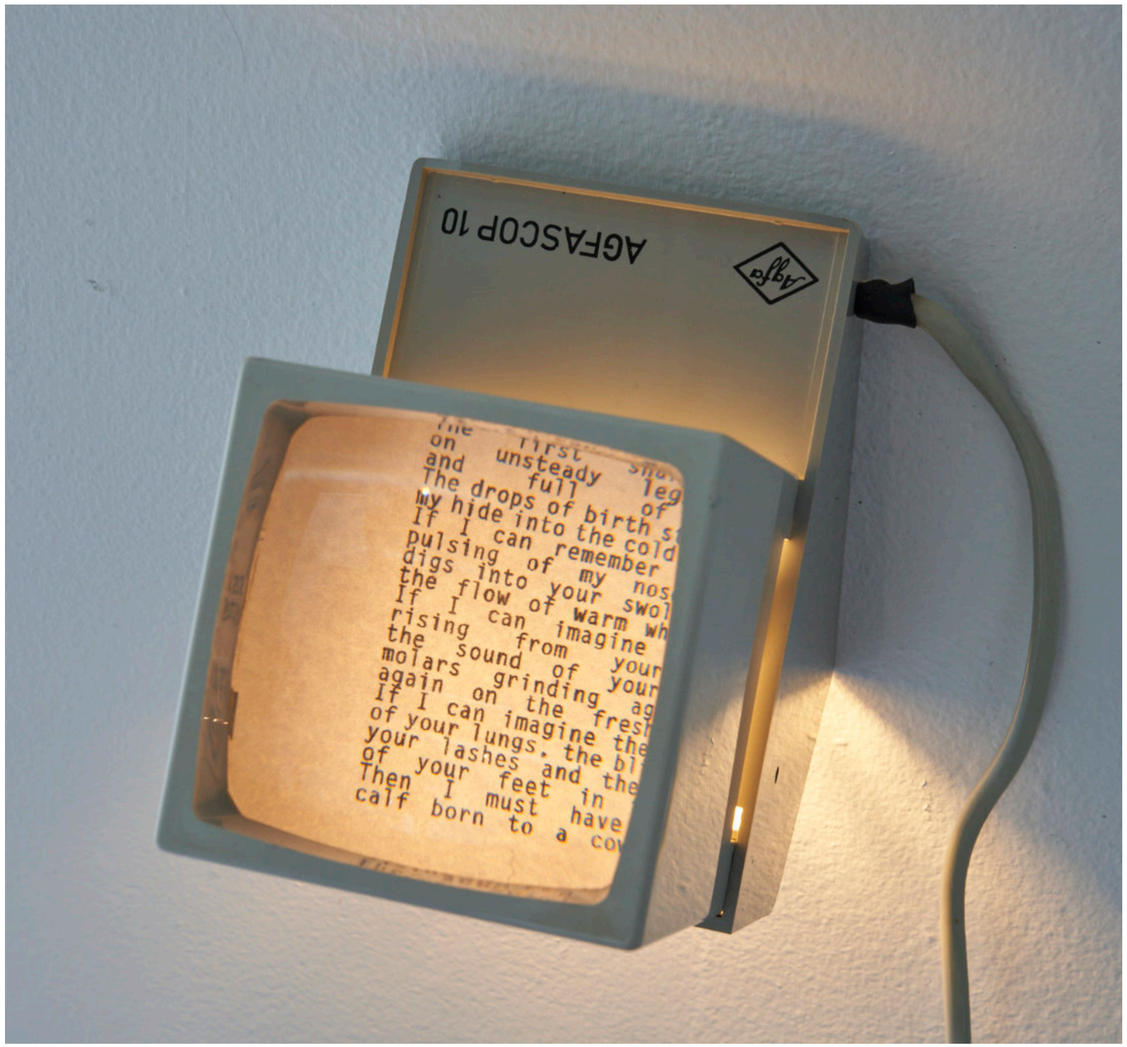
My work is not necessarily meant to be thought about, or even felt about, but known within its own epistemology. A kind of logic that runs through the spine.



Thoughts Are Bells (2026)

Installation (500 × 500 cm), comprising a sculpture (250 × 100 cm), floor coverings (clay, organic material, carpet, beeswax), and text.





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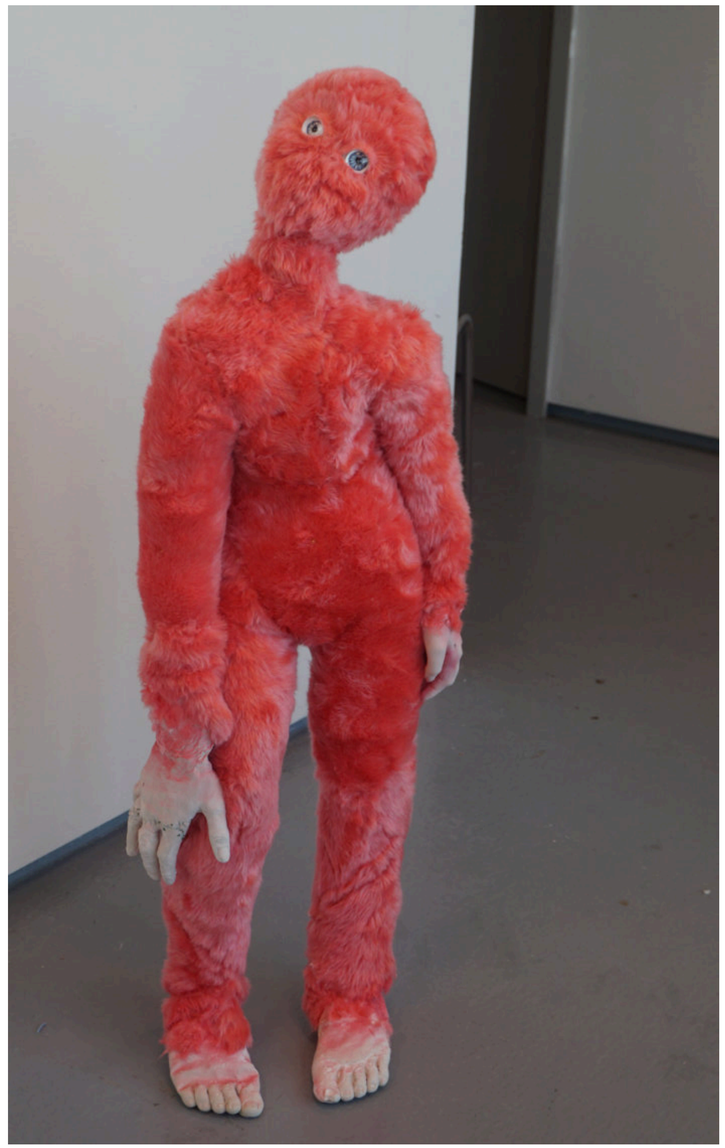




Where were you even going this time of day? (2025)

Installation, comprising two mixed-media sculptures (hare: 40 × 90 cm; branch: 50 × 50 cm), cyanotype on carpet (120 × 80 cm), and text.





Unnamed (2025)

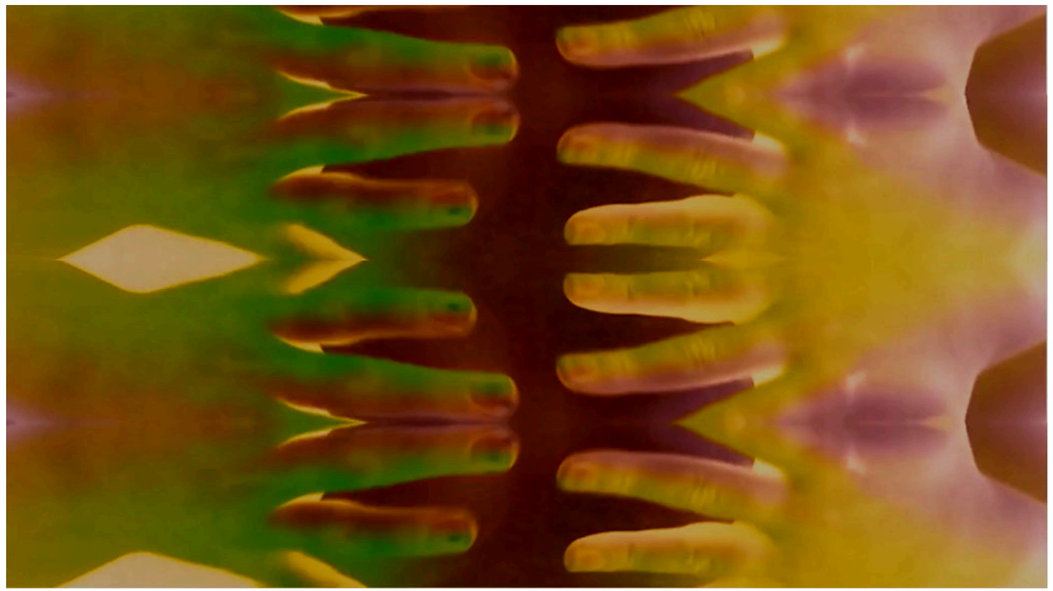
Sculpture (135 × 30 × 30 cm).





Jackdaw (2026), video stills

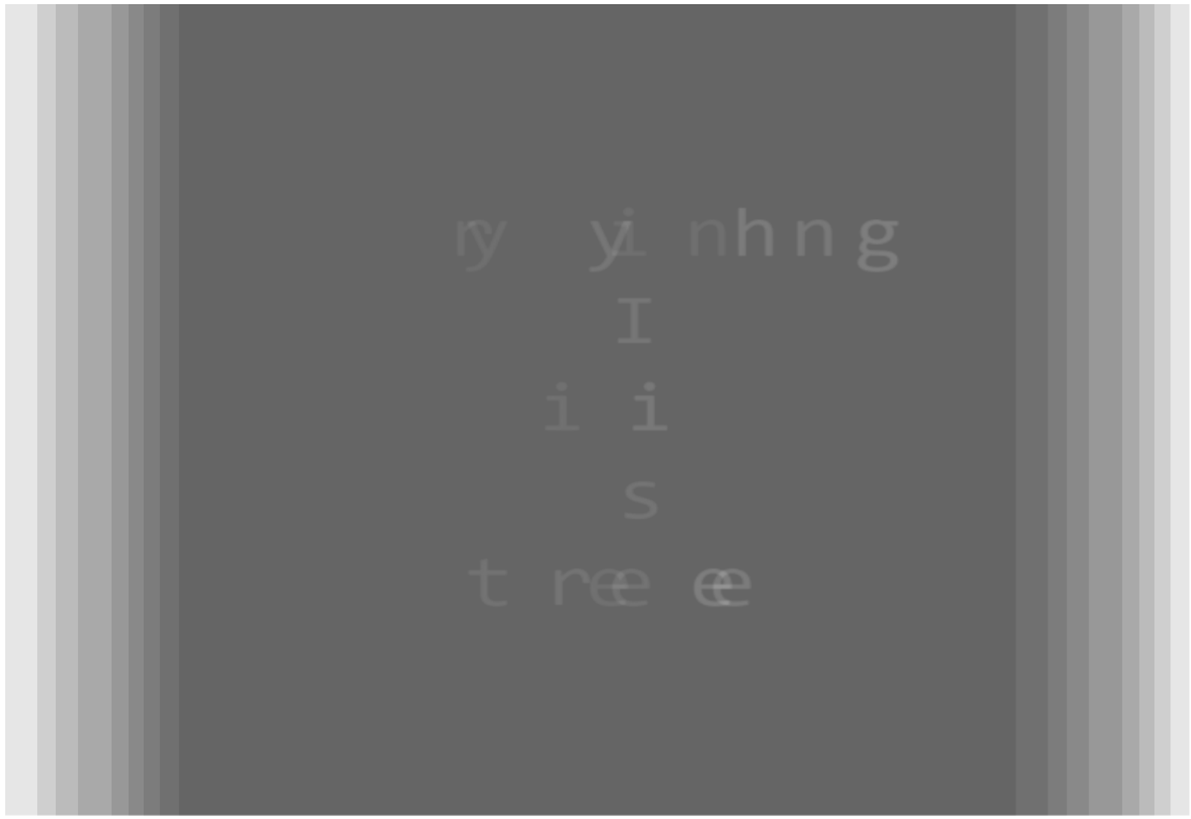
Motion extraction video (3:31)





FUNG (2023), video stills

Video (2:38)



Everything I write is true (2026), video stills

Videoloop

" The thesis is a bold project informed by cognitive science, embryology and philosophy that examines questions regarding origin, differentiation, individuation and subjectivity. These questions find their counterpart in her visual practice. She recognises the relationship between the two practices as reciprocal as if the artistic space of imagination feeds the scientific space of imagination and vice versa. It appears to be a core theme of the thesis in which the creation or becoming of an entity (or perhaps identity) arises through interaction delimitation and tension.

[...]

But what makes the thesis special is that by shifting perspectives in the two complementary columns of text as in each column separately wondrous textual depths emerge. From scientific vistas derived from the detailed study of the processes of formation at a molecular level in the uterine canals to speculation about black holes in the cosmos—as a poetic musing on the dead body of her mother and the contingency of her own origin as a cell nucleus—it sometimes makes you as a reader dizzy. It is in that dizziness that every form of hierarchical thinking dissolves and makes way for a poetic wonder that both informs and confronts the reader with some tension with the urgency of her groundbreaking discoveries far-reaching insights and established connections. " - Willem van Weeldern (as part of the "Spill the Thesis" selection comittee.)

Pia Mater, Dura Mater, an Anatomy of Tension (2026)

Thesis, selected for presentation at Spill the Thesis, Gerrit Rietveld Academie.

You could take on the candle pose, in which your toes stretch way above your shoulders.

You can't help but acknowledge the way you always look down at them from up there.

Dear toes...

you'll start,

I've come to the conclusion that I, me, on my own, am a useless piece of shit,

you'll rightfully continue...

I ask you for mercy, for I now know that I'm nothing without your unfathomable wisdom and strength,

and I pray for you to accept the shortcomings that constitute me and love me regardless,

for I have come to know, but not control them.

Then, you'd greet the jackdaw as a sign of your willingness to surrender to the unknown.

It's too early on the weekend for anyone to be up right now.

The silhouette in the cold fog lingering in the grass calls you to the silence.

It's crisp.

You slowly get off your bike, a tightness in the muscles of your eyes.

As long as you're able to hold your breath, he'll stay there

looking at you.

Behind the thin, gentle veil of the morning.

You wish to have a body so small it can hide beneath the mist,

to feel the freshness of the first hours of the day on soft fur.

You could glide through the stillness and disappear without leaving a trace.

Where were you even going this time of day?

Fables (2025)

Zine. Excerpts from the publication.

Abstract

Art engagement involves an exchange between internal and external domains, in which sensory input becomes integrated through self-related processing. The present study investigated whether an art-viewing task designed to elicit either self-referential or other-referential thought could influence the stability of the self, as represented by the susceptibility to a Body Swap Illusion (BSI), and whether creative traits moderated the effects of these tasks. Participants completed a self-referential art task, an artist-referential art task, and a control task, before and after undergoing a VR-based Body Swap Illusion. Illusion susceptibility was assessed using a novel proprioceptive drift measure, alongside self-reported measures. The paradigm successfully captured a core component of body illusions: proprioceptive drift. Although no overall differences in BSI susceptibility were observed between the self- and artist-referential tasks, exploratory moderation analyses indicated that task effects varied as a function of individual participant characteristics. In particular, divergent thinking appeared as a moderator of proprioceptive drift and subjective embodiment. Individuals with higher levels of divergent thinking showed a stronger decrease in proprioceptive drift following the self-referential task and an increase in drift following the artist-referential task. Variability in emotional responses to the artworks also emerged as a potential moderating factor. These findings suggest that the influence of self- and other-referential engagement with artworks on body illusion susceptibility may depend on individual differences in higher-order cognitive processes.

Bringing the Otherside in Modulating Body Ownership Through Art (2026)

Master thesis, in preperation for scientific publication.

Education

BA Fine Art and Design (Unstable Media), Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam

MSc Cognitive Neuroscience,

Radboud University, Nijmegen

BSc (medical) Biology,

Radboud University, Nijmegen

Other

2026 Co-founder of "*de Werktitel*", Nijmegen based experimental art community

Presentations and Exhibitions

2026 Amsterdam Art Week, Volkshotel, Amsterdam (Selected artist)

2026 NFC Digital Art Biennale, Amsterdam

2026 Rietveld Graduation Show, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam

2026 Spill the Thesis, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (Selected for presentation)

2025 SISISPEX, Amsterdam (groupshow)

2024 OFF_Space, Amsterdam (groupshow)

Press and Publications

2026 Rietveld Review(ed) - Featured artist

2026 Het Parool - Interview and feature on Thoughts Are Bells



Are You Dreaming? (2023)
Interactive code. A popup appears at random intervals, asking whether you are dreaming.

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