

LINKEE ONDER  
00'6 OPTREKKEN

# The Floor is Lava

Sander Breure &  
Witte van Hulzen

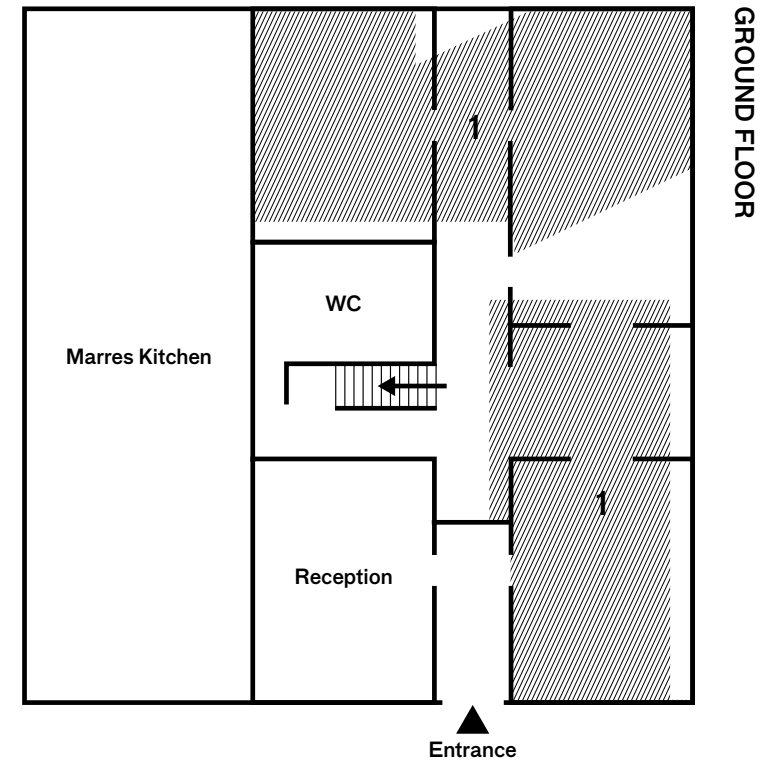
17 March —  
4 August 2019

## PROLOGUE

The artists' duo Sander Breure and Witte van Hulzen works on an ambitious oeuvre that shuns no type of material, medium or story. They work with video, performance, plaster, drawings and music. It seems a trademark of theirs to always take a new direction just when people thought they had a sense of what their work is about. Their versatility is anchored in two characteristics that apply to all their works, firstly the attention for human proportions: the human face, character and behavior, and, as a consequence, the social space in which those human qualities gain public meaning. As a corollary, the second quality is the artists' view on that social space — always from the perspective of the theater.

These qualities make the duo perfectly suited for the program in which Marres invites artists to not just drop off existing works and position them in the space, but rather to transform the entire house into a reservoir, a frame of thought and an installation of their work. Artists who have preceded the duo did so by, for example, creating a house within a house (Levi van Veluw) or turning the Marres house and garden into a meditational environment (Marijn van Kreijl). Sander Breure and Witte van Hulzen continue along those lines by creating a landscape of four installations that encourage visitors to tell their own story about the current state of human qualities in social spaces.

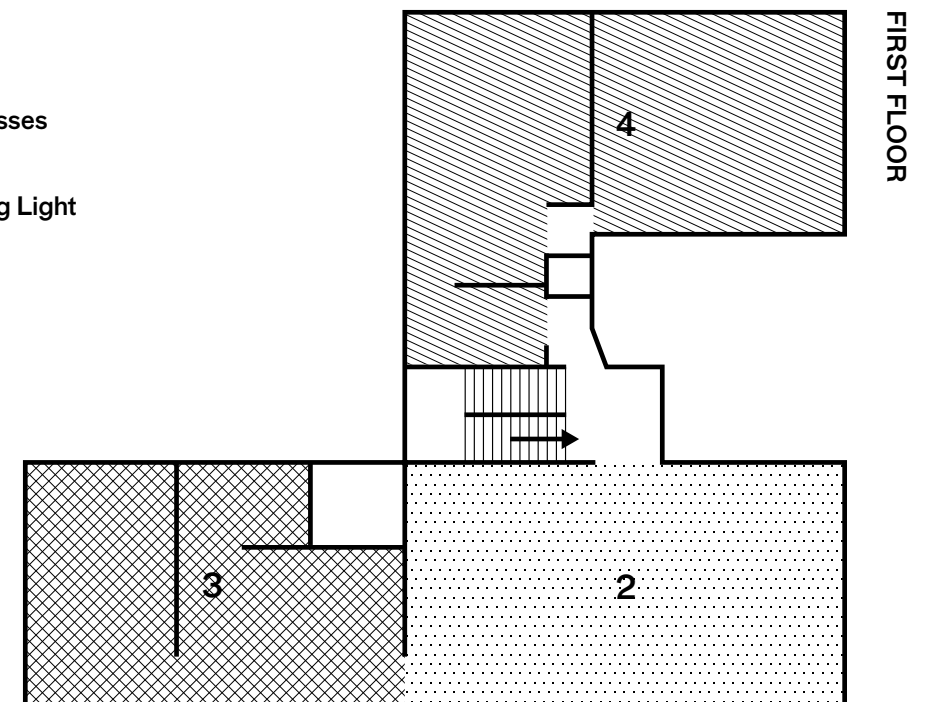
### 1. The Floor is Lava



### 2. The Thief

### 3. Seven Addresses

### 4. In a Flickering Light





Hercules Segers, *View through the Window of Segers' House toward Noorderkerk*, c.1622–c.1630. Etching, 141 × 177 mm. Collection Rijksmuseum

# 1. The Floor is Lava



*View from our Studio*, 2018. Steel, wood, bitumen, lead, textile, aluminum porcelain, 2015 × 250 × 170 cm. Courtesy tegenboschvanvreden

I was sitting on the roof of the State Publishing House, making sure that everything was in order, because no sooner do you overlook something than something happens. You can't leave the city unwatched. And who will keep an eye on the city, if not me? So in case of some kind of disorder, we can stop it right away.

Statutes of the State Publishing Roof Watch

First rule: A Watchman should be a man of the Oberiu confession with the following characteristics:

1. Moderate height.
2. Brave.
3. Far-seeing.
4. A stentorian and powerful voice.
5. Mighty and plain spoken.
6. Able to catch every kind of sound and not easily bored.
7. A smoker or, in an extreme case, a non-smoker.

Second rule (what he should do):

1. A Watchman should sit at the very highest point of the roof and, not sparing himself, should assiduously look from side to side, for which purpose he is instructed to turn his head continuously from left to right and vice versa, moving it in both directions until his vertebrae can bear it no longer.
2. A Watchman should see to it that good order be maintained in the city, ensuring:
  - a. That people walk around not just anyhow but as the Lord God himself has ordained.
  - b. That people travel only in those kinds of carriages made specifically for that purpose.
  - c. That people not walk on roofs, cornices, pediments or other raised places.

*Note:* Carpenters, painters and other laborers are permitted.

Third rule (what a Watchman should not do):

1. Ride on the roof on horseback.
2. Flirt with the ladies.
3. Insert his words into the conversations of passersby.
4. Chase after sparrows or adopt their habits.
5. Call policemen "Pharaohs."
6. Spit in your eye.
7. Grieve.

Fourth rule (the rights of a Watchman):

A Watchman has the right to:

1. Sing.
2. Shoot at whomever comes along.
3. Invent and compose, also make notes, and recite in a low voice, or learn by heart.
4. Look over the panorama.
5. Compare life below to an anthill.
6. Contemplate book publishing.
7. Take a bed along.

Fifth rule: A Watchman must be polite to firefighters.

That's all.

Founding members:

Daniil Kharms, (signature)  
Boris Levin (signature)

Helped:

Yury Vladimirov (signature)

May 22, 1929.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, a 68-year-old woman steals a wallet at a store in Oldenzaal, the Netherlands. While paying for her purchases she takes the wallet that an elderly woman has left at the checkout counter just before her. It appears to be a deliberate theft.

The theft was recorded by a security camera in the store. The police cannot solve the case and in January 2017, the Public Prosecution Service decided to have the security footage aired on the TV crime show *Onder de Loep* (under a microscope) of the local station RTV-Oost, hoping for tips from viewers. Shortly after this broadcast the images also appear on the website *Dumpert*, a spin-off of the controversial website *GeenStijl* that is mainly used to publish videos. Both are owned by Telegraaf Media Groep.

On *Dumpert* the video gets hundreds of thousands of views, inviting many — generally vicious — comments. The woman's address soon becomes publicly known and she receives threats at home as well.

On the day of the broadcast the woman calls the police to turn herself in. She commits suicide a day later.

In a statement the Prosecution Service laments the situation, but it does not consider itself accountable for 'what happens on the internet'. A later response states that the Prosecution Service 'has had a wake-up call with regard to privacy' but does not intend to change its current policy regarding the recognizable showing of suspects. After questions from the NOS (Netherlands Broadcasting Service) a response appears on *GeenStijl* in its characteristically ironic style, more or less stating there is no proven correlation between the broadcasting of the images and the suicide. The relatives of the deceased do not want any contact with the media.





## 2. The Thief



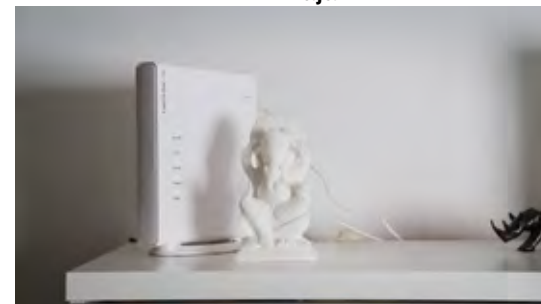
Anoniem Siegburgs, *Kan*, 1350–1399.  
Crockery, glazed. Catalogue of the  
Historical Museum of the city, W.C.  
Schuylenburg (Utrecht, 1928)

1 — Welmoet



Wanted to be a ballet dancer as a child. She greatly admired (and admires) her teacher Nel Roos. Her parents did not think much of ballet. After finishing domestic science school, she eventually did become a ballet teacher in Utrecht. She met her husband at a disco in Groningen and they had two daughters. She is now divorced and lives alone, learning Italian and taking a course in astronomy in order to face her fear of the universe.

2 — Raja



Came to Europe from India at age 17. He has worked in IT and as a sales manager. He wanted more time for himself, not spend all of his life on someone else's payroll. He is now doing a PhD at Utrecht University, developing an Artificial Intelligence program through which doctors can rehearse conversations with patients. His earliest memory is having to bring his mother bottles of milk and accidentally dropping and breaking them in front of their house.

3 — Leon



Owner of tobacco shop 't Vosje in central Utrecht. It was his father's shop. Due to lower tobacco sales he now also sells souvenirs. For relaxation he enjoys watching the koi carps he keeps in a pond in his yard. He lives in Vinkeveen with his girlfriend.

4 — Hasan



Spent 1.5 years in prison after an armed cafeteria robbery. The corner of his cell was his best friend there. He later became addicted to cannabis and was homeless for several years. During his homeless period he had a small red suitcase from the Emmaus charity organization, in which he kept his toiletries so that he could look presentable. He now lives in a house again, is in the debt rescheduling program and works part-time in homeless care as a counselor with personal experience, parallel to following an education program.

5 — Xander



Secretary of Emmaus Nederland, a foundation for housing and employment support that helps homeless and deprived persons from a Christian standpoint. He formerly was a news photographer in Northern Ireland, until his boss died in a bombing. He no longer wanted to make money photographing other people's misery. He lives together with his wife, a theologian.

6 — Jessica



Works as teacher/counselor with personal experience on poverty and social exclusion. Her past is marked by abuse and poverty. She now lives in Utrecht with her husband and son. She disagrees with the image of poverty presented in reality TV shows on commercial stations.

7 — Bianca



Lives in Utrecht with her husband and daughter. She is the founder of the animal food bank, where people living below the poverty line receive support in caring for their pets. She considers her stillborn son Dylan to be part of the family. Each year she and her husband organize a large Halloween party for the neighborhood. Dreams about her father paralyzed from the waist down, crawling across the floor.

This work was commissioned by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht en Centraal Museum, Utrecht, on the occasion of the performance *What Is The City But The People?* from an idea by artist Jeremy Deller.





## 4. In a Flickering Light

The performance *In a Flickering Light* was staged by four actors at the MACBA Barcelona in 2018, and originated as a response to the phenomenon of binge-watching. The actors sit and lie on a sofa in postures that people adopt when they have been sitting for a very long time. The bodies then appear to be paralyzed; as if they have become objects. The light of the screen, of which the public sees only the reflection, makes the facial muscles of the four actors contract, contort and expand.

German-Austrian sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt created a large number of heads with varying facial expressions between 1770 and 1783. He produced these portraits in front of a mirror, using himself as a model. Together the heads form a small lexicon of human expression, while also offering insight into a great amount of distorted versions of Messerschmidt's own face.

In his 'poor theater', Polish theater director and teacher Jerzy Grotowski sought the expression of an enhanced awareness. Without a script and using minimal means, he taught actors to employ their face as a mask. Under Grotowski's direction the faces of actors were not illustrations of a text or idea, but rather a ritual version of that which was happening inside of them. To him, the language of theater was the language of the body.



Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, ZWEITER  
SCHNABELKOPF "Charakterkopf" Nr. 6,  
1777-1781 © 2019 Österreichische  
Galerie Belvedere, Wien

Performers: Anneke Sluifers, Chandana Sarma, Karina Holla, Phi Nguyen.  
Curator: Marta Ramos. Originally performed at MACBA, Barcelona.  
Made possible with support of the Mondriaan Fund, tegenboschvanvreden,  
MACBA and Loop Festival.

4. In a Flickering Light





4. In a Flickering Light

The interview takes place on a rainy Saturday in the artists' studio in the Amsterdam Jordaan area. The artists constantly complete one another's descriptions of their work. Sander will begin to speak and Witte is ready to offer additions, or Witte says something while Sander thinks. One talks fast and easily, the other pondering and with hesitations. I have presented the two artists as one voice here, as a team, just like they create their works. The artists are still in the middle of their working process. The exact form of the installations, how they will be installed and how they will be titled is to become clear over the course of the following six weeks. We talk about the collective experience of performance and the silence of sculpture.

## THEATER AND SCULPTURE

Theater is a thread that runs throughout our work and lives. Sander was trained as a composer and was involved in the stage arts and musical theater. Witte took up choreography alongside visual art at [the art academy of] Arnhem. We started out making dance performances, so in that sense theater has been a presence in our work from the very start. Those dance performances also included sculptures, but they were light architectonic forms and the dancers moved around them.

After years of making performances and films, we began creating sculptures as well. We wanted to do something with our hands. And because we like the stillness of sculptures. With performance and film, you're always following the narrative. You need to invest time in order to follow it and identify with the performers. The stillness of a sculpture gives you the opportunity to walk around it and observe it from different sides. Your pace and course determine the experience of a work and exhibition. We found this experience lacking in our performances and videos. A performance exists only by grace of the audience and the actors. A sculpture is always there, even when you aren't.

Yet there are still many things in our sculptural works that are related to theater. One of them is the human size of our sculptures, nearly always human figures. The body is our frame of reference. When you're looking at something, you're always comparing it to your own proportions. If visitors are looking at human-sized sculptures, a sort of mirroring comes into play that makes them co-players or actors on an equal footing in the work. We wanted to utilize this insight. We view the sculptures as actors executing very slow performances. Apart from being modeled after people from our environment, and therefore in a sense portraits, they also refer to a more theatrical gesture or a particular expression.

The material defines the duration of a sculpture's performance. We liked that idea: looking at sculptures as theatrical pieces that last for a very long time. The viewers always change, and the same applies to the role and significance of

the sculptures. They may still be there in 300 years, as testaments of our time and ourselves. In contrast, when you see a performance you know this is happening now, in the moment, and that it will be over soon.

## THE FLOOR IS LAVA

When you enter Marres you will climb immediately onto the roof, and if you then go up the stairs you'll arrive at the intimate inner world of the living room. The house has been turned inside out. The rooftops at the start of the exhibition function as a stage for a few isolated sculptures, as well as for visitors. It refers to the notion of the city as a theater, while also symbolizing flight. Sometimes you go out onto the roof to enjoy the view. In that case it's about watching. But on a rooftop you can also put yourself above and beyond things. If you're standing on a roof in Amsterdam you don't hear the madness of all the locals, day-trip visitors and drunken tourists. For a moment you step away from all that, and this distance makes you see things differently. An exhibition works like that. It puts something between quotation marks.

From our studio we were once watching rooftop workers installing solar panels. One of them was working on a panel, another was making a phone call on the edge of the roof and then gazed into the distance. To our eyes this was already a scene from a theatrical play. Only later we realized that many artists have painted the view from their studios. This is typical of our work. We notice something that stands out to us both and it becomes an image. This can be someone staring at a screen for a long time, or someone walking through a station. Some of these images stick with us, without us knowing exactly why. We investigate them. That research is very associative, bringing us new images and insights that stick to the original image like snow to a snowball. Our work of art then concludes this process.

The work offers us a way of looking at the city with a theatrical gaze. For *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other* (1992), Peter Handke sat down on a bench on a small square in Trieste and described everything and everyone passing by. He turned this into a theater

play. A woman walks by and then a hearse shows up, driving behind her. This changes your perception of that woman, although she doesn't have a clue.

## IN A FLICKERING LIGHT

Our work always flows from one medium to the next. A film can become a performance, a performance a sculpture or a script. The performance *How Can We Know the Dancer from the Dance* (2016) consists of a choreography spanning six months in the main hall of Utrecht Central Station. By executing it over and over, that work obtained the character of a sculptural installation. Our sculptures, sometimes wearing the same clothes as the actors in that piece, arose from this.

The installation *In a Flickering Light* is in a way the documentation of the eponymous performance. For this performance, we made hidden camera recordings on the Loop video fair in Barcelona, where art videos are shown in hotel rooms. Looking at those recordings, we were struck by the flickering light of the screen illuminating the bodies draped across beds and chairs. You'll see that while they're watching, only the face and the head are activated. The body is dormant, or paralyzed. It reminded us of people hunched over their phones, as if they want to fall into it head first. A symptom of the addiction to the screen. The desire to disappear. That observation was central to the performance, in which you only see the faces of people watching a movie.

While we developed the performance we were already thinking about a series of sculptures on the same theme. We had made sculptures before, for which we created the heads separately from the bodies. Effectively, they became masks. Masks are very dual things. They hide the face while also expressing something. In the theater masks are used to indicate specific roles: a farmer, a priest, a ghost. The 17<sup>th</sup>-century German-Austrian sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt created busts that you could also consider masks. He isolated himself in his studio, making nothing but self-portraits with contorted expressions in front of the mirror. He then placed them in front of his windows in order to ward off evil spirits.

Sometimes we think of Messerschmidt's grimaces as selfies. In a way, screen addiction is also an addiction to the self-image.

## SEVEN ADDRESSES

BAK and the Centraal Museum in Utrecht asked us to create a work in response to the performance *What Is The City, But The People?* (2018), in which the artist Jeremy Deller created a portrait of that city. In the work, 200 Utrecht residents walked across a runway on the central Jaarbeursplein square. We visited the rehearsals and the runway, where a group of people was representing the city of Utrecht. We wanted to create a more detailed portrait of several people and decided to film a series of still lifes at their homes. Thus we created portraits of them through the objects they surround themselves with.

All homes look somewhat alike: everyone has a coffee maker and a television and many people have cats. But in this work you also see scenes in which someone bashes two bottles or crawls across the kitchen wearing a mask. Those scenes are based on the protagonists' memories. It is something that does exist, but is not usually visible. It reminds us of an earlier piece, *Het familieportret* (The family portrait), in which we had the ambition of portraying an average Dutch family. If you then come closer, however, these families turn out to consist of unique people, each with a story of their own. We realized that there isn't really such a thing as an average family.

We are not artists who create works about ourselves. The portrait takes up a central position in our work. That requires a sense of transportation into sometime or someone beyond yourself. The core of making a portrait is that you, as an artist, are no longer the only one capable of judging whether something is good. You must do justice to the reality beyond yourself. We engage with people, meaning that we also have to take them into account. You don't want to create a caricature or stereotype. It has to be more than a projection of ourselves. It needs to show that we've really listened.

## THE THIEF

In *The Thief* we create for the first time a series of sculptures inspired by a concrete event. The event took place some years ago in Oldenzaal [a city in the east of the Netherlands]. An elderly woman stole a wallet while she was in a store. The images of the theft were put online. They went viral and caused many hateful reactions. As a consequence the woman committed suicide. We find this course of events exemplary for the way images tend to live lives of their own on the internet. The justice system is based on carefully weighed sentencing, but public judgment is not bound by these conventions. No one can control it.

We start by dissecting such a story and then shape it in terms of dramaturgy. We first identify the players. There is the protagonist, her family, the woman whose wallet got stolen. The police is involved, the Public Prosecution Service decides what should be done with those images. There are the people who manage the website on which the footage is published, the advertisers who keep the website in the air and have a financial interest in content going viral. Then there are the people consuming the images and responding to them. We give a dramaturgic shape to these various positions. One question, of course, is how to present the people commenting on the footage. We have put together a cast of people from our direct environment who modeled for the sculptures in the story. They function as the actors of this new narration. So on the one hand you're watching portraits of people, and on the other you are experiencing a collective story.

## PHYSICAL NARRATION

We have spent much thought on the relations between story and image. You might think that if you want to tell a story it's better to work in a linear medium, such as sound, film or a book. But there is also a tradition of stained glass windows and genre pieces, for example, that tell a story in a different way. The visitors are situated in the middle of a story, and can experience all events and characters at the same time. This affects the manner in which you perceive the story. Of course there are different levels of interpretation. The perspective of

a child, for example, in a direct and physical response to size, color or sound. But there is also the possibility of giving it more thought and finding other conceptual layers. When visitors see so many figurative sculptures placed together, they will probably assume that a story is being depicted. But they might only find out later which story that is.

We leave traces of the making process in the sculptures. Those traces are the result of the working process, which has the character of a performance that can only be executed a single time. This way the work keeps a certain openness that suggests this outcome is only one of many possibilities. Godard stated in an interview that he wanted to make films that constantly make you feel as if someone could be hit by a car. To us, an artwork is not locked into a world in which things are ordered and definitive, but in an environment in which coincidence exists.

In any case you need to aim for a certain incompleteness and fragmentation when you are portraying people, because a person can never be fully captured in a fixed material. We create a beginning, and it's up to the viewer to finish it. The work of art only comes into existence in the mind of the viewer.

## THE EXHIBITION

The screen plays a role in each work, but we didn't plan it that way. All works were created in the same period and have influenced one another. When you analyze our society, you can't ignore that it is dominated by screens. In *The Thief* they are not only witness, but also a medium of transmission and an instrument of penalization. In *Seven Addresses* you see televisions on which you see living rooms that, in their turn, also have screens in them. For us this is not so much about what can be seen on the screen, but rather, as *In a Flickering Light* suggests, about the persons watching it. The work *The Floor is Lava* acts as a sort of counterpoint, offering the possibility of a brief escape from the world of screens.

*The Floor is Lava* is a children's game, but people also know it as an online hype in which you must get your feet off the ground within 5 seconds.

To us, the title also suggests danger: liquid (hot) earth. Choosing such a title before the work is finished becomes a benchmark. We feel that this title has influenced our work without being able to directly explain it. The artist John Baldessari has a photograph with a man in front of a palm tree. He's put *wrong* underneath it. Of course that makes you wonder exactly what is wrong. A good title is at odds with the image: it keeps you wondering what the work is really trying to say.



SANDER BREURE and WITTE VAN HULZEN both live and work in Amsterdam. Breure graduated from the Royal Conservatory, The Hague, and Van Hulzen graduated from ArtEZ in Arnhem. Their multidisciplinary work is based on research about body language and its interpretation. Their work has been shown in solo and group presentations at home and abroad, including at MACBA Barcelona and Museum Boijmans van Beuningen Rotterdam in 2018, Centraal Museum Utrecht in 2017, Contour 7, the biennial for the moving image, Mechelen in 2015 and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2014. They have been artists in residence at CCA Zamek Ujazdowski Warsaw in 2015, at the Foundation of the Arts NYFA New York in 2012, at Hangar Barcelona, 2010 and Platform Garanti, Istanbul in 2009. In 2016 and 2017, they took part in the residency programme of the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. Their work was awarded the the Charlotte Köhlerprize in 2018, first prize at the Seoul New Media Festival in 2016, the René Coelho Prize and the TENT Academy Award in 2009. They are represented by tegenboschvanvreden, Amsterdam.

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Tuesday—Sunday  
12—5 pm

Marres is a House for Contemporary Culture located in the heart of the old town of Maastricht. Marres develops with artists, musicians, designers, chefs and perfumers, a new vocabulary for the senses. In addition to bringing a lively program of exhibitions, presentations and performances, Marres also features a beautiful garden and a wonderful restaurant.

#### COLOPHON

Artists: Sander Breure, Witte van Hulzen  
Curator: Valentijn Byvanck  
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FONDS 21

BankGiro Loterij FONDS

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