



Pari Perspectives

"The future has an ancient heart"
CARLO LEVI

**Ideas in Science, the Arts,
Spirit and Community**

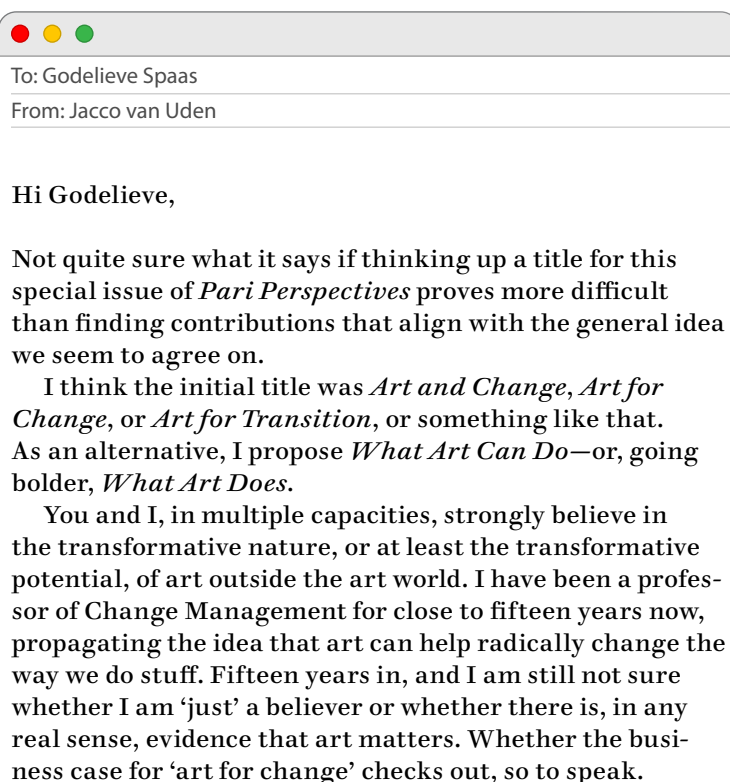
This Is Not Art

SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

Issue 24 / June 2026

Introduction

GODELIEVE SPAAS and JACCO VAN UDEN



To: Godelieve Spaas
From: Jacco van Uden

Hi Godelieve,

Not quite sure what it says if thinking up a title for this special issue of *Pari Perspectives* proves more difficult than finding contributions that align with the general idea we seem to agree on.

I think the initial title was *Art and Change*, *Art for Change*, or *Art for Transition*, or something like that. As an alternative, I propose *What Art Can Do*—or, going bolder, *What Art Does*.

You and I, in multiple capacities, strongly believe in the transformative nature, or at least the transformative potential, of art outside the art world. I have been a professor of Change Management for close to fifteen years now, propagating the idea that art can help radically change the way we do stuff. Fifteen years in, and I am still not sure whether I am ‘just’ a believer or whether there is, in any real sense, evidence that art matters. Whether the business case for ‘art for change’ checks out, so to speak.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

Reed holds the riverbank in place, while seeds drift on the water toward unknown shores where they can take root. Art that roots beyond her own domain moves the same way. She generates knowledge that could not emerge otherwise, and lands, with direction and intention, in the middle of domains that thought they could do without her.

Marga Rotteveel

Artistic researcher, Research group Economy in Common, Centre of Expertise Wellbeing Economy and new Entrepreneurship, Avans University of Applied Sciences

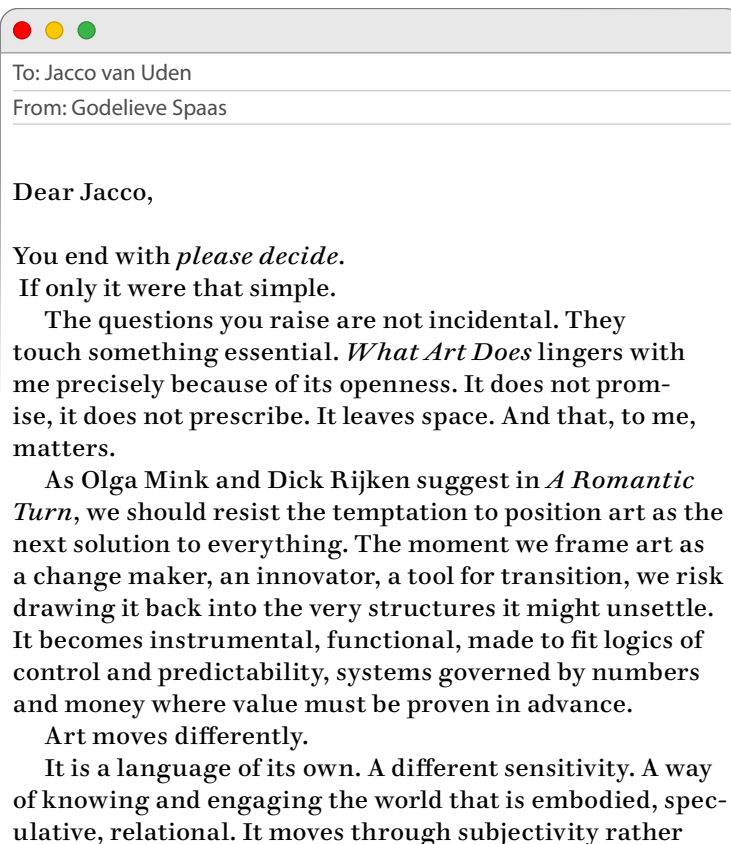
I know, I know—I can’t seem to shake off the business logic that I am trying to undermine.

So I guess that’s where *What Art Does* is coming from: fewer general claims or sweeping statements about the transformative potential of art, and more focus on the specifics of how art sets things in motion. Art in action, so to speak.

Which could also be the title for this issue.

Please decide...

Love, Jacco



To: Jacco van Uden
From: Godelieve Spaas

Dear Jacco,

You end with *please decide*.
If only it were that simple.

The questions you raise are not incidental. They touch something essential. *What Art Does* lingers with me precisely because of its openness. It does not promise, it does not prescribe. It leaves space. And that, to me, matters.

As Olga Mink and Dick Rijken suggest in *A Romantic Turn*, we should resist the temptation to position art as the next solution to everything. The moment we frame art as a change maker, an innovator, a tool for transition, we risk drawing it back into the very structures it might unsettle. It becomes instrumental, functional, made to fit logics of control and predictability, systems governed by numbers and money where value must be proven in advance.

Art moves differently.

It is a language of its own. A different sensitivity. A way of knowing and engaging the world that is embodied, speculative, relational. It moves through subjectivity rather

than objectivity, through attention rather than control. It does not stand outside the world to describe it, nor does it enter with the intention to fix it. It stays with what is not yet clear, not yet sayable. It engages, questions, unsettles, not by offering answers, but by shifting what can be perceived, felt, and thought.

In that sense, art does not simply contribute to change. It produces forms of knowing that cannot emerge otherwise. It creates spaces where different logics can coexist, where uncertainty is not a problem to solve but a condition to work with, where something can be rehearsed before it becomes legible. Where you, in your professorship, look closely at how art can play a role within processes of change, I find myself, together with the artistic researchers in my group, drawn to a slightly different movement. We look at how the stories and skills that shape our world can be critically questioned and transformed through artistic practice. Perhaps this difference also explains why we look, just slightly, in another direction. You tracing how art enters change processes, I tracing how art reshapes the very conditions through which change can be imagined at all.

And yet art does not do this alone.

It exists only in relation. In the encounter between the work and the one who meets it. The viewer, the participant, the witness. Something happens there that cannot be predetermined. A shift in perception, a hesitation, a recognition, a discomfort, a new opening. Through art we experience the freedom to see otherwise, to feel otherwise, to enter into another story and relate to it, even if only for a moment. It is in this lived exchange that art comes into being, not as an object, but as an event.

This also brings to mind the question posed by David Peat: 'How can organizations and individuals transform themselves so that they can become as subtle, sensitive, intelligent and fast responding as the world around them?' Perhaps art does not answer this question directly, but makes it inhabitable. It cultivates precisely those qualities, subtlety, sensitivity, responsiveness, that our systems, in their pursuit of control and predictability, have learned to suppress.

This is also what Verily Klaassen and I reflect on in *An Unusual Solution for Complex Issues* with Edo Dijksterhuis. Can we leave open what art does. Can it remain multiple, shifting across time and context, allowing different encounters to generate different meanings. Perhaps the beauty of art is not that it does something, but that something happens in relation to it. That it invites rather than directs. That it holds knowledge without fixing it.

What we are circling around, I think, is not art as instrument, but art as a way of knowing in action.

Which makes your unease with the business case not only understandable, but generative. It reveals the friction between regimes of value. One asks for evidence, scalability, measurable impact. The other moves through resonance, relation, emergence. Perhaps this issue does

not need to resolve that tension, but to hold it, to make it perceptible.

So rather than defining what art does, we might begin to show how it operates. Across contexts, across encounters. In science, in governance, in communities, in economies. Not as a solution, but as a force that reconfigures the conditions under which solutions are imagined.

And perhaps also how, in doing so, art itself is changed.

As for the title, a few possibilities stay with me.

What Art Questions

Art!

What Art Knows

Maybe we do not need to decide just yet. Let us read the contributions, sit with them, move through them together.

We will know then.

With love,
Godelieve

To: Godelieve Spaas
From: Jacco van Uden

Thanks Godelieve,

It has taken me a while to come to approach art not as a thing, but as a way of knowing. A particular way of knowing, for that matter: one that does not promise answers—as you might expect from ways of knowing—but one that generates knowledge as much as it questions it.

To appreciate that, you have to study art in the wild. To be less concerned with where to separate artworks, in time and space, from the rest of the world, and more with how art works in and with the world.

In that respect, I think the contributions of Betiana Pavon and Denise Harleman could work really well together. Both authors reflect on projects that are essentially, I think, about relations. Or more precisely, about just how difficult it is to understand the world first and foremost in relational terms. About how inclined we are—or have become—to see discrete entities.

In *Liefste Collectief Kapitaal*, a love letter, Denise Harleman describes, in a beautifully layered way, the complex relationship with her—and there we go already—'own' initiative Collectief Kapitaal. She writes: 'You have been brought into the world to help make a society possible in which every human being can live with dignity. You must exist—there was never any doubt about it. The necessity was and is palpable, unmistakable. But how you must exist—that is another question.'

Denise Harleman describes in detail how difficult and exhausting the realisation of an initiative such as

Collectief Kapitaal is when the different forms the initiative successively takes seem each time to do violence to the intention behind it. Denise: 'If there is anything that you have been to me in these past few years, it has been a constant shift.'

As someone who wonders what organisation studies and change management can learn from the arts, I get very excited by what Harleman calls a tenacious expectation: '... that one can become master of the change one envisions.' Change, she continues, 'then becomes something that can be predicted, controlled, regulated and managed. A professional, after all, knows where they are heading and stays the course. This logic works only as long as systems are optimised that do not question their own premises. But once change demands a reconfiguration of relationships, power dynamics and meaning, that same logic becomes a form of fixation; an attempt to freeze movement before it can reveal what is truly at stake.'

A seemingly very different kind of artwork is central to the article by the Argentinian artist Betiana Pavón: 'Compostable Altar: Offering to the Earth is a biodesign project that explores decomposition as a regenerative strategy. A biodegradable installation that is not designed to last, but to disappear—and in doing so, to nourish the soil that sustains it.'

Betiana, too, shows how things are not what they are. More strongly still, that they are not things. The ease with which we talk about soil as 'a something' in no way does justice to the relations that lie underneath it, literally: 'The soil is not merely a substrate. It is a living organism—complex, dense, teeming with invisible processes that sustain all life on the surface.' Betiana describes how modern thinking has deprived us of the sight of the unmistakable inherent connectedness of life on earth, both in time and in place. With philosophical arguments and modern technology—through what she calls 'bio-digital craftsmanship'—Betiana shows that a relational perspective offers a workable alternative to a worldview in which the earth can appear as a disposable object. As an artist, designer and transdisciplinary researcher, Pavón formulates it as follows: 'If the soil is a living body, what does it mean to design for it rather than design on it?'

And this project, too, makes me very happy as a change scholar, for instance when Betiana writes: 'Compostable Altar celebrates impermanence. It is born to disappear. As it slowly decomposes, it regenerates the soil. It is a gesture that acknowledges the vitality of matter...and which shifts the focus away from the designer as author and controller, positioning them instead as a mediator within a broader assemblage: matter, the environment, technologies, artistic practice.'

Agree that these two articles make a good couple? And yes, let's postpone our decision on the title of this edition of *Pari Perspectives*. See what emerges.

x Jacco

To: Jacco van Uden
From: Godelieve Spaas

Dear Jacco,

I agree with you that both Denise Harleman and Betiana Pavón are searching for a transformation, or perhaps even a dissolution, of the role of the maker within their work.

Someone who engages this question in a markedly different yet equally charged way is Renzo Martens. Like Denise and Betiana, he wants, and I emphasize wants, to change the world. He mobilizes art to redirect flows of money and power, to intervene in the extractive logics that continue to shape both people and land. His work enters processes of decolonization, and does so in ways that are deliberately uncomfortable, even controversial. It raises the question whether it is his position, as a white man, to occupy such a central role. Yet rather than stepping back, he steps into that tension. He does not position himself outside the conflict, but inhabits it.

At the same time, he complicates his own authorship. In the presentation of his work at the Venice Biennale, he actively relinquishes control, handing over parts of the work to others. What emerges is not a resolved position, but an ongoing inquiry. How does this process change me? What is mine to do? Not only in terms of giving space to others, but also in terms of letting go, stepping forward, withdrawing, redistributing power. It is a position that is frictional, and at times painful.

Eva Schmertz engages a similar questioning, yet through a very different energy. By participating in Tino Sehgal's work *This you you*, she explores the meaning of motherhood, both personally and through literature. Together with her baby, she enters the work over the course of five months, sitting each Friday in the space of Museum De Pont. Two interpreters respond to her and her child, and she to them, in an unfolding choreography of presence and attention. As she writes, 'My connection with the artwork showed me that motherhood is not only a social role but also a philosophical and economic practice. It interrupts the illusion of autonomy and reveals that our existence is fundamentally relational and dependent.'

An essential dimension of Sehgal's practice lies in what remains absent. There are no photographs, no recordings, no documentation. The work exists only in its enactment. This choice is not incidental, but part of a broader inquiry into sustainability and intergenerational connection. Through voice, rhythm, and body language, something takes shape, only to dissolve again. Nothing is left behind. In this, Sehgal, like Betiana, plays with the ephemerality of the work, and with the shifting role of the artist within it.

This questioning of impact itself is central to the work of Marjolijn Zwakman. She moves away from impact as a linear relation of cause and effect. Away from meas-

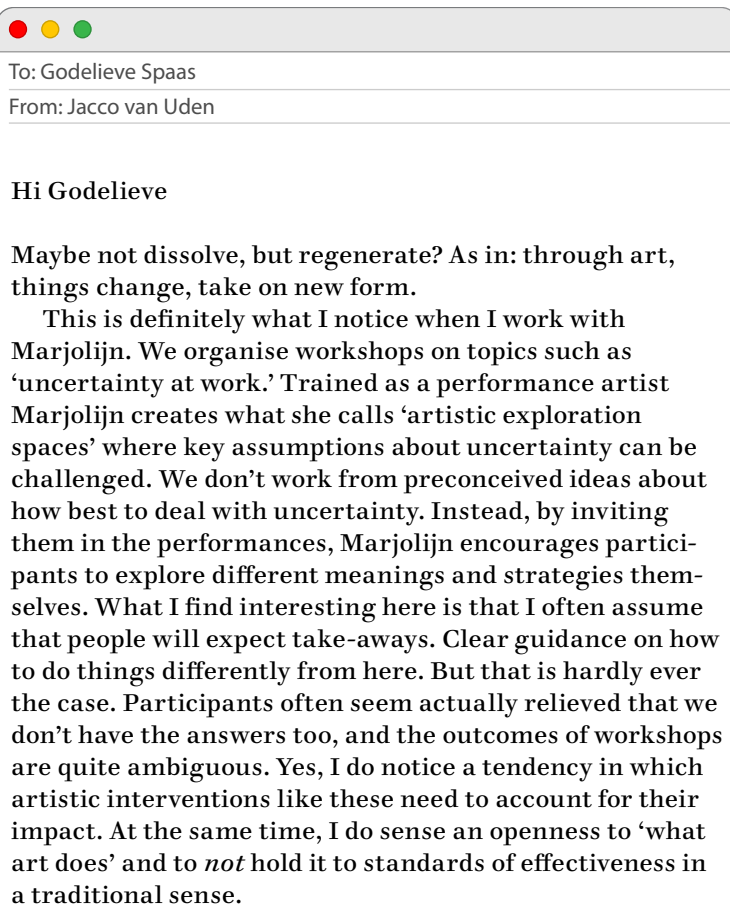
urement, from numbers, from the need to demonstrate outcomes. Instead, she turns towards resonance. Towards attuning to fields that are already in motion. Towards embodied experience as a site where change does not occur through intervention alone, but through participation, through being moved.

Jacco, perhaps you could deepen this reflection through her work. After all, she developed her research within your group, and her practice seems to articulate, in a very grounded way, what it might mean to think of art not in terms of impact, but in terms of resonance.

And perhaps, in all these practices, another line quietly emerges. Not only art as something that creates, intervenes, or transforms, but also art as something that allows things to dissolve. To disappear. To not be held, measured, or sustained. Something we are not particularly skilled at in a world so oriented towards control, preservation, and accumulation, even in our notions of sustainability.

Maybe a title could also move in that direction. *Art of Dissolving*. Or something close to it. Not as an answer, but as another opening in the conversation we are holding.

With love,
Godelieve



To: Godelieve Spaas
From: Jacco van Uden

Hi Godelieve

Maybe not dissolve, but regenerate? As in: through art, things change, take on new form.

This is definitely what I notice when I work with Marjolijn. We organise workshops on topics such as ‘uncertainty at work.’ Trained as a performance artist Marjolijn creates what she calls ‘artistic exploration spaces’ where key assumptions about uncertainty can be challenged. We don’t work from preconceived ideas about how best to deal with uncertainty. Instead, by inviting them in the performances, Marjolijn encourages participants to explore different meanings and strategies themselves. What I find interesting here is that I often assume that people will expect take-aways. Clear guidance on how to do things differently from here. But that is hardly ever the case. Participants often seem actually relieved that we don’t have the answers too, and the outcomes of workshops are quite ambiguous. Yes, I do notice a tendency in which artistic interventions like these need to account for their impact. At the same time, I do sense an openness to ‘what art does’ and to *not* hold it to standards of effectiveness in a traditional sense.

Which is why I propose juxtaposing the contributions of Marjolijn Zwakman on the one hand, and Lija and Rodolfo Groenewoud van Vliet on the other. Both pieces explicitly deal with the question of how to express the impact of art, but take quite different approaches in answering it.

In the artistic exploration spaces Marjolijn hopes to create, ‘there is room for pre-verbal knowledge, there is room for energy that can flow between people. In these spaces something can emerge that is not immediately visible or explainable. It does not follow a clear line from action to result and cannot easily be captured in words. Precisely there, in that in-between space, something shifts.’ She wants to make room for the emergent, the difficult to grasp.

Well aware of the challenges this poses with regard to trying to communicate what she hopes to achieve, Marjolijn writes: ‘Practice-oriented researchers are expected to realize demonstrable impact on societal issues with their work. Impact is often reduced to what is measurable: numbers, reach, visibility. Working in organizations I recognize the need to make impact visible. And I understand that desire. We want our work to matter. At the same time, discomfort is growing among researchers and artists about this reduction. It narrows what we can perceive. What can be counted becomes central, but how do we speak about impact that cannot be captured in numbers?’

She finds inspiration in Tatiana Fraser’s work on Deep Scaling: ‘In my work I see that this deep impact takes place in relational and emotional processes that are difficult to capture, but essential for transformation. It is about creating conditions for change. Practices of scaling deep focus on collective learning, connection and healing. They shift the focus from solving to meaning-making, from accelerating to slowing down, from control to relationship.’

Lija and Rodolfo Groenewoud van Vliet approach things differently. They are the founders of In4Art, a European-focused independent research and development organisation for artistic experimentation and responsible innovation. ‘Art-driven innovation,’ as they refer to their way of working, inherently begs the question of how art works if it is to contribute to innovation.

I interviewed Lija and Rodolfo as they worked on an impact infographic to reconstruct in detail how the E-missions project they helped initiate played out. Lija and Rodolfo discovered that impact is neither a tangible outcome nor a static product. Instead, impact represents a dynamic process that evolves and manifests in various ways across different settings. As they put it themselves: ‘The reconstruction distinctly highlights the gradual evolution and maturation of ideas before they find resonance in a particular context. At times, stakeholders require repeated exposure to a project—three, four, or even five instances—before taking action. Occasionally, it may initially be shelved, only to resurface later on.’

Best, Jacco

To: Jacco van Uden
From: Godelieve Spaas

Dear Jacco,

Reading the articles by Edo, Verily and myself, alongside the text by Olga and Dick, I find myself returning to the question we touched upon earlier in our exchange. The question of the title, yes, but more insistently the question underneath it. What do we actually invite in when we invite art?

In the previous letter I spoke about the risk of making art functional, of folding it back into the logics of change, innovation, transition. Reading these texts together, that tension does not resolve. It sharpens.

The article by Edo, and the text by Verily and myself, circle around a delicate construction. Rabo Art Lab is not simply a place where art happens, but a space that must be actively held open. Protected, even, so that art does not collapse into purpose. The condition is fragile. Art must take place in freedom, otherwise it ceases to be art. And yet it is placed at the very heart of an institution that measures, calculates, decides. A system that cannot help but ask what it yields.

So art is invited in, and at the same time kept from being absorbed.

The work of Henk Wildschut in *Territory* embodies this tension without resolving it. It does not intervene. It does not reconcile. It does not translate conflict into clarity. It remains with what is, and with what is disappearing. It holds multiple realities side by side, without forcing them into dialogue. And somehow, precisely there, something begins to move.

Not because the work sets out to create change, but because it refuses to reduce what it encounters.

In a different yet closely related way, the text by Julia Mullié opens up the work of Rodrigo Hernández. She does not simply describe his practice, but moves within it, tracing how figures, memories, humans and animals continuously emerge, dissolve, and reappear. What becomes visible through her writing is a world in which identity is never fixed, where meaning is not given but formed in relation, and where perception itself becomes unstable.

Through Hernández's work, as she unfolds it, the relation between human and animal is not symbolic or illustrative, but experiential. It is felt. A shared world in which boundaries blur, where presence is always partial, and where to see is already to be entangled. Her text does not explain this away, but stays with it. It allows the work to remain open, layered, and in motion.

Like Wildschut, Hernández does not resolve what he encounters. And like Wildschut, what his work produces is not an answer, but a condition. A way of holding multiple temporalities, perspectives, and realities together without forcing coherence. Julia's writing makes this perceptible, not by closing the work, but by carefully extending its field.

In both, art does not step in to fix or to clarify, but to hold open. To allow multiple worlds to exist at once, without forcing alignment. To remain with what is in between.

This resonates deeply with what Olga and Dick articulate. Their refusal to cast art as solution is not a withdrawal, but a repositioning. Art does not operate in the logic of problems and answers. It operates in the realm of meaning. Of ambiguity. Of felt knowledge. It resists definition, not out of vagueness, but out of precision. Because what matters cannot always be named, let alone measured. And so the question intensifies.

How do we allow art to remain fluid, indeterminate, not fully knowable, and still grant it a solid place within processes of knowledge development? Can something that escapes function still carry weight? Can something that does not aim to deliver still be taken seriously?

Perhaps this is where the real work lies. Not in demonstrating what art does, but in holding open the conditions under which it can act without being captured. Not outside the system, not fully inside it, but in a space that remains unsettled. A space that insists.

Which brings me, again, to the title. *What Art Does* still echoes, but it begins to feel almost too certain. As if we might be able to point to it, define it, contain it.

Maybe we need a title that resists us a little more.

This Is Not Art.

Not as a rejection, but as a warning. As a mirror held up to our own desire to make art useful, legible, accountable. To make it work. Because perhaps the moment art fully works, within the terms we set, it ceases to do what we need it to do.

With love,
Godelieve

To: Godelieve Spaas
From: Jacco van Uden

Hi Godelieve,

Can I propose a subtitle to go with that? Something that underscores that art doesn't like being told what it is and isn't. 'This Is Not Art: See Inside for Details'

x J



GODELIEVE SPAAS is Professor of Art | Culture | Transition at HZ University of Applied Sciences, where she works at the intersection of artistic research, societal transformation, and cultural imagination. Her work grows from an attunement to the ways contemporary systems have become too hard for life itself. Shaped by control, efficiency, and extraction, they often fail to remain sensitive to complexity, relationships, vulnerability, and care. Through performance, curating, writing, and participatory research, she explores how art can open spaces within these systems for other ways of sensing, knowing, and relating. Her practice approaches artistic research not as a tool for solutions, but as a force that can question dominant narratives, unsettle fixed structures, and create room for more relational, embodied, and life sustaining futures.



JACCO VAN UDEN is a professor of Change Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. He has a background in organisation studies (Erasmus University Rotterdam, NL) and holds a PhD in Humanistic Studies. The Change Management Research Group (www.lector-aatchangemanagement.nl) focuses not only on the 'management of change' but also addresses the question of how management ideas and practices themselves can be changed. To answer this question, Jacco often turns to the arts for guidance. In addition to his academic career, Jacco also works as a theatre play director. Jacco and Godelieve co-initiated the SUSTAIN project, an ongoing exploration into how artistic forms of knowledge can contribute to cultural change within fields such as governance, science, education, and business.