



Johanna Monk

I'm Johanna. I do performance art. I make music. I play clarinet and saxophone and piano and electronics and anything else I can get my hands on. I write stories, poems, essays. I try to find ways of doing all these things at the same time. I like to read my stories out loud while my friends play music. Sometimes I organize cultural happenings, because I found out it's not just about me and you can get a lot more done together. I live and work in Rotterdam. I used to live in Canada. I'm told I was born there but I don't remember being born so I'll have to take their word for that. Nowadays I like to be known as Johanna and she/her, but it wasn't like that when I was born.

I have to tell you about Vanita, because nothing of me makes sense without Vanita. We lived and worked together for 35 years. We wrote and published a novel and short stories and plays and poems and zines and comics. We did countless music and spoken word and art performances. We had exhibitions and curated events and festivals and ran an art/music space. We made short movies and released records. We did experimental psychotherapy on each other and re-lived our childhoods together and made art about that. We did psychedelic drugs and had kinky queer genderbending sex and made art about that. We meditated in cemeteries and hospitals and all-night bars and made art about that.

Vanita became severely disabled in 2021. For the next two and a half years, the focus of our practice shifted towards survival, care, mourning and ultimately death. And now it's up to me to continue our work. There's enough unfinished material to keep me busy for a few lifetimes, but I can't just live in the past. And yet, even when I make something completely new, somehow it's still a collaboration with her. It's still about our love and healing and transformation and enlightenment. But it's also about our traumas and violence and lust and death and politics and all the ridiculous ideas we entertain about ourselves, how we always keep fucking everything up and the absurdity of it all.

We make art about these things too because otherwise it would be too easy, just another fairy tale, a drugstore novel, a Hollywood romance, a three-minute love song. We make art about these dark things because light needs darkness to stand out against, just like silence stands out among noise.

So I guess you know a little more about me now. I invite you to discover in the following pages what this looks like in practice.

*A Year in the Life of a Plane Tree Outside Our Window*

Silent video with live ambient acoustic soundscape

[Het Stomme Film Festival](#),  
Vredestuin, Rotterdam,  
October 12, 2024



A meditation on time, love, life, death and rebirth, further expanding upon my ongoing collaboration with my life and work partner of 35 years, Vanita Monk.

For this event, I was commissioned to perform live music accompanying a silent film of my choosing.

Using several hours of material shot by Vanita in 2010-2011, I post-processed the footage and made a 20-minute edit for this performance. I'm working on a 60-minute edit for future performances.





### ***Vanita Monk Celebration Orchestra Happening, Worm, Rotterdam, September 3, 2024***

An [evening-long interdisciplinary memorial extravaganza](#) where I was able, as creative director and performing artist, to continue developing the body of work created together with my lifelong partner Vanita Monk. Rather than a memorial of her death, I chose her 80th birthday for a celebration of her life and art, bringing together 18 artists and musicians who had collaborated closely with her during the last years of her life.

The event featured a lecture on Vanita's visual work by [Florian Cramer](#), Research Professor at Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam; ongoing projections of her artworks, curated by me;

spoken-word segments (literary texts written by Vanita and me); and live music performed by a 15-piece orchestra of improvising musicians, composed and conducted by me, with the assistance of Friso van Wijck (freelance musician, composer, composition teacher at Codarts University for the Arts, Rotterdam) and Gonçalo Almeida (freelance musician). There were also remote audiovisual contributions by past collaborators Geo Wyex, Goodiepal and Suzana Lașcu. We played for a full house.

In 2025 I will be researching possibilities of further developing the Vanita Monk Orchestra as a long-term project. There was also a multi-camera [video livestream of the event](#).



## Double exhibition, De Aanschouw, Rotterdam, August 2024

Curated in collaboration with Florian Cramer, who invited me to present two consecutive one-week exhibitions at window gallery [De Aanschouw](#) in Rotterdam: one featuring [my own graphic designs](#) for our artist-run record label, and one focusing on [Vanita's work](#) (for which I selected a painting

she made in 2014). The 12 albums exhibited here were designed by me between 2010 and 2024. The albums are released without any physical sound carrier: the audio can be accessed via a [QR code and weblink](#). Florian has gone so far as to call this format an entirely new medium for releasing music.



**Schande #4 (magazine cover and feature article)**

**Schande #4 Release Party (music and makeup performance)**

**Slash Gallery, Rotterdam, July 31, 2022**

I was the first trans (and the first 40+) "cover girl" for [Schande](#), Rotterdam's self-styled art, lifestyle and gossip magazine, edited by local artists Anne Kolbe and Jacco Weener. Anne interviewed and photographed me and wrote a three-page feature about Vanita and me. The magazine's policy was to talk about anything except the work, so the article focused instead on love, death and gender. In my role of cover girl, I also dressed up and put on makeup and played a saxophone solo at the launch party.

## But Not Today (November 2020) / Just Another Day (May 2021)

Theater Galerie Dordtselaan / South Explorer Arts Festival, Rotterdam

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, we livestreamed two 78-hour durational lockdown performances from our studio/theater/gallery in Rotterdam.

Visitors, both real and virtual, could watch us build up a display window exhibition of [photos by me](#) (2021) and of [recent paintings by Vanita](#) (2020), and observe us performing various other creative and mundane activities: making music, reading aloud from our own writings, meditating, posting documentation online, and maintaining the physical space and our own physical bodies. Both exhibitions remained visible from the street for several weeks after the event.

You can read more about Theater Galerie Dordtselaan on the next page.



From 2015 to 2022 I was the main curator and custodian of [Theater Galerie Dordtselaan](#) (also known as [De Nieuwe Ruimte](#) and [Theater aan de Laan](#)), a small but notable venue within Rotterdam's DIY art and music scene. We hosted events and exhibitions by international artists, writers and musicians, as well as local social and cultural events organized by others.

During these 7 years, we were materially supported by the urban renewal organization National Programma Rotterdam Zuid. We were also subsidized by the municipality of Rotterdam in 2015 and 2016, the period in which I personally curated events on a regular basis.





### *We Don't Believe in Love*

RUIS Gallery / Qtopia Queer Arts Festival, Nijmegen, August/September 2019

A [two-week paid residency](#) in collaboration with Vanita Monk and [Geo Wyex](#), combining music, poetry, improvised spoken word, field recordings, unannounced street performances, a video installation, and two gallery performances.

The result was an [enigmatic transmedia meditation](#) on love, friendship, queerness, gender, alienation, pornography, transgressiveness, the epistemology of faith, and reappropriation of public spaces by marginalized voices.



Four art performances, 2017-2021, mostly in collaboration with Vanita Monk. Top to bottom and left to right:

[Jacques Derrida: Le monologisme de l'autre](#) (2019)

Solo: performative theory reading with live noise music

Florian Cramer x50 Performance Art Event, Pink Pank, Rotterdam

Dated (2018)

Scholarly lecture and queer butoh audience flirt

Queer Performance Art Evening #2, Worm Ubik, Rotterdam

[Free Bananas, a Clarinet and a Picture of Keanu Reeves](#) (2021)

Live music, random curated objects and absurd gestures

The Performance Bar / Slash Gallery, Rotterdam

[Portrait of the Artist and Her Trophy Wife](#) (2017)

Zen calligraphy, perilous feminine attire, live ambient music and deep meditation

Gender Bending Queer Party, The Performance Bar, Rotterdam



Four art performances, 2018, all in collaboration with Vanita Monk. Top to bottom and left to right:

*Contesting Madness: Live at De Schie Prison*

Unannounced street performance, music, improvised choreography  
Still from a video installation by Natalia Sorzano (2018)

Performative asynchronous double reading of our novel *Antarctica* (2008)  
at Sandberg Instituut / Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (2018)  
Studium generale curated by Jay Tan

*This Book Will Change Your Life*

5-hour performance featuring written and spoken word, live music, drawing and painting, live media coding, pulp bookmaking, butoh dance, sacred objects, sex magick, mystical allegories, and whatever other means may or may not be necessary  
Gardena IV, De Player, Rotterdam (2018)

Performative reading of our novel *Antarctica* (2008) at Huis der zotheid, Rotterdam (2018)  
With artworks by Vanita



Four music performances, free jazz / improv / noise, 2018-2024. Top to bottom and left to right:  
Traumatic Octopus Experience: Johanna Monk, Bruno Ferro Xavier da Silva, Philipp Ernsting  
Sound Room De Boog, [outdoor concert on King's Day](#), Rotterdam, 2024

Saxophone and clarinet solo  
[Raw Dates #8](#), iii, Den Haag, 2022

Boterkontje: Johanna Monk, Vanita Monk, Linda Nijboer  
[Vrooom #67](#), Klooster Oude Noorden, Rotterdam, 2018

Leading and performing in a [workshop on improvised music](#),  
commissioned by the feminist/queer electronic music collective Re#Sister,  
of which I have been a founding member since 2018. Worm, Rotterdam, 2021



Four music performances, free jazz / improv / noise / spoken word, 2013-2019. Top to bottom and left to right:

Clarinet solo with found art objects  
Simon Kentgens' studio, Het Wilde Weten, Rotterdam, 2019

Oxygen Tank: Johanna Monk, Friso van Wijck, Vanita Monk  
[Halloween in the Spring](#) (exhibition and festival curated by me), Atelier Tarwewijk, Rotterdam, 2013

Goodiepal & Monks: Johanna & Vanita Monk, Lars Skinnebach, Moisés Horta Valenzuela  
De Nieuwe Ruimte / Theater Galerie Dordtselaan, 2016 ([album released of this concert](#))

Johanna Monk & Bruno Ferro Xavier da Silva  
Ver uit de maat festival, Worm, Rotterdam, 2017

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Photo by Mia AndréSEN

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Photo by Caro Linares; 10 stills from silent film by Vanita Monk,  
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2 opening photos by Marieke van der Lippe

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8 stills from video by Rowan van As

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Top right photo by Florian Cramer; bottom right photo by Johanna Monk;  
2 stills from livestream video by Johanna Monk

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Left to right, top to bottom: photos by Koos Siep, Johanna Monk,  
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Reading at Sandberg Instituut / Rietveld Academie: photo by Jay Tan  
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Boterkontje: still from video by Johanna Monk  
Solo, Raw Dates #8, iii: photo by Francesco Enriquez  
Re#Sister workshop: still from video by Davids Danoss

Page 13: Four music performances  
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Goodiepal & Monks: photo by Simon Kentgens  
Oxygen Tank: photo by Luisa Moura  
Johanna Monk & Bruno Ferro Xavier da Silva: photo by Mihai Gui

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