



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

THIJS REIJNDERS | 2025

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

From a young age, I've been telling stories. Through my drawings and animations, I tried not only to show people something but also to make them feel something. I wanted to raise awareness about the personal experiences I have had, as well as about themes that I found important. Now, I use design as a way to tell stories, stories that set something in motion, that make people think about societal issues.

For me, design is a way to give meaning, to inspire people, and make them look at the world differently. As an experience designer, I follow a user-centered approach in my work. I believe that an experience only truly makes an impact when it connects to the user's personal context, evoking emotion, inspiring, or teaching something. That is why I always start my design process with the user. Through research, I delve into the theme and identify the user's needs and problems. As an empathetic person, I try to see things through their eyes to then design an experience that connects with what they feel, need, or even miss. Building on that foundation, I use my creative and visual skills to shape the concept in a way that resonates with the target audience and serves the project's goal. In doing so, I focus primarily on creating an immersive experience. I achieve this not only through animation and interaction on the screen but also by incorporating tangible and interactive elements. This combination not only makes the experience more interactive but also more personal, thereby enhancing the story's impact on the user.

I am a naturally independent person and often prefer to work alone. However, during my studies, I experienced how valuable collaboration can be, especially with like-minded individuals who share the same motivations. Exchanging ideas with others brings new perspectives and often strengthens the concept or design. Although I prefer to work independently on a story or the visual development, I recognize the value of input from others as it contributes to the overall quality of the end result. This balance between autonomy and collaboration is of great importance to me within the design process.

My strength as a designer lies primarily in the creative and visual aspects of the design process, where I translate a context into a story and a meaningful experience. I like to focus on the visual development of the experience, consciously making design choices based on existing theories. For example, I apply colour theory to create atmosphere and evoke emotion; consider the use of light to enhance feelings; and utilize shape language to design characters or elements with distinct personalities. I often start my process with sketching, both on paper and digitally in Photoshop, to visually



explore ideas. Then, I use programs such as Illustrator, After Effects, and Blender to bring the story and the experience to life in 2D or 3D.

In addition to the visual development, I strive to craft narratives that emotionally resonate with the user, purposefully incorporating metaphor to enrich depth and meaning. During my studies, I also developed a strong interest in designing interactions, both digital and physical. By working with Arduino and learning to program, I started experimenting with tangible interactions. In this, I investigate how story and interaction can reinforce each other within a single, coherent experience.

In the future, I aim to further expand my skill set as a designer by strengthening my analytical skills. By integrating user research and testing more thoroughly into my design process, I aim to improve my ability to substantiate design choices effectively. Additionally, I strive to continue experimenting with tangible design and integrating rich interactions into my experiences by utilizing new technologies. In this way, I strive to make my designs even more impactful and personal. My goal is to create experiences that are not only visually or interactively strong, but that truly make a difference to the user.

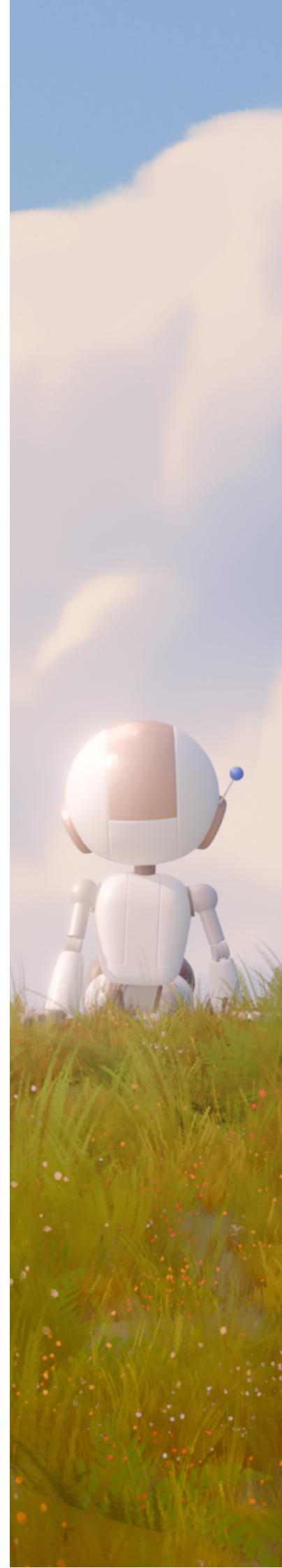
VISION

We live in a rapidly evolving digital world, where the focus is on performance and measurable achievement. Due to social media, we are increasingly focused on what others achieve rather than on who we are as a person and our own dreams. This trend often leads to a loss of personal motivation, identity, and passion and causes mental health issues. [1] Themes such as mental health, but also climate change, and inclusivity require more awareness and involvement so that we can tackle these problems as a society. [2] I believe in a future where people have a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them so that they are inspired to contribute to positive change. A future with more empathy, room for personal strength, and where we work on a better, inclusive future together.

I believe that design is a powerful tool for creating awareness and addressing societal issues. Through a user-centered approach, designers can create experiences that truly connect with users' needs. By immersing ourselves in their world and the context, we can create concepts that are meaningful and have a real impact. Furthermore, I believe that new technologies, such as tangible interfaces and immersive media, can play an essential role for designers in enhancing these experiences. They make it possible, not only to tell stories, but also to let the user feel and experience them. In this way, users can influence a story themselves through tangible interactions, resulting in a more personal and layered experience. By combining physical elements with digital storytelling and animations, designers can make abstract or sensitive themes tangible, understandable, and open for discussion. In this way, design not only stimulates awareness but also active involvement and personal reflection.

I furthermore believe in the power of animation and visual storytelling within the entertainment industry. Animated films have the unique ability to address complex themes in an accessible and narrative way. Through strong stories, visual metaphors, and emotional experiences, they can create awareness, stimulate empathy, and inspire people to view social issues in a different light. In my vision, animations can, therefore, not only be part of experiences but can also be powerful tools in themselves to touch people and move them towards a more conscious and inclusive future.

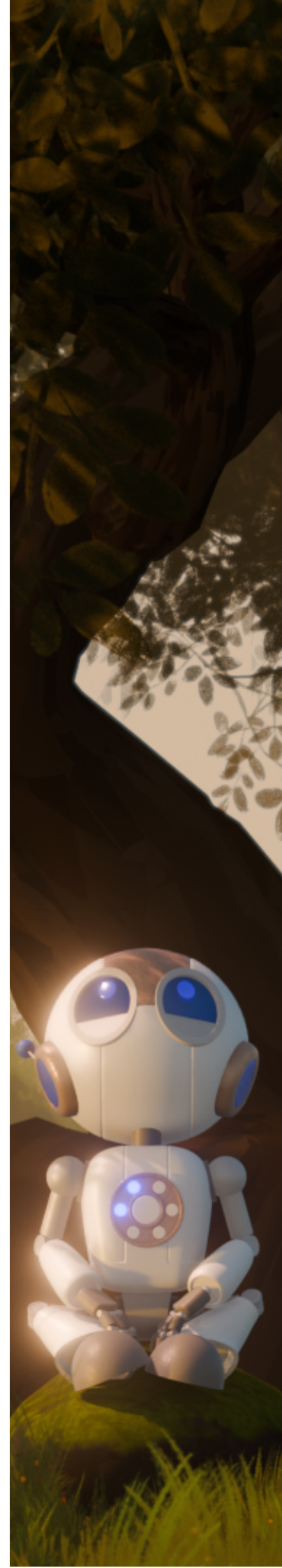
As a designer and storyteller, I want to bring the design world and the animation industry together. I strive to create immersive experiences that, through a combination of animation, storytelling, and tangible interactions, convey social themes to users in an accessible and understandable way. It is



important that I clearly understand who the user is and what their needs are. By immersing myself in the user's perspective, I can develop animated stories that resonate with them on multiple levels. To achieve an immersive experience, it is essential that not only the story connects with the user and the context but also that the visual style and interactions are precisely tuned towards the narrative of the experience. By consciously using colour, light, and shape language in the animations, I want to create an emotional connection with the story. In addition, I aim to enhance the experience through a combination of digital and physical interactions, making it more personal and unique and, therefore, more effective. I consider it my most important task to gain a deep understanding of the user, enabling me to apply my creative skills to design meaningful experiences that help address societal challenges.

[1] Yuhas, D. (2024, February 20). Why social media makes people unhappy--and simple ways to fix it. Scientific American. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-social-media-makes-people-unhappy-and-simple-ways-to-fix-it/>

[2] Reece, T. (2023) Public Awareness and It's Impact in Empowering Individuals for Societal Change. J Pol Sci Pub Aff. 11:020. DOI: 10.35248/2332-0761.23.11.020



PERSONAL GOALS

Working with electronics to create interactions (T&R) (M,D&C)

During my FBP I want to focus on connecting interaction design with animation, by making an interactive animated experience. To do this I want to work with Arduino or Raspberry Pi to create physical inputs for these digital interactions. This way I get a better understanding of both experience design and my technological skills. By the end of my FBP I want to have created working interactions that combine physical input with digital output.

Using a playful and interactive user research to make more substantiated design choices (U&S) (C&A)

The second goal within my FBP is using user research to create substantiated choices within my animated experience. I want to come up with a playful way to do this user research and with this learn more about preparing and doing a user research on my own. This way I hope to include user research as an essential element within my design approach. My goal is to do at least one interactive and playful user research during my FBP.

Using input and feedback from experts within the work field to substantiate my project. (U&S) (C&A)

The final goal of my FBP is to work closely with experts in the fields of animation, games and self-esteem to take my project to a professional level. This way I can make substantiated choices when designing and animating my experience. Furthermore, I hope to learn more and novel methods to use in both the experience and the animation that can actually have an impact on ones self-esteem. At the end of my FBP I hope to have had at least one interview with an expert from the work field and have used their input within my experience.

