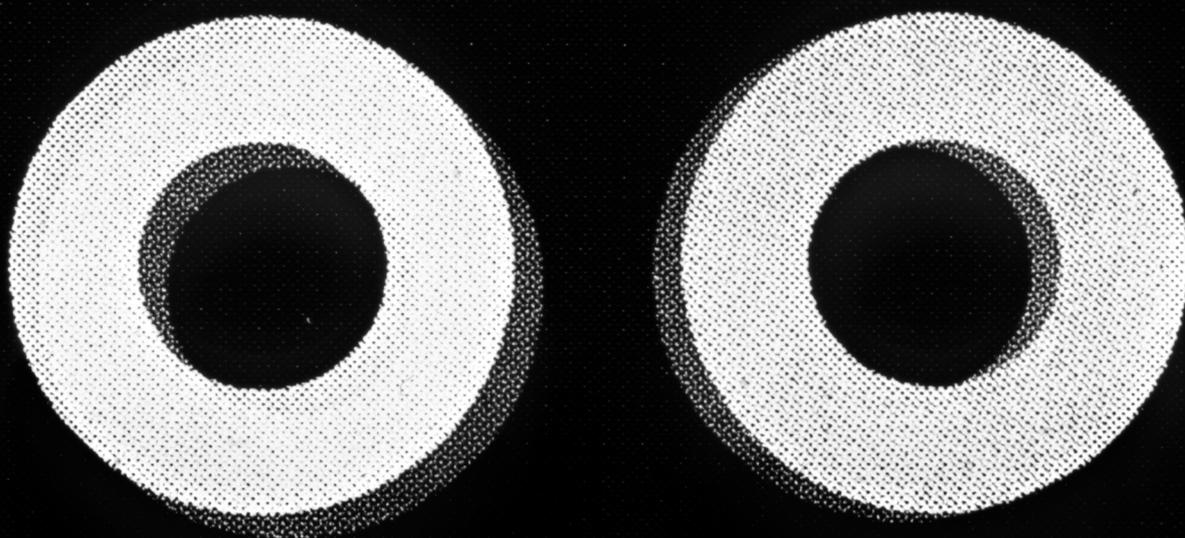


PRESS KIT

Willem Oorebeek



OBSTAKLES

WIELS

PRESS RELEASE

WIELS presents *OBSTAKLES*, a major survey of Willem Oorebeek's work. Since the early 1980s Willem Oorebeek (1953, NL) has been a prominent figure with an extensive presence in exhibitions, publications, and as a teacher and a mentor. He developed his practice in the Netherlands before moving to Brussels in 1994, where he has been living and working ever since. Over the past decades Oorebeek has explored the impact of images and the erosion of the viewing experience caused by the mass inflation of 'print' or 'screen' reproduction.

Spread across two floors, *OBSTAKLES* highlights Oorebeek's in-depth exploration of authorship and aura by way of appropriation techniques, selecting printed matter to manipulate and transpose into other media. By focusing on duplicating, copying and translating, Oorebeek explores the malleability of the structure of images, across abstraction or representation, form or sign.

The exhibition features around 40 series of work spanning from the 1980s and 1990s to new productions that engage spatially with the building's architecture. Key series such as *Vertical Club*, *BLACKOUTS*, *Pirelli portals*, variations on grids and screens will be featured alongside installations conceived in collaboration with fellow artists, including Koenraad Dedobbeleer, Aglaia Konrad, and Joëlle Tuerlinckx. The exhibition is accompanied by a book edited by Will Holder and Willem Oorebeek, published by Roma Publications.

Structured as a non-linear, associative diagrammatic presentation, *OBSTAKLES* reflects the artist's evolving engagement with print media, notably revealing a confrontation through pictorial effects. Defying the dominance of neo-expressionist painting that reigned in his early years, Oorebeek sought an impersonal or mechanical method

within appropriation by mobilising printing techniques, which he has continued in a coherent and consistent manner ever since.

In his work, the many possibilities of a printing press—such as those used for engravings, etching or offset—the format and the very logic of printing as an organisational system are central. For him, printing is not simply a means of reproducing texts or images—it becomes an active mode of structuring and reinterpreting knowledge. The printed page, with its layout, sequence, and typographic choices, becomes an allegory of knowledge itself—its organisation, dissemination, and transformation. Oorebeek employs processes of repetition and superimposition— mostly carried out manually—in a quasi-painterly manner, working with a serial structure characterized by rhythmic or iterative qualities. The result often takes the pictorial form of rectangular planes, an abstract play of signs and symbols, and conceptual reflections on the status of the image and of authorship. By applying methods of content recycling to his own work, he turns artistic production into self-consumption.

For Oorebeek's work simultaneously engages with forms of media representation and the possibilities of perception. Overprinted, or obscured by black ink as in the *BLACKOUTS* series, his images function like a palimpsest: they enter into a continuous cycle of erasure and re-emergence, while the original source resists and disrupts, never completely submitting to obliteration.

In the artist's words, these distanced images take us through a "choreography of the gaze" requiring an active process of interpretation. The difficult legibility underscores the dynamic nature of perception and understanding. The image deceives the desire for immediate access, requiring instead a process of tension, reflection, and displacement to be fully apprehended.

At the heart of Oorebeek's approach is the human figure, through which he explores the politics of the image, the appeal of icons, and the humor that emerges from their overexposure in the collective imagination. Through this lens, the work not only questions the dominance of visual culture, but also presents the image as something through which we see the world—and yet, something that blocks our access to reality.

Curator: Pauline Hatzigeorgiou

BIOGRAPHY

Willem Oorebeek (1953, NL) took courses in graphics, painting and drawing in Rotterdam from 1970 to 1975. He developed his practice in the Netherlands until he moved to Brussels in 1994, where he still lives and works. In 1997, he represented the Netherlands at the Venice Biennale together with Aernout Mik. From 2008 to 2020, he supervised the residency programme at WIELS. Recently, he decided to stop teaching and fully devote himself to his own artistic practice in his studio in Schaerbeek.

His work is part of the collections of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen Rotterdam, Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, Generali Foundation Vienna/Salzburg, MUHKA in Antwerp, M Museum in Leuven and Kanal-Centre-Pompidou in Brussels.

Willem Oorebeek is represented by dépendance Brussels.

EVENTS

Conversation with Camiel Van Winkel & Willem Oorebeek 21.02 (EN)

Look Who's Talking:

Pauline Hatzigeorgiou 05.02 (FR),
Noor Mertens 29.03 (NL),
Devrim Bayar 02.04 (FR),
Catherine Mayeur 17.04 (FR)

Guided tour and presentation of the publication by Will Holder & Willem Oorebeek 20.03 (EN)

Lecture by Sabine Folie (EN)

Nocturne

Every first Wednesday of the month, open until 9pm

Family Fundays

first and third Sunday of each month at 2pm

Guided tours

Tours for groups, classes or individual visitors can be booked via the website.

More info via WIELS.ORG

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a book edited by Will Holder and Willem Oorebeek, published by Roma Publications and supported by WIELS, Mondriaanfonds, Monolith BV and dépendance Brussels.

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