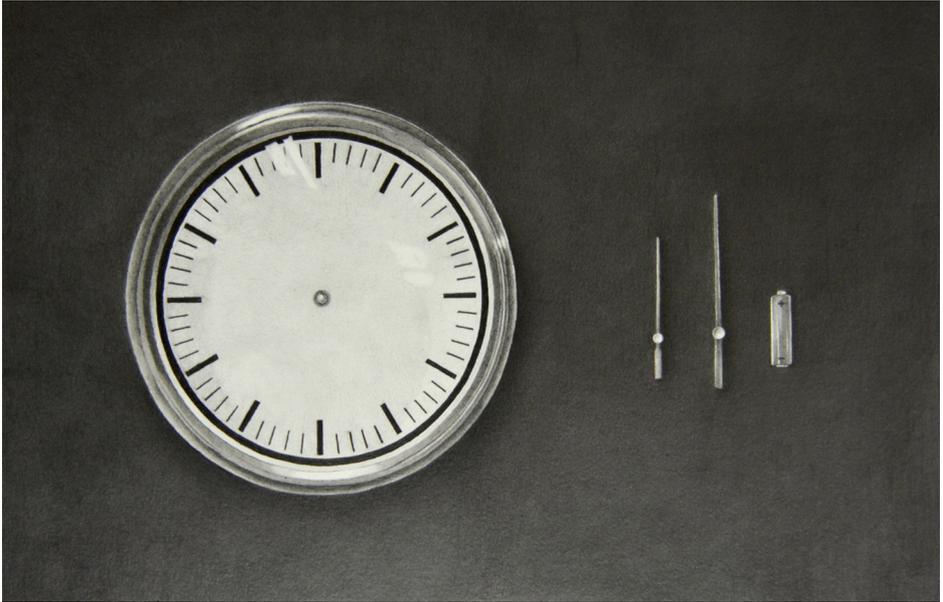


# OVERGADEN.

Michael Würtz Overbeck  
*Parable of Love*  
03.09 – 23.10 2016



Michael Würtz Overbeck, *Disrupting Time*. Pencil drawing, detail from *Stray Thought Atlas*, 2016

## With Death as Leitmotif

By Louise Steiwer

On a sloping podium in the dimly lit gallery a two-metre high, meticulously detailed pencil drawing emerges from the quivering semi-darkness. A man with his back to us holds a mirror in front of his face, capturing our gaze in his reflection. His face is painted with a death mask, and he does not bat an eyelid as he looks us right in the eye with his silent reminder that we too, and those we love, will die one day.

Confronting the transience of life is central to Michael Würtz Overbeck's art, which revolves around the constant and perhaps futile human search for truth and meaning. In Overbeck's perspective, this confrontation is coupled with a loss of meaning that exceeds the framework of our shared nar-

ratives, changes our perception, and leaves us alone and alienated in relationship to the world we live in. In works that appear like fragmented archives of different perspectives and explanatory models, he exposes the basic human need to piece them together to a coherent worldview. At the same time, any 'truths' are exposed as illusionary and unstable, and our perceptions as subjective and partial. Death becomes a leitmotif in the search for meaning and logic in life, a search that in the shadow of loss seems profoundly absurd.

Like much of Michael Würtz Overbeck's work, the exhibition *Parable of Love* is a total installation transforming the upper gallery of Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art

into a labyrinth and cyclical course of narrow corridors that suddenly and unexpectedly open up onto more open spaces. Overbeck removes us from our familiar surroundings, leading us into a constructed three-dimensional representation that both disturbs and distorts our sense of time and place. In a continuous, constructed progression, which at no point reveals either the boundaries of the physical gallery or our location within it, we are completely at the mercy of the premise and direction of the installation. The space the work creates is both a very physical entity the viewer enters, and an indefinable abstraction. Within its hushed and sacred passageways and spaces, we abandon the realm of fixed points and definitive answers. The claustrophobic universe of the total installation leaves us almost ruthlessly alone in our confusion and disorientation – a parallel to the way our navigational ability and sense of reality is shaken when we are confronted by the absurd, the incomprehensible, and that which is larger than life itself.

Throughout the exhibition our experience of spatiality shifts between being a physical presence and an abstract symbol. The same duality exists in relationship to the individual works, where motifs are repeated and displaced. The narrow opening in the antechamber to the exhibition leads onto a long corridor so narrow we can only just get through. We are in the transitional zone between the physical space of the gallery and the mental space of the work. Via the narrow passage of the fabric corridor, we move through a wormhole into another world – and into ourselves. The corridor opens onto a room occupied by an obscured light source projecting thin rays of light into the darkened room. A monstrous glass case surrounds the source of light, which is wreathed in thick smoke. A parallel shift takes place in the video work *From X to Y*, but here it is detached from any physical, bodily experience, existing only as an abstract symbol. Through the surface of the screen, the viewer is pulled into a narrow, cave-like corridor where the darkness deepens as the text element of the video unfolds. The small shaft opens onto a larger vault, where a dark sphere rotates faster and faster until it suddenly stops. The motif – like the use of space in the installation – is

ambiguous in its insistence on being simultaneously a very physical presence and a total abstraction. As a result, the unpredictable construction of the space becomes a condition at more than just an architectural level: rather than merely 'staging' the individual works, it underlines the way they interact in a labyrinthine play on narrative structure.

In theme and structure, *Parable of Love* refers to classical mythology of the underworld represented in works like Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and Virgil and Ovid's legends of Orpheus and Eurydice. In Greek mythology, Eurydice was the nymph loved by the singer Orpheus. When she was killed by a snakebite, Orpheus decided to challenge fate and travels to Hades, where he sang so sorrowfully that he was allowed to take her back to earth with him – on condition that he did not turn to look at her during the journey. But he did, and she was lost to him forever in the underworld. In the work of Michael Würtz Overbeck the journey to the underworld is a metaphorical and psychological inner journey – an exploration of the meaning of loss. Death and loss become leitmotifs to probe reflections on our own mortality and that of others. Confronted by the loss of the other, our understanding and perception of the world shifts, and answers and explanations that seemed so certain now seem indeterminate and in flux. Overbeck's journey to the underworld is thus not about bringing the dead back to life or discovering any definitive meaning, but about an inner journey and the questions it can raise.

One example of this is the work *Stray Thought Atlas* – a kind of archive of explanatory models. A long row of pencil drawings hang side by side on a rack, apparently carefully ordered and categorised. On a podium there is a pair of white, cotton gloves, a magnifying glass and an old-fashioned box of index cards with information about each drawing. It is possible to flick through the drawings, but not to get any kind of overview of multiple drawings at once. One of the drawings is a highly detailed depiction of the Milky Way where the area surveyed by the Kepler telescope is marked. The Kepler telescope is used to search for planets that resemble earth, and therefore have the



Michael Würtz Overbeck, *Gaze (The Mortality of the Other)*, 2016. Pencil drawing

potential to sustain life. Another drawing is a list of contents from a Wikipedia page where world religions are listed as links to further studies – an endless list of ‘truths’ that contradict each other. At the bottom of the drawing there is a link to the relevant Wikipedia page where viewers can log in and edit its contents. A third drawing shows a screenshot of an open browser window with a photograph of an atom bomb that has just detonated. Another browser tab has the name of the photographer who has taken the picture, and yet another shows a Google search for ‘How to take a screenshot on your Mac’. Each drawing tells the story of how through patient investigation, categorisation and analysis, we are able to gather huge quantities of information on nature, culture, world history and ourselves. There is physical evidence, psychological explanations and spiritual approaches, all of which present fractions of the meaning we try to piece together from a vast reservoir of fragments. Using the magnifying glass we can zoom in on minute details of the fragments, or we can navigate between the different worldviews trying to find threads and connections that can expose new layers of reality and causes and effects. The drawings present us with an inexhaustible realm of possibility for the subjective formation of opinion, leaving us in a state of isolation surrounded by broken patterns and incomplete glimpses of meaning.

With *Parable of Love* Overbeck raises questions about existence, perception and the making of meaning. Questions that call for reflection rather than explanation, making the exhibition a fragmentary archive of different perspectives layered on top of each other and connected by constant interaction. But on the handle of the door at the end of the exhibition there is a cardboard sign with the words ‘A vague sensation of the redemptional force of love’. Maybe an offer of the possibility of escape: an exit through love of the other.

*Louise Steiwer is a freelance writer and holds an MA in Art History from Copenhagen University.*

*Translation: Jane Rowley*

## CV

Michael Würtz Overbeck (b. 1982) graduated from the Funen Art Academy in 2010. He has previously exhibited at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Kunsthal Aarhus, OK Corral, MOHS Exhibit, C4 Projects, NLHspace, Ringsted Galleriet and Koldinghus Museum in Denmark, as well as at Rom8 in Bergen and Contemporary Image Collective in Cairo.

## EVENTS

Thursday 22 September 6-7.30pm

### **Walk & Talk // Trine Ross and Michael Würtz Overbeck**

This evening in the company of Trine Ross Michael Würtz Overbeck will speak about his thoughts and the process behind his current exhibition *Parable of Love*. In their conversation they will touch upon various themes of the exhibition such as the transience and absurdity of life.

## THANK YOU

Michael Würtz Overbeck would like to thank Sofie Hertz, Michael Isling, Jonas Palm, Pelle Møller Schøidt, Simon Byrckel Sivertsen, Hannah Skarsholm, Anne Karina Steen, Louise Steiwer, Mai Sung, and Overgaden.

## UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 11 November 2016 Overgaden presents solo exhibitions by Seimi Nørregaard and Ann Lislegaard. The exhibitions run through 8 January 2017.

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: [www.overgaden.org](http://www.overgaden.org)

The exhibition is supported by:

## **DANISH ARTS FOUNDATION**

Overgaden is supported by the Danish Arts Foundation's Committee for Visual Arts and the Obel Family Foundation.

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### **Overgaden.**

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