

Mariken Wessels

I'M OK – YOU'RE OK

4 March – 11 June 2017

Visual artist Mariken Wessels (b. Vlaardingen, 1963) produces works that occupy a grey zone somewhere between fact and fiction. For her 'documentary fiction', she uses her own photographs together with found images, playing around with their meanings until a new narrative emerges. Her *Taking Off. Henry my neighbor* series won last year's prestigious Author Book Award at the Rencontres de la photographie festival in Arles (France). In this exhibition – Wessels' first ever Dutch museum solo – the Hague Museum of Photography presents that work together with three earlier series: *Elisabeth - I Want To Eat* - (2008), *Queen Ann. P.S. Belly cut off* (2010) and *Keepsake* (2011). The exhibition also includes a work specially made for the occasion: a short film entitled *Elisabeth* (2017).

Mariken Wessels graduated from the Theatre School Amsterdam in 1989 and acted with *Het Nationale Toneel* and other companies before taking a fine arts degree from Amsterdam's Rietveld Academie in 2008. Wessel's background in the theatre still influences her artistic approach: she thinks and works in terms of story lines, tableaux and staged situations. Her books and installations are generally based on found documentation, such as old photograph albums, letters, brief notes or jottings, and sometimes entire archives. She hunts out this material in junk markets or receives it from friends. Having found it, she sets out to investigate the characters, gradually uncovering the story behind the found documentation. In doing so, Wessels exercises a large degree of artistic freedom, redacting the images and shaping the story line as she sees fit. Where an extra picture is needed to tell the story, she looks for a new one in another archive or creates one herself. The result is what she calls 'documentary fiction', a term that captures the essence of her work.

Recurrent themes explored in Mariken Wessels' work are the self-image in amateur photography, broken or difficult relationships, and the dividing line between the public and the private. Wessels often suggests that voyeurism is at play. In this respect, the photographs she exhibits are reminiscent of the work of Gerard Fieret and Miroslav Tichý (although her work is the result of a wholly different process). Wessels' books can be found in the collections of many major institutions, including MoMA (New York), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Albertina (Vienna), Ampersand (Johannesburg), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) and Leiden University Special Collections (Leiden). In 2016 she had a solo show at the Antwerp Museum of Photography (FOMU, Belgium) but her present exhibition at the Hague Museum of Photography is her first ever solo show in any museum in the Netherlands.

Taking Off. Henry My Neighbor

Taking Off. Henry My Neighbor was published by Art Paper Editions in 2015. The following year, the book was honoured with a Best Dutch and Flemish Book Designs award, received an Honorary Appreciation from the international panel of the Best Book Design from Anywhere in the World contest at the Leipzig Book Fair, and won the prestigious Author Book Award at the Rencontres de la photographie festival in Arles.

Taking Off. Henry My Neighbor tells the story of Martha, for many years the 'muse' of her husband Henry and the object of his photographic obsessions. Together with Wessels' earlier books, *Elisabeth - I want to eat* - (2008) and *Queen Ann. P.S. Belly cut off* (2010), it forms an open trilogy. In this show at the Hague

Museum of Photography, Wessels is showing the three series together, accompanied by her installation *Keepsake* and the film *Elisabeth*.

The initial print-run of *Taking Off. Henry My Neighbor* is now sold out. A second edition is being published to coincide with the exhibition at the Hague Museum of Photography. In addition, a special collector's edition is being issued, encompassing all three books. This special edition is handmade and is being produced in a limited edition of ten.

The Hague Museum of Photography is supported by its chief sponsor, the renowned Dutch law firm of Pels Rijcken & Droogleever Fortuijn, and the Erik Bos Fund.

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Images available on the press page of our website: <https://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/nl/pers/mariken-wessels>