

# Wouter Van de Voorde Opgelicht

CIVIC ART BUREAU JULY 2025



OPGELICHT
Wouter Van de Voorde
5.7.25 – 27.7.25

#### FRONT

Datura at Monaro extension 5, 2025 Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired resin paper 8 x 10 inch

BIO PAGE Fire pit, 2021 Hand printed silver gelatine print on resin paper 8 x 10 inch

#### BACK

Dead mullion, 2022 Hand printed silver gelatine print on resin paper 8 x 10 inch

with thanks to Martyn Jolly, David Hempenstall and Oscar Capezio

www.woutervandevoorde.com

#### CIVIC ART BUREAU

Director Adam Bell
Melbourne Building upstairs Smiths Alternative
76 Alinga St / GPO Box 2299 Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
info@civicartbureau.com
civicartbureau.com / Instagram @civic\_art\_bureau

You may have noticed that traditional, analogue, chemically based photography has been having a bit of a moment lately. People seem to like the materiality of the darkroom print. They seem to value the hands-on directness of the various optical and chemical process the photographers have used. But I have noticed that for many of those contemporary photographers (they know who they are), it's all a bit of an add-on. They have artfully deployed traditional photographic processes, or the semblance of traditional photographic processes, to produce certain, more or less known, effects of 'the photographic' — with all of their, more or less known, associated connotations.

Not so Wouter van de Voorde. He doesn't know what he's doing, or what he's going to get. And that's what makes his photographs so exciting.

He makes pictures in the slip stream of the photographic industry, or perhaps in its churning wake. He works in that interregnum between the too old to confidently use and the too good to throw out. Many kindly people who find themselves in possession of obsolete technologies and out of date materials sense that perhaps there is something still there that might be of use to someone else. And there is. Wouter makes use of the loose stock of donated, deleted and dusty stuff which, these days, our arts and education organisations are increasingly finding themselves the custodians of. His private remediation of the recent past of that most technologically amnesiac of mass mediums allows him to create his own parallel universe within the everyday.

A good case in point is the Hasselblad. It was once the *ne plus ultra* of cameras, so good they used it on the moon. But that was fifty-six years ago. The one which Wouter uses has a special wide-angle lens, the legendary C38. The rear element of this triumph of optical engineering is so close to the film plane there is no room for the camera's usual reflex-mirror ground-glass viewfinder, so instead a little plastic eyepiece has to be mounted on top. For his lighting, Wouter bought a Godox flash unit online. Some photographers get sniffy about these cheap and Chinese flash units, doubting their consistency. But for Wouter it does the job because it 'goes hard'. So, those dark disconcerting shadows you are enjoying so much on the gallery wall? To get them Wouter had to precariously hold the camera, cradled in the palm of one hand, up to his eye, with the thumb resting on the shutter button while stretching the other arm with the flashgun up and out as far as possible. Then, teetering, blam.

To print the negatives, he might have used out of date Ilfobrom, an old reliable paper from the 70s with plenty of silver in its emulsion; or a thin, warm, curling Agfa paper from even further back in time. From that whole process there will be one or perhaps two prints —unique, never to be repeated

— that create something, a sense of another world. Because it is expired, the tonal range of the paper is flattened. If we were operating in digital space the bell curve of the histogram would be nipped in at the two toes, no blacks and no whites, and flattened in the middle, everybody's moving through a crepuscular space. Easy to adjust, but Wouter doesn't. He scans the aged prints, with all their stains and light leaks, and posts them directly onto Instagram (where they are showered with likes), or sequences them into his photobooks *Safe*, *Death is not here* and *Nucleo* (which sell out), or exhibits them in this gallery.

Wouter fell into photography as a kind of powerful accident. He's got a masters in painting and printmaking from Ghent's Royal Academy of Art, and his etchings from that time assemble various little fanciful scenes into grids of window-like boxes, so it's not hard to make the connection between these and his subsequent Insta posts and photobooks — and this exhibition.

When they fell in love, the transnational couple of Wouter and his partner could have stayed in Belgium but, for Wouter, there was the opportunity of a readymade extended family and new rural environments to experience here in Australia. In both Canberra and at Gerringong he began to take photographs on a small Lumix camera (a handy, but classy, rangefinder point'n'shoot) to share images of his new country with friends and family back in Belgium. Other old cameras — medium format, large format — began to fall into his lap, and his photographic process is now an intricate part of his family life — a life suspended between countries, cultures and languages, as well as generations of relatives and stacks of memories.

That's the point about Wouter's photography, he inhabits his process, day in and day out.

Men's families have been the basis for many photographic practices. Here in Australia there's Trent Parke, maybe; or overseas there's Emmet Gowin or Ralph Eugene Meatyard, definitely. (Both were purchased by our own National Gallery of Australia in the 80s), But don't dare think of Wouter's family as some kind of twee 'unit' going on adventures together. They are more like a loosely collective, mobile ecology, moving through the frayed edges of Canberra or Gerringong, where suburbs give over to nature walks which give way to exhausted paddocks. Again, ambiguous urban littoral zones like Wouter's, with their dankly reflective dams and drooping acacias, have long been a favourite subject for photographers. In Australia, there's the Pictorialists, probably; or overseas there's Lee Friedlander or John Gossage, definitely. (Again, both collected by the NGA back in the day).

Weird things happen with scale. Piles of sand from a road works site at

Coppins Crossing become as big as The Alps. Weird things happen with time. Children move through thickets of undergrowth made entropic with dense chromas of red. Weird things happen with space. His favourite wide-angle lenses and precipitous flash fall-off dilate and decompress environments into subjective dreamscapes. Wouter says that he and his family are trying to get away from the anthropocentric. Although we think we are all snug in our little rectangular frame of Canberra humanity, beyond that frame but contiguous with it there are other frames with whole societies — human, animal and botanical — from other times inside them.

The datura plant becomes emblematic here. According to the NSW Weedwise website, it's dangerous in every respect: jagged edges on the leaves, green spikes on the fruit, bruised looking flesh-trumpets for flowers, hairy stems running with poisonous sap, deeply probing tap roots, and hard black seeds that can remain dormant for years until they are disturbed by 'progress' — road works, say — so the whole satanic ensemble erupts out of the dirt again. Long ago, it was introduced to Australia from Central America as a garden plant — by the English, natch — and has now nationally metastasised as one of our commonest, but most commonly overlooked weeds. Hence Wouter. He bought a specimen home, posed it in a makeshift garage lighting studio, lit it in different ways. He gave it respect.

There's another scene in this exhibition we want you to know about. As a child, like most other children in Belgium and the Netherlands, Wouter loved the Efteling theme park with its fairy tale rides designed by the famous illustrator Anton Pieck (heaps weirder than Walt Disney). Most beloved of all was the Haunted House ride, now re-invented by the park as Danse Macabre, complete with Saint Saens' famous music. On a return trip home, he photographed the ride. Back here, he printed the negatives onto expired colour photographic paper, wildly twisting the cyan, magenta and yellow filters of his colour enlarger-head like a demented organist, developing it in un-temperature-regulated trays of colour chemistry like a frantic alchemist.

As every artist, or theme park manager for that matter, knows, to dance the dance of death is to feel yourself to be alive. So Wouter's photographic processes are not a superadded effect, they are the source of his life.

# 1. *1/8 from Spookslut Series*, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750

# 2. **2/8 from Spookslut Series**, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750

## 3. 3/8 from Spookslut Series, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750

# 4. **4/8 8 from Spookslut Series**, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750

# 5. *5/8 8 from Spookslut Series*, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750

- 6. 6/8 8 from Spookslut Series, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750
- 7. **7/8 8 from Spookslut Series**, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750
- 8. **8/8 8 from Spookslut Series**, 2023 Hand printed RA4 print on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$750

#### 9. C and fam at Werri, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on Fiber paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 10. Fire pit, 2021

Hand printed silver gelatine print on resin paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$750

#### 11. C at Werri, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 12. Sandhill at Coppins Crossing, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 20 x 23 inch \$950

#### 13. C walking away at Narooma, 2023

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 14. Datura at Monaro extension 1, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired resin paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

#### 15. Datura at Monaro extension 2, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired resin paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

#### 16. Datura at Monaro extension 3, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired resin paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

### 17. Suspended Datura with F shadow, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 20 x 23 inch \$950

#### 18. Datura at Monaro extension 4, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired resin paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

#### 19. Datura at Monaro extension 5, 2025

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired resin paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

#### 20. F at Jerrabombera 1, 2022

Hand printed RA4 print from black and white negative on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

#### 21. *Jerrabombera*, 2022

Hand printed RA4 print from black and white negative on expired paper  $8 \times 10$  inch \$650

#### 22. F at Jerrabombera 2, 2022

Hand printed RA4 print from black and white negative on expired paper 8 x 10 inch \$650

## 23. Cape York fallen tree scene, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 24. Scarecrow, 2022

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 25. Cape York bunker, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 26. **Dead mullion**, 2022

Hand printed silver gelatine print on resin paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$550

#### 27. F and legless lizard, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 28. Acacia tumour, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 29. Mt Arawang forked path with bushfire smoke, 2022

Hand printed silver gelatine print on resin paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$550

## 30. C holding on at Narooma, 2023

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

# 31. Fam disappearing at Gerroa, 2023

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 6 x 8 inch, matted \$650

# 32. Belco from Mt Painter, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 6 x 8 inch, matted \$750

# 33. *Sint-Pauwels, Belgium, forest/field border,* 2022 Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 34. F at Wee Jasper, 2020

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 35. Fam at Mt Painter, 2024

Hand printed silver gelatine print on expired fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

#### 36. F at Gerroa, 2022

Hand printed silver gelatine print on resin paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$550

### 37. Causeway rain, 2023

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

# 38. Fam at Cooleman ridge frogpond, 2022

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper  $8 \times 10$  inch, matted \$650

### 39. Dead gum at Chapman, 2022

Hand printed silver gelatine print on fibre paper 8 x 10 inch, matted \$650

Note all works sold unframed Each work is a unique state



Wouter Van de Voorde is a Belgian living in Canberra, Australia's capital city. He navigates the tensions of home, migration, and belonging.

*Opgelicht* is a table of contents for a practice still very much in flux. These images transform familiar places and experiences into something uncanny and fragile, hovering between personal memory and broader histories.

*Opgelicht*, Dutch for "lit-up" or "scammed," speaks directly to the material nature of this exhibition. The hand-made processes and techniques reflect an embrace of imperfection and human error.

At the same time, *Opgelicht* refers quite literally to light, the illumination of scenes onto photographic film, or photographic paper being exposed in a wet darkroom. This dual meaning runs through the entire exhibition.

The exhibition brings together fragments from different bodies of work, forming a constellation of images that reflect the messy, layered ways Van de Voorde inhabits the world.

Datura, a toxic, hallucinogenic plant, and noxious weed, recurs in his work, embodying the balance between allure and danger, memory and loss.

Strange scenes from family holidays also recur, with his wife, children and other relatives drifting into view. Misty and dank beaches. Tropical forests lit up. Second World War bunkers. Sandhills on the edge of town. A decommissioned scarecrow. The haunted house and a hole dug into his suburban backyard, it's rim on fire, transformed into the kind of thing Dante warned us about.

