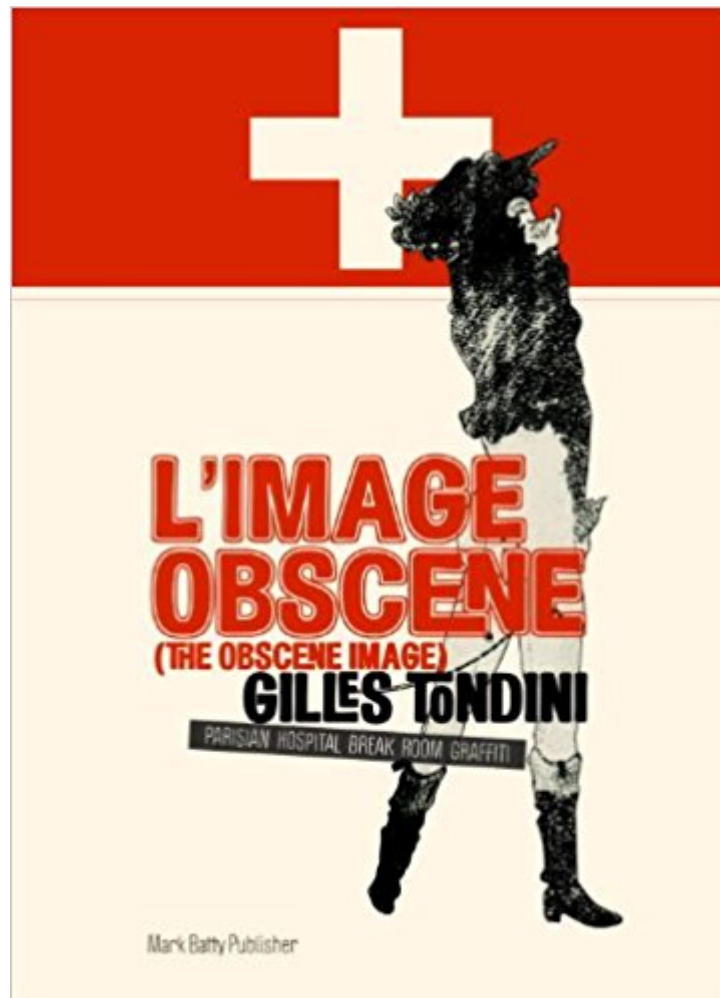




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# The Obscene Image: Parisian Hospital Break Room Graffiti



## Synopsis

Certain hospitals in Paris contain illustrated phenomena that have remained unseen, by the French and the world at large, until now. In *The Obscene Image*, photographer Gilles Tondini reveals the frenzied frescos created by doctors and nurses who use hospital break rooms to let off steam and maintain sanity as they work to save lives. In these rooms – known as *salles de garde* – the rules of decorum observed throughout the rest of the hospital take a leave of absence in the name of relieving stress. Graphic, sexually charged, saturated with color and lewd references, these images manifest all the frustrations, stresses, highs and lows that medical professionals anywhere must deal with in their quests to keep people healthy. These manic murals provide visually compelling insight into how the medical professionals of 12 hospitals in the greater Paris area try to keep themselves healthy. Along with all of its sexual content, the imagery in *The Obscene Image* draws from high and low cultures, from the Bible's Last Judgment and chivalric tales to comic book heroes and villains.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gilles Tondini is a photographer based in France. He previously authored *Paris Underground* with MBP.

*L'IMAGE OBSCENE (THE OBSCENE IMAGE)* is a completely engaging book of photographs by Gilles Tondini of a world unknown to most - the hospital break rooms of 12 hospitals in Paris that

house some of the most raucous graffiti yet to be published. Writer Marie L. Bouchon provides both the Introduction to the book as well as a brief history of Parisian hospital break room decor, a tradition that started in medieval times with the barber surgeons and moved into the hospital edifices from the 18th century on. She describes how the break rooms have always been the sanctuaries where doctors and nurses could find relief from the stress of dealing with the very ill and dying patients who consumed their minds and hours of devotion to the practice of medicine. 'More than anything the break room is a place where the interns can exchange their own expertise and knowledge. It keeps a place, the sole one within the hospital, for life, for people to recover from the stresses of disease, complications and death.' In these safe havens the artists among the interns and doctors moved from creating dignified homages to their profession to instead allowing their frustrations become visual - explosions of sublimated sexual energy and parody that at times incorporated the faces of fellow physicians and nurses, of famous movie people, and of traditional art figures performing all manner of bawdy activities! 'The break-room frescoes do not represent; they explore. Their images are cathartic, the laughter they incite is mad, epileptic, and dies out in a flurry of coughs or bitter spasms...Doctors are stripped naked and twisted into grotesque positions. They are the laughing actors at a roudy fair where anything goes....In here, conventions are thwarted and turned upside down, then ravaged by wicked troops. The hospital's rules are replaced by absurd and bombastic commandments...etc' Bouchon's writing is a novel that could stand alone! But the real reason for publishing this fascinating and absorbing book is the photography by Gilles Tondini who has visited all 12 hospitals and captured for posterity the incredibly naughty, bawdy, and lurid jollity that defies description. These frescoes or other forms of graffiti are not only creative, but are in many cases as fine as fine art of this genre can be. The book is divided into sections about each hospital, offering a terse history of the break room and in many instances giving evidence that the fate of this 'art' is on borrowed time. But Tondini has now catalogued this survey so the art - and hopefully the release for physician's high level of tension - will continue, at least in our minds! Grady Harp, November 10

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