



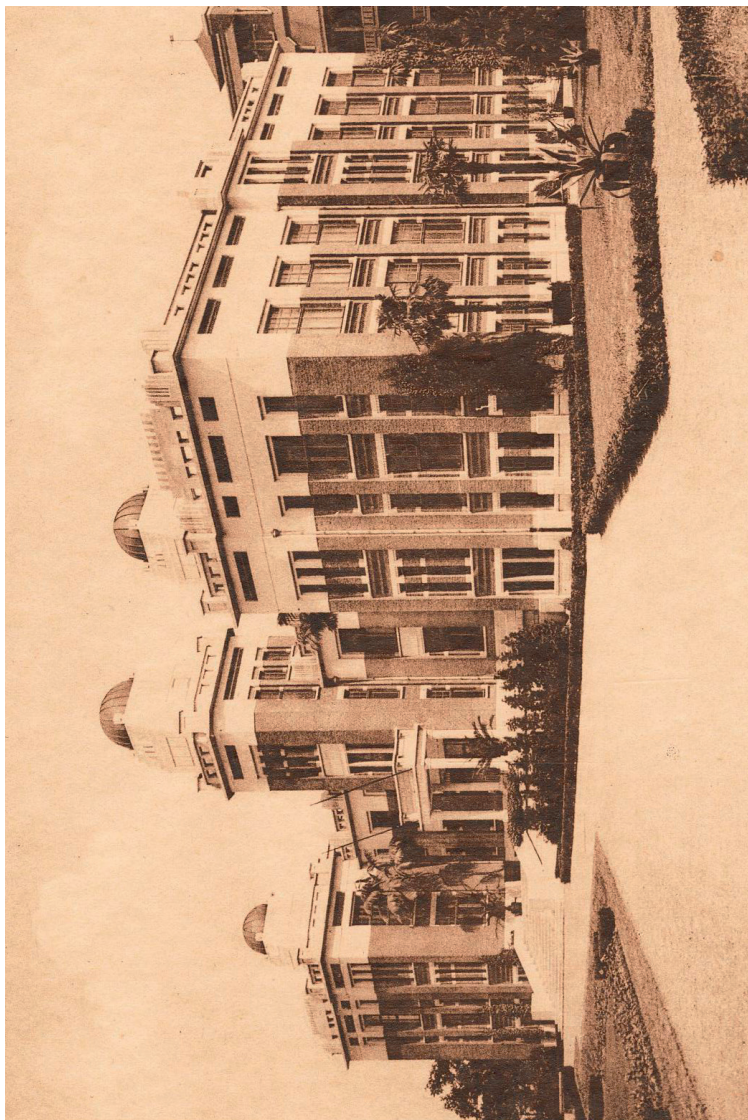
Congoville Contemporary artists tracing colonial tracks 29.05 – 3.10.2021

The Middelheim site has its own colonial past. In the summer exhibition ‘*Congoville*’, fifteen international artists investigate these physical and mental colonial traces. Even though you often no longer see them, they still remain tangible in today’s society. The artworks offer new and different perspectives on past events that are too often recounted as a one-sided story.

Discover the exhibition!

Basali-ntoki ya lelo bazali kolanda banoko belesi.

“Boya kotala Litalesi !”

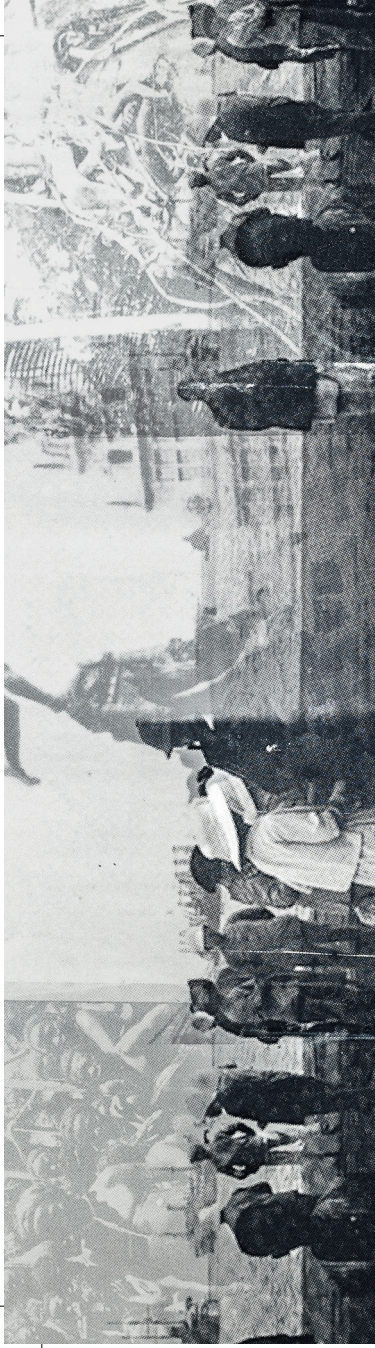


Postcard of the former Colonial College of Belgium, ca. 1935, © Collectie Bob Vermerght

Welcome to Congoville

As a contemporary heritage institution, the Middelheim Museum questions itself every day which stories and works of art can provide more insight into our cultural heritage. In this context, the *Congoville* exhibition explores the colonial traces on the Middelheim site. A growing awareness of the complex history of the remarkable Art Deco building just outside the fences of the Middelheim Museum was the immediate cause. Nowadays it is part of the University of Antwerp, but it used to house the Koloniale Hogeschool or Colonial College. The broader Middelheim site thus played a central role in the colonial organization and training in Belgium, but who even remembers that? Which colonial traces can still be found here? Who notices them? What do they mean today? How do we want to deal with them in the future?

The Middelheim Museum invited the Belgian-Congolese art historian **Sandrine Colard** to create an exhibition on these and other related questions. With an expertise in colonial and post-colonial visual cultures and arts, Colard explicitly investigates the elements that shape the current vision of the Congo and African and African diasporic people in Belgium. She gathered 15 artists who in turn invite the public to join them in *Congoville*.



Hank Willis Thomas, *Antwerp, Belgium to Boma, Congo at Dakar*, 2019, © Hank Willis Thomas & Maruani Mercier

Congoville

“In spite of contemporary Belgium being one of the most diverse European countries, the majority of the general public still blissfully ignores how deep the colonial foundations of their cityscapes run.”

Sandrine Colard, curator *Congoville*

Sandrine Colard developed the Congoville concept as a theme. According to her, *Congoville* consists of the physical and mental traces of our colonial past and extends over the whole of Belgium. It is the buildings and landmarks such as the opulent

headquarters of rubber companies on the Meir in Antwerp, which have been paid for with the riches extracted from the territories colonized by Belgium. It is the buildings that were used in the colonial organization, such as the Colonial College. It is the monuments and street names that uncritically commemorate figures such as Leopold II. It is the racial stereotypes that live on in all layers of society. *Congoville* is therefore all around us and still has a structural impact on the society in which we live. But how many people really see that legacy?

This exhibition presents 15 extraordinary artists who make *Congoville* visible and open to discussion. They share their perspectives on the existing situation and make proposals for the future.

Metropolis

In a colonial context, the word 'metropolis' is used for the 'motherland' that dominates another geographic area. Belgium was thus 'the metropolis' of the Belgian Congo. '*Congoville*' is also a reference to the colonial European custom of naming cities in Africa by combining the name of influential colonial and conquering figures with the word 'ville' / 'stad', such as Léopoldville / Leopoldstad. Those cities in turn gave their names to the large ships that sailed back and forth between Antwerp and the colony, such as the SS Thyssville.

Strolling through Congoville

Sandrine Colard invited 15 artists to reflect on *Congoville* and the Middelheim site. As black flâneurs and flâneuses, they guide us through the site and the exhibition. Colard here refers to the *flâneur* figure as coined by the French poet Charles Baudelaire in 1863: a stroller who observes and melts into the spectacle of the modern urban life. Modern cities were crucially shaped by the economic exploitation of the colonies. The (white male) flâneur as imagined by Baudelaire strolled the boulevards and parks and enjoyed the grandeur. *Congoville* reverses the roles and asks how black flâneurs and flâneuses – past and present – experience the city and the Middelheim Park.

“Congoville invites artists to become city and park dwellers, to question and tread old paths, but also to map out new forms of urban and social commonality and commemoration. Visitors are invited to see the city’s public space through the eyes of these artist-flâneurs – in the past, the present, and inevitably the future as well”.

Sandrine Colard, curator *Congoville*

© Maurice Mbikayi





Congoville through the eyes of the artists

The artists are Congolese, African, of African origins, or have a long-standing practice about the colonial legacy and its ongoing influence. Through their work *Congoville* becomes tangible: some artists literally work with the site's colonial past, others establish broader connections. They tell the stories that need to be told and open perspectives on a different future.

“Today, as a free open-air museum, the Middelheim Museum has the democratic potential to invite diverse visitors to look at colonial and postcolonial history through the eyes of black flâneurs of the world, and to transform *Congoville* from a creation of colonial exploitation to a map for a future postcolonial Utopia.”

Sandrine Colard, curator *Congoville*

A walking route
through Congoville.

Pascale Marthine Tayou

Born in 1966 in Nkongsamba (Cameroon),
lives and works in Ghent (Belgium) and Yaoundé (Cameroon).

① Le Chemin du Bonheur (2012)

The exhibition starts (and ends) on an optimistic note: there is a way to a happier future. With his typical bright colours, Tayou draws an alternative path on which we can stroll together. He paints a picture of a life with 'the eternal sun under our footsteps every day'. For Tayou, the museum can be a place where we meet, where we exchange ideas and where we learn from each other. *Le Chemin du Bonheur* traces the possibility of another path within the Middelheim Museum and beyond, aspiring to map reconciliation for the future, transcending the colonial sediments lying underground.



© Pascale Marthine Tayou &
Galleria Continua

Maurice Mbikayi

Born in 1974 in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo), lives and works in Cape Town (South Africa).

② The Aesthetic Observer (2021)

In this figure's clothing we recognize keys recuperated from old computer keyboards, a reference to the raw materials needed in today's technology: it is still exploited workers who extract the ores from the ground in Congo, thus enabling the Western way of life. And afterwards, the West often dumps the materials back in Africa as toxic waste. Mbikayi collects the remains and uses them in his art. In this way, he not only denounces this skewed situation but also pays tribute to the resilience of the African people, who have found endless ways to make the most of limited resources. The 'aesthetic observer' is a *flâneur* and a dandy, an imagined cousin to the famous Congolese *sapeurs*. The dandy pays close attention to his appearance, as a sign of resistance and independence.



© Maurice Mbikayi

Location: AVL Franchise Unit – Atelier Van Lieshout

KinAct Collective

Founded in 2015 in Kinshasa by Eddy Ekete and Aude Bertrand, KinAct is an international festival and artist collective that collaborates with varying performers. Eddy Ekete was born in 1978 in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Aude Bertrand in 1988 in Vairéas (France). They live and work alternately in Paris (France) and in Kinshasa. For *Congoville* KinAct works together with Louis Van Der Waal (c.1979, Netherlands), Precy Numbi (c.1990, Democratic Republic of Congo) and Charlien Adriaenssens (c.1988, Belgium).

③ La maison du chef / Ndaku ya Mokonzi (2021)

The *La maison du chef / Ndaku ya Mokonzi* project consists of an installation representing the house of a traditional Congolese chef, a radio program in which you as a visitor can share your *Congoville*, filmed performances and performance characters.

The *Mokonzi*'s house is built from the waste that the West dumps in Africa and KinAct gives it back to us. This 'donation' refers to



© KinAct Collective

the colonists who visited the chiefs in their homes bringing gifts (mirrors, alcohol or guns) in exchange for the rights to their land. Just as the waste today is toxic to people and the environment, the gifts offered then were also poisoned. KinAct wants to re-enact the exchange. They invite us to share our own fragments of *Congoville* with them and their listeners: we can tell stories and recount memories during their radio broadcast on July 24. In this way the house becomes a place for collecting, exchanging and restoring.

KinAct is best known for its performances in the streets of Kinshasa, with figures such as the *Homme Canette* and *Papa Miracle* (see the performances on video). They have created several new characters for the Middelheim Museum, each with their own costume fashioned from waste material, not dressed fancily like the typical dandies. The materials in themselves have a meaning, from the rubber of the Leopold II era to today's electronic waste. If they were to move, these exuberant figures would force visitors into uncanny encounters taking them out of their comfort zone.

Radio KinAct Connect

Members from KinAct will produce a broadcasted radio show live in the Middelheim Museum from the pavilion of Atelier Van Lieshout. The program can be listened to online, at home or in the park, in 3 episodes:

#1: 30/05/2021 : 13u-16u: first radio show

#2: 30/06/2021 : 13u-16u: special radio show

'independence' with live audio connection to Kinshasa

#3: 24/07/2021 : 13u-16u:

special 'Parlement Debout Day' where people are invited to share their emotions and memories on the Congo (from colonial times to the present).

Documentary

Elie Mbansing, *KinAct* (2019), documentary film about the KinAct Performance Festival in Kinshasa. KinAct is short for Kinshasa-in-action and aims to stimulate exchange between artists from Africa and Europe. Large African cities such as Kinshasa have a thriving artistic scene with artists displaying their work directly to the public, without galleries or museums as is common in the West. The KinAct participants create their (street) performances before the eyes of – and in interaction with – an audience of millions. Social themes such as the environment, health care, superstition, violence, African identity and the struggle for survival are central to this. Much attention is also paid to workshops for children, who learn to express themselves in different ways. Interest in this approach is also growing in Europe, with an increasing number of street performance festivals, some directly inspired by KinAct.

Congolese filmmaker and photographer Elie Mbansing has been involved with KinAct since the beginning. In this film he portrays the Afrofuturistic atmosphere of the different editions in Kinshasa.

The participation of KinAct Collective in the exhibition was made possible by various partners such as Maarten Vanden Eynde (ICC, Brussels - Lubumbashi), Philip Buyck (Lumumba Library, Brussels), Gia Abrassart (Café Congo) and Anne Wetsi Mpoma.

Ibrahim Mahama

Born in 1987 in Tamale (Ghana), lives and works in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale (all in Ghana).

④ UNTITLED (2019)

Planted to create a majestic entrance into the park, the grandiose proportions of this installation of proud, high-flying flags, are tarnished by the worn-out aspect of the material they are made from. This contrast shows how national pride can be based on misery and inequality. After all, the flags here are not a symbol of a country, but of exploitation. They are made from hand-sewn burlap sacks. The choice of material refers to the bags used to transport African-sourced food and commodities such as coffee and cocoa, typical exports of the artist's native Ghana. But the natural resources of Central Africa have also enriched the Belgian economy. The jute bags are a reminder of this exploitation, both in the past and very often in the unequal world trade today.



© Ibrahim Mahama & White Cube, London

Location: Artiesteningang – John Körmeling

KinAct Collective

⑤ Toza kaka / On est (encore) là (2021)

Copyright movie: the artists & Noud Wynants.

Archive film: *Les Marins congolais à Anvers*
by Gerard De Boe & Emile Degelin (1952)

Collection Cinematek Royal Belgian Film Archive;
copyright Gerard De Boe & Cinematek

Around 1950 several colonial propaganda films were shot, documenting selected groups of Africans being taken on tours of Belgian 'highlights' – in this case Congolese sailors on leave in the port of Antwerp. Visits ranged from cultural sites to monuments celebrating colonization. Meanwhile, an alienating and imposing voiceover exalts the prescribed admiration that Congolese are to feel for an 'unsurpassed' Western civilization.



© KinAct Collective & Noud Wynants



© KinAct Collective & Noud Wynants,
photo: Ans Brys

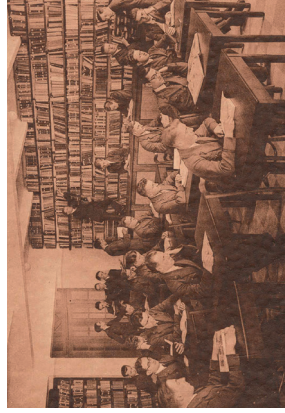
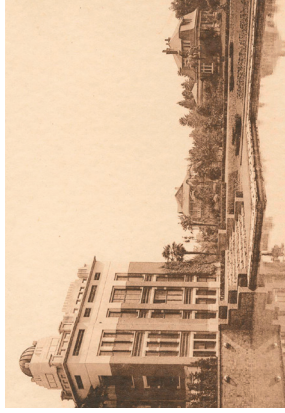
In a newly filmed performance, KinAct Collective enters into a dialogue with this archive film. In contrast to the sailors who had to follow the script, the performers use their bodies and self-created costumes to loudly claim their place in Antwerp's public space. Charged with the energy of the contemporary Kinshasa streets where they were born, these radical anti-flâneurs make themselves highly visible.

“Toza kaka means both ‘we are together’ and ‘we are (still) here’. It is a reference to our forward-looking cooperation as a collective, and the historical coexistence of Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo – which is still ongoing; ‘we are still here’ also refers to the garbage that wanders the streets and does not decay, and it is a statement by many of our colleagues and friends in Kinshasa: the government does not look after us, our stories are ignored, life has been a battle for centuries, but we are still here”

Charlien Adriaenssens, performer KinAct Collective

Location: University Antwerp – Campus Middelheim (former Colonial College)

The route now leads us to the former Colonial College of Belgium, founded in 1920 and closed down in 1962. The school trained officials to run the Belgian colonies. Here, Europeans were considered superior, with skin colour being the criterion for distinguishing between 'civilized' and 'primitive'. This mindset resulted in the conviction that the 'civilized Westerner' had a duty to civilize the 'primitive other', which served as an excuse to dominate and exploit the other and steal his natural resources. In addition to the main building with its symbols, including the colonial star, the garden also houses the colonial-style director's villa and the empty plinth of the statue of Baron Dhanis, vice governor-general of the Congo Free State, which was removed and left in the museum's open-air depot.



Postcards of the former Colonial College of Belgium, ca 1935, collection Bob Vermerght

The Colonial College was one of the central locations in Belgium where the imperialist view was developed. Belgian colonialism (as elsewhere in Europe) was driven by imperialism: extending the political, economic and cultural power of a state to other areas. Through education, church, media, art and (world) exhibitions, the Belgian (and European) population was so imbued with the so-called European superiority that this, often unconscious, colonial view still shapes reality today. The former colonization continues to affect existing power structures, and imperialism continues to exist in contemporary forms, such as the unequal trade relations between Europe and Africa. Today, the word 'decolonization' has a much broader meaning that goes further and is more complex than the declaration of independence alone.



Postcard of the former Colonial College of Belgium, ca. 1935, collection Bob Vermerght

Ibrahim Mahama

⑥ Dokpeda 2012-2021, 2021

Mahama breaks the 'monumental silence' that regularly weighs on physical colonial sites. The former Colonial College's founding mission became concealed when it was converted into a campus of the University of Antwerp. Mahama makes that camouflage the very subject of his work, by covering up the front façade with his signature stitched jute sacks. He stimulates the viewer to consider what lies behind it. By fixing them onto an educational institution, these dark screens refer to the silences of our history classes but also, to the imposition of Western knowledge systems on the rest of the world.



© Ibrahim Mahama & Apalazzogallery

Pélagie Gbaguidi

Born in 1965 in Dakar (Senegal), of Benin descent, lives and works in Brussels (Belgium).

⑦ The Missing Link. Dicolonisation Education By Mrs Smiling Stone (2017-21)

Gbaguidi elaborates on the role of education in imperialism and the accompanying racism. Here in this building the colonial perspective was taught, as the promo film from 1939 *Sous l'étoile d'or* illustrates. The broad Belgian population was also informed through education, among other ways, that the colonial enterprise was respectable. The truth was hidden, as the thinly veiled images of disciplined black people in the installation testify. We still live with that legacy. As long as our schools don't focus more on colonial history education and disproving stereotyping, white people will continue to see their black fellows as inferior beings. Gbaguidi herself takes the lead with a workshop on stereotyping in a classroom in Brussels – the students' drawings have been incorporated into the installation.

With: archive film *Sous l'étoile d'or* by Héléne Schirren (1939)

Collections Cinematek Royal Belgian Film Archive, Brussels and AfricaMuseum, Tervuren;
copyright Héléne Schirren, AfricaMuseum, Tervuren and Cinematek

© Pélagie Gbaguidi

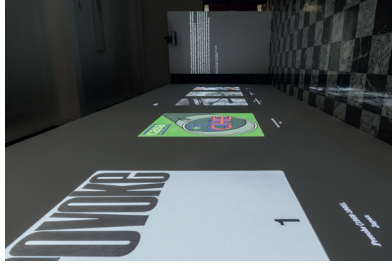


Zahia Rahmani

Born in 1962 (Algeria), lives and works in Paris and the Oise region (France).

⑧ Seismography of Struggle, Towards a Global History of Critical and Cultural Journals (2017-21) In collaboration with INHA, Paris.

This installation loops more than 900 covers, manifestos, texts and pamphlets taken from the long and rich history of political and cultural resistance to Western imperialism around the world. Resulting from extensive research, the installation presents periodicals from Africa and other colonized regions, from the eighteenth century until the end of the twentieth. These printed cultures were long denied, devalued, and often censored, which erased the militant and intellectual vigour of the colonized people, and perpetuated the lie that the 'civilized Westerner' had a duty to raise the 'primitive other'. Rahmani's work is a groundbreaking contribution to the rewriting and balancing of colonial history. Sixty years after its closure, this installation finally brings the African perspective to the former Colonial College of Belgium.



© Zahia Rahmani & INHA,
Paris

After this exploration of *Congoville* in the former Colonial College, the route takes us back into the Middelheim Museum.

Location: Collection pavilion

Bodys Isek Kingelez

Born in 1948 in Kimbembele Ihunga in the Belgian Congo, moved to Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1970, where he passed away in 2015.

⑨

Atandel (2000)

Prismacongo (2000)

2001 (2001)

Mickaël (2001)

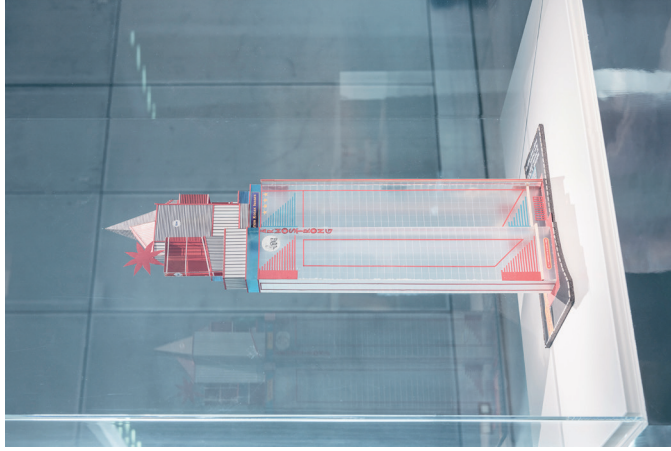
Armstrong Ville (2001)

Sète en 3009 (2000)



© Bodys Isek Kingelez & Miam

Kingelez created scale models, from buildings to entire cities, architectural fantasies that mix elements from Kinshasa with components that he encountered around the world or imagined himself. Made entirely of cardboard, these models are not escapist dream worlds, but utopian alternatives that the artist proposes to restore the failed ideals of the post-colonial world. How do we offer better care and education? But also, how to imagine bright, colourful urban societies that promise freedom, justice, and peace for all? Kingelez' pieces are a reminder of the limitless power of inhabitants of postcolonial cities to reinvent them. They are the proof that nothing is set in stone.



© Bodys Isek Kingelez & Ferdinand Fabre

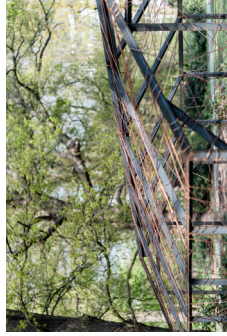
Jean Katambayi

Born in 1974 in Lubumbashi (Democratic Republic of Congo), lives and works in Lubumbashi.



⑩ MM / Afrolampe (2021)

MM stands for Ma Maison (my house) and Middelheim Museum. Katambayi creates a scaled-down copy of the miner's house he grew up in at the Katanga mines, and uses copper from those same mines for the facades. In doing so, he transplanted a part of the miner's life in Congo to a park in Belgium and establishes a link between the harsh labour of Congolese workers, the plundering of natural resources in the Congo, and the leisurely lifestyle in Europe. The impressive light bulb in the house is a new sculpture based on his series of *Afrolampes* drawings. The lamp stands for energy, electricity and light, but the complicated wiring also refers to the frequent lack of it in today's Congo. Katanga's rich copper reserves (copper is an important material for electrical wiring) still mainly benefit others, not the local population.



© Jean Katambayi

Sven Augustijnen

Born in 1970 in Mechelen (Belgium), lives and works in Brussels (Belgium).

① AWB 082-3317 7922 (2012)

This work is a 'political ghost shrine' for Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), the first Prime Minister of the independent Congo. Lumumba was assassinated by a coalition of Belgian, American and Katangese authorities, but to this day has still not been given a grave. The bicycle had been Lumumba's preferred means of transportation. The sacks of charcoal and the tree to which the bicycle is attached refer to the tree against which he was executed along with two political companions, and which was probably reduced to ashes to cover all traces. But also, the piece imitates the bike riders carrying homemade charcoal, so common on contemporary Congolese roads. Augustijnen's assemblage is titled after the airway freight number assigned to the shipment of these objects from the village in which Lumumba was assassinated to Belgium. In the end, the package never arrived. That loss, on the way from Africa to Europe, plus the seriality and anonymity of the administrative code, echo the 'cold case' of this murder, and in a broader sense of the Belgian-Congolese post-colonial history.



© Sven Augustijnen & SMAK

Ângela Ferreira

Born in 1958 in Maputo (Mozambique), lives in Cape Town (South Africa) and Lisbon (Portugal).

12 Independence cha cha (2014 / 2021)

This installation-sculpture is a wooden remodelling of the facade of a gas station in Lubumbashi (DRC). The original is a modernist building designed by Belgian architect Claude Strebelle in the 1950s in what was then Elisabethville. The innovative interplay of lines symbolized the alleged optimism and progressive nature of late colonialism. By only showing the facade of the building, Ferreira implies that these were empty promises with no substance. Strebelle's work was erected in a city that was still segregated and reserved for white people. The artist elaborates on that dissonance in her videos. In the first, two Lubumbashi residents on the roof of the gas station sing a folk song about the horrors of working in the mines – a symbol of the empty promise that colonialism would bring progress and wellbeing to the Congo. In the second we hear a sad rendering of the hit song *Indépendance Cha Cha*, a symbol for the thwarted outcome of emancipation.



© Ângela Ferreira

Location: Braempaviljoen

To start with, two more archive films are shown in the Braem Pavilion:

Albert et André visitent Bruxelles, by SOFIDEC (1949)

Collection Cinematek Royal Belgian Film Archive, Brussels; copyright Cinematek & Memento Productions

En Belgique, Les Notables congolais, by Paul Lonchay for INFORCONGO (1956)

Collection AfricaMuseum, Tervuren; copyright AfricaMuseum, Tervuren & Paul Lonchay.

These are colonial propaganda films similar to *Les Marins congolais à Anvers*, the one we saw earlier. In this film too, Congolese visitors are taken on a very marked tour of Belgian sights and monuments, such as the Brussels Grand Place and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (where the Congolese soldiers who died in WWI are not commemorated). Here we see how monuments not only commemorate and honour, but also exclude, hurt and humiliate.

The artworks in the Braem Pavilion reflect on the events and people we commemorate and honour in stories and monuments. Long before the recent protests against colonial monuments, artists were preoccupied with which stories we tell and which ones we do not. They invite us to think about this together.

Hank Willis Thomas

Born in 1976 in New Jersey (United States), lives and works in New York (United States).

13

In 2019 Thomas made a series of works on the relationship between Antwerp and Congo that takes the hand as a recurring motif. This artist's gaze is permeated by Leopold II's colonial rule in Congo. It determines his perception of the place that hands, detached from a body, occupy in the city's visual symbolism.

This personal and artistic association can also be perceived as painful or exaggerated. After all, these Antwerp symbols have a completely different origin and the Antwerp and Flemish population is much more acquainted with their meaning. In Antwerp, the hand is a symbol that explains the name of the city, or represents the urban liberties and rights. It goes back to the 13th century.



© Hank Willis Thomas & Maruani Mercier



The biscuit dates from 1934 and was invented by a Jewish baker. Today it is an official regional speciality. The chocolate version made its breakthrough in the 2000s as a quintessential Antwerp delicacy.

The practice of cutting off hands belonged to the most gruesome period in Belgian colonial history, during the reign of King Leopold II over the Congo Free State.

For the artist, the associations refer to the role that the city played in the import of valuable raw materials from the colony. By visually connecting the images in his artworks, he wants to make his perspective on history visible and allow different interpretations of it to co-exist.



© Hank Willis Thomas & Maruani Mercier

500 Euros Ivory Tower (2019) Brabo and the Ivory Tower (2019) Antwerp, Belgium to Boma, Congo at Dakar (2019)

The three photo works are screen prints on retro-reflective vinyl. This material makes it possible to place a second image beneath the first, which only appears under the flash of a mobile phone camera. The phone is a reference to the exploitation of the natural resources of Congo for the enrichment and comfort of Westerners. We see this exploitation in the past (ivory in *500 Euros Ivory Tower*), but also now (the coltan in our phones). In *Brabo and the Ivory Tower*, a link is made between that exploitation (ivory) and, depending on your perspective, either the enrichment of Antwerp (beautiful fountain on Grote Markt) or the ruthless exploitation of workers. *Antwerp, Belgium to Boma, Congo at Dakar* draws attention to the port of Antwerp, which, until aviation developed, was the gateway between Belgium and the colonies. People left and arrived, but above all: all the goods from the colonies entered through here, goods that contributed to the prosperity of Antwerp.



© Hank Willis Thomas &
Maruani Mercier



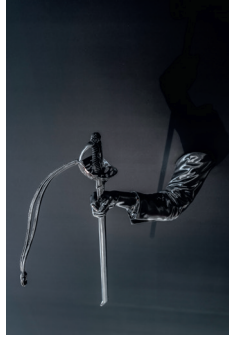
© Hank Willis Thomas &
Maruani Mercier

Antwerpse Handjes (sculptural wall piece inspired by Belgian Antwerpse Handjes) (2019)

The 'Antwerp hands' form a pattern that refers to the famous textile from the Kuba Kingdom (situated in the southeast of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo). The histories of Belgium and the Congo are intertwined, but it is a history of violence, even if it looks beautiful.

Justice, Peace, Work (Stolen Sword Punctum) (2019)

This image zooms in on the triumphant gesture of Ambroise Boimbo who stole King Baudouin's sabre on Independence Day, an action immortalized by German photographer Robert Lebeck. Here the hand is no longer an icon of violence and suffering, but one of triumph and liberation. This could be a new monument to *Congoville*, one created from an African perspective.



© Hank Willis Thomas &
Maruani Mercier

Simone Leigh

Born in 1967 in Chicago (United States), lives and works in Brooklyn, New York (United States).

14 No Face (cobalt) (2016)

The invisibilisation of black women's experiences is the question at the heart of Leigh's work. The face on the sculpture is hollow and shows no features, as a sign of the secret interior life that black women had to protect to endure. At the same time, the black female figure proudly holds her long neck, a nod to the antique busts of Egyptian queens and the unashamed beauty of deep dark skin tones. Made of terracotta and porcelain with a rosette of rosebuds, the delicate handiwork and the ceramic elevate the usually lesser-seen female 'crafts' to the rank of 'high art' that they deserve.



© Simone Leigh

Sammy Baloji

Born in 1978 in Lubumbashi (Democratic Republic of Congo), lives and works alternately in Brussels (Belgium) and Lubumbashi.

15

The Other Memorial (2015)

Monuments glorify chosen memories, they are not the mirrors of history. Sammy Baloji's sculpture is a small-scale replica of the dome covering the imposing Église du Sacré-Coeur de Cointe in Liège that commemorates the fallen allied soldiers of WWI. Made of thirteen tons of copper from the Katanga mines, the memorial nevertheless ignores the Congolese soldiers who died for Belgium in WWI as well as the Congolese forced labourers who extracted the mineral. Baloji created a new (half) copper dome retrieving them from oblivion, inscribing scarification patterns typical to the Luba and Lunda groups from the Katanga region. By making the



© Sammy Baloji & Sindika Dokolo Foundation



© Sammy Baloji & Imane Farès

surface akin to the ancestors' decorated skin – all the more so with the copper's shiny brown colour – Baloji makes their bodies and their identity marks present.

Untitled (2015 / 2021)

Congolese copper was also an indispensable raw material for the artillery of the two world wars. Among other things, it was used in cartridge cases. Soldiers often carved figures in these cartridges: to keep fear at bay in the trenches or against boredom during their revalidation. We still find these shells today in Belgian living rooms and cafes, especially in West Flanders. They stand on the mantelpiece or serve as a flowerpot. Baloji reappropriates this recycling by presenting Congolese plants in Congolese copper. Even the typical Flemish sansevieria is a legacy of Belgian colonization! *Congoville* is everywhere, also in what is growing from our soil.



Elisabetta Benassi

Born in 1966 in Rome (Italy), lives and works in Rome.

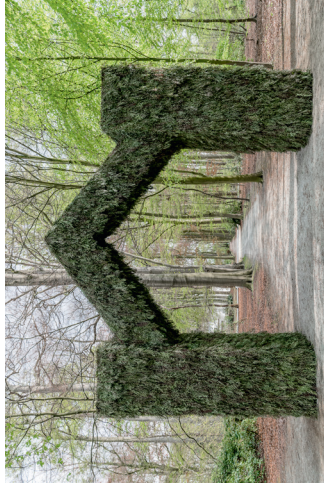
16 M'FUMU (2015)

M'Fumu was the nickname of the Congolese activist and nationalist Paul Panda Farnana (1888-1930). He was the first Congolese to ever receive a higher education and diploma in Belgium. Benassi imagines a probable visit of Farnana to the colonial museum in Tervuren on the 44 tramline from Brussels. She designed a macabre tram stop for this popular tramline to the AfricaMuseum, still the largest and most ideologically outspoken remnant of Belgian colonialism in Belgium. As an agronomist, Farnana may have been well aware of the destruction of nature that resulted from colonization, echoed in the casts of the bones of exotic animals that make up the shelter. M'Fumu offers a space to mourn, one to speak the truth, and also one to claim justice.

Every last Saturday of the month, performer Douglas Park will read from *King Leopold's Soliloquy* (1909) by the American writer Mark Twain. At the time, it was the most vicious charge against King Leopold II.

Kapwani Kiwanga

Born in 1978 in Ontario (Canada), of Tanzanian descent, lives and works in Paris (France).



17 Flowers for Africa: Rwanda (2019)

This triumphal arch is a copy of the arch that was erected in Rwanda in 1961 for the festivities surrounding the proclamation of the Republic (independence was ratified in 1962). Independence was celebrated in various ways in African countries, but Kiwanga focuses in her *Flowers for Africa* series on one of the most transient: the flower arrangements. The arch is covered with eucalyptus, a native plant of Rwanda. Naturally, the flowers and plants wither after a while. This withering symbolizes the independence that soon lost its lustre, but it is also a reflection on whose stories and memories are preserved and used to write history, and whose are not.



© Kapwani Kiwanga

Pascale Marthine Tayou

18 La Paix des Braves (2019 / 2021)

Stones symbolize protest and revolution. Throwing stones has been part of uprisings throughout history: the 1830 French barricades, May 68, and the Palestinian Intifada, for example. Arranged in a pile, here the stones appear as if in a post-destruction moment, after the dismantling of an unjust order and of our cities' fraught foundations. To this image of protest, Tayou joins symbols of peace: a white flag planted on top of the colourful pyramidal mound. The installation combines the necessity of reparation and at long last, the aspiration for reconciliation.



© Pascale Marthine Tayou & Galleria Continua

Location: Gloriette

Maurice Mbikayi

19

Princesse Mathilde La Kinoisé (2018)

Mademoiselle Amputée (2019)

These two female figures embody the relationship between the enrichment of the Belgian high bourgeoisie and noble families with the exploitation of the Congo. They too are dressed in twenty-first century recycled electronic waste, just like *The Aesthetic Observer*. But their costumes refer to the end of the nineteenth century, when Leopold II ruled the Congo. Thus an arc is made between exploitation then and now, from the children with severed hands on rubber plantations during the reign of Leopold II to the children digging up coltan for electronic devices today. The current Belgian queen Mathilde is portrayed as a lady from Kinshasa: because the Congo has brought wealth to the royal family, every royal descendant is a Kinois(e). Conversely, the Congolese lady deserves royal credit for prevailing over the difficult circumstances.



© Maurice Mbikayi & Gallia Barzilai
Hollander & Officine dell'Imaginare,
Milano

Congoville on the Middelheim site

“The city of Antwerp, and the Middelheim site in particular, offer a powerful prism through which one can see and re-imagine the contours of an invisible city. As a port city, Antwerp was the Belgian gateway to the Congo for a long time. Ships left here with imperialist beliefs, people and weapons. (...) But the ships also returned (...). They landed an incredible amount of material, raw materials, valuables, propaganda in images and words, and experiences.”

Sandrine Colard, curator *Congoville*

The exhibition starts from *Congoville* on the Middelheim site (the area known as ‘Middelheim’ is larger than the museum site itself). Which colonial traces can be found here?

The most striking link is to be found just outside the Middelheim Museum: the former Colonial College, established in 1920, where civil servants for the colonial territories were trained. The foundation act of the Colonial College was signed in the Middelheim Castle. The Castle also served as a venue to host important

guests and the museum grounds were used for the school’s sports activities. But the school and what it stood for have been forgotten. The first significant research on the topic, commissioned by the Middelheim Museum, has only recently been conducted. So it has taken Belgium some sixty years since the declaration of the independence of Congo, Rwanda and

Burundi to actually take a close look at this important piece of colonial heritage.

A second link is the park where the Middelheim Museum was founded in 1950. The city of Antwerp bought the domain in 1910 and opened it to the public in 1912. These dates are not without meaning. Since 1908, Belgium had been a colonial superpower and that is reflected in the urban development of avenues, monuments, parks and squares. The beginnings of the Middelheim Park parallel the birth of the Belgian colonial, notes Sandrine Colard.

The Belgian colonization in five dates:

- 1885** International recognition of the private colony of King Leopold II: the Congo Free State.
- 1908** Under international pressure denouncing the abuses, Belgium takes control of the colony: Belgian Congo.
- 1916** Belgium acquires two German colonies: Ruanda and Urundi, which are run and exploited as one area.
- 1960** Official end of colonization and independence of the Congo.
- 1962** Official end of colonization and independence of Ruanda-Urundi. They continue as two separate countries: Rwanda and Burundi.

“The greatest ambition of the exhibition is to take the visitor on a journey in which he learns to distance himself from the imperialist story that is still uncritically glorified in this city. At the same time, it also seeks to show the various African and African-descendant communities how much the public space is ‘theirs’ as well.”

Sandrine Colard, curator *Congoville*

A third link can be found in the history of the museum itself. According to its 1950 mission, the Middelheim Museum collects and displays an international overview of contemporary sculpture. However, under ‘international’ we understand something different today than we did back then. The collection profile and the exhibitions are currently still very focused on Europe, but in the future we want to change our approach. *Congoville* fits in this new perspective on the programming and collection policy.

With *Congoville*, the Middelheim Museum investigates who has a voice in the stories we tell about our culture and society. The Middelheim Museum is committed to polyphony and more specifically to involving people with Congolese and African roots. The aim is to explore new, long-term relationships for the museum, expand the museum’s network and knowledge spectrum, and as an institution learn what our blind spots are. The concept of our guest curator prompted us to look for these partners and to enter into dialogue with them. In concrete terms, this not only resulted in an exhibition and new works of art, but also an extensive public program.



The exhibition, publication and public program have been realized thanks to the enthusiasm, dedication and support of employees and colleagues.

The museum team expressly wishes to convey recognition and gratitude to all discussion partners: they took the time and effort to inform, guide, warn, question, investigate and challenge us. With their help and contributions, the Middelheim Museum wants to bring park, collection and public together in an open space where different perspectives can be safely shared with the audience.

Our special thanks also goes to the lenders, SB BOF Decor Atelier, the Parks Department, Team Conservation and Management of the museums and heritage institutions of the city of Antwerp, University of Antwerp and in particular Linda Schools, MAS (Museum aan de Stroom) – Els De Palmenaeer, Nadia Nsayi Madjedjo and Tammy Wille, Pascale Obolo, Louis Van Broekhoven and all employees of the public programme: Yao Issifou, Sarah Agyemang, Omar Ba, Lies Busselen, Judith Elseviers, Ruth Felter, Billy Kalonji, Stef Mabo, Benedicte Moussa, Steve Nzitunga, Souleymane Ouattara, Access ngo, Mirandolo, Sérine Mekour, Bitshilualua Kabeya, Primrose Ntumba.

For more insight into the concepts, backgrounds and contexts of the exhibition, including the research on the Colonial College, and for more information about the artists and artworks, including a number of interviews: see the *Congoville* publication published by Leuven University Press (2021). This publication is for sale in the museum shop and can be consulted on the museum website, www.middelheimmuseum.be.