

Dutch Pavilion

**CATPC**

Renzo Martens

Hicham Khalidi



La Biennale di Venezia

60. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali



# The International Celebration of Blasphemy and the Sacred



Giardini della Biennale  
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Commissioned by:

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# The International Celebration of Blasphemy and the Sacred

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**Renzo Martens & Hicham Khalidi**

The International Celebration of Blasphemy and the Sacred is a presentation by Congolese artist collective Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) for the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Created in collaboration with artist Renzo Martens and curator Hicham Khalidi, it highlights CATPC's endeavour to reclaim exhausted plantation lands and to restore the Sacred Forest, along with their broader mission of spiritual, ethical and economic reckoning. The exhibition is commissioned by the Dutch Mondriaan Fund.

## **Sculptures**

The sculptures exhibited in the Dutch Pavilion are made of clay from remaining old-growth forests around Lusanga and recast in cacao and palm oil in Amsterdam. By using these raw materials, CATPC feels that the sweat and proceeds of plantation labour are transformed from impure stains into tools for repair. They exhibit their ideas in the same fruits that they have produced on the plantation. The goal of the exhibition is to write a scenario in which good contaminates evil and in which problems become solutions. The stories told through the sculptures are intended to generate change as they travel the world. CATPC argues that many museums were financed - at least in part - with profits from plantations. CATPC claims these plantations are still being exploited today and their extracted wealth continues to flow to museums through corporate sponsorship.

**'Each sculpture will mark the passage from a painful and dark past to an ecological tomorrow, a future in which the Sacred Forest will flow through the pavilion.'**

CATPC, 2023

## **The post-plantation**

CATPC is situated in Lusanga (formerly Leverville) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). With their artistic practice, they have been able to purchase parcels of depleted palm oil plantations, once confiscated by the British-Dutch multinational Unilever and its subsidiaries, where they and their families live and work. Over the past ten years, CATPC has succeeded in reclaiming 200 hectares of confiscated land to allow for a peaceful coexistence between humans and nature. The collective calls this undertaking, to replenish the land and to develop a sustainable economy, the post-plantation.



Still from *The Judgement of the White Cube*, CATPC, 2023, image by Jurgen Lisse.

### **The Judgement of the White Cube**

CATPC claims white cube museums and galleries are steeped in ideologies of dominance. In 2017, CATPC erected its own white cube exhibition space in Lusanga. A joint initiative with Renzo Martens and realised with the help of renowned Dutch architecture firm OMA. For CATPC, the Lusanga White Cube stands for all white cube museums throughout the world. In 2023, CATPC placed their White Cube on trial. In the performance film titled *The Judgement of the White Cube*, CATPC demands justice for the extraction of wealth. They convict the White Cube and sentence it to dedicate its energies for the good of the post-plantation. CATPC hopes their story sparks change and will ripple across the globe, beginning in the Dutch Pavilion - yet another white cube, designed by Gerrit Rietveld in 1954.

### **Jumelage - Twinning**

The twinning (jumelage) of the Lusanga White Cube and the Dutch Pavilion forges a channel for this transmission. A video livestream between the two spaces allows audiences in Lusanga to engage with those in the Dutch Pavilion. Visitors in Venice are welcomed, virtually, as guests of Lusanga, and vice versa.

## The sculpture Balot

For the duration of the Biennale Arte, the Lusanga White Cube has become a shrine for the sculpture of the power figure created by a Kwilu Pende artist. This sculpture depicts the Belgian colonial officer Maximilien Balot, who forcefully recruited labourers for Unilever until they revolted, and he was killed in 1931. The sculpture was carved as an act of resistance to harness Balot's angry spirit in service of the Pende people. Temporarily loaned by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, it has returned home for the first time in 50 years.



Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer, Maximilien Balot, circa 1931, Unknown artist (Pende, Democratic Republic of the Congo), wood (possibly *Alstonia Boonei*) with metal repair staples. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund, 2015.3. Photo by Travis Fullerton © 2015 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

## **The International Celebration of Blasphemy and the Sacred**

For CATPC, to exhibit in the Dutch Pavilion presents a double bind. Not only must its members contend with their ambivalence toward participating in an elitist art world event – to which they have little access and for an audience with whom they have a conflicted relationship – they also feel they must hold themselves accountable for the privileges this opportunity affords. At the same time others within their community are struggling to survive, let alone to make their own work visible. In words of CATPC member Ced'art Tamasala: 'We are not sure that good intentions will have the desired result or that good intentions will really lead to a Sacred Forest. In reality, we are at the very beginning. And, even if it works, it is a small step on the path toward those forests [in the four corners of Congo] being regenerated.'

### **CATPC's recent exhibitions include:**

The Learning Garden, After Rain, Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale, Saudi Arabia / online (2024); In Schitterend Licht, Wereldmuseum, Leiden, Netherlands (2023); Fruits of Labour, Museum Dhont-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2023); Kunsthal Charlottenborg Biennale 2023, Copenhagen, Denmark (2023); Someone is Getting Rich, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2023); Dig Where You Stand, Palais de Lomé, Togo (2023); Economics the Blockbuster - It's not Business as Usual, The Whitworth Manchester, UK (2023); Memory is an Editing Station, 22nd Biennial Sesc\_Videobrasil, São Paulo, Brasil (2023); The Way We Are 4.0, Weserburg Museum of Modern Art, Bremen, Germany (2023); Monomaterial, Kunstsaele, Berlin, Germany (2023); Remember Me: Liberated Bodies, Charged Objects, Lagos Photo Festival, Lagos, Nigeria (2022); Toxicity, Lubumbashi Biennale VII, Lubumbashi, DRC (2022); Dig Where You Stand, SCCA Tamale, Ghana (2022); Hurting and Healing: Let's Imagine a Different Heritage, Tensta konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden (2022); Time is Going – Archive and Future Memories, Dak'art Biennale off-program, EUNIC Sénégal, Dakar, Senegal (2022); tiple: What's on your plate?, Hayy Jameel, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2021); BALOT, KOW Berlin, Germany (2022).

## **Dutch Pavilion**



Giardini della Biennale  
Sestiere Castello, Venice

*For current opening hours, visit the website via the QR code*

**[dutch-pavilion.com](https://dutch-pavilion.com)**



Still from *The Judgement of the White Cube*, CATPC, 2023, image by Jurgen Lisse.

‘You should know that Lusanga is built at a confluence. This is where the two great rivers (Kwilu and Kwenge) meet. We are building a new world at this confluence, where energies meet. These combined energies also allow us to rebuild a connection between barely paid plantation labour and the art world. We do not want to establish this confluence only at home, but at the other end of this river, at the other end of this relationship of power.’

CATPC, 2024

Dutch Pavilion

# Colophon

## Commissioner

Mondriaan Fund,  
director Eelco van der Lingen

## Artists

Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation  
Congolaise (CATPC):

Djonga Bismar, Alphonse Bukumba,  
Irène Kanga, Muyaka Kapasa, Matthieu  
Kasiama, Jean Kawata, Huguette Kilembi,  
Mbuku Kimpala, Athanas Kindendi,  
Felicien Kisiata, Charles Leba, Philomène  
Lembusa, Richard Leta, Jérémie Mabiala,  
Plamedi Makongote, Blaise Mandefu,  
Daniel Manenga, Mira Meya, Emery  
Muhamba, Tantine Muku ndu, Olele Mulela,  
Daniel Muvunzi, Alvers Tamasala, Ced'art  
Tamasala. CATPC is presided by  
René Ngongo.

## Artistic team

Hicham Khalidi (curator) &  
Renzo Martens (artist)

## Production team

Janke Brands, David van den Berg,  
Hans Lentz, Ankie Schellekens,  
Anniek Vrij and the CATPC team  
at White Cube Lusanga

## Communications & PR

Madelon van de Pas, Esther Schussler,  
Rhiannon Pickles

## Exhibition installation

Landstra Ontwerp en Uitvoering

## Audio visual

Indyvideo

## Publication and wall texts

Milo Vermeire

## Authors publication

Hicham Khalidi, Amanda Sarroff, CATPC,  
Renzo Martens, Eelco van der Lingen

## Graphic design publication and exhibition

Michaël Snitker

## Graphic design communication

Das Buro

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(Raul Balai, Hendrik Folkerts, Franziska Nori,  
Suzanne Swarts, Fatos Üstek, and chairman  
Eelco van der Lingen)

## Special thanks for their contribution

Team and board of Human Activities, Jan Hein  
van Joolen, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

## Website / instagram / hashtags

[dutch-pavilion.com](http://dutch-pavilion.com)

[instagram.com/dutch.pavilion.venice](https://instagram.com/dutch.pavilion.venice)

**#catpc #dutchpavilion**

**#BiennaleArte2024**

**#StranieriOvunque**

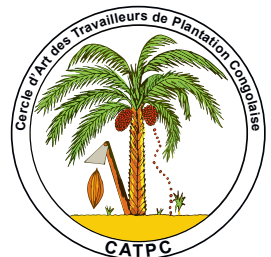
**#ForeignersEverywhere**

**#LaBiennaleDiVenezia**

**#MondriaanFonds #Venice**

Logo CATPC by  
Michel Ekeba

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Renzo Martens,  
Hicham Khalidi,  
Mondriaan Fund





# The International Celebration of Blasphemy and the Sacred

Coed'art Tamasala and CATPO about the sculptures:



**CATPO (Bilaka Mandala), Mvaya Bileletator / Phepa Libenno, 2022**  
Mvaya is a village artist who uses bark to crack open white cube museums across the world. He is sensitive to the pain of his fellow countrymen, when he finds another land or an animal trapped by hunters, he intervenes to help the creature free itself. Here, he prises open gently white cubes to liberate the energy contained within.



**CATPO Philimbaka Lembaak, Nege Nemorah / Amona Anegil, 2022**  
This inspiring led to a spirit who disperses inequalities and seeks colonialist capabilities. An eagle of war, he uses monu to drive people into conflict. The cone covering the length of the wing applying influence over humanity, through integrating economic and military wars, the painter continually towards self-ambition.



**CATPO (Mibuka Kipapa), Mademé and Mofika / Lady of Mawawon, 2022**  
The plantation is the mother of museums. She inspires and nurtures the creation and constant existence of museums around the world. Yet art and financial institutions constantly seek to her barren black benches. Subjugated without consent, she conspires to help her tormentors to give them her robust and strength to birth art-time museums.



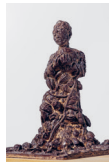
**CATPO (Giréme Maléla and Gjongja Bilema), Ballewe de Fende / The Art Collector, 2022**  
The Art Collector is a recurring character in our work. He also collects the Art Collector focus is difficult choice about to share his wealth - an option symbolized by his wings and flowers that have around him - or to keep it for himself - as suggested by the avian structure of the tongue. The work is a message to everyone who has the means to purchase our sculptures.



**CATPO Oengry Mulumba, Ballewe de Fende / The Mad Art Collector, 2022**  
This sculpture features the Art Collector mounting a bull who is dead with rage. The bull represents all the sacred works that have been pillaged and are now impacted by art institutions. These museums try to contain something they understand little and rarely respect.



**CATPO Mathika Kalamé and Coed'art Tamasala, Crucifixion du Ballewe / Crucifixion of The Art Collector, 2022**  
Here the Art Collector is near the end of his life, who mirrors that of Jesus. To his benefit of his area of inspiring monoculture agriculture and destroying lands, he decides to be crucified. After his death, he is resurrected, along with the post-plantation. Monoculture agriculture is replaced with biodiversity.



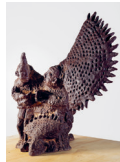
**CATPO Lalaméla Kalamé and Charles Lohu, Cerveau Polypocifur / Polypocifur Brain, 2022**  
The Polypocifur brain is an intelligence that is not one with values, here it is shown entwined among plants and animals. It gives us a right to meet monoculture and nature biodiversity or without any generation. This intelligence drives our community to acclaim land and to regenerate the Sacred Forest.



**CATPO (Mugaka Kappa), L'Argent et le Bêta / Money and the Beast, 2022**  
In our community, animals can be used to represent social or political predicaments. Here, a porcupine is related with a wastefulness around, a gift not, who massacres all the fish. The robot symbolizes the power of banks, while the fish represents the accumulation of wealth in the Global North. The gift set is an authoritarian beast who does as he pleases.



**CATPO (Gama Kawa), Polaireur Protecteur / Fish Protector, 2022**  
Dedicated to life on the post-plantation in healing the land, but also caring for one another. A people united can protect each other. This sculpture shows a magnificent fish protecting her offspring. When danger threatens, she swallow her babies who to keep them safe in her belly, only to vomit them again to explain a new secure place.



**CATPO (Olela Mulele Labamba), Mairie de Plantation / Plantation Mairie, 2022**  
Community is a significant part of life on the planet. It ought not to be apart. This sculpture shows someone who has been caught by the Plantation Mairie because the land is controlled by it. This mairie is coordinator, wants to represent him but instead gives him the tools to be able to work properly. Here, the coordinator represents all the members of the CATPO community.



**CATPO (Oubou Kipapa), Couple / Eglise / Couple of Eglise, 2021**  
The two heads of this sculpture represent the artist, Mibuka Kipapa, and his husband. After he fell sick, Mibuka assumed all responsibility. This couple of a woman as the head of a household courses the more traditional image of a Congolese family.



**CATPO (Mugaka Kappa and Coed'art Tamasala), Semer / Semence, 2022**  
We believe that seeds should be shared to plant the Sacred Forest. To be able to share, one must first not only work with one's land but with one's mind and heart. This interconnection, done here by our dear deceased colleague, Thomas Lohu, is also called kigala.



**CATPO (Chiquette Kizimi and Mira Mvaya), Naléance Merveilleuse / Wonderful Birth, 2022**  
This sculpture represents our community's diverse benefits agriculture. A farmer sits on the trunk of a fallen palm tree from a well-used monoculture plantation. She has learned all genetically engineered seeds from her newly acquired fields and urges her neighbors to do the same. The title evokes the versatility of many natural assets, which can produce offspring born in the future.



**CATPO (Oéne Kanga, Racine / Rats, 2022)**  
This sculpture is a testament to the importance of roots. Good roots like those from which the post-plantation grows, facilitate a connection between us, the earth and sacred forests. Bad roots like the one controlled by it, the one who contains everything that emerges from them, is contaminated.



**CATPO (Kipaka Leta), Vengeance Pende 2022 / Pende Vengeance 2021, 2021**  
This stolen land was a Congolese colonial agent under orders to forcibly recruit white-bodied men from the Paraka population in Okavango (2021) for labor on the Lower Brothery plantations. Following the rape of Mafuaka, and several other women by white territorial agents, her husband and Mafuaka decided to revolt. In 1951, Baidé was placed with arms before being decapitated by Shalémbingo.



**CATPO (Froese Kanga), Amour Froese / Froese Love, 2019**  
Here, Hans Kanga depicts his personal experience with a historic event: the rape of the Paraka woman Mafuaka by a Belgian colonial agent in 1951. In the midst of one of many local conversations to forcibly round up men for labor on the Lower Brothery plantation in Luauanga.



**CATPO (Oéne Kanga and Coed'art Tamasala), Travail Froese / Froese Labour, 2020**  
This large pig, feeding greedily from the basket of a kneeling girl, represents the 'toilful' Western world. In the subjugated state, the young girl is not the one who is surviving. Between the hunger and the daily threat of disease, she is obliged to work in silence and without complaint.



**CATPO (Oéne Kanga and Coed'art Tamasala), White Ode Luauanga, 2020**  
This sculpture depicts the White Ode museum in Luauanga. It is covered by the Paraka carving of Mafuaka Baidé, submerged among other sacred institutions based during the colonial era and implemented in this in other white cube museums in the Global North. Chapters of Luauanga's history are lost across the buildings' four facades.



**CATPO (Coed'art Tamasala), Ommet Mow Grand'ère a Service / Here My Grandfather Survived, 2015**  
Coed'art Tamasala's grandfather became an orphan when his father fell from a palm tree and died while working on a plantation. The company he died for also financed a mission in his town. Tamasala's grandfather lived and gave him a Kipapa-style company. This identification disconnects him from his Congolese culture.



**CATPO (Froese Kanga), Mivaya Employé(e) / Polaireur Mivaya, 2015**  
In this work, capitalism is an animal that changes color like a chameleon and makes a political mistake. It has built its teeth into a woman's left foot. Like a chameleon, it adapts to each new environment. It spreads the poison in a wondrous way. Capitalism takes possession of every human in a profound and tournaistic moment of transformation.



**CATPO (Mugaka Kappa), Oenge Mawawon / Oenge Mawawon, 2022**  
The war and atrocities occurring in the east of Congo are a constant worry for us. The daylight eyes depicted here is the one who celebrates Congolese people. He is merciless and kills men and children who are in the subjugated state. He is the exterminator of all the people in western Congo that are currently under attack.