

In and Out of Brussels: Africa Inside Europe

A project by TJ Demos (University College London) and Hilde Van Gelder (KULeuven)

In and Out of Brussels: Africa Inside Europe represents a multifaceted project, including an intensive collaboration between international theoreticians, art critics, and Brussels-based artists over a two year period, operating on various levels of production and output. It centers on four recent and in-progress art films by Herman Asselberghs, Sven Augustijnen, Renzo Martens, and Els Opsomer, two of which will be newly produced within the framework of this project. In addition to assisting financially with the production of these two films, the project will organize three interdisciplinary debates (one of which will be public), an exhibition, and a book publication, which will correspond to these four films.

Specifically, the project addresses the diverse ways in which these artists have investigated sub-Saharan Africa both as a site of political conflict, poverty, and migration, as well as an imaginary screen for the construction of European identity, humanitarian concern, and political engagement. Martens' provocative film *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* (2008; recipient of the Culture Prize of the Flemish Community in 2010) investigates poverty in the DR Congo, challenging the common perceptions of humanitarianism, photojournalism and politically engaged contemporary art; Augustijnen's *Spectres*, a 90 min. film that will premier at the Kunstenfestivaldes arts in May 2011, powerfully analyses Belgian colonial history, in particular the haunting of cultural memory by the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. Opsomer's film, a work in progress, proposes a subtle perceptual inquiry into Senegal's urban fabric and social networks that seeks to rupture cultural stereotypes; and Asselberghs' proposed film, a self-reflexive inquiry, plans to consider the political motivations of contemporary artists—including Martens, Augustijnen, and Opsomer—whose films focus on Africa, placing these motivations in historical perspective by comparing them with the earlier engagements of filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker, and Pier Paolo Pasolini who also filmed on the continent. In the works of these diverse practitioners, Africa emerges variously as a zone of crisis, situated between the fraught legacies of colonialism and the recent failed neoliberal state; as well, Africa figures as a terrain of artistic invention and a focal point for the critical interrogation of political practice within Europe.

The project intends to parse the political and aesthetic implications of these four films, generating discussion via interdisciplinary and international conversation. Its multiple outcomes include: 1) Four symposia gathering international and interdisciplinary participants to discuss the project's films; 2) A book project that will integrate the edited transcripts of the four conversations, which will include photographic portfolios of imagery from the films; and 3) An exhibition that will combine the screening of all four films and offer the opportunity for an international book-release event, both in Brussels and at a venue in London. At present we have received confirmation that University of Leuven Press will publish the book, and that Wiels will consider hosting a simultaneous book-release reception and an exhibition/screening of all the project's films.

Saturday May 21, 2011 (14.00) a by-invitation seminar on Sven Augustijnen's new film *Spectres* (2011) will take place at Wiels, Contemporary Art Centre (Brussels). Augustijnen's *Spectres*, that will premier at the Brussels KunstenFestivaldesArts on May 7, 2011, powerfully analyses Belgian colonial history, in particular the haunting of cultural memory by the assassination of Patrice Lumumba.

The seminar will consist of a number of interventions by an interdisciplinary panel of distinguished speakers: Sven Augustijnen (artist, Brussels), Dirk Snauwaert (Director, Wiels Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels), Filip Deboeck (Institute for Antropological Research in Africa, K.U.Leuven), Françoise Vergès (Lecturer Postcolonial Studies, Goldsmiths, London). This will be followed by a debate moderated by T.J. Demos and Hilde Van Gelder.

Program:

11.00: Screening of *Spectres* at Wiels

14.00: Seminar followed by debate

This seminar is generously supported by the Fondation Fernand Willame, Stichting van Openbaar Nut (Belgium), Wiels and K.U.Leuven. More information is available at:

http://www.lievengevaertcentre.be/research_projects.htm

Participation to this workshop is by invitation only. However, it will be possible to applicants who send a motivated letter by April 7th, 2011, to fill in potentially remaining places. Please send your letter before this date to: jeroen.verbeeck@student.kuleuven.be.