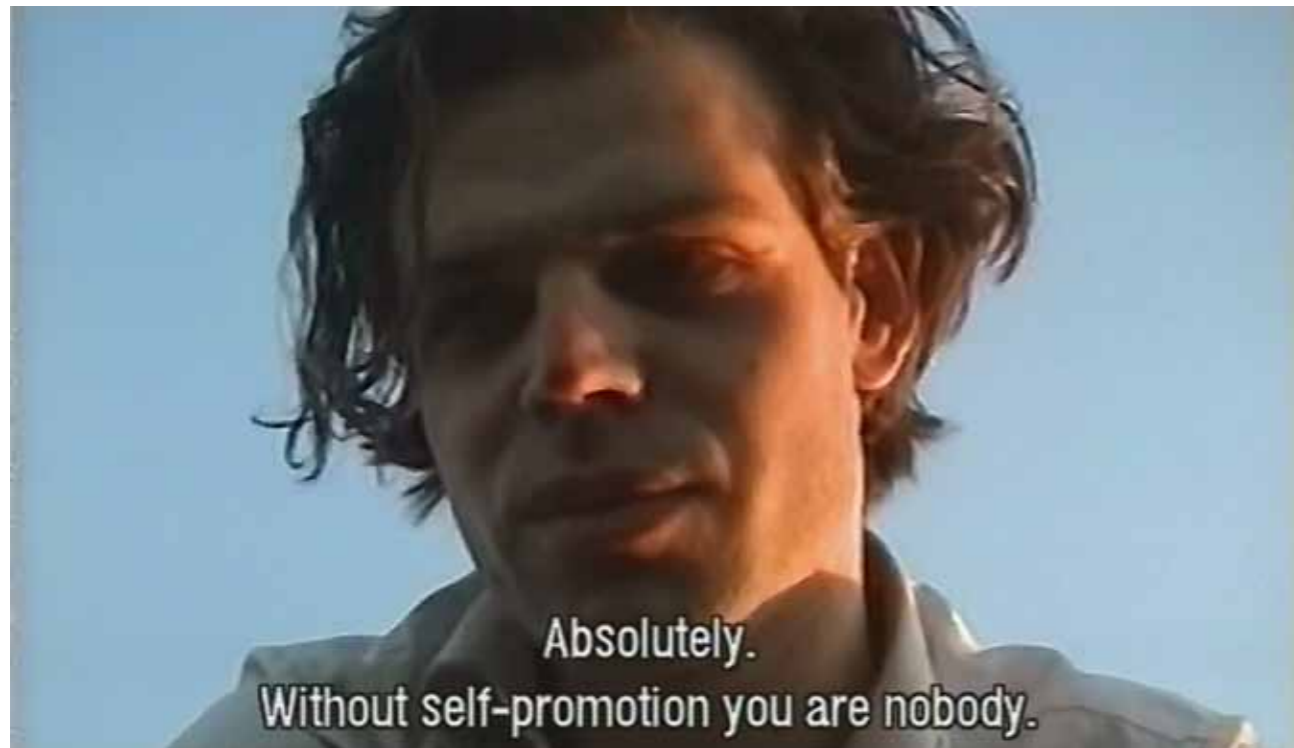




RENZO MARTENS DOSSIER 2008–2015

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Episode I is the registration of Renzo Martens' activities in Chechnya. He penetrates the war-zone —alone, illegal and carrying a Hi8 camera- and takes on the role of the single most important actor in war: that of the ubiquitous, yet forever undefined, television viewer for whose attention the battles are being fought. Amidst ruins and bombings, he does not ask refugees, UN employees and rebels how they feel. Those stories are well known, and serve no purpose for those who tell them. Instead, he asks them how they think he feels. The film forms a metaphor for an economy of images, roles and emotions. At the same time, there Martens stands, alone, with his camera, recording. The film is not about some external phenomenon, but about the terms and conditions of its own existence.



Renzo Martens

Episode I, 2000-2003
SD video, 4:3, color, sound
45 min



Episode III, also known as 'Enjoy Poverty', is the 90 minute film registration of Renzo Martens' activities in the Congo. In an epic journey, the film establishes that images of poverty are the Congo's most lucrative export, generating more revenue than traditional exports like gold, diamonds, or cocoa. However, just as with these traditional exports, those that provide the raw material: the poor being filmed, hardly benefit from it at all. Amidst ethnic war and relentless economic exploitation, Martens sets up an emancipation program that aims to teach the poor how to benefit from their biggest resource: poverty. Thus, Congolese photographers are encouraged to move on from development-hindering activities, such as photographing weddings and parties, and to start taking images of war and disaster. With a neon sign, packed in metal crates and carried through the jungle by Martens' porters, the local population is encouraged to capitalize on what the world has given them as their share. It states 'Enjoy Poverty.' Hapless plantation workers question it, accept it, dance around it, yet in the end, the whole project seems bound to fail. By enacting its own parameters, the film exposes its complicity in a world obscured by depictions of it.



Renzo Martens

Episode III (Enjoy Poverty), 2008
SD video, 16:9, color, sound
90 min



Since its premiere *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* travelled the world and has been shown in a variety of art institutions worldwide. Despite the film's wide reach and critical potential it did not however contribute to any actual material change in Congo. This inspired Martens to found the Institute for Human Activities (IHA) in Congo in 2012. The IHA asserts that even when art critically engages with global inequalities, it ultimately brings beauty, jobs, and opportunity to places like the Lower East Side in New York and Berlin-Mitte. IHA wants to reverse this given and recalibrate art's critical mandate: it will bridge the gap between artistic engagement and the material effects of artistic engagement, so that art can make more profound claims on reality.

Together with the newly founded Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantations Congolaises (CATPC) chaired by social and environmental activist René Ngongo IHA created a research centre on art and global inequality where workshops and lectures are held, exhibitions planned, and the 'Critical Curriculum' is run in order to allow for the former plantation workers to develop an artistic practice that reflects on their live conditions. Plantation workers who cannot live off plantation labour now live off artistic engagement with plantation labour. First sculptures were made out of clay, then digitally scanned and reproduced by a 3D printer in Amsterdam. Chocolatiers then manufactured Belgian chocolate casts from this secondary prototype. The resulting sculptures are exhibited in various venues of the art world, while the international conference series 'The Matter of Critique' addresses the material conditions of critical art production. Exhibitions in the Congo, publications, and various other local and international activities add to project that aims at creating alternative and sustainable modes of artistic critique and production responding to the current neoliberal paradigm.



Renzo Martens / Institute for Human Activities

Undisclosed location, DR Congo, 2015



The sculptures of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs des Plantations Congolaises (CATPC, Congolese Plantation Workers Art League) were created in workshops supervised by Michel Ekeba, Eléonore Hellio, and Mega Mingiedi Tunga. The three artists from Kinshasa shared their technical expertise with the plantation workers technical and, perhaps more importantly, taught them basic concepts of the art of sculpture. The workshop participants jointly selected the loam sculptures to be scanned and then reproduced and displayed in Europe. These statues and busts are made of solid Belgian chocolate. Some of the titles are hard to render in English, and the versions that appear here were translated first from Kikongo into French and then into English. Conversely, the participants in the workshops had to come up with adequate words to match some English and French terms. For example, Mathieu Kasiama, who remembers some virtually forgotten words of Kikongo, used the term "Fiofio"—a person who brings new ideas into the world—to render "concept."



Renzo Martens / Institute for Human Activities

Thomas Leba
Poisonous Miracle, 2015
Chocolate
139 x 57 x 86 cm

Jérémie Mabilia & Djonga Bismar
The Art Collector, 2015
Chocolate
120 x 62 x 65 cm

Thomas Leba & Daniel Manenga
A Lucky Day, 2015
Chocolate
162 x 56 x 74 cm



Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs des Plantations Congolaises
Workshop, undisclosed location, DR Congo, 2015

The Plantation Workers Art League collects profits from the sales of their sculptures on the international art market and use them to supplement the artists' incomes and improve the local infrastructure. In addition to the editions offered by galleries, IHA distributes two unlimited multiples for €39.95



Renzo Martens / Institute for Human Activities

Mubuku Kipala
Self Portrait without Clothes, 2014
Chocolate
62 x 90 x 70 cm

Djonga Bismar
The Spirit of Palm Oil, 2014
Chocolate
91 x 42,5 x 41 cm

Exhibition view KOW, 2015

Djonga Bismar
The Visionary, 2015
Chocolate
33 x 26 x 30 cm

Mathieu Kasiama
A man is what the head is, 2015
Chocolate
30 x 28 x 32 cm



Renzo Martens / Institute for Human Activities

Mubuku Kipala
Self Portrait without Clothes, 2014
Chocolate
62 x 90 x 70 cm

Multiples, unlimited edition

Djonga Bismar
Self Portrait, 2014
Chocolate
33 x 31 x 34 cm

Manenga Kibwila
Self Portrait, 2014
Chocolate
34 x 35 x 32 cm



Renzo Martens / Institute for Human Activities

The Matter Of Critique
KW Institute for Contemporary Art,
Berlin, 2015



Conversations, lectures, interviews



In the summer of 2016, the Institute for Human Activities will organize a major art event in the Congolese rainforest: the 1st Lusanga International Exhibition. The exhibition will present prominent international artists that engage with global inequality, the sculptures of the plantation workers, and works of important Congolese artists. Some of them showcased their work in the framework of the Unilever Series in Tate Modern (2000-2012), partly financed through the income from palm oil plantations in Congo, until this point only leading to beauty and prosperity in London – not in Congo. This is a unique moment in history: for the first time, critical art about inequality will not further stimulate gentrification and economic benefit in London, Venice or New York, but inclusive economic growth at one of the poorest places on earth. Instead of chasing away poor local inhabitants, this 'reverse gentrification' will bring improved housing and infrastructure to locals. After 2016 the programme will not stop: IHA, CATPC and the Lusanga International Exhibition form a driving force for further cultural, social, and economic development in Lusanga and the surrounding rural region with 50.000 inhabitants.



Renzo Martens / Institute for Human Activities

Undisclosed location, DR Congo, 2015



Renzo Martens
Dossier 2008– 2015

Design: Alexander Koch
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