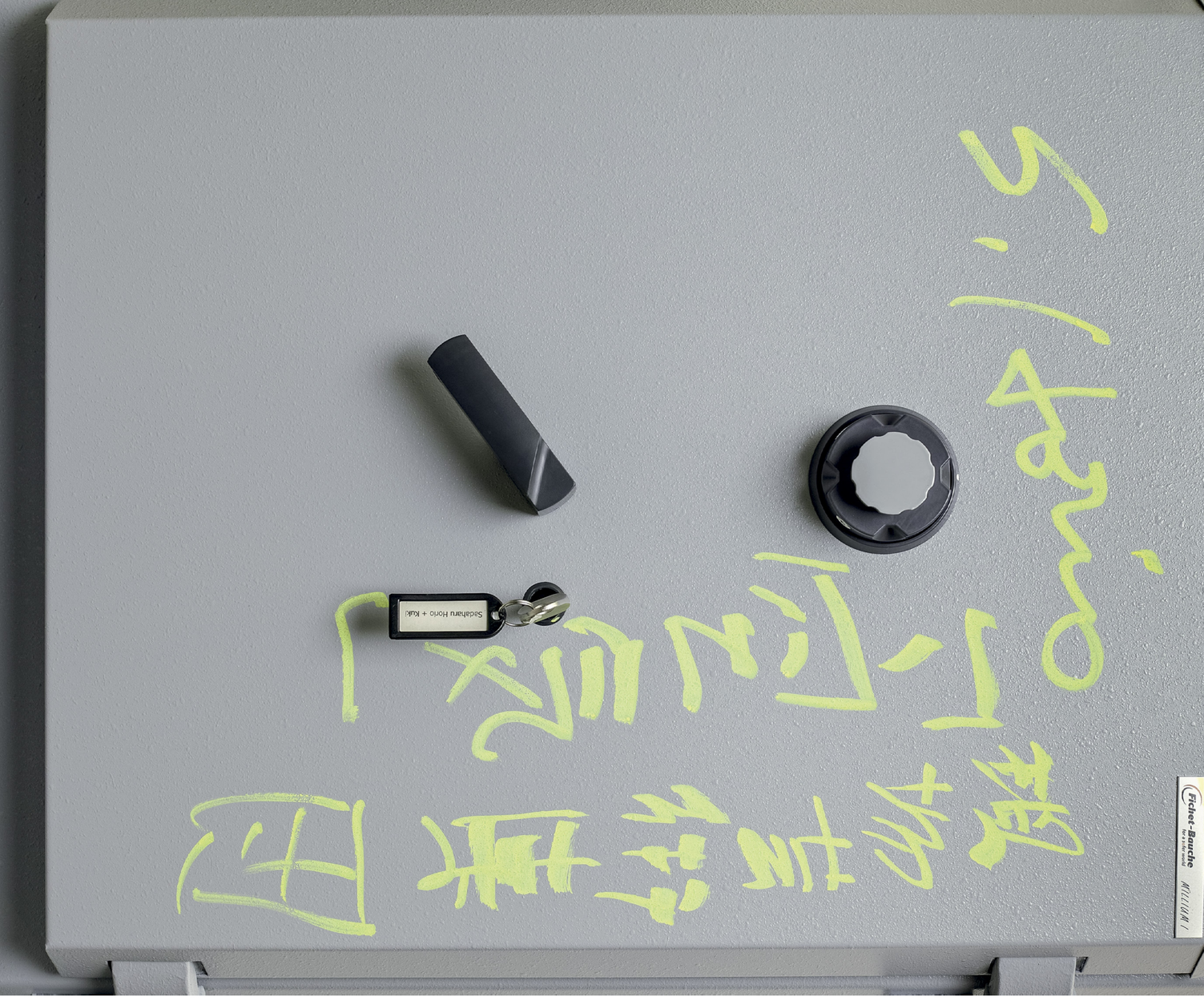


cut out and keep souvenir programme

The Locations

Act I, Art Brussels
An annual contemporary art fair at the end of April, Art Brussels attracts 30,000 visitors over four days. In 2015 Art Brussels hosted six artist and curator-run, non-profit spaces. Each one was invited to present a special project, creating a platform for experimentation and durational practice. From 2016, Art Brussels will be held at the Tour & Taxis site in central Brussels.

Art Brussels, 22 April – 24 April 2016 at Tour & Taxis
artbrussels.com/en

Act II, The Belgian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale
Belgian artist Vincent Meessen, together with international guest artists, present Meessen's proposal *Personne et les autres*. The exhibition breaks the tradition of Belgium's representation in Venice, which has to date featured solo or duo exhibitions of Belgian artists. It challenges the notion of national representation, opening it up to include multiple positions and viewpoints. Working in close collaboration, Meessen and curator Katerina Gregos have welcomed 10 other artists from four continents, whose work has explored the question of colonial modernity. The title of the exhibition, *Personne et les autres*, is borrowed from a lost play by André Frankin, a Belgian art critic affiliated with the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals. It questions the Eurocentric idea of modernity by examining a shared avant-garde heritage, marked by artistic and intellectual cross-pollination between Europe and Africa.

Personnes et les autres, *Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale runs until 31st October 2015*
personne-et-les-autres.be

The Production Team

Alexia Menikou
Francesca Donovan
Emma Geliot
Rhiannon Lowe

With special thanks to all of the collaborators.

CCQ
a creative conversation

Opening Up



A play in two acts, in two cities,
in which not much happens but much is said

by
Bertolt van Mülders

Catalogue P.F.A. – les bandes dessinées de petit format pour adultes publiées en France, Yves Grenet, 2015. 7 volumes articulés par éditeurs, de 164 à 464 pages chacun, 210 mm x 297 mm. Artists Club Coffre Fort, (Les Coffres Forts/ The Heaviest Booth, Art Brussels 2015), Photo: Gáston van Mülders, (after Juan Sánche Cotán)



cut out and keep souvenir programme

About the play

Opening Up is the only surviving work by Bertolt van Mülders, the enigmatic playwright who came to prominence, briefly, at Art Brussels in April 2015, where the first act is set. He workshopped the dialogue with the artistic director, Katerina Gregos, and some of the exhibitors in the not-for-profit section of the art fair, namely Artists Club Coffre Fort, the Holls collective and Nathalie Hartjes, of Nieuwe Vide.Van Mülders resurfaced a month later, at the Venice Biennale, and continued to develop the work with some of the artists who had been invited by Vincent Meessen to exhibit in *Personne et les autres,* at the Belgian Pavilion. Shortly afterwards, *Opening Up* was published (the title plagarised from a catalogue essay by the pavilion's curator, Katerina Gregos – making a return appearance). Van Mülders then vanished; rumours about the playwright's disappearance have been rife. It has been said that he died in a tragic accident, involving a space hopper and some sausage meat.

The Cast

Katerina Gregos
Artistic Director, Art Brussels and Curator, The Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 2015
An art historian, curator and writer, based in Brussels, Gregos was curator of *Contour 2009* – the 4th Biennial of Moving Image in Mechelen – and the founder of a new initiative, *The People's Cinema* – a flexible and mobile presentation platform, devoted to work by contemporary artists working with moving image. During 2006 and 2007, she was the artistic director of the Centre for Art and Media in Brussels, and an independent curator between 2003 and 2005. From 1997 to 2002 she was Director of the Deste Foundation, Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens. Gregos regularly publishes writing in magazines, books and exhibition catalogues, and is a frequent speaker at international conferences and seminars.

The Holls Collective
Participating artists, Not-For-Profit area, Art Brussels
The collective comprises: Lisanne Ackermann, Dóra Benyó, Saskia Burggraaf, Katinka van Gorkum, Josje Hattink, Pia Louwerens, Lotte Pet, and Machteld Rullens. They all trained at the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague. While retaining individual practices, they operate as an interdisciplinary machine. Their performances involve physical labour, time and endurance, to create space-invading installations. The Holls organises themselves in meetings and metaphors, often using game tactics. At Art Brussels, their performance *Got my mind on confetti and confetti on my mind*, was an adaption of their earlier work *Confetti/Control* (2013). Involving 200kg of confetti, it subverted the art fair, confetti inadvertently being carried away by visitors.
thehollscollective.com

Artists Club Coffre Fort
Participating artists, Not-For-Profit area, Art Brussels
Artists Club Coffre Fort is an artist-run, not-for-profit initiative, focusing on supporting experimental practice and the production of new work. Set up towards the end of 2012 by Thibaut Espiau, Ištvan Išt Huzjan and Gregoire Motte, together they run a studio and a lively exhibition programme in the vault of a former jewellery store.
artistsclubcoffrefort.com

Nathalie Hartjes
Artistic Director, Nieuwe Vide
Based in Haarlem, the Netherlands, Nieuwe Vide has been showcasing emerging contemporary art practice since 1997. The programme ranges from exhibitions, festivals and gatherings, with a developing focus on cross-disciplinary working. Small experimental solo presentations, in their own exhibition space, coexist with large collaborations at multiple locations. Hartjes was, at the time the artistic director of Nieuwe Vide in Haarlem, and commissioned Holls' performance at Art Brussels
nieuwevide.nl

James Beckett
Participating artist, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
In his work produced for the Biennale, *Negative Space: A Scenario Generator for Clandestine Building in Africa* (2015),James Beckett examines African architecture and the surge of Modernist vernacular. An automated storage and retrieval machine – as used in warehouses and pharmacies – arranges wooden building blocks into portraits of Modernist African buildings, referencing the buildings' negative space and potential for clandestine expansion of living spaces.
jamesbeckett.tk

Maryam Jafri
Participating artist, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
For the Belgian Pavilion, Maryam Jafri presents a series of photo and text-based works, which juxtapose iconic images from post colonialist African Independence in Ghana, Mozambique, Kenya, and Congo. Ownership of the images is claimed by private image banks. Jafri highlights their contested ownership to reveal inherent inconsistencies. Presenting a new work for the exhibition, *Getty vs. Musée Royal D'Afrique Centrale vs. DR Congo* (2015), Jafri contrasts an image of King Baudouin of Belgium with one of President Kasavubu of Congo on the day before Congo's independence from Belgium.
maryamjafri.net

Olive Martin & Patrick Bernier
Participating artists, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
The collaborative duo present a new work, *L'Echiqueté,* as part of *Personne et les autres* at the Belgian Pavilion. *L'Echiqueté,* included in the ICI exhibition *Free Play,* is a variant of the game of chess – but captured pawns are not removed from play, instead they change colour from black to white, or vice versa.



Opening Up

A play in two acts, in two cities,
in which not much happens but much is said.

by

Bertolt van Mülders

Dramatis Personæ

In order of appearance

Act I Brussels, April
Ric Bower – reporter
Katerina Gregos – Artistic Director, Art Brussels
Ištvan Išt Huzjan – Artist, Artists Club Coffre Fort
Thibaut Espiau – Artist, Artists Club Coffre Fort
Gregoire Motte – Artist, Artists Club Coffre Fort
The Chicken – Collaborator, Artists Club Coffre Fort
The Chorus – The Holls Collective
Nathalie Hartjes – Artistic Director, Nieuwe Vide

Act II Venice, May
Katerina Gregos – Curator, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
James Beckett – Artist, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
Maryam Jafri – Artist, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
Olive Martin – Artist, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale
Patrick Bernier – Artist, Belgian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale

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Brussels
Act I, scene I
Art Brussels. A great hall divided into booths. Set back from the main commercial stands, a cluster of not-for-profit, artist-led booths huddle together for warmth. The stage is occupied with one such 25m² booth, it is crammed with open safes filled with artworks by Artists Club Coffre Fort collaborators. In one safe, a chicken clucks. In the background the braying noise of art-lovers, collectors and critics is muted.

[Ric, the reporter, enters stage left and sits on one of the safes. He eyes the chicken uneasily and furtively looks down at his notes. The artists and the chorus lounge on the other safes. They talk to each other, ignoring the reporter]
The Chicken: Pwark!
[Katerina enters from behind the booth and sits next to the reporter. They begin to talk, their conversation is inaudible at first. The background noise fades away]
Katerina: I think it is important to consider how an art fair yields its power. The not-for-profit spaces at big art fairs, like Art Brussels, allow for practices that are more experimental.
Ric: So, how does performance fit in at an art fair?
The Holls: *[sarcastically]* We fill the space with 200 kilos of useless material and eight performing artists. It barely fits into a 25m² art fair booth. You might call the original version of the performance, *Got my mind on confetti and confetti on my mind,* our bestseller. Repeating this performance with more confetti pretty much guarantees us even more success, don't you think?
Ištvan: We are always questioning the format within which we create. For Art Brussels we have become merchants, safe salesmen.
The Holls: It's interesting to see how artists, represented by not-for-profit spaces, emphasise the sales aspect of the art fair and use the opportunity to reflect on and play with the specifics of that context. For us, it was always clear that we couldn't participate in Art Brussels without joining in with this game.
Ric: *[looks down at his notes again, runs his finger down a list]* Nietzsche once said, "We possess art lest we perish of the truth"; what role does truth play within creative practice?
The Holls : Our response to Nietzsche would be that truth is both the starting point and the destination of creative practice.
Katerina: I would be careful about using the term 'truth', because it is a relative concept; but, that said, art reveals things that some prefer not to be revealed.
Ištvan: As artists we tell the truth by lying.
Thibaut: *[dead-pan]* I think the chicken has something to say on the subject of truth...
The Chicken: ...pluck, pluck, pluck... BDAAK, bdaaaak, pluck pluck!
Gregoire: When we got the proposal from Katerina, our initial reaction was to work with people we already work with, as opposed to seeking out famous or saleable artists to collaborate with.
Ric: Some might claim that art has become irrelevant to everyday experience. How might creative practice re-engage with the general population?
Katerina: There is a paradox in your question. You are saying that art has become disengaged at a moment when art has never been more popular. There have never been more exhibition spaces, museums or cultural initiatives; there is an explosion of art all over the world. I would turn the question round and ask you 'what does that say?' ⟶



Ric: But is there not a distinction between popularity and relevance?

Katerina: *[increasingly irritated]* You cannot presume that because millions of people are visiting exhibitions, they are only going to see a spectacle. How can art engage more effectively? By not being elitist for starters. Everybody wants to know to what extent art affects society, but this question presupposes that art is something you can measure with tools of statistical analysis. That is simply not how art works. In both society and individuals, art works latently. In short, I am not going to answer your question because I disagree with it.

Ištvan: I think there is a way to measure it, and that is by taking it away. This has happened before in times of fascism. It is happening again now due to politics of austerity.

[Nathalie Hartjes rushes into the booth and takes a seat on a spare safe.]

Ric: Katerina, how do you fold inherently non-saleable practices into an art fair?

Katerina: First of all, some of the work on view in the Not-for-Profit section is saleable. Not-for-profit does not mean not-for-sale. What I hope will happen for these spaces is that, on the basis of dialogues and relationships created within the fair, there will be a continuation of activity. Not necessarily just within the field of art. When one has an encounter that sparks the intellect, one tends to pursue that encounter. These encounters – as I have seen happen many times before – might then be transformed into other dialogues; a domino effect that you cannot predict.

Nathalie: *[slightly breathless]* In principle, everything is saleable. Tino Sehgal sells what he does with unwritten contracts, even though it is entirely intangible. What we do here, you can label simply not-for-profit, but I think it is more accurate to say that we have an alternative obligation. As public institutions, we have a responsibility to the public, whereas the gallery's obligations are firstly to the artists and their careers. We are showing here a performance piece, *Got my mind on confetti and confetti on my mind,* which is certainly difficult to sell, but by no means impossible. Aside from the issue of sales, the exposure we get here, at Art Brussels – where there are 30,000 visitors over four days – is really useful.

Ric: Does society get the art it deserves?

Katerina: *[now very irritated]* I have problems with that question too. You are presuming that art takes a specific form that is reflective of society. When you look at the one per cent – the bankers, the financiers and the flippers – perhaps they get the art they deserve: the bling-bling work with the inflated prices. But that is the one per cent and the rest of us are the 99%, of course. I have real trouble when people say 'the art world'. They are presuming that art is just one thing. There is no art world. There are art worlds, plural. In the same sense, there isn't one society; therefore there cannot be one kind of art that is a mirror of society.

Nathalie: It is a really evil question!

Ric: Can you see us moving into a time when art is not seen as product; a pre-renaissance, pre-enlightenment time, when artists were cultural prophets perhaps?

Katerina: I would not call artists prophets, but artists are often ahead of the times in terms of understanding societal mechanics and perceiving, or alluding to, how things might change.

Nathalie: When you phrase the question 'going back to a time', you are presuming that over the course of the intervening centuries, a phenomenon did not exist. There are undertows and sub-currents in which a great variety of creative engagements occur.

Ric: Is it impossible to stand separate from the traditions within which we operate?

Katerina: There is a difference between tradition and history. What is important is to understand where you have come from. If you want to kill your parents, so to speak, you first need to work out who they are.

I would like to offer a reflection on entanglements at this point; particularly, if you will excuse me, misunderstandings perpetuated by the press in relation to linear definitions of power. In reality things are more complex than the black-or-white perspectives proffered by the media. An art fair is a good place from which to reflect upon this artificial polarisation. The truth is there is no art without at least some money to enable it and the market, in itself, is not inherently bad. It's how one exercises one's ethics from within it that counts.

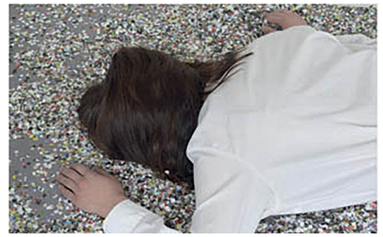
Nathalie: The sale of a work is often the first step towards its conservation...

Katerina: ...I agree. And, that aside, art is perhaps the last unregulated space for free expression in the face of increasing commodification and privatisation. Maybe for some it is a niche space, but does it have to lose that character if it is from within this niche that the best critique comes?

[Fade to blackout]

The Chicken: Bwark!

[Curtain] ⟶



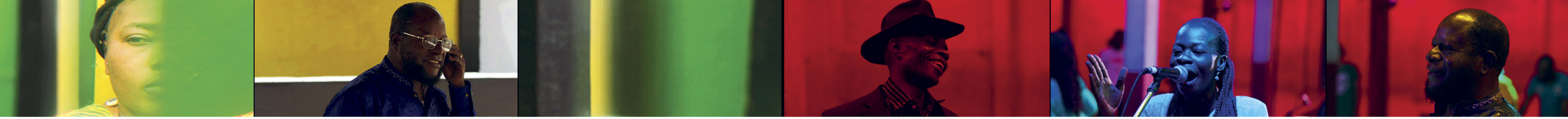
[p48]
Untitled, **Sadaharu Horio + On-site Art Squad 'KUKI®**, 2015
safe, various materials, cardboard, paper, wood, various dimensions
Artists Club Coffre Fort, (Les Coffres Forts/ The Heaviest Booth, Art Brussels 2015), photo: Gástôn van Mülders, (after Juan Sánche Cotán)

[p51]
PUPE, **Evor**, 2015, plaster, ink, 310mm x 150mm x 70 mm
Artists Club Coffre Fort, (Les Coffres Forts/ The Heaviest Booth, Art Brussels 2015), photo: Gástôn van Mülders, (after Juan Sánche Cotán)

[p52]
Fox, Henhouse and Crow, **Robert Whilhite**, 2015
safe, taxidermy fox, chicken and crow, various dimensions
Artists Club Coffre Fort, (Les Coffres Forts/ The Heaviest Booth, Art Brussels 2015), photo: Gástôn van Mülders, (after Juan Sánche Cotán)

[p54]
Prop, **James Beckett**, 2015
safe, mixed steel and wood, various dimensions
Artists Club Coffre Fort, (Les Coffres Forts/ The Heaviest Booth, Art Brussels 2015), photo: Gástôn van Mülders, (after Juan Sánche Cotán)

[above]
Got my mind on confetti and confetti on my mind, **The Holls Collective**, 2015, confetti, various dimensions, Art Brussels 2015, photo: courtesy of The Holls Collective



Venice
Act II, scene I
A garden in front of The Belgian Pavilion, its façade just seen, in the Giardini at the 56th Venice Biennale. There is a great deal of media activity on stage. Artists and curators are being interviewed; camera crews and glamorous television presenters are jostling for the best locations. On a low plinth, to the rear of the stage, Katerina is doing a television interview. We see her gesticulate. Ric sits on a deckchair in the shade of a solitary false acacia tree, sipping espresso from a paper cup. He is waiting. Katerina finishes a television interview and draws up a second deckchair beside him.

Ric: *[taking a deep breath]* In the catalogue essay for *Personne et les autres,* the Belgian presentation for the 56th Venice Biennale, you talk of 'opening up'. What does that mean exactly?

Katerina: We had to consider, within the context of the Venice Biennale, what national representation means today. The Biennale is a construct that originates in 1895, during the heyday of the idea of the nation state. The Biennale was one of many exhibitions and fairs that were intended to showcase the achievements of the European superpowers. Now we are in the 21st century and the world has completely changed. The notion of the nation state is in question and identities are acknowledged as being migratory and fluid. It is very strange to me that the majority of pavilions in the Biennale still adhere to this 19th century model. I find it rather conservative and deeply uninteresting to be honest. It also makes absolutely no sense to base the criteria of selection for a pavilion on an artist's origin. Often the norm in national pavilions is a solo exhibition of an artist that comes from – in other words, holds the passport of – the country they are representing. So the first thing we asked ourselves was what it means to represent a country. The Belgian Pavilion is a very particular case. It is shared by the two main linguistic communities within Belgium – the French speaking and Flemish speaking regions. I had already worked with Vincent Meessen on a number of occasions. He came to me with the idea of opening the pavilion up and not occupying the Pavilion alone as an artist; something he very well could have done. We decided to invite10 international artists to participate in what Vincent determined as an act of sharing and exchange. Of course, this gesture of sharing throws into question the notion of exclusive authorship. The artist chooses not to occupy centre stage but to enter into a dialogue: 'the harnessing of collective intelligences', as Vincent puts it. Through these dialogues we are looking at what Belgium represents as a country. Belgium itself is a construct that was created in 1830 and perhaps, within Europe, has the least developed sense of national identity. In that sense, it provides the perfect context for an international exhibition.

[James enters. His hair is long and his arm is in a cast after a recent motorbike accident; he wears sawn-off skate shorts and a loose fitting T-shirt. He pulls up another deckchair and sits down.]

Ric: How do assertions of ego or, conversely, demonstrations of altruism – the manifestations of a practitioner's character – fold into this presentation where there are so many participants involved?

Katerina: The title, *Personne et les autres,* answers your question I think. *Personne* is the individual but it also means 'no one' in French, so the individual becomes anonymous in relation to the whole. In this case Vincent becomes the *Personne.* He relinquishes the authorial position and puts himself in relation to *les autres.* He becomes anonymous. It becomes about the development of relationships and how these relationships occupy space on an equal footing.

James: We have to make a community of artists so we can help develop each other's practices, rather than this linear bullshit. Ego is what separates us, so when the shit hits the fan we find that we are lacking solidarity, and the infrastructure around us serves only to foster those individual egos. China is a very interesting extreme. I was working there from 2000 to 2006. Students would be picked up by galleries and then their classmates would, as a result, be completely out of the picture. It seemed random, how they got selected. There was certainly nothing healthy about the process. Artists in the West generally have to be entrepreneurial; they have to push themselves. I get the sense that elsewhere, in Russia for instance, artists can aspire to be hermetic and to focus on their work over their career.

Ric: This kind of falls in line with the Platonic idea of *eudemonia,* the good composed of all goods; a kind of holistic flourishing.

James: The Greek idea of community, whereby you give yourself to your friends in a process of personal interchange, is a useful idea too. Our perception of what constitutes happiness has become this polar and essentialist thing. Many such old ideas have suddenly become urgent and pertinent.

Katerina: Russia is a good example of how private interest plays a significant role through foundations run by oligarchs. There is the myth, though, that public institutions provide a purer domain in which to work, but the moment an artist is selected to represent a pavilion – or is chosen for the main exhibition at the Biennale – a mechanism is put in place where private money still needs to be harnessed. Nothing is pure. There is hypocrisy in demonising the market. Art has always needed money; it can't be made out of thin air after all! What is dangerous here is a shift in balance where private money is taking over from public money in importance.

[She pauses and looks up through the leaves of the tree]

We are seeing the erosion of state contribution towards the arts; collectors and private investors have stepped into a more central role. When this happens commercial factors come into play and certain other considerations are inevitably marginalised.

When we began work on this show we received basic funding from the French-speaking community of Belgium, which is the amount of money with which one would expect to produce a solo exhibition, rather than a group show. So, I started fundraising for the pavilion. It was very, very difficult to convince people to put money towards a project that was, first of all, political and dealt with an uncomfortable aspect of Belgian colonial history and, secondly, included artists who are not market names. Some collectors said to me, 'But, who is this Vincent Meessen? We have never heard of him, he does not have a gallery'. It highlighted to me the discrepancy that exists between these different art worlds. It is as if an artist who does not have a gallery does not exist.

Ric: What does showing at the Venice Biennale do for the development of an artist's career?

Katerina: Let's start with a basic given: it is extremely challenging and difficult for an artist to show in a context which has been increasingly co-opted and commercialised by the art market. Personally, I do not look at 'career trajectory', but into what an artist creates in terms of his or her practice. In the case of Vincent – who has consciously been completely outside the art market and has been producing his work under the radar for many years – he has not been as susceptible to the kind of violence the market exercises on other artists who have been hyped. There are different art worlds: the art world of commerce and then the art world of institutions, biennials, critical and institutional practices and so on. Within the context of the commercial art world, this constant searching for the 'next hot young thing' becomes a problem. Elsewhere, artists can develop their practices in a more organic way. The Venice Biennale is both the best and the worst place to show. It offers a tremendous platform, but, on the other hand, there is so much to see that people's attention is compromised. I know some artists who have done very well with Venice and others who merited great success, but nothing happened for them. Showing in the Biennale does not come with any guarantees.

Ric: Once the hegemony of the old historical metanarratives have been laid to waste, what might we expect to find in the ashes?

Katerina: Ashes are a good metaphor because they are grey. It is within this grey territory that truth lies, particularly when deconstructing history, as artists are doing in this pavilion. From the ashes of formerly cemented narratives, the artist comes to play an important role. The sociologist Paul Gilroy recently said the people who are leading the discussion, in terms of the state of the world, are not politicians or academics or philosophers, they are artists. Artists are able to pinpoint, excavate and reconstruct using these ashes to rediscover meanings that had been cast aside. And once we know where we come from we can inquire as to where we are going.

[Fade to blackout] ⟶

[above and below], *ONE. TWO. THREE.* **Vincent Meessen**, 2015, Three channel video installation in loop, Photo: courtesy the artist and Normal



Act II, scene II

[Ric and James are still sitting in their deckchairs under the tree. Katerina's seat is now empty.]

Ric: I can't work out whether *Scenario Generator for Clandestine Building in Africa*, your contribution to the Belgian Pavilion, is essentially optimistic. Or are you co-opting characteristically postmodern vehicles – the computer and the commercial robot – to subvert the dehumanising influence of modernity, to seek out a different path, so to speak?

James: It's a bit of a tongue-in-cheek trick, really, to turn ceremonial and infrastructural modernist African architecture – universities, airports and hospitals – into residential space. Most of the buildings we examined were built between the war and the respective African countries' independence from their colonial occupiers. *The Scenario Generator for Clandestine Building in Africa* proposes bricking in and making private the negative spaces within these buildings. Residential use of these buildings is, of course, absurd! You would never do it! It is more celebration than subversion though. The African buildings we are looking at are fantastic and really varied; from Art Deco in Ethiopia, through a number of variations on the International Style, to Israeli architects working in Nigeria. I actually have very little critique personally of modernist architecture; we are just creating facade portraits of the buildings.

Ric: It feels like the Amazon robots, which you have used in the installation, have been redeemed from their normal societal function, in some way; that is to feed consumer demand. How did your thinking develop to include them?

James: The idea developed out of a conversation with Katerina about trade. We were referencing a particular Situationist play. I went on to research how the use of ivory in the manufacture of billiard balls transitioned into the use of Bakelite. I wanted to create a device that demonstrated the process of mechanisation in the movement of commodities. Then our conversation shifted to encompass architecture – in fact, the conversation keeps shifting. It is not about appropriating the robots to do something of genuine use, as you were suggesting, but demonstrating that we already have super-efficient machines doing things that are completely ridiculous, like the car, for instance, which is a brilliantly executed, bad idea.

Ric: How does your machine make decisions? Is there an algorithm by which the space within each building is reordered?

James: The program works with data from scans, which is collated into a database, rather than from a single, universal algorithm. The blocks themselves are derived from Froebel blocks and they represent all the possible dimensional permutations of the reconstructed space; as they get larger they become lighter in colour. Froebel blocks are educational toys that became popular as brainstorming tools for architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and within the Bauhaus. The geometry of each space is represented through a separate vernacular within the different types of blocks.

Ric: Is research, in the context of your practice, inherently a collaborative process?

James: Very often, yes. When working with Katerina you get pushed. It's nice to be pushed.

[Darkness] ⟶

[Above], *Negative Space: A Scenario Generator for Clandestine Building in Africa*, **James Beckett**, 2015, Installation view, Photo: courtesy of the artist





[left]
Constitution of Niger Armed Forces, **Unknown**, 1961
Photo: courtesy of Patrick Bernier

[right]
L'Echiqueté (Checkered Chess), **Olive Martin & Patrick Bernier**, 2012
Installation view, photo: Olive Martin

Act II, scene III

[Interior of the Belgian Pavilion. Olive is standing in front of a chess board. There is a large black and white photograph and some descriptive text on the wall behind her, stage right. Ric enters, stage left. Walks up to the photograph, glances at the text and raises an eyebrow at Olive]

Olive: The project started with an archive image. We conceived our chess variant to disrupt that formalised opposition inherent in the game.

[Patrick enters, eating an apple]

Patrick: We find ourselves attracted to transitional characters. Switching sides in life can be a survival strategy. The chequered character that emerges in our chess variant plays this part.

Ric: To be transitional, or transgressive, is a provocative position in itself. Society finds it threatening. Have you therefore formalised the idea of the transgressive within your chess variant?

Olive: Yes, indeed. Society usually demands clarity.

Patrick: A chess player approached me to play yesterday. He began by asking me what my level was as a player. I showed him the adjusted rules, then we began to play 'rigorous' chess. When he made the first capture I explained to him that the piece was now a 'common' piece. He stood up sharply, exclaimed it was all 'completely ridiculous!' and left. He was really upset. In a less emphatic sense, when I teach people to play the variant there is a level of broader comprehension that develops. People find the chequered pieces uncomfortable; they want to take them out of the game.

Olive: In chess the language associated with capturing a piece is violent: you *take* or you *capture*. *L'Echiqueté* uses a different set of words; to *cross* or to *marry*. As with colonisation, within the chequered piece remains a scar of the initial violence, but the character of both sides remains within it too. When playing *L'Echiqueté*, one experiments with the idea of reciprocal capture.

Ric: How did you find working in a pavilion with nine other projects?

Olive: We had known Vincent for years and he was familiar with *L'Echiqueté*, as we first presented it in 2012. He spoke to us about being involved before he knew he had got the gig; we thought it was courageous. We did not know all the artists but we trusted him. It is all very much about dialogue for us. We met Katerina later through this project.

Ric: Can you explain the significance of that single archive photograph you took as your starting point for the project?

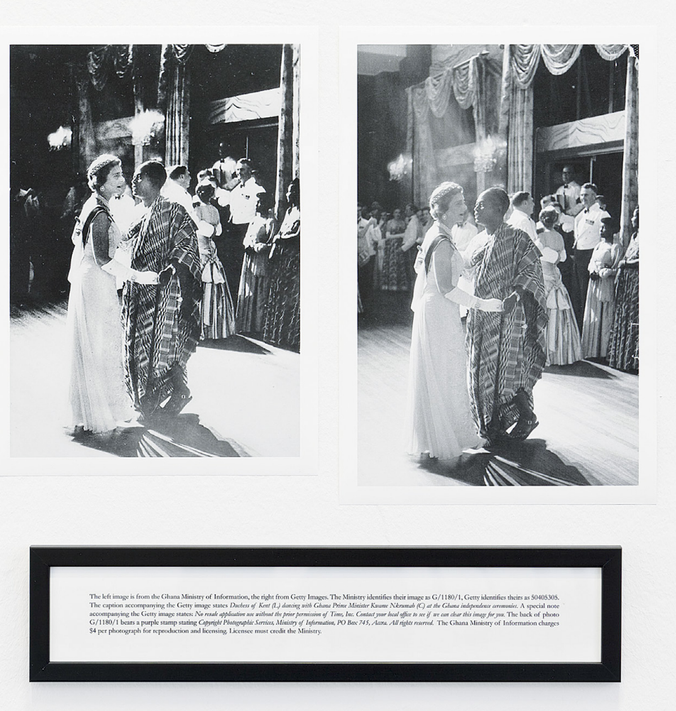
Patrick: The photograph is of the constitution of Niger's Armed Forces and the commemoration of the first anniversary of the Republic of Niger in 1961. This event followed the signing, which had occurred a few months earlier, of a defence agreement between France and what are now Burkina-Faso and Benin. The agreement stipulated that the French would provide material aid and would allocate troops to help these countries form their own national armies. Under the table, negotiations were being made to ensure France's privileged access to Niger's abundant natural resources. In many ways this event marks the beginning of France's neo-colonialism in the area.

[He pauses, looking around for somewhere to deposit the apple core, which he has been using to emphasise words like 'violent', gives up and continues to hold it, turning back to Ric]

The three key people in the photograph are the first president of Niger, Hamani Diori, wearing black; and at his side is the commander of the French army in Niger, in white. On the other side of the president is the first counsellor of the French ambassador, Auguste Bernier, wearing grey. That's my grandfather. He was from Guadeloupe in the French Caribbean and went to Paris during the '30s to study at the *Ecole Coloniale*. He made his career as a colonial administrator in different African countries. This position, in the newly independent Republic of Niger, was his last one. His profile was not unique; French administration seemed to make use of its Caribbean citizens in that way. I question how someone coming from a colonised piece of land, with a background related to African slavery, should morph into the administrative arm in another colonised country in Africa. These paradoxical characters epitomise the transitional characters Olive and I are interested in.

Ric: That is fascinating, but we must play chess now. And I warn you, I get very grumpy if I don't win. *[They all leave, walking slowly off behind the wall bearing the photograph. Patrick is still waving the apple core as they disappear, their voices disappear]*

[Fade to blackout]



Act II, Scene IV

[Maryam collapses, exhausted, into an empty deckchair, under the false acacia tree, brushing spent blossoms from the canvas as she sits. Ric appears and walks briskly to stand in front of her, digital recorder in his hand. He remains standing]

Maryam: I hear you lost in five moves. Is that a record? Just to let you know, I am running on fumes, so go easy on me.

Ric: *[unsympathetically]* Maryam, is the exhibition space – as it has developed over the 20th century – inherently inappropriate for the presentation of your work which, due to its intimate scale, requires close examination and total attention from audiences?

Maryam: *[struggling to hide irritation]* That is a leading question. You are expecting me to say 'yes' but the answer is 'no'. The work is in dialogue with specific elements of art history and showing the work in a white cube formalises that lineage. I am always thinking of dialogue with other artists when I work. I question who actually owns the archives that artists, researchers and academics are looking at. Where are the information pipelines and how do they reach us, in other words? I was specifically looking at African colonial independence days images, which are already highly charged. There is an older museological debate related to cultural patrimony going on too. Rather than dealing with the Parthenon Marbles though, we are dealing with information; bits and bytes.

Ric: What is it about the lens that is so pertinent as a vehicle for documentation? Are we moving into a post-lens era now?

Maryam: We *are* moving into a post-lens era, but not a post-image era. The dialogue I present is not so much looking back as looking forward. Getty and Corbis own a huge portion of the image landscape we see online. Official information is almost all coming from those guys. The Internet is bizarre; it is an explosion of diversity and homogenisation simultaneously. It's schizophrenic. On one hand it levels the playing field with new voices, and on the other it concentrates sources of power. My Venice works present a series of schisms: offline/online, African/international, public/corporate, digital/analogue.

Ric: Where would you say this schizophrenia is leading us?

Maryam: The dystopian view states it will get more concentrated in terms of capital, power and the right to make images. Then, there is the privatisation of absolutely everything. But you have just had an election so you know that! In Africa we were dealing with fragile analogue archives, stored in tropical conditions so, unfortunately, it will be the digitised Corbis and Getty versions of history that will dominate in the next 30 to 50 years.

[Fade to blackout] **—CCQ**

[above], *Getty Vs. Ghana*, **Maryam Jafri**, 2012,
Installation view (detail),
Courtesy of the artist