

CONGO AS FICTION

ART WORLDS
BETWEEN PAST
AND PRESENT



Museum Rietberg Zürich
Scheidegger & Spiess





Monsengo Shula
Ata Ndele Mokili
(Tôt ou tard le monde changera)
2014, acrylic and sequins
on canvas, 130 × 200 cm
Henri and Farida Seydoux
Collection



Shula
2014

To all the artists from the Congo,
in the past, present, and future

CONGO AS FICTION

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AND PRESENT**

Edited by
Nanina Guyer and
Michaela Oberhofer

Museum Rietberg Zürich
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FOREWORD — The first exhibition of Congolese art at Museum Rietberg opened in 1993. Called *Zaire 1938/39*, it displayed photographs that Hans Himmelheber had taken during his extensive travels through the territories of the Yaka, Pende, Chokwe, and Kuba peoples before the outbreak of the Second World War. I was fascinated by the vitality and dynamism of the dance and mask performances that Hans Himmelheber captured with his Leica. The ethnologist Himmelheber also documented intensive contemporary culture in his artist portraits of mask carvers at work. Just how immediately they processed recent impressions is described by Himmelheber in his article in the journal *Brousse* from 1939. According to this, the Yaka artists carved mask crests adorned with figural scenes, for example a clerk on a motorbike. Today, eighty years after Himmelheber's journey to the Congo and twenty-six years after the *Zaire* show, the present *Congo as Fiction* exhibition once again focuses on the culture of the late 1930s as documented by Himmelheber. At the same time, and again following in Himmelheber's footsteps, we are also interested in the work of the country's contemporary artists. The art world in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi is blossoming; it is dynamic and has international connections. Artists from the Democratic Republic of the Congo exhibit in biennials and in museums and galleries all over the world. In our exhibition we show works by two female and twelve male contemporary artists; seven artists have created works especially for this exhibition. A prominent position has been given to the installations by Sammy Baloji and Sinzo Aanza, who explored the objects and photographs in our museum's collection as artists-in-residence. These artworks should be understood on the one hand as the result of research into the country's colonial past. On the other, they are statements about everyday life—but also about exploitation and social inequality in the modern-day DRC. Including the present in the form of contemporary art is imperative for a museum that intends to continue to play an instrumental role in exhibiting and educating about African art and culture in the future.

Naturally, our museum's collection is and remains the foundation of all our research and educational work. The Congo collection along with Hans Himmelheber's photographic and written estate that is preserved in the museum provide a unique opportunity to gain deeper insight into the art and culture of the 1930s, a time when the Congo was under Belgian colonial rule (until 1960). This estate documents the view of a German art anthropologist who studied various ethnic groups and acquired numerous objects in the course of his intensive fieldwork. It is thanks to this comprehensive and revealing source material that the Museum Rietberg and the Historisches Seminar of the University of Zürich were awarded financial support by the Swiss National Science Foundation for a long-term research project. By investigating and publishing the material collected by Himmelheber eighty years ago, we are also making a contribution to the current debate about decolonization and restitution, as well as creating the foundation for dialogue with the country of origin, the Congo. Launched with this exhibition, we aim for a cooperation and will maintain a dialogue in the future with the Congo.

It is thanks to Hans Himmelheber (1908–2003) and his wife Ulrike Himmelheber (1920–2015), as well as the munificence of their children Eberhard Fischer, Susanne Himmelheber, and

Martin Himmelheber, that we are able to preserve and research Hans Himmelheber's estate—which consists of 750 objects, 15,000 photographs, and a written archive of diaries, letters, and notes—in our museum. We would like to thank the ethnologist and friend of the museum Clara Himmelheber, Hans Himmelheber's granddaughter, for her unfailingly generous assistance. Thanks to the financial support of Eberhard Fischer, the former director of our museum, and his wife Barbara Fischer, we have been able to inventory and digitize these documents over recent years. Furthermore, their donations have enriched our museum's African collection for many years. Another occasion for this exhibition was the Congo collection—comprising 484 artworks and objects—gifted to us by Martin Himmelheber in 2018 from his father's effects. We express our heartfelt gratitude to them all.

For a close, productive collaboration with the University of Zürich in the context of the research project supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation, we would like to thank Gesine Krüger, who holds a modern history chair at the Historisches Seminar and specializes in teaching and researching modern African history. Michaela Oberhofer, our curator of African and Oceanian art, and Nanina Guyer, our curator of photography, have embraced this exhibition with burning enthusiasm and boundless energy. Both curators have focused on African art and history in the course of their longstanding research and exhibition work, whether in the field of ethnology or in the field of the history of photography. I extend my sincere thanks to them both for their tireless and superb dedication to this project. Finally, I would like to thank the board and the members of the Rietberg Society who made a substantial contribution to this exhibition. *Congo as Fiction* combines traditional art, historical photography, and contemporary art in equal measure while also raising issues of provenance and restitution. As such, the exhibition adopts an innovative approach—an approach for the future. I wish the exhibition great success and its visitors lasting impressions and deep insights. Finally, I am delighted to pass the torch to my successor Annette Bhagwati with this exhibition. She will take over the management of the museum from December 2019.

Albert Lutz, Director

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS — With *Congo as Fiction*, we are entering new territory in many respects. Although we have already realized several exhibitions at Museum Rietberg, for the two of us as a curatorial team, this is the first major exhibition on Africa in this museum. For the first time, artworks and photographs are exhibited alongside one another as equals. Starting point is the archive of Hans Himmelheber, comprising his exceptional private collection as well as his extensive photographic and written estate, which has arrived at the museum over the past five years thanks to his family. In the exhibition, several of the impressive artworks and black-and-white photos will be shown to the public for the first time. At the same time, we are presenting the initial results of the new research project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) on Hans Himmelheber's archive. The extensive source material, first and foremost the diary he kept on his Congo journey in 1938/39, allows us to show not only his art ethnological research, but also to reconstruct how Himmelheber acquired artworks on site. The critical work on the history of the collection is not only a personal matter, but is more important than ever precisely now in an era of contemporary debates on restitution and decolonialization. Another novelty is the commissioning of contemporary artists from the Congo and the diaspora to create new artworks for *Congo as Fiction* in reaction to the archive from Himmelheber. We are very thankful to all involved, inside and outside of the museum, for venturing into this experiment with us.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Hans Himmelheber's family for their generosity, trust, and good will. Barbara and Eberhard Fischer, Susanne Himmelheber and Peter Pausch, Martin Himmelheber and Clara Himmelheber, as well as all other family members, have supported our project in a variety of ways, whether through gifts and loans, tips and transcriptions, in discussions and interviews, or through their voices, such as in the case of Martin Himmelheber, a trained radio and newspaper journalist whose voice recordings for the exhibition provide his father's direct quotes.

Our thanks go to the international museums for their generous loans—notably, the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, and the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève—as well as the private collectors and galleries—including Jan Calmeyn, Nuno Crisostomo, Christraud Geary, Marc Felix, Boris Kegel-Konietzko, Wally and Udo Horstmann, François Mottas, MAGNIN-A, CAAC – The Pigozzi Collection, Nomad Gallery, Henri and Farida Seydoux Collection—and all lenders who prefer not to be named. For their substantial support during our research, we thank Isabella Bozsa, Bambi Ceuppens, Anne Brandstetter, Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala, Sarah Ferracuti, Bernhard Gardi, Beatrix Heintze, Markus Himmelsbach, Floriane Morin, Jan Raymaekers, Pascal Martin Saint Léon, Sarah Van Beurden, Julien Volper, Albrecht Wiedmann, and Richard Woodward. Extremely valuable in the conception of the exhibition were, internally, the suggestions from colleagues of the curatorial board and from Lorenz Homberger; and externally, dialogue with the students in the courses we teach at the University of Zürich, as well as discussions among professionals at the two workshops in the context of the SNF project. Special thanks go to our colleagues in the Himmelheber project,

Gesine Krüger, Anja Soldat, and Esther Tisa Francini, for the solid and inspiring collaboration.

This catalogue would not have been possible without the other authors, including Sandrine Colard, Laura Falletta, Nzomba Dugo Kakema, David Mannes, Constantine Petridis, and Jens Stenger. Christraud M. Geary and Z. S. Strother not only contributed essays to the catalogue, but also assisted us with their expertise during the entire preliminary phase, and have eagerly supported us in many ways. We would like to thank them sincerely for their contribution to the success of the catalogue and the exhibition. We thank the Paul Scherrer Institut in Villigen for the enlightening look into the interior of the artworks. Our thanks also go to Claudio Barandun who was responsible for the contemporary and carefully conceived catalogue design, and Muriel Blanco from Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess and our publication coordinator Mark Welzel. Jonathan Bret Maney's translations of the poetic texts by Sinzo Aanza and Fiston Mwanza Mujila deserve special mention. We thank Rainer Wolfsberger for the wonderfully fresh photographs of our own objects.

Representative for all of the others at our museum, we would like to thank Andrea Kuprecht, our registrar, as well as Nanny Boller and Martin Ledergerber for conservation and restoration; Elena DelCarlo, Alain Suter, and Nicola Morgan for marketing and communication; Maya Bühner, Linda Christinger, and Caroline Spicker for the educational program; Michael Busse and Patrizia Zindel for finances and personnel; Silvan Bosshard and Mesut Kara for facility management. For the successful design and graphics, our thanks go to Martin Sollberger and Jacqueline Schöb. We thank Masus Meier as well as Robbert van Rooden and Robin Burgauer from Inlusio for the impressive multimedia projections. Our sincere gratitude also goes to our two assistants Laura Falletta and Daniela Müller; what would we have done without you? Furthermore, we would like to mention, in particular, our director, Albert Lutz, who has graciously supported us and our work over the past several years.

We found the close exchange and discussions with the exhibition's artists from the Congo and the diaspora extremely enriching, both intellectually as well as personally. Our sincere thanks go to Sammy Baloji and Fiston Mwanza Mujila, Sinzo Aanza and David Shongo as well as Yves Sambu and Michèle Magema, whose newly created works enhance the exhibition, as do those by Angali, Steve Bandoma, Hilary Kuyangiko Balu, Aimé Mpane, Chéri Samba, Monsengo Shula, and Pathy Tshindele. For the part of the Congolese diaspora in Switzerland, cited first and foremost is the artist Fiona Bobo, representatively, we also thank Fabrice Mawete, Hardy Nimi, and the Swiss *sapeurs* for their support.

Our most heartfelt thanks go, in the end, to our families without whom we would not have been able to achieve this intense phase of thinking, curating, organizing, and writing.

Michaela Oberhofer and Nanina Guyer

HOMMAGE AUX ANCIENS CREATEURS

EN VISITANT REVERAISE
OFFICIELLE LA SALLE
D'EXPOSITION DE VOL-
KERKUNDEMUSEUM
DES UNIVERSITAT ZU-
RICH SE TROUVANT
DANS LE SOUS-SOL D'UN
JARDIN PLEIN DE
BAMBOUX, J'ETAIS
FRAPPE PAR LE GRAND
NOMBRE D'OBJETS
ANTIQUES (MASQUES,
TEXTILES, STATUES...)
TOUT DE TRES HAUT
NIVEAU DE REMPLI-
ME CETTE SALLE.
JE SENTAIS COMME SI
QUELQUES UNS DE CES
OBJETS ME FAISAIENT
DES FRICTIONS AU CO-
RPS. J'ETAIS ALORS
PERSUADE QUE CES
OBJETS AVAIENT TOUT
JOURS LEURS POUVOIRS
SURNATURELS ET
C'ETAIENT DES VRAIS
...

... JUSQU'A CETTE EPO-
QUE LE MARCHÉ N'ETAIT
PAS CONCURRENCE ET IL
NE DEVAIT DONC PAS Y
AVOIR DE FAIBLE PIERCE.
JE TAI TOUT DE MEME
ETONNE D'APPRENDRE QUE
M. CORAY QUI AVAIT
MONTE CETTE IMPRES-
SIONNANTE COLLECTION
N'AVAIT PAS CONNU
L'AFRIQUE D'OU PRO-
VENAIENT LES OEUVRES
DE SA COLLECTION POUR
RENCONTRER LES
CREATEURS A QUI JE
TENDS HOMMAGE.

Y A T-IL D'AUTRES
COLLECTIONNEURS
SEMBLABLES A
MONSIEUR CORAY ?

Chapman THE

Fig.1

INTRODUCTION: FICTIONS AND ART WORLDS OF THE CONGO BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

Michaela Oberhofer, Nanina Guyer

In view of current debates about colonial collections, the question is posed today, more so than ever before, of the appropriate treatment of objects from Africa that have been separated from their cultural surroundings and their original voices. As these objects were never intended for a museum context, it therefore creates a curatorial dilemma, which was also present at the start of deliberations on *Congo as Fiction—Art Worlds Between Past and Present* [fig. 1].¹ Hans Himmelheber's extensive archive—the starting point for this exhibition—has recently been given to the Museum Rietberg by the community of heirs to Himmelheber's estate. It comprises his private collection, unrivaled for its uniqueness, as well as his photographic and written legacy. Himmelheber (1908–2003) was a German art ethnologist who, in his research in Africa, propagated an approach to art and artists that was innovative for its day, and remains influential until the present. The focus of this catalogue is on the 100 colorful masks, fligree figures, woven and embroidered cloths, and everyday objects as well as the roughly 200 historical photographs that he brought back to Europe from his journey in 1938/39 to the Belgian Congo, which in 1971 became the Republic of Zaire, and from 1997, the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC. Many of these artworks and black-and-white photos have never been publicly shown or published. In light of current questions regarding restitution and identity, as well as the global challenges of migration and digitization, what is the appropriate way of dealing with museum objects and photographs from Africa? Is there a single, correct way? Or aren't, instead, a multitude of perspectives with complementary and also contradicting interpretations required for approaching the archives as witnesses to the colonization of the African continent and the interlocked history of Africa with the rest of the world?

Since the 1980s, African intellectuals, such as Valentin Mudimbe, Achille Mbembe, and Felwine Sarr, have pointed out what the global North's monopoly and the asymmetry in the production of knowledge about Africa mean. Decolonizing thought and historiography necessitate recognizing the African perspective.² The exhibition *Congo as Fiction* presents a possible way—at least to some extent—to breach the interpretive dominance of Western art discourse and expand the view to include alternative narratives and realms of imagination related to the Congo's past and present. The images by Monsengo Shula in the style of popular painting offer a contemporary symbol for this change in perspective: "Afronauts" in luminous wax-printed textiles float around satellites, which are crowned by figures from traditional art. With this, the Kinshasa-based artist not only refers to the Congo's ambitious space program of the 1970s, but also envisions a new world order with the Congo, that is, Africa, as the center of the cosmos [see figs. on the endpapers].

1 For their valuable and thought-provoking comments, we would like to thank Christraud Geary, Gesine Krüger, Anja Soldat, and Esther Tisa Francini. On the curatorial dilemma, see Kasfir 1997.

2 Mbembe 2015, Mudimbe 1988, and Sarr 2019.

Exhibitions on the Congo are frequently devoted to either historical or contemporary art.³ In the past, a masterpiece discourse commonly prevailed, meaning that on the basis of a Western art canon “the seminal” artworks from renowned museums and collections were brought together and exhibited.⁴ In doing so, they were classified according to the “one tribe equals one style” paradigm based on regional or ethnic styles.⁵ At the forefront was often the representative art by powerful kingdoms, such as that of the Kongo, Kuba, or Luba [figs. 2/3]. In exhibition catalogues, the pieces were illustrated sideways in front of a monochrome, usually gray or black background in conformance with Western viewing habits, in order to fabricate a certain aura and aesthetic. Historical photographs were used—if at all—to show the “authenticity” of the objects. The presentation of the objects in space and in book form often reinforced the stereotype of Africa as ahistorical and traditional.

For quite some time, a dynamic art scene—long ignored by Western art critique—has existed in the Congo, which comprises artists from the successful art schools dating back to the colonial era in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, as well as young artist collectives and art initiatives. Currently, there is a proper hype in the West with regard to contemporary art from the Congo, as evident by the growing number of exhibitions in Europe and the USA. Popular painting, in particular, emerged in the environment of the art academies founded by colonial officers and missionaries in the 1930s. The colorful images of everyday scenes from urban and folkloristic Congo after all corresponded, despite their inherently political messages, with the widespread stereotype in the West of a festive, colorful Africa.⁶ Currently, exhibitions are increasingly devoted to young, often women, artists and feature alternative genres and media, such as photography, performance, literature, installation, sculpture, and digital art.⁷ Ever more frequently, Congolese curators are taking over the conception of the exhibitions and foregrounding themes such as urbanity, migration, and utopia,⁸ as evident, for example, in the motto of this year’s biennale in Lubumbashi: *Future Genealogies: Tales From The Equatorial Line*.

Hans Himmelheber was one of the first in the 1930s to recognize and study the individual authorship behind African objects. Just as he worked together in his day with living artists of his era, we are doing the same now in this exhibition. For *Congo as Fiction*, our curatorial team—Nanina Guyer, curator for photography and Michaela Oberhofer, curator for Africa and Oceania at the Museum Rietberg—envisioned the connection between two art worlds and time periods: the 1930s of the colonial era and the postcolonial present. Congolese artists have always referred in their art to current events and cultural memory, and they comment on social and political situations then as well as now.⁹

At the turn of the twenty-first century, in the course of the archival turn, the extensive colonial archive shifted into focus for artists who, based on the historical sources, became critically occupied with their own history and the archives’ inherent knowledge production and materiality [see fig. 1]. This turn to the past opened up the colonial archives—texts, photos, objects, and sound documents—for artistic practice, and led to a series of im-

3 We speak of “art” and “artists” although we are aware that the carvers and sculptors, weavers and embroiderers, ritual experts and potters in the Congo of the 1930s described their activities with other words and concepts, which have less to do with our understanding of these terms as shaped by European art history. Nevertheless, these terms refer to a culturally specific aesthetic that must be described, and to the special role of artists in many societies.

4 Only a few exhibitions focused on the history of collections such as *Exit Congo Museum*, AfricaMuseum, Tervuren 2000.

5 For a critique of the “one tribe equals one style” paradigm in the art history of Africa, see, for example Kasfir 1984 or Gagliardi 2015.

6 Exhibitions on popular painting from the region were, for example, *An/Sichten: Malerei aus dem Kongo*, Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 2001; *Congo Art Works: Popular Painting*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Brussels, 2017; and *Beauté Congo*, Fondation Cartier, Paris, 2015/16.

7 See, for example, the exhibition *Kinshasa Chroniques*, Musée international des arts modestes, Sète 2018/19; or *Multiple Transmissions: Art in the Afropolitan Age*, WIELS, Brussels 2019.

8 Recent examples are Sammy Baloji and Fiston Mwanza Mujila as co-curators of *Congo Stars* at the Kunsthau Graz and Kunsthalle Tübingen 2018/19, In Koli Jean Bofane as curator of the festival *Kongo am Rhein* in Basel 2017, and Eddy Ekete and Freddy Tsimba as curators of *Megalopolis*, Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig 2018/19.

9 For historical art see, for example, Strother 2016.

pressive works, first and foremost, the works of the artist Sammy Baloji who is represented in the exhibition. For Sandrine Colard, art historian and curator of the Biennale 2019 in Lubumbashi, this archival turn initiated a dialogue between Africa and Europe about a shared colonial history [see Colard/Guyer].

In this spirit, for *Congo as Fiction*, we invited six contemporary artists from the Congo and the diaspora to engage critically with Himmelheber's archive from their own perspective. Sinzo Aanza, Fiona Bobo, Michèle Magma, Yves Sambu, and David Shongo, along with Sammy Baloji (and indirectly Fiston Mwanza Mujila), participated in a dialogic process in the form of brief artist residencies. They created artworks in reaction to the historical objects, photographs, and texts from Himmelheber; works that focus, comment on, and thereby update the older art and its acquisition as well as the archive and its origins in the context of colonization. Added to that were further works by Angali, Steve Bandoma, Hilary Kuyangiko Balu, Aimé Mpane, Chéri Samba, Monsengo Shula, and Pathy Tshindele. The artists all refer formally and in terms of content to historical art and thereby to their own cultural heritage and firmly, but in entirely different ways, confront the colonial past and the social practice of remembering as well as the exploitation and inequality persisting until today in the Congo.

During the intense talks with the artists, we continued to critically question our own perspective. One statement repeated especially often was: "Le Congo, c'est une fiction." This implicit challenge to perceive the past and present of the Congo as constructed and imagined, depending on the specific actor, time, and location, became the central theme of our project.

GLOBAL ENTANGLEMENT AND LOCAL ART PRODUCTION IN THE CONGO

Although the Congo is the product of a fictitious drawing of borders and, then as now, also a projection surface for Western and Congolese imagination, it is nonetheless a real, existing space whose history and art creation is shaped by a relationship of exchange with the West.¹⁰ The natural wealth and resources of the huge and diverse land, whose area is roughly seventy-nine times larger than that of the former colonial power—Belgium—play a decisive role in this. Artists in the past as well as present focus on the themes of the country's colonial exploitation and the unequal power relations between the global North and South and process them in their own works with satire, seriousness, and humor.¹¹

Already in the fifteenth century, through trade, missionary work, and conquest, the Congo was part of early globalization. The former Kingdom of the Kongo on the lower course of the eponymous river had a close relationship to Portugal, delivered ivory, copper, and slaves to Europe, and their upper class adopted the Christian faith. These relations also played an important role in the creation of art: on the one hand, local artists appropriated the newly available materials and forms for their own works; for example, Christian motifs, such as crosses and depictions of saints, were integrated into syncretic religious movements and the associated visual imagery [figs. 4/5].¹² On the other hand, a production for the Western art market began just a short time later; the best-known example being the fine ivory carvings with scenic depictions, which European seafarers, explorers, and deal-

10 Van Reybrouck 2012 provides an overview of the history of the Congo.

11 See on this Strother 2016.

12 See Fromont 2014 for a study on the Christian art in the Congo between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

ers purchased or commissioned from local artists [fig. 6]. Global interdependencies also influenced local art production in areas located further inland. When the Portuguese abolished slavery in neighboring Angola in 1830, the entire region reoriented itself economically and politically, which also became noticeable in the art. For example, Chokwe chiefs, who had become powerful through the ivory trade, commissioned the carving of memorial figures depicting themselves as invincible hunters in the style of the legendary Prince Chibinda Ilunga [fig. 7].¹³

The violent conquest of large parts of the African continent began in the final third of the nineteenth century. From 1876, the Belgian King Léopold II, who reigned from 1865 to 1909, pursued primarily his own personal economic interests in the area of the Congo under the pretext of civilizing and economic efforts. He contracted the British-American journalist Henry Morton Stanley to use unrelenting discipline in convincing local rulers to sign contracts that assured Léopold land and labor power. In the Congo, Stanley was given the name Bula Matari (breaker of rocks) for his brutality. His travelogues and memoirs became bestsellers in Europe and the USA. They made Stanley famous throughout the world, and permanently shaped the perception of the Congo in the West.

At the Berlin West Africa Conference 1884/85, which was tellingly also called the Congo Conference, the major European powers agreed among themselves on “their” areas of influence on the African continent, in order to avoid costs and conflict. The Belgian king, with his *Association Internationale du Congo*, was promised the huge territory of today’s DRC as a sovereign area of power. The history of the Congo Free State, which existed from 1886 to 1908, but whose exact borders were first determined in 1910, was one of the bloodiest chapters of colonization. Companies given concessions used armed soldiers to exploit the population with extreme cruelty and extorted huge harvests of rubber. From these early days of the Congo Free State is Joseph Conrad’s grim tale *The Heart of Darkness*, about the soulless world of the colonial trade, which until today has contributed to a one-sided reception of the Congo as defined by crisis and conflict. In her work *Under the Landscape*, the artist Michèle Magma focuses on forced labor on the plantations and fictitious borders drawn during the colonial era [fig. 8]. On eighty-one rubber panels, in fine lines she engraves the borders of present-day Congo with its nine neighbors.

After missionaries and human rights activists made the atrocities public—through photography, especially—Léopold II ultimately had to surrender his Free State to the Belgian state in 1908. But the new colony of Belgian Congo, too, was based on exploitation and forced labor under inhumane conditions [fig. 9]. The colonial government further expanded the system of indirect rule in that they divided the huge area into administrative “chiefdoms,” each ruled by a *chef indigène*. Often without any backing from the population, these *chefs* were given medals as a sign of their new post [see story, p. 80]. The *chefs médaillés* were important cooperation partners and middlemen for the Belgian colonial power, as were the *évolués*, who were educated Congolese raised mainly in missionary schools, who lived in the cities and had adopted European clothing and attitudes and were often active in the colonial administration.

13 LaGamma 2011, pp. 182–223.

Fig. 2
Artist of the Luba region
Bow stand
Before 1939, wood, iron, plant fibers,
95.7 × 21.5 × 8 cm
Collection Kegel-Konietzko
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 3
Artist of the Luba region
Figure of a sitting woman with bowl
Before 1939, wood, glass,
28.5 × 17.2 × 17.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.1109
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 4
Artist of the Vili region
Crucifix
Nineteenth century, brass, wood,
28.5 × 23 × 5.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2007.144
Gift through mediation by Novartis
Restiau Collection

Fig. 5
Artist of the Songye region
Figure with crown of thorns
Before 1938, wood, 28 × 15 × 14.5 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 6550
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 6
Artist of the Kongo region
Walking stick of Robert Visser
Late nineteenth century, ivory,
silver 96 × 6 × 6 cm
Horstmann Collection

Fig. 7
Artist of the Chokwe region
Figure of Prince Chibinda Ilunga
Nineteenth century, wood,
49.3 × 12.9 × 13.2 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2007.1
Gift through mediation by Novartis



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

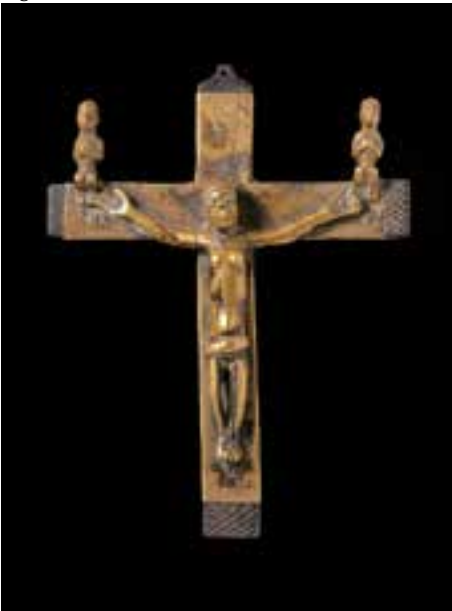


Fig. 4

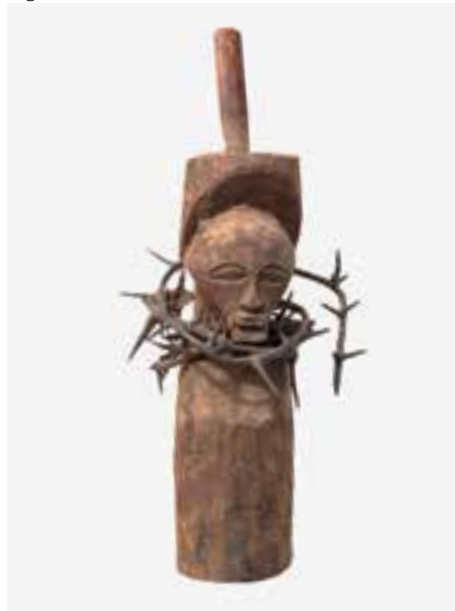


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8.1



Fig. 8.2



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 8
Michèle Magema
Under the Landscape
2015, rubber, 300 × 200 cm
Michèle Magema

Fig. 9
Hans Himmelheber
Men working on street construction
Luluwa region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 186-20

Fig. 10
Artist of the Luluwa region
**Half-burned figure as example
of iconoclasm *bwanga bwa bukalenga***
Before 1939, wood, 55 × 18 × 22 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 14
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

With the help of the administrative system and the companies granted concessions, the population was once again ruthlessly exploited by the Belgian colonial state in order to increase production from agriculture and mining. The interwar years were characterized by growing unrest and mutual mistrust. The population revolted again and again, such as in the case of the Pende Revolt, which was brutally struck down by the colonial government. Through religious movements, the population attempted to liberate itself from the iron grip of the Belgian colonial rule [fig. 10]. At the same time, art was also a symbol of resistance [see story, p. 206].

In the early twentieth century, an abundance of natural resources, such as copper, uranium, and gold, were found and mined to meet the worldwide demand for raw materials.¹⁴ Even after the Congo's independence from Belgium in 1960, global economic interests and local exploitation continued to shape the country's history. The mining of the mineral coltan, in particular, is responsible for the brutal armed conflicts that have erupted repeatedly since 1994, especially in the east of the country. Nearly every electronic device—mobile phones, electronic motors, and computers—requires coltan. Contemporary artists such as Sammy Baloji and David Shongo also address in their works the conflicts surrounding the mining of raw materials.

Not only the colonial conquest of the African continent came to a climax in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also the “hunt” for Africa's material production. Explorers, colonial officials, missionaries, and traders brought back from their travels extensive collections, which very quickly filled the newly founded ethnology museums.¹⁵ At the same time, they took thousands of photographs, which led to a distorted image of Central Africa that continues to influence our perception of the region until today.¹⁶ In Paris, but also in Brussels and New York, a lively art market for works from the African colonies became established in the 1920s and 1930s. The objects, which in the nineteenth century were still considered curiosities, colonial trophies, or ethnographica, were now elevated to works of art as so-called primitive art or *art nègre*. Along with the avant-garde, also museums, galleries, collectors, and art critics were involved in the Western canonization of African art.¹⁷ At the same time, awareness developed within colonial circles in the Congo that “traditional” art was worthy of being promoted, collected, and exhibited in its own museum [see essay Oberhofer]. Just a few months before Himmelheber's arrival in Kinshasa, the Musée de la vie indigène, today's National Museum, was created on the initiative of the *Association des Amis de l'Art indigène*.

HANS HIMMELHEBER'S ARCHIVE

Himmelheber was integrated within this transatlantic network of the art worlds—between the collecting and exploring in the colonial South and the art market and art canon in the global North.¹⁸ Between 1933 and 1976, the German art ethnologist undertook a total of fourteen expeditions to the Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, the Congo, and Alaska. His innovative studies on African aesthetics and artists provide important impulses until today for work with the art of Africa. He was among the first to study Africa's material culture by interviewing the artists about their

14 In the era of industrial and military expansion around the turn of the century, copper was important, then, during the Cold War, uranium. The atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War contained uranium from the Congo.

15 See Schildkrout and Curtis 1998. The Musée Royal de l'Afrique centrale, or AfricaMuseum, in Tervuren owns the largest collection, which emerged in 1910 from the World's Fair (Van Beurden 2015). But also other European and American museums own extensive inventory from Central Africa.

16 For a comprehensive study on the origins, co-authorship, and logic of this image world, see Geary 2002.

17 Monroe 2012.

18 Based on the concept of the “art worlds” from the American art sociologist Howard S. Becker (2017, first edition 1982) we understand art not as a product of an individual person—the artist genius—but rather, as a collective process of a network that extends beyond regional borders. In the case of the Congolese art world in the past and now, various actors are involved in production and use, sales and marketing, as well as knowledge production and imagination of the same.

careers, their work, techniques, and their aesthetic ideas, rather than focusing on the museum objects; he was interested in the artists' personalities and photographed and described their creative processes.

Himmelheber was born in Karlsruhe in 1908 and earned a degree in ethnology and medicine. In order to finance his studies, already as a young man he began in 1929 to trade in African and Oceanic objects. In Paris he established contact with the French gallerist and collector Charles Ratton, who also supported his journey to the Congo and became an important business partner. He was also able to make a name for himself internationally as a scientist and art dealer after his first two expeditions to the Cote d'Ivoire (1933 and 1934/35) for research and collecting. He supplied numerous museums in Germany, France, and Switzerland and also sold to private collectors. At the same time, he built up a network of universities, museums, and the art trade in North America. He provided loans to the iconic *African N— Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1935). During a stay in the USA between 1935 and 1937, he held academic lectures on his studies on African art.¹⁹ In 1936/37 he spent the winter on the Nunivak Islands in Alaska and studied artists of the Yupik peoples.²⁰ His friendship with Erhard Weyhe, born in Germany, whose gallery was the main financier of the Congo journeys, also stems from this time [see essay Oberhofer].

Only one week after his return from the USA, Himmelheber, who was just thirty years old at the time, set off on a two-year journey to Cameroon, Gabun, and the Belgian Congo, which was not typical for him, as he would never return there again [fig. 11]. The catalogue and exhibition *Congo as Fiction* focus on the time period from May 1938 until June 1939, when Himmelheber traveled the region between the rivers Kwango, Kwilu, and Kasai through to Sankuru and Lomami, which are now the provinces Kwango, Kwili, Kasai, Kasai-Central, and Kasai-Oriental as well as the adjacent areas of the provinces Sankuru, Lomami, and Lualaba [fig. 12].²¹ Whereas mainly the courtly art of the Luba, Congo, and Kuba enjoyed great popularity in Europe, Himmelheber concentrated —along with the Kuba—also on less-explored art regions, such as the Byombo, Chokwe, Luluwa, Pende, Songye, Suku, and Yaka.

Himmelheber had two reasons for his Congo journey: for one, he wanted to continue his research on art and artists that he had begun on the Ivory Coast and in Alaska; for another, he took the Congo journey for financial reasons. As an independent ethnologist who would never be permanently employed as a professor or curator by a university or museum, Himmelheber was forced to rely on the acquisition and trade of artifacts from Africa to finance his scientific work and personal expenses [figs. 13/14]. In the case of the Congo, he was there to collect, as commissioned by the Swiss ethnology museums in Basel and Geneva, as well as the Weyhe Gallery in New York and the Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris.

At the same time, Himmelheber set aside for his private collection particularly impressive artworks that were never intended for sale. In 1993, the Museum Rietberg offered the first showing of parts of the collection, together with his photographs, in the exhibition *Zaire 1938/39*, curated by his granddaughter Clara Himmelheber, the current curator for Africa at Rautenstrauch-


19 He lectured, for example, at Universities in Cambridge, New Haven, Washington and New York. In the USA he met American ethnologists such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Franz Boas. The latter advised him on his research stay in Alaska.


20 Resulting as pendant to his doctoral dissertation *N—künstler* (1935) was his book *E—künstler* (1938).


21 Before the reform of the area, between 1988 and 2015 this region corresponded to the old provinces Bandundu, Kasai-Occidental, and Kasai-Oriental. In the Belgian Congo, after 1935 these provinces were called Léopoldville and Lusambo with the districts visited by Himmelheber, Kwango, Kasai, and Sankuru.


Fig. 11
Unknown photographer
Hans Himmelheber with a group
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich,
FHH 167-12 to 167-14

Fig. 12
Hans Himmelheber's itinerary in the Belgian Congo
Continuous line = Precise route
Broken line = Assumed route
Dotted line = Visited region, exact route not known



Stage 1: visited region, exact route not known 2.5.1938–24.12.1938


Stage 2: ship's route from Kinshasa to Basongo 24.12.1938–1.1.1939


Stage 3: itinerary from Basongo to Kananga 1.1.1939–28.3.1939


Stage 4: tour from and back to Kananga 28.3.1939–4.4.1939


Stage 5: tour from and back to Kananga 4.4.1939–18.5.1939


Stage 6: return journey from Kananga to Kinshasa 18.5.1939–9.6.1939

YAKA, PENDE etc.
Names of language groups visited by Hans Himmelheber

Itinerary reconstructed on the basis of Hans Himmelheber's diary and publications

Concept: Daniela Müller

Fig. 13
Artist of the Yaka region
Male figure
Pre-1938, wood, 56 × 11 × 13 cm
Musée d'ethnographie de Genève,
ETHAF 015945
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 14
Hans Himmelheber
Hans Himmelheber photographs a village square, the acquired figure in front of him
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zurich, FHH 166-19



Fig.11

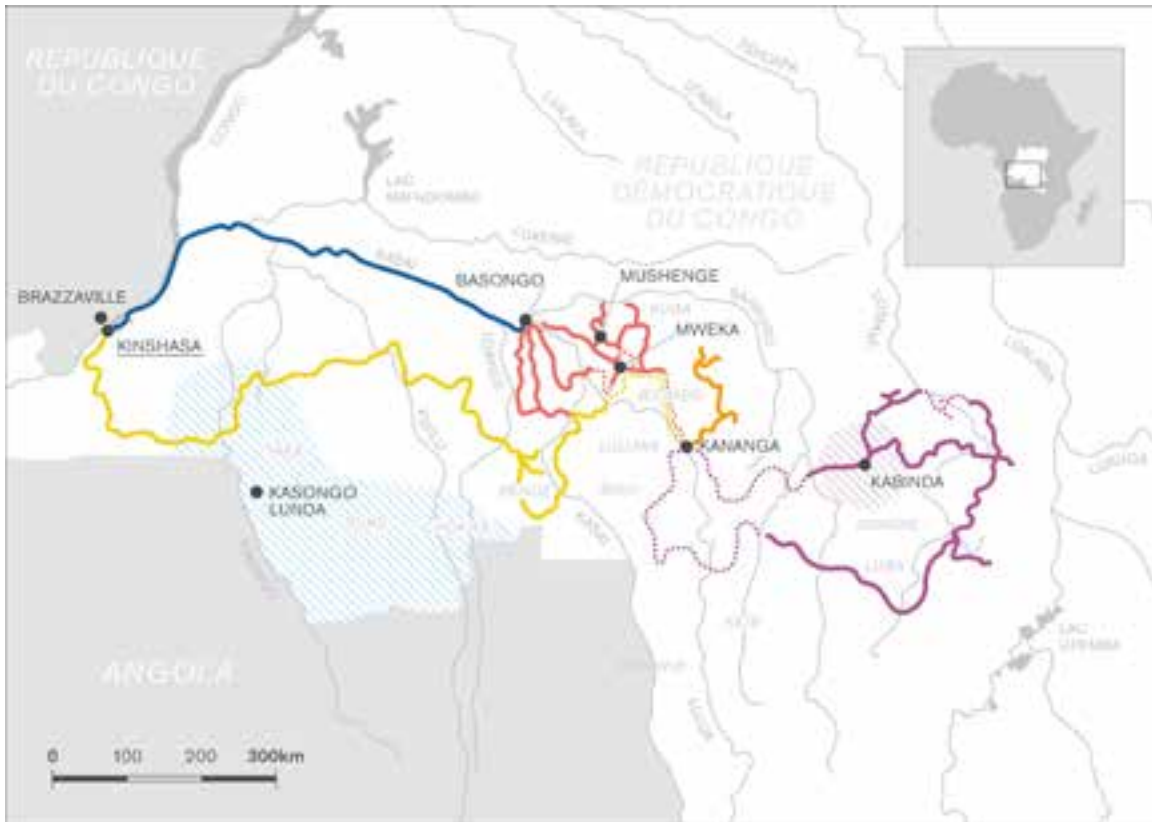


Fig.12



Fig.13



Fig.14

Joest-Museum, and his son, Eberhard Fischer, the former director of the Museum Rietberg.²² A selection from the nearly 1,500 photos that Himmelheber took on his Congo journey was published for the first time in the accompanying catalogue [fig. 15].

In the last five years, thanks to the Fischer/Himmelheber family, his collection, which is considered a “family treasure,” has arrived at the Museum Rietberg—for the most part in the form of gifts. The collection meanwhile comprises more than 750 objects, whereby almost one-third are from his journey to the Congo. Among them are finely carved sculptures, elaborately embroidered textiles, richly decorated everyday objects, and particularly rare ensembles of initiation masks from former times. Added to that is the photo archive with 15,000 black-and-white negatives from all of his journeys. Himmelheber was a gifted photographer who always took his camera with him and used photography systematically during his art-ethnological journeys as a working tool. Thus, together with the extensive written estate, which has been at the Museum since 2016, a unique “archive” has been created, which is being explored in the context of a project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation.²³ Among other things, *Congo as Fiction* presents the initial results of this collaborative research process, which is planned for four years.

Although Himmelheber’s academic field study notes (also those on the Congo) were lost during the Second World War to a bomb in Karlsruhe, by a stroke of luck a copy of his diary on the Congo journey has been preserved [fig. 16]. Beginning with New Year’s Day 1939, every day for the last seven months of his stay, Himmelheber used a typewriter to record his experiences, usually working until late in the night. What arose is a thick description of the journey, which contains his personal emotions, desires, and evaluations, the imponderability of everyday life while traveling, his collecting activity, but also everyday colonial life on the eve of the Second World War in the Belgian Congo. Also evident in his writings is the contradiction and ambivalence between Himmelheber’s enthusiasm for certain artworks or artists and his ideas—characteristic of his era—about the hierarchy between the colonial masters and the colonized people. In addition to the archives in Basel and Geneva, in which Himmelheber provided detailed information on the acquired pieces, important as sources are also his scientific articles in the journal *Brousse*, the newly founded journal at the time of the *Association des Amis de l’Art indigène* in Kinshasa.²⁴ Moreover, for the analysis of his photographs, helpful are the extensive keyword catalogues and notes on the contact prints [fig. 17]. With its wealth of sources, Himmelheber’s archive, can, at the same time, be categorized within the larger context of the global art market, the concept of authenticity, and the thereby implied contradiction between tradition and the modern era [see essays Guyer and Oberhofer].

The linking of the various media in the archive—object, image, and text—offers important starting points for researching the objects’ biographies and the accompanying reinterpretation process. For example, the path of a Yaka mask can be traced from its creation and use to its purchase in the Congo through to its being placed in museum and aesthetic contexts. Initially created by a Yaka mask maker for the *mukanda* initiation, together with a mask costume, used for dancing in a performance accompanied by drums in front of an audience [fig. 18], the mask then became

22 See on Basel also Gardi 1986.

Fig. 15
Cover photo of the photo catalogue
Zaire 1938/39: Hans Himmelheber. Photographic documents on the arts of the Yaka, Pende, Tshokwe and Kuba. Zürich 1993

Fig. 16
Hans Himmelheber
Page from Hans Himmelheber’s
Congo diary
Kuba region, January 22 and 23, 1939
Archive Museum Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 17
Hans Himmelheber
Contact prints
B/w positive on paper
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 194-21b

23 The research project “Hans Himmelheber – Kunst Afrikas und verflochtene Wissensproduktion,” which has been running since October 2018, is a collaboration between the Museum Rietberg and the Chair of Professor Gesine Krüger at the Historisches Seminar of the University of Zürich.

24 In addition to the three published articles is also a fourth, which was no longer printed due to the war, but is available in draft form in the archive of the Museum Rietberg.

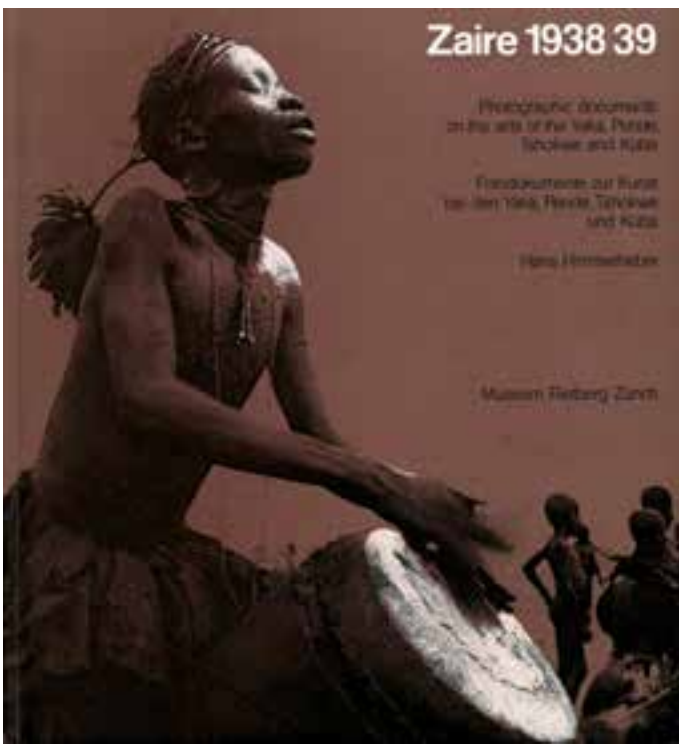


Fig. 15



Fig. 17

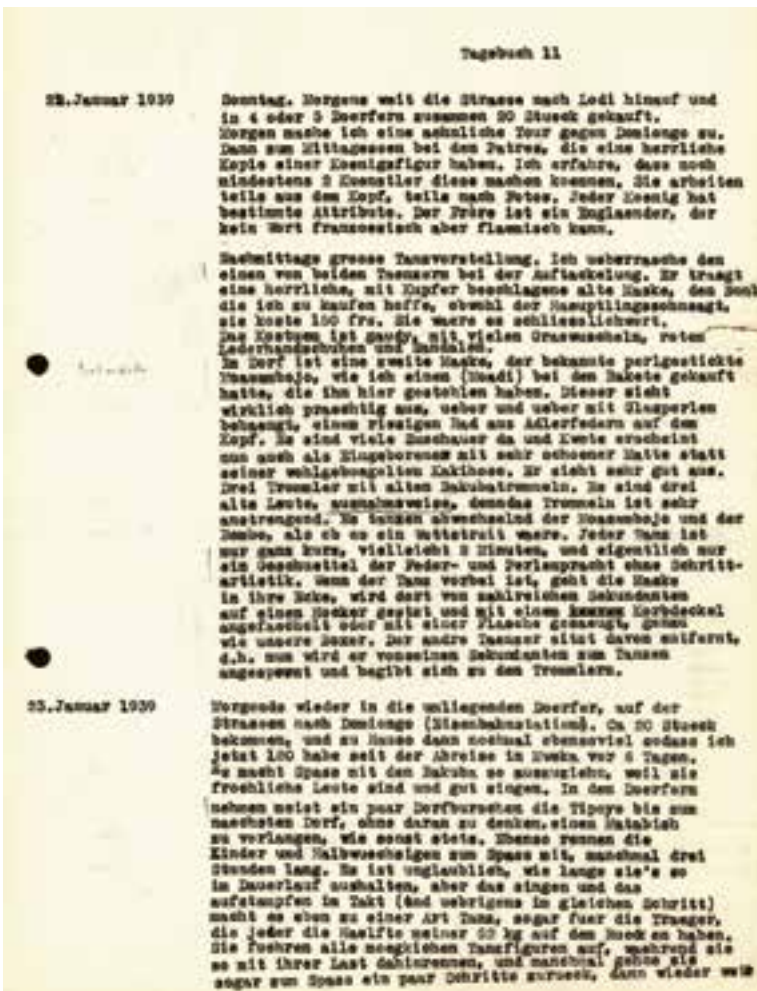


Fig. 16



Fig.18



Fig.19



Fig.20

Fig. 18
Hans Himmelheber
The Yaka masks in dance
Kingulu, June 20, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-39

Fig. 19
Hans Himmelheber
**The Yaka masks in overview
on the ground**
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 158-18

Fig. 20
Artist of the Yaka region
The Yaka mask as museum object
Before 1938, plant fibers, color pigments,
circa 44 × 22.5 × 18 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 7
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

the commodity of a dealer, with field photos testifying to its “authenticity” [fig. 19]. Now it is an aesthetically staged artwork—whose colors have meanwhile faded—in the context of a museum [fig. 20]. Detailed essays and short stories are devoted to the intersections in the archive and the dense narratives that arise from them.

ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Congo as Fiction comprises four chapters illuminating the art worlds of the Congo in the past and present; Hans Himmelheber’s archive and the art world of the 1930s are the starting points throughout. The first section, “Exploring, Photographing, and Acquiring Art” shows how the purchase of the objects and the on-site transport—whether in a type of hammock (*tipoye*) or in a car [see stories, pp. 72 and 84]—took place, and which actors were involved [see stories, pp. 88 and 92]. During his expeditions to the Congo, Himmelheber attempted to do justice to both his scientific ambitions as an art ethnologist, as well as his duties as a collector and dealer [see essay Oberhofer]. He employed the camera, which he always had with him, in very different ways, for example to articulate his intentions with regard to the village population, as a tool for his studies, and for the construction of a particular visual fiction of the Congo [see essay Guyer]. Both the acquisition of the art and Himmelheber’s photographs are characterized by an imbalance of power between the colonists and the colonized, yet at the same time, moments of African agency can also be pointed out: for example, when Himmelheber documents the role of the artist or the production for the art market, or when the local elite use photography as a means of self-portrayal.

The artists Michèle Magma and David Shongo interpret the visual world created by Himmelheber in entirely different ways. In his *BLACKOUT POETRY, IDEA’S GENEALOGY* series, the Lubumbashi-based musician, composer, and artist David Shongo (born 1994) focuses on the colonial gaze that resonates in Himmelheber’s photos. In impressive collages, Shongo discloses and at the same time exponentiates this gaze by subjecting the photo’s subjects to an update using elements that we all know well, such as astronaut helmets, barcodes, electrical panels, virtual reality glasses, or machine guns, which not only allude to the exploitation and conflicts surrounding raw materials, but also make those depicted appear both familiar and remote [see p. 104].

The performance, video, and photo artist Michèle Magma (born 1977) created *EVOLVE*, an installation composed of photos, drawings, and texts, marked by her own specific interpretation of Himmelheber’s photo archive [see story, p. 96]. In the years between the wars, when Himmelheber was traveling through the Congo, her paternal grandfather was among the educated urban elite, the *évolués*, who lived like Europeans and welcomed the goals of the colonial project with regard to education and economic modernization.²⁵ The France-based artist, who is among the few internationally successful women in Congolese art, combines her personal biography with the colonial past and considers her work a ritual of redressing the history of her family and her country.

25 *EVOLVE* is to some extent a continuation of the work *Mémoires Hévée* (2015), in which Magma’s maternal family history is foregrounded.

In the next section, focus is on “Design and Elegance” as important aspects of the Congolese art worlds—beyond temporal and regional borders. In the past, prominent were the Kuba with their elaborately designed common objects and objects of prestige made of wood, glass pearls, and cowries [see stories, pp. 128, 144 and 156]. Similar to others before and after him, Himmelheber was excited by the Kuba’s creativity and “art, for transforming the world based on aesthetic principles.”²⁶ Particularly impressive are the more than six-meter-long dance skirts made of raffia cloth, whose abstract patterns inspired artists such as Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse. In both the past as well as the present, luxurious accessories and designs are associated with pompous and elegant appearances. For example, for public appearances, the kings of the Kuba wore richly decorated garments with head coverings and jewelry that were so heavy they could hardly move in them. Based on this visual repertoire, the contemporary painter Pathy Tshindele (born 1976) created his own vision of an idealized Kuba king with his series *It’s my kings* [see story, p. 136].

26 Himmelheber 1940, p. 22.

Just as it does now, in the past, the medium of photography played an important role in self-staging. For example, the Kuba elite used their European visitors’ cameras to show their cultural wealth and superiority to others—corresponding with the image of the Kuba in the West [see essay Geary]. Himmelheber’s camera, too, was used during his 1938/39 journey by individual men and women as a platform for self-representation. When the Congolese photographer and artist Yves Sambu (born 1980) saw these historical images for the first time, he exclaimed, astonished, “*Mais, c’est contemporain!*” In a dialogue with the black-and-white photos from Himmelheber, Sambu chose particular motifs from his *Vanité apparente* series [see p. 166]. These show portraits of *sapeurs* in Kinshasa who are characterized by their luxurious clothing and eccentric lifestyles. With their looks and way of performing, the *sapeurs* articulate an identity that is uncommon in the harsh conditions of the megacity Kinshasa.

The young Zurich artist Fiona Bobo (born 1992) thematizes the self-confident appearance of the *sapeurs* living in Switzerland. The title of her multimedia installation *Mvutu-Mboka Na Biso—et la Suisse* can be translated as “clothing style, our country—and Switzerland.” Using photographs and videos of Swiss *sapeurs*, Bobo documents the immense importance of the extravagant clothing, style, and fashion in the Congolese diaspora [see p. 173]. The juxtaposition of Himmelheber’s, Sambu’s, and Bobo’s photos links phenomena such as self-staging, fashion, and elegance in the past and present, city and countryside, tradition and the modern era.

The section “Power and Politics,” forefronts the agency and political dimensions of artworks. In the past, colonization and missionary work influenced the religious and political relations of power as well as the arts associated therewith. This also resulted in the illegalization of secret societies, such as *kifwebe* and its masks [see story, p. 212]. In some cases, such as with the Pende Revolt, art served to symbolize resistance against the colonial power [see story, p. 206].

With the *mankishi*, the power figures of the Songye, and those of other groups, a ritual specialist charged the wooden

sculptures with substances, thereby empowering them with the ability to heal disease and ward off evil powers [see story, p. 232]. In the case of the Luluwa, the finely carved power figures (*manga*) were also characterized by their ambivalence and complexity and possessed both positive as well as negative qualities [see essay Petridis]. The inner lives of the power figures was thereby just as important as their outer lives, which is made visible in the catalogue and the exhibition through the latest imaging techniques [see essay Oberhofer/Mannes/Stenger].

With power figures, too, artists refer to political power relations. In many locations, the meaning of such figures initially increased during the colonial era. Chiefs and the local population used them to try to maintain control over trade and politics in the colonial system, or to regain it [see story, p. 218]. As a reaction, colonial officials and also missionaries had the sculptures destroyed in an effort to prevent the practices associated with them. The fact that this did not entirely succeed can be seen by the recent power figures equipped with Chinese door locks. Also contemporary artists, such as Hilaire Balu Kuyangiko (born 1992), have discovered the subject for themselves. In his work *Nkisi numérique*, the Kinshasa-based artist charges such a power figure using electrical scrap. Balu thereby formulates a grim vision of the future of the world economy, characterized by consumption, capital, and exploitation.

For *Congo as Fiction*, the internationally renowned artist Sammy Baloji (born in Lubumbashi in 1978) created the installation *Kasala: The Slaughterhouse of Dreams or the First Human, Bende's Error* [see p. 242]. The multilayered work of mirrors, photos, sounds, and projections refers to Himmelheber, but also poses timely questions about dealing with colonial collections and archives: What happens with objects from Africa that have been robbed of their cultural context and have landed in museums of the global North? To what extent is it legitimate to expose the secret inner lives of power figures? How can objects be reanimated, to get back their voices? What alternative forms of commemoration exist? For Baloji's installation, the Graz-based writer Fiston Mwanza Mujila composed a remembrance poem (*kasala*) in Luba style, in which he not only poetically captures the brutality of the exploitation of raw materials, but likewise embarks on a search for his cultural roots.

The "Performance and Initiation" chapter focuses on the central significance of movement, music, and interaction in the mask performances in the art of the Congo. Among the Pende, Yaka, Chokwe, and Byombo, colorful masked figures perform during the *mukanda* initiations, a period of tests and deprivation in which, until today, young men prepare for their future roles as men [see stories, pp. 273 and 298]. Himmelheber visited the camp in which the circumcisions were carried out and photographed the masked dances. American art historian Z. S. Strother followed in his footsteps exactly fifty years later [see essay Strother]. The dynamics of the dances captured in the photographs, emphasize the importance of performance and spectacle in this art, entirely opposed to the static art at the royal courts. After their use, such initiation masks were often deemed worthless, which meant that collectors such as Himmelheber were able to acquire them.

The mask ensembles with costumes that Himmelheber acquired captivate through their diversity of colors, forms, and materials [see story, p. 288]. The creators of the Yaka masks, for example, were expected to be as creative and innovative as possible in order to surprise and amuse the audience with consistently new subjects. Local beauty ideals and concepts of masculinity and femininity were expressed in the performances, but eroticism and humor also played a role. The masks' iconography sometimes also referred to current events and offered, for example, a humorous look at the demeanor of the colonial administrators. The *mukanda* camp outlived both the colonial era as well as the current conflicts; in the Pende region, the most recent *mukanda* camp was carried out in 2018 with an increase in the number of participants [see essay Strother].

Contemporary artists have become involved in different ways with the legacy of the masked figures and their performances. The artists Steve Bandoma and Aimé Mpane refer to the unusual, asymmetrical *mbangu* initiation masks of the Pende. While Steve Bandoma, in his painting *Papotage*, questions the message of salvation found in Christianization or missionary work; Aimé Mpane, in his double portraits *La Demoiselle Picasso*, comments on the reception of African art in the avant-garde [see story, p. 284].

The young writer and artist Sinzo Aanza (born 1990) uses a masked figure in the form of a priest's robe hung on a rope in his poetic installation *The lord is dead, long life to the lord* [see p. 222]. In his work, Aanza pursues the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and postcolonial history and politics as well as the issues of restitution and reparation. The soundtrack was created as a mix of his own text together with sound recordings that he made in the villages visited by Himmelheber.

“LIKE CONGO, I AM FICTION AND FUTURE”

The starting point for *Congo as Fiction* is the archive of Hans Himmelheber containing objects, photographs, and texts, which led to various interpretations from curatorial and artistic perspectives, and their interweaving with one another. At the same time, precise borders between objects and photos, whether modern or traditional, past or present, are dissolved. On the one hand, the historical artworks are combined with the photographs that Himmelheber took on his journey in 1938/39, as complementary media of knowledge production. On the other hand, the Congolese art world of the colonial era is confronted with the present, and vice versa. This gives rise to an interlacing of diverse practices and positions across temporal and regional borders, with old and new art, fine arts and photography, scientific and poetic texts, design and performance becoming intertwined in a kaleidoscope of fictions and imaginations of the Congo. A photo by the young artist David Shongo [fig. 21] is representative of this; he wears a self-constructed mask with the portrait of a chief photographed by Himmelheber on it. Similar to our exhibition, the artist's statement “Like Congo, I am fiction and future” draws an arc spanning from the past to the present—and beyond, into the future.

Fig. 21
David Shongo
Like Congo, I am fiction and future
Instagram-Post, August 23, 2019
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B1glT8XHrKZ/>
(accessed on September 5, 2019)



Fig.21

**EXPLORING,
PHOTOGRAPHING,
AND
ACQUIRING ART**

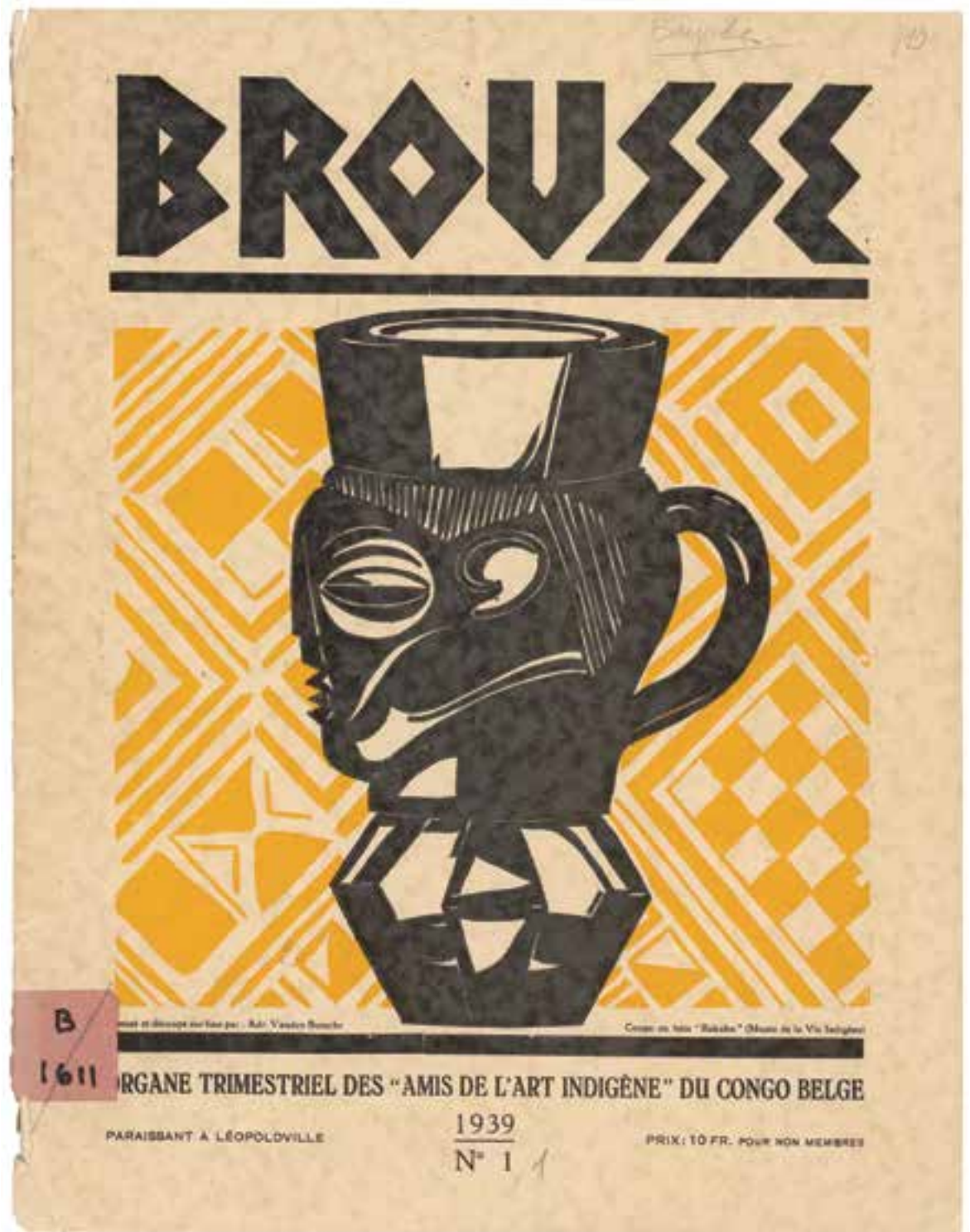


Fig. 22

BETWEEN RESEARCHING AND COLLECTING: HANS HIMMELHEBER IN THE CONGO, 1938/39

Michaela Oberhofer

“Today, New Year’s Day 1939, I have decided for the second or third time to keep a diary, because for a while now I have been determined to work more systematically. [...] I am in Basongo, the administrative center of the Bashilele, to study the art and artists here for the journal *Brousse*, for which I must write a series of four articles.”¹

When Hans Himmelheber started the diary of his sojourn in the Congo with these words in early 1939, he had already been traveling in Africa for sixteen months. On September 3, 1937, he had arrived by ship in Victoria (Nigeria), now Limbe (Cameroon), and from there he had traveled for six weeks predominantly around the British-controlled Cameroonian grasslands. In mid-November 1937, he continued his journey—this time under much more difficult conditions—in Gabon, at the time part of French Equatorial Africa. Both the transportation on site and the acquisition of art objects proved to be more complicated than expected. After five months he left Gabon disappointed and, in April 1938, headed for Brazzaville. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Himmelheber was frequently confronted with reservations toward Germans. Only thanks to the intervention of the French governor-general of French Equatorial Africa, François-Joseph Reste, whom Himmelheber knew well from his sojourns in the Côte d’Ivoire between 1933 and 1935, did he finally receive a permit to enter the Belgian Congo from its governor-general Pierre Ryckmans.²

In late May 1938, Himmelheber reached the true objective of his journey: the colony of Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From Kinshasa, then still known as Léopoldville, he initially ventured south along the border to Angola. After traveling by boat from Léopoldville to Basongo, he visited the central province of Lusambo before returning to Léopoldville via the Kasai region. The easternmost place that Himmelheber visited was Kabongo and environs; the southernmost was roughly Mato northwest of the then province of Elisabethville. He never found his way into the economically important city of Elisabethville, modern-day Lubumbashi, in the Katanga region. In total he spent thirteen months in the Congo before boarding the Woermann shipping company’s cargo ship *Togo* on June 8, 1939, sailing to Hamburg and returning to his homeland after almost two years in Africa.

Hans Himmelheber’s intentions in the Congo can be inferred from the first lines of his diary: he wanted to conduct systematic field research into art and artists and publish his scientific findings in the new magazine *Brousse* [fig. 22], which had been

1 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Basongo, January 1, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

2 Letter from Himmelheber to Eugen Paravicini, Brazzaville, May 22, 1938 (archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel).

founded by Belgian art enthusiasts in the Congo. A few years prior to this he had realized similar projects among the Baoulé in the Côte d'Ivoire and among the Inuit in Alaska.³ The focus of his investigations in the Congo would be the production, use, and significance of objects, as well as the artists themselves, their biographies, and their beliefs. Unlike colleagues who only studied material culture in museums, Himmelheber considered himself one of the few ethnologists who actually went into the field themselves and researched African art on-site.⁴

Yet he was not motivated by science alone. As Hans Himmelheber was never permanently employed at a university or museum, throughout his life he had to rely on trading artifacts to finance his research. This applies particularly to his Cameroon-Gabon-Congo journey, which was conceived as a collecting tour and commissioned by the ethnological museums in Basel and Geneva, as well as the Weyhe Gallery in New York and Charles Ratton's gallery in Paris. He believed he had a special obligation to the two museums, because in his opinion he had not brought enough ethnographic artifacts back to Europe from his Alaska sojourn, which had been supported by Basel and Geneva.⁵ With the comprehensive collection that he sent to Germany and Switzerland from the Congo, Himmelheber hoped for a "turning point in my career" so that he would no longer have to depend on benefactors.⁶

This essay discusses Himmelheber's Congo journey in 1938/39 at the intersection of his scientific work as an anthropologist of art and his obligations as a collector and art dealer. The objects he acquired, his photographs, notes, and publications, and primarily his diary from the last seven months of his sojourn in the Congo serve as sources. The combination of these various levels of analyses provides new insights into his research questions and methods, as well as into his acquisition of and trade in artworks.⁷ Himmelheber's detailed observations are an impressive reflection of everyday colonial life and the tense political situation on the eve of the Second World War, but they also testify to his somewhat paternalistic attitude toward Congolese men and women. This essay attempts to reconstruct their agency within the colonial system, although there are no sources from an African perspective. In the sense of Howard S. Becker, the archive of Himmelheber lays bare the connection between the "art worlds" and their protagonists at the intersection of local art production and acquisition, as well as between colonial politics and the global art market.⁸

ANTHROPOLOGIST OF ART AND AESTHETE

"How did you start making these things out of wood?"⁹ It was with this question that Hans Himmelheber started his conversations with the artists he met on his research trips in North America and West Africa. During his time in the Congo Hans Himmelheber interviewed at least two dozen mask makers, carvers, and weavers in the region of the Chokwe, Kuba, and Yaka. He would ask them about their training and their careers and meticulously documented the artistic creative process. In his publications he named the artists, compiled biographies, and documented their work. To his sponsors, too—like the museum in Basel—he delivered not only information about the function

3 The findings were incorporated into his dissertation in 1935 and in the monograph from 1938.

4 As further exceptions, Himmelheber also named, e.g., Franz Boas (North America), Augustin Krämer (New Ireland, Samoa), and Joseph Maes (Congo) (manuscript of the lecture "Les Esquimaux et leur art," Kinshasa, July 25, 1938, archive of the Museum Rietberg).

5 His Inuit collection is now considered in its entirety to be unique evidence of the material culture of the period.

6 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Port Francqui/now Ilebo, March 13, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

7 For their valuable feedback on this essay, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Eberhard Fischer, Christraud Geary, Clara Himmelheber, Nanina Guyer, Marko Scholze, and Esther Tisa Francini. I alone am responsible for any errors that may have found their way into the text.

8 Becker 1982.

9 Himmelheber 1939b, p. 25. "*Wie hast Du angefangen, diese Sachen in Holz zu machen?*" Here Himmelheber used the colonial "Du" (informal "you"), which was an expression of Europeans' perceived superiority over Africans.

and production, local designation, and regional and ethnic provenance of the works he acquired, but also the names of their creators, to the extent that he knew them. Especially in the case of the Yaka, Himmelheber noted down in his inventories the names of numerous makers of masks or arrows, such as Bunila, Hukungu, Kaakambu, Kapalulu, Katomi, Futikissa, Kwatebo, Magaza, Monizaku, and Ngendele [fig. 23].¹⁰

In anticipation of his book *N—kunst und N—künstler*, which would only be released in 1960, even during his Congo tour Hans Himmelheber was already interested in questions of the aesthetics and art of Africa. It is striking that the dichotomy between art and craft was immaterial to him. As such he avoided the classification into allegedly higher and lower artistic forms of expression that was customary during the colonial period and that went hand in hand with an evolutionistic viewpoint, which elevated the culture of the geographic north to the measure of all things. On the contrary, Himmelheber wanted to prove that there were art and artists in the modern Western sense in Africa. Underlying this idea was a universalistic concept of art as expressed in avant-garde, aesthetic modernism, and not least the founding of the Musée du Quai Branly. In his second *Brousse* article from 1939, in which he addressed art historians and artists, he discussed the question of whether realistic portraits existed in African art as in European art.¹¹ In his opinion the female dance masks of the Chokwe approximated this, considering that they were modeled on the facial features of particularly beautiful women. Another concept that repeatedly occupied him was *l'art pour l'art*. In contrast to the specific purpose for which masks and figures were created, he felt that “decorative art” objects were produced according to purely aesthetic principles. Alongside the carvings of the Baoulé, he includes the sculptures created by Kuba women from redwood powder *bongotol* in this category [see story, p. 156]. He considered this decorated but nonfunctional objects as “independent artworks.” Himmelheber’s understanding that there are objects created and enjoyed purely for the sake of art was entirely consistent with that of Western modernism.

Putting the social role and personal histories of the male and moreover female artists at the heart of his research was both exceptional and innovative [fig. 24]. In the literature on the Congo that Himmelheber had reviewed (e.g., Baumann, Maes, Planquaert, Torday, Wissmann), artists were not perceived as individuals.¹² Their works were attributed to an allegedly homogeneous ethnic group; their creators were considered committed to a traditional, “tribal” style and remained anonymous—partly because the Western researchers did not ask for their names, partly because they presumed they were irrelevant. The latter may well have been accurate for some art forms and regions—for example, if an object was produced by a group or as an everyday object, such as the raffia textiles of the Showa that were made by a male weaver and a female embroiderer. However, the opposite was also the case: a work that was considered particularly well made could be closely connected to the name of its producer. For example, the Bashilele chief Niamandele was known for his ornamented drums, and Himmelheber observed Prince Georges Kwete Mwana making borders. Among the Yaka, highly regarded mask makers were awarded the honorary title

10 Yaka collection inventory, August 16, 1938 (archive of the Museum Rietberg). In addition to this initial inventory of his collection from 1938, other lists were probably burned in the war along with the other documents.

11 See also his article on the unusual series of experiments about the issue of the portrait (1972), as well as Boeck 2019.

12 In the late 1930s or in the 1940s, Frans Olbrechts, the director of the museum in Tervuren, started to classify art styles for the Congo, yet he was only marginally interested in individual artists (e.g., the “Master of Buli”).

kimvumbu by the chief, and among the Pende they were permitted to adorn themselves with a decorative axe [fig. 25]. Throughout his life, Himmelheber was interested in the question of artistic license and innovative ability. Instead of paying attention merely to what was typical of a regional style, Himmelheber also appreciated what was unusual or surprising about an artistic depiction. In the process, he always took into consideration the possible influence of cultural contact and interethnic relations in the groups he visited.

Himmelheber's approach differed in yet another regard from that of the collectors and dealers of his age.¹³ In the art market of the 1920s and 1930s, age and authenticity were important criteria for elevating African objects to works of art. Signs of use and patina were considered features of an "authentic" work from pre-colonial times, prior to contact with foreign influences. These alleged "antiquities" and "antique treasures"—even if they were actually recent—were associated with long-lost cultures and hence disconnected from the present and its contemporary producers or owners. Johannes Fabian referred to this interpretive framing as the "denial of coevalness."¹⁴

That this was not the case with Hans Himmelheber is extremely unusual. Even if he sometimes extolled an object as old and attempted to acquire it, age was not the only evaluation criterion for him, neither in his texts nor in the face of his sponsors. On the contrary, he dedicated his third article in the magazine *Brousse*, "Art et Artistes 'Bakuba,'" to a specific readership—dealers, collectors, and museum directors. In it he referred in no uncertain terms to the fact that the dating of African sculptures was often "ridiculously exaggerated."¹⁵ Indeed, in two-thirds of cases the creators of works on the art market were still alive. Another example Himmelheber names are Yaka masks, which were frequently burned or sold after their performances in the circumcision camp, which is why the pieces—far from museums' claims—could only be a couple of years old at most.¹⁶ He also challenged patina as a sign of age. During his research he documented cups destined for the art market being intentionally given a shiny patina with the aid of copal smoke and body fat [fig. 26]. Conversely, the old pieces feature a matte, dark shade due to their many years of use. Himmelheber did not judge this and emphasized that what mattered was that the patina made an object more beautiful regardless of its age.

For Himmelheber beauty and quality were far more important criteria than age when assessing Africa's material culture. Everything that he saw and observed, he judged by whether it was "beautiful" or "bad" or rather "ugly," or by whether it had "no charm" in his eyes. Here it was irrelevant whether he was judging the appearance of a person, landscape and architecture, or objects. Himmelheber was an aesthete with a Western-informed universalistic concept of art and beauty. He staged "beauty competitions" in order to have a selection of masks or other objects assessed by his African attendants during his travels. Only after they had expressed their points of view did he also make his opinion known. In his experience, his judgment always aligned with that of the locals, which he took as important evidence of a universally valid aesthetic. That his employees had possibly already adapted themselves to the taste of their employer or other Europeans is not something he took into consideration.

Fig. 23
Hans Himmelheber
Himmelheber documented the names of artists like the pipe maker Kwatebo
Kungasi, June 8, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 154-13

Fig. 24
Hans Himmelheber
Hans Himmelheber also took portraits of women artists like this potter
Suku region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 170-5

Fig. 25
Artist of the Pende region
Decorative hatchet for artists
Before 1939, wood, metal, 36 × 7 × 31.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.438
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer/
Susanne Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 26
Hans Himmelheber
Carver blackening a cup for the patina
Lele region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 178-9

Fig. 27
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Expressive mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, plant fibers,
and metal, 43 × 23 × 28 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2017.27
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

13 On the art market in Paris and New York, see Monroe 2012. On Leo Frobenius, see e.g., Oberhofer 2016.

14 Fabian 1983.

15 "C'est superflu d'introduire ce facteur d'ancienneté dans l'appréciation de l'art primitive" (Himmelheber 1940, p. 28).

16 Himmelheber 1939a, pp. 22 f.



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 26



Fig. 25



Fig. 27

For Himmelheber a thing was “beautiful” if it had been made with care and was ornamented. He equated this with artistic quality. The decisive factor in his assessment was an artist’s craft skill, mastered techniques, and creative ability—and not an object’s age. Even a new object that had been carefully carved or that featured balanced proportions and a certain harmony, could be “beautiful.” At the same time, as an ethnologist he attempted to allow for regional differences in artistic expression and understanding. For example, he advised against misinterpreting as threatening the open mouth of a Pende mask in which the filed teeth can be discerned. Quite the reverse: the Pende would see in this a laughing mouth [fig. 27].

However, Himmelheber’s sojourn in the Congo was not exclusively devoted to research into the anthropology of art; above all, it was a collecting tour.

TRANSPORT AND THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF TRAVELING

“I am horrified when I think of the five months in the green tunnel in the Gabonese jungle, and of the fact that I went everywhere there by foot, always with wet shoes (boots were broken after a month), and how one had to balance one’s way up—or, even worse, down—the slippery mountain paths there, and through the swamps, etc., etc. The Congo really is a paradise.”¹⁷

After his strenuous travels through Gabon, Hans Himmelheber found the everyday life of traveling in the Congo virtually heavenly. Again and again he appears deeply impressed by the beauty of the Congolese landscape. He mostly used the colonial transport network and his travel route was oriented toward the most important centers of trade in the Belgian Congo [fig. 28]. After having arrived in Basongo via the river paddle steamer *Berwine* from Léopoldville, he visited numerous places to the southeast along the railroad between Port-Fancqui/Ilebo and Luluaburg/Kananga. Until he purchased a delivery truck from an oil plantation owner for the last five months, Himmelheber had to rely on being transported by *tipoye*. This entailed two or more men carrying a wooden pole onto which a hammock or wooden frame with a chair was attached [fig. 29]. Himmelheber’s caravan contained four to eight *tipoye* bearers, who often had to take turns due to the physical exertion, as well as several porters for his equipment and panniers or crates containing the newly acquired objects. From his notes it emerges that the porters were given between thirty and seventy centimes for four to six hours of work. In 1939 pieceworkers at a coffee or oil plantation could earn two to four francs a day according to Himmelheber. The traders in roadside shops earned up to fifty to sixty francs a month, while the annual income of whites living in the Congo amounted to at least 2,000 francs.¹⁸ With the car—a 1936 Chevrolet worth 10,000 francs (approximately 800 reichsmarks)—Himmelheber’s range grew, but so did his fixed costs. The gas cost roughly four francs per liter, meaning that his daily expenses increased to approximately forty francs.

In addition to the porters, his staff also included a chef and a “boy,” who was responsible among other things for washing laundry, ironing, setting the table, packing, and pitching the tent [fig. 30].

Fig. 28
Hans Himmelheber
**The port of Léopoldville, from which
Himmelheber took a steamer east**
Kinshasa, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 160-12

Fig. 29
Hans Himmelheber
**One of the *tipoye* that initially served
Hans Himmelheber as a means of
transport**
Yaka region (?), 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 162-32

Fig. 30
Hans Himmelheber
**Two of Himmelheber’s employees
ironing and preparing food**
Lele region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 178-25

Fig. 31
Hans Himmelheber
**Two panniers with parceled boxes
and cups**
Kuba region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 184-37

17 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Domiongo, February 2, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

18 According to his statements at the time, 10 francs were worth roughly 80 pfennig and 1 reichsmark = 12.5 francs. 1 reichsmark in 1937 corresponded to approximately € 4.10 as of January 2017 (<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichsmark#Kaufkraft>, accessed on July 20, 2019).



Fig. 28



Fig. 30



Fig. 29



Fig. 31

Furthermore, Himmelheber mentioned his “police officer,” who guarded him and above all his collection and gathered together the objects after their purchase. He frequently had problems with his employees and they in turn with him: within half a year five employees had deserted him. In his diary he expressed his discontent with their work and accused them of theft or fraud. While he documented the names of artists, chiefs, and informants in precise detail for his research, the people with whom he had daily dealings remain curiously vague and anonymous [see essay Guyer]. Even the interpreters who made an important contribution to the success of his studies and acquisition of objects are not mentioned by name. He must also have had a teacher who helped him to learn the trade language of Tshituba (a pidgin of Tshiluba).

To organize his everyday life while traveling, Himmelheber resorted to colonial infrastructure just like all other travelers.¹⁹ He arranged the delivery of his collection by rail or ship via trading companies such as Hellebau M.A.S., yet even competent storage in the damp climate was a challenge—in a missionary building part of his collection started to grow mold. Moreover, the fragile, occasionally voluminous works also needed to be well packed [fig. 31].

Mostly Himmelheber used the rest houses (*gites*) of the colonial administration and stayed overnight with colonial officials, missionaries, and plantation owners—at times to his vexation, as the associated invitations kept him from his work. Sometimes he spent the night with his caravan in the villages that he visited. That this could lead to conflicts is illustrated by an episode after his arrival in a Kuba village:

“In every village there is a chief and a kapita. The chief has the majesty, the kapita the work. He has to bring me water and wood and is in charge of the collection. Evidently he is obliged to always be in or near the village, because we always find him straight away. Once today ‘only’ the chief was there, and most unusually the villagers did not want to carry the crates. Disgusted, the chief picked up a crate himself. But an old dignified advisor forcefully hindered him from doing such ignoble work and then the young men felt ashamed and came after all. I gave one of them a kick and sprained my foot. One should never do that in low shoes.”²⁰

Inflicting physical violence on Africans had not just been part of the brutal regime of the Congo Free State but was still common in the Belgian Congo. In this quotation it emerges that Himmelheber vented his anger about the disrespectful conduct toward the elder generation. However, in his detailed diary this is the only passage in which he mentions having become physically aggressive. That he retrospectively redacted his diary by cutting out the passage, shows the extent to which he was obviously ashamed by his behavior.²¹ At another point he criticizes the violent appropriation of objects about which other collectors reported.²²

In addition to the traditional village chiefs, the Belgian colonial government appointed especially cooperative chiefs as *chefs médaillés*. Furthermore, the colonial administration and the trading companies collaborated with agents (*kapita*; from the Latin *caput*, “the head”) who were responsible for collecting taxes or funds and who exploited their position to climb the colonial

19 Due to the lack of manpower, he advocated three years of colonial service.

20 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mubanga, February 4, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

21 However, the missing passage survived on a copy. There is another redacted section in which he reports for example that he had left a street sign that had fallen over on the floor so that as many Belgians as possible would be led astray.

22 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Sumi-aminene, January 13, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg). Here he is citing a report in the magazine *Art et métiers indigènes dans la Province de Léopoldville* (1938, 9, p. 16), according to which, in the Bas-Fleuve region, a traveler forced the owner of a work in ivory to exchange it for a worthless old umbrella.

hierarchy. Not only in the aforementioned village but also on two other occasions Himmelheber was not received as he had expected; for example, he received no water. It remains unclear whether this was an act of passive resistance or, conversely, an expression of fear of being oppressed by the colonial system. The episode cited above reveals that disagreement and conflicts existed between traditional and colonial authorities regarding how hostile or cooperative and hospitable one should be to foreigners in the colonial power structure.

ACQUISITION AND TRADE

“And thus the most beautiful old things arrived from morning to evening.”²³

The aim of Himmelheber’s Congo sojourn was to compile comprehensive collections of ethnographic artifacts and artworks for his sponsors. According to his diary, in mid-March 1939 Himmelheber sent 1,736 objects packed in eighteen large crates by rail from Port Francqui (now Ilebo) to Europe. In his subsequent notes, exact quantities are named only occasionally and therefore, this is merely an estimate; however, in the space of just over a year Himmelheber acquired at least 2,500 to 3,000 artifacts for himself and his sponsors in the Congo.²⁴ As his sojourn lasted longer than intended, Himmelheber frequently experienced financial difficulties and wrote to his sponsors for an advance. They had high expectations of him and their words left no doubt that they were putting him under pressure. For example, he received a letter from Charles Ratton in the field “in which he very coolly writes that I had undoubtedly returned to Europe and he was expecting a detailed report of my travels and several good items.”²⁵ Even when purchasing or packing the collection, Himmelheber presorted the objects for his various sponsors.²⁶ The majority of the masks and figures that were considered art in the West went to Erhard Weyhe in New York as his most important sponsor, then it was the turn of Ratton in Paris. However, Himmelheber also kept important collections for himself. Beyond this, the two ethnographic museums in Basel and Geneva—the latter provided the smallest purchasing budget—demanded more ethnographic items, tools, and everyday objects.

A comparison with other collections reveals what is unique or typical about Himmelheber’s acquisitions. Instead of purchasing objects from regions that were already represented in European museums and informed the artistic canon in the West in the early twentieth century, Hans Himmelheber avoided the region along the Loango coast and did not visit the Yombe, Kongo, Bembe, Teke, Mangbetu, Hembra, nor the southern Luba. Instead, during his collecting tour he concentrated on the region between the rivers Kwango and Kwilu—which was entirely atypical of the period—where he bought pieces by the Chokwe, Pende, Suku, and Yaka. It was a happy coincidence that he was able to acquire and photograph a series of masks from the circumcision camps that were taking place and coming to an end there. It is likewise unusual that he not only acquired the wooden head crest—as was common—but also entire mask ensembles with raffia collars and costumes [figs. 32/33].

In contrast, the objects Himmelheber purchased from the Kasai and Sankuru conformed to classic Western artistic tastes.

23 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Tenambange, January 31, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

24 Of these some 276 objects can now be found in the Museum Rietberg, 137 in the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, and 52 in the Musée d’ethnographie de Genève (MEG).

25 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Port Francqui/now Ilebo, March 13, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg). Further, it says of Ratton: “It will be embarrassing for him now when he gets my airmail announcing the collection, and maybe then he will be more likely to decide to send me more funds.”

26 In the 1980s he furnished his private collection from the Congo, which can now largely be found in the Museum Rietberg, with the white inscription “H. Himmelheber.” With this label he wanted to make clear that this family treasure was not intended for sale.



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

Fig. 32
Artist of the Yaka or Suku region
Dance shirt *kivouu*
Before 1938, woven cord, 75.5 × 78 × 5 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 1354
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 33
Hans Himmelheber
Performance of the Yaka mask with costume
Kingulu, June 20, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-37

Fig. 34
Hans Himmelheber
Woman with a small pharmacy bottle imported from Europe as an earring
Suku region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 169-35

Among the Songye he purchased the *kifwebe* masks and power figures that were highly sought-after abroad. His enthusiasm for the applied art of the various Kuba groups also corresponded to the Western reception of Kuba art as something unique. In the minds of the Europeans, the Kuba set themselves apart from neighboring groups as a result of their hierarchical society with a king at the helm and their outstanding artistic skills [see essay Geary]. While regalia like the royal *ndop* figures are lacking in Himmelheber's Kuba collection, it does contain their universally popular cups, boxes, and textiles in great quantity and quality.

His acquisitions stood out for their diverse materials (feathers, wood, metal, plant fibers, etc.) and comprised the object categories considered in the West to be art, such as figures, masks, and prestigious objects. Furthermore, Himmelheber was commissioned by the two ethnographic museums in Basel and Geneva to also buy the things of everyday life, including tools, dinnerware, vessels made of clay, wood, or calabash, hygiene products like rectal syringes and razors, as well as clothing. Compared to the obsession of some other collectors, Himmelheber showed little interest in weapons, perhaps because he was a civilian and not a colonial officer.²⁷

When viewing Himmelheber's images [fig. 34], it is striking that, despite often photographing men and women with jewelry, he rarely purchased any. This may have been a personal preference but can also be explained by the fact that many pieces of jewelry were made from materials like glass beads or safety pins, which had been imported from Europe and hence were not "traditional" in the eyes of Western collectors and thus not worth collecting.²⁸

But how did Hans Himmelheber purchase the artifacts? Even in the early twentieth century collectors took European wares with them as mediums of exchange; they neither shied away from using force nor—like Leo Frobenius—occasionally furtively stealing an item. If one analyzes the detailed descriptions in his diary, none of this applied to Hans Himmelheber, who instead paid for all objects with money. He entered the villages quite openly as a potential buyer of "beautiful old" objects. As a result, both higher-ranking people like chiefs and kings and average villagers—especially in the region of the Kuba including women—offered him their property for sale.

A process of commodification in the sense of Kopytoff (1986) was taking place here. In the moment of transfer the things previously used in an everyday or ritual context became a commodity for which one received money in exchange. While local currencies like cowries and copper crosses (*katanga*) or copper bars (*mitakos*) were still commonplace in the early twentieth century, the monetary economy prevailed from the 1920s with advancing urbanization and proletarianization.²⁹ Initiated by the Belgian colonial government, this process of monetarization had wide-reaching consequences. Every transaction between people, and above all the per capita taxes, had to be paid with money. Money was likewise necessary to buy the European products that were flooding the country. At the same time, objects were given away or destroyed in the course of Christianization. As such it is not surprising that many people jumped at the chance or felt compelled to part with their old things for a few coins. Himmelheber's collecting coincided with this period of social and economic upheaval triggered by colonization and proselytization.

27 An exception were approximately one hundred arrows and twenty bows that he bought from the Lela. Here he was interested primarily in the production of the arrows.

28 On the later recognition of jewelry as an art form, see Oberhofer 2018.

29 Cf. Van Reybrouck 2012, p. 156 f.

Hans Himmelheber himself saw the objects as a commodity with which to finance his travels. The prices varied greatly depending on how valuable the object was deemed to be in the eyes of the Western art market. Everyday objects like bows and arrows could be bought for just twenty centimes. For an unusual Kuba mask he was even prepared to pay 150 francs on one occasion. For the Kuba's elaborately made raffia mats or carvings adorned with abstract motifs, Himmelheber paid between three and five Congolese francs. This was roughly ten times his porters' daily wage. At the same time, when one considers that he wanted to sell on the Kuba textiles and carvings to his customers for thirty to forty reichsmarks, this was a hundred times the purchase price—though he did have to cover his travel costs, too.

At the sales exhibition in the Weyhe Gallery, which took place with Himmelheber's pieces in New York in 1940, the Kuba fabrics were offered for thirty-five to sixty US dollars (eighty-eight to 150 reichsmarks), meaning three- to fourfold the price that Himmelheber had received for them.³⁰ The price for wooden boxes and wooden cups by the Kuba was even higher; the top item, a figural cup, was priced at 150 US dollars. Such a high discrepancy between the reward paid to the creator for his work and the proceeds realized for it by gallerists and auctioneers, is typical of the art market then as now. Interestingly the decorative art, for example a small Chokwe chair and Kuba carvings and textiles, were valued much more highly in the Weyhe catalogue than the masks offered by the Kuba, Chokwe, or Yaka, which look more expressive and comprise materials other than wood. In contrast to today, a Yaka mask without a raffia collar was actually worth more than one with this collar. Conversely, the masks of the Suku, Byombo, and the helmet masks of the Pende—all more reserved in their design—were valued slightly higher. These preferences reflect the classic taste of collectors at the time who preferred harmonious, naturalistic faces, and a shiny patina.³¹

BETWEEN BROKERING AND REFUSAL

“So they hesitate to hand over the pieces.”³²
A characteristic of Himmelheber's research and collecting was his great mobility in the Congo. The ethnologist never stayed more than a couple of days in any one place and covered long stretches on an almost daily basis. Mostly there was only time to observe the externals of public life like architecture or clothing. There was often not enough time for more in-depth studies on religion and culture. Himmelheber's research aim was very often at odds with the necessity to collect. Much was a matter of coincidence, such as when he came across a masked dance, a burial, or a circumcision camp en route. Nevertheless, Himmelheber attempted to proceed more systematically, for example, by having masked performances given especially for him or by showing around a sketch of the object he was searching for—such as a Luluwa figure with scarifications [fig. 35].³³

To research and purchase objects, Himmelheber relied on cultural brokers. When he arrived in a village, he first addressed the local authorities and openly stated his desire to meet artists and buy objects for money. He was keen to establish a good relationship to these key figures, and he gave them gifts like money,

30 See catalogue *African N— Art* by the Weyhe Gallery in 1940. At the time one US dollar was equivalent to roughly 2.5 reichsmarks (<https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>, accessed on July 20, 2019).

31 Rubin attributes this “classic taste” to the art dealer Paul Guillaume, who had a formative influence on many collections, such as those of Eduard von der Heydt and Han Coray (Oberhofer and Tisa 2016).

32 Hans Himmelheber, diary, near Galikoko, January 12, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

33 About the role of photography during the collecting see essay Guyer.

tobacco, or alcohol. In many cases he was offered objects for sale immediately by the traditionally recognized chiefs themselves, some of whom were also *chefs médaillés*, and by notables, as well as by Congolese agents (*kapita*), or they brokered contact with the appropriate people for him.

Where possible Himmelheber had his arrival announced a day in advance so that he could be certain that the items' owners would be present in the village during the day and not working on the fields. On some days he succeeded in acquiring up to seventy, eighty, or over one hundred objects. Occasionally he would return to a place a second time. Once the car was available to him as a means of transport toward the end of his journey, he added another purchasing strategy that depended even more on chance. On the road he would give a ride to passersby who then introduced him to the nearby villages and announced his request [fig. 36].

“While traveling along, I now often pick up people who I drive a couple of villages down the road so that upon arrival they can convince their fellow countrymen of my honest intentions and most importantly my paying power.”³⁴

Now and then he remained in the background and surrendered the transfer to these spontaneously recruited middlemen, as this case of purchasing a number of Pende masks proves:

“I buy an array of them with the aid of a Butshiok we picked up on the way who continued to acquit himself splendidly until the evening. I remain [...] sitting in the car while he brings out the masks in just a few minutes—something that often costs me an hour.”³⁵

It is interesting that this cultural broker was a Chokwe man who purchased masks by the Pende for Himmelheber in the mixed settlement zone. There is also evidence that he sometimes found it easier to purchase objects as an outsider—as he repeatedly asserted—because with foreigners it was guaranteed that one's fellow countrymen would learn nothing of the transfer.

A unique acquisition situation—between control and self-interest, between open and covert—was found by Himmelheber among the various Kuba groups. Here, too, Himmelheber initially approached the highest authority with his request, the Kuba king *nyim* Kot Mabiinc, called Lukengo by him as in the literature of the time. At their second meeting in his residence near Mweka, the king assigned him a “constant companion.” For two months there are notes in Himmelheber's diary time and again saying that his companion or “minister” had helped him as a broker upon his arrival and welcome in a village, as well as when purchasing art. Even the monarch's son, Prince Georges Kwete Mwana, not only offered Himmelheber objects for sale but also organized a dance performance for him and had his photograph taken by him [see essays Geary and Guyer]. On the one hand, King *nyim* Kot Mabiinc had a certain control over the ethnologist and his actions via his closest confidants. On the other, the unnamed middleman took control himself and afforded Himmelheber access to the king's wives behind his back:

“I have now stoked a palace intrigue because Lukengo does not want to allow me to come near his wives' treasures. My minister, who accompanies me at Lukengo's behest, has established ties to the harem and the women

34 Hans Himmelheber, diary, in the vicinity of Bakwa Mue, May 19, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

35 Hans Himmelheber, diary, in the vicinity of Bakwa Mue, May 24, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

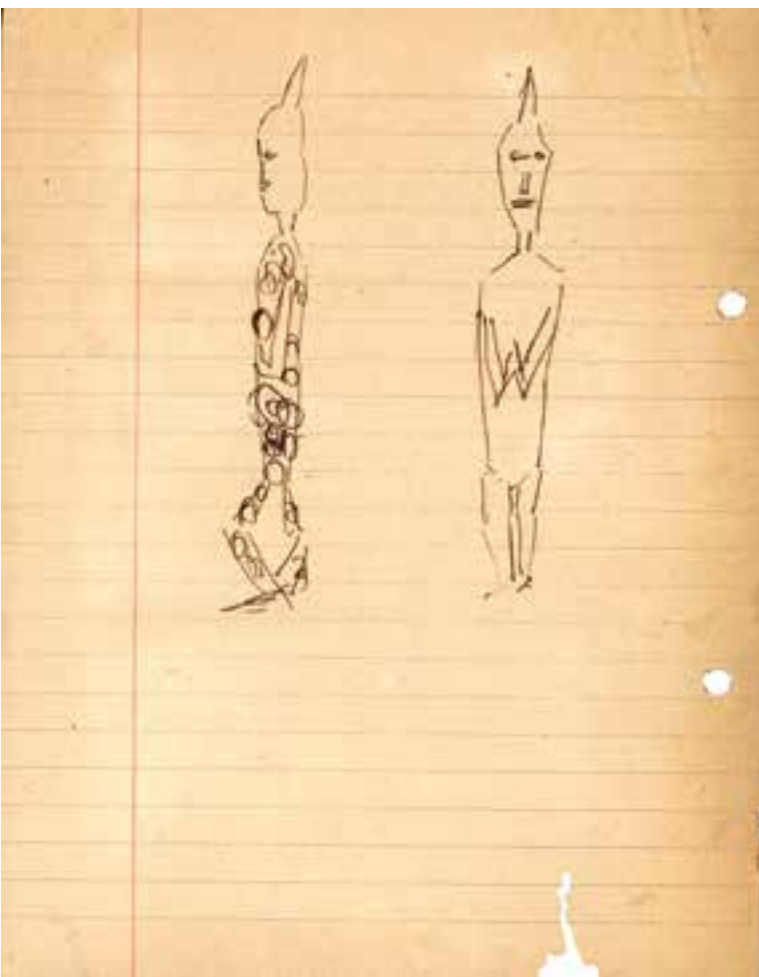


Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

Fig. 35
Hans Himmelheber
**Sketch of a Luluwa figure enclosed in
Hans Himmelheber's diary**
1938/39
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH.01-02.01

Fig. 36
Hans Himmelheber
**The car attracted the attention of many
passersby**
Byombo region, May 20–22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-1

Fig. 37
Hans Himmelheber
**Himmelheber photographed a Showa
carver with his tool**
Tenabange, January 31, 1939, b/w
negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 184-31

sneak over to me with their boxes under their low-waisted skirts before they go to the plantations.”³⁶

As a broker, Himmelheber's companion used his high rank and associated contact to the women at court to secretly set in motion the objects' sale for the collector. Similarly, the women also sold their pieces on their own initiative without the monarch's knowledge [see story, p. 212].

Himmelheber spoke positively about how willingly the various Kuba groups offered him objects for sale. According to Western perception, also in his eyes, the Kuba were “something better” [see essay Geary]. Additionally, they were “very open, they do not hesitate to present their things for sale and never flee at the sight of a white man.”³⁷ Very unusually, this was also true of women. Many of the objects belonged to them, like the decorated wooden bowls, or had been made by them, like the *mboong itool* and the embroideries for the raffia textiles. This readiness among many Kuba owners to sell their objects to Western collectors already had a long history. Often they were objects of everyday use and applied art. The elaborately adorned wooden boxes or wooden cups, for instance, were used for mixing redwood powder and for drinking water or palm wine. Consequently, they neither had a ritual function nor were they preserved for specific groups of people.

In the late 1930s Himmelheber was still able to witness active art production in many Kuba villages. Both men and women and even children worked as carvers, weavers, embroiderers, or sculptors alongside their work in the fields. “The desire to transform the world according to aesthetic principles” was part of daily economic life.³⁸ Stocks could therefore be replenished in the event of a sale. The large quantity of textiles and carvings that Himmelheber was able to purchase while traveling through the region suggests that the art objects were also produced in reserve. By his own admission, Himmelheber could have bought hundreds of modern raffia mats in a short space of time from the Kuba villages between Lodi and Mushenge.³⁹ Furthermore, he documented the production of art targeted at the Western market. For instance, a Showa carver produced a pipe while the ethnologist watched, took photographs of the working steps, conducted an interview about the production process, and finally purchased the objects and even some of the tools (fig. 37).⁴⁰

Himmelheber saw in the various Kuba groups cultural guardians (*conservateurs*) who successfully resisted missionaries and would preserve their cultural heritage.⁴¹ Some of the Kuba were aware of the high value and popularity of their art objects among the Europeans. “Even the Bakuba speak of the old things with respect and in contrast to all other tribes visited thus far they set a higher price on them.”⁴² While Himmelheber was able in many cases to agree on a lower price with the sellers, there were also cases in which the price offered was too low for the owner and the transaction did not take place.

However, it was not just the financial value but also the emotional and historical value that kept some owners from selling their art objects. In the following unsuccessful transaction, a high-ranking Kuba man emphasized the significance of the work as a family memento:

“A minister [...] has a stunning rectal syringe that he stores reverently in a sack and wants to sell to me for

36 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mushenge, March 6, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

37 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mushenge, January 28, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

38 “Le désir de transformer le monde extérieur selon des principes esthétique” (Himmelheber 1940, p. 22).

39 In view of the fact that several days or—in the case of the older pieces—even months or years were necessary for their production, the immediate availability of the textiles when Himmelheber was passing through means that they had been produced beforehand.

40 This would be much more pronounced in later field research than during the Congo tour.

41 Letter from Hans Himmelheber to Eugène Pittard, Bakwa Kengo, February 17, 1939 (archive of the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève).

42 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mushenge, January 20, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

forty francs as something very special. I want to barter, but nothing can be done. He says it is his father's rectal syringe, I would not get it any cheaper."⁴³

The age of the works and their associated history were valued particularly highly by the Kuba. Another reason why Himmelheber could not acquire something was because it was still needed or used for rituals.

"The chief has a Bakuba mask of the type moadi but does not want to sell it to me. Because he needs it to die. Then it will be placed on him when he is laid out and in the grave, too. I interview him about the history of the Bakete."⁴⁴

Rather than harassing the owner, Himmelheber accepted his refusal and conducted an interview with him instead.

The aforementioned examples are active refusal tactics by the local actors who did not sell their objects to the Western collector for financial, emotional, historical, or cultural reasons. In a long passage in his diary, Himmelheber described another form of refusal. Although the inhabitants of a Luba village had promised Himmelheber a large figure, they made him wait so long—five hours—that he lost patience and drove away incensed. Despite having clearly stressed his desire for the object, Himmelheber was unsuccessful. Delaying the guest rather than giving in to his will can be interpreted as a passive act of resistance to the supremacy of the Europeans acting in the colonial system.

In the region of the Songye, Himmelheber was also not very successful and was only able to acquire a few of the *kifwebe* masks that were sought-after by the West due to their Cubistic forms and colorful striped pattern. Yet here the destructive politics of the missions and the colonial administration already reveal their consequences. In the area of Kongolo the villagers explained the absence of masks with the fact that the missionaries and colonial administrators had confiscated and destroyed the masks of the powerful *kifwebe* secret society.

"They are extremely rare because the administration has destroyed many of them, and the missions, Catholic and Protestant, continue to burn any they can find. I was able to buy a few last examples, but the locals were careful not to disclose any information about them that goes beyond 'That is for playing/C'est pour jouer.'"⁴⁵

The quote suggests that the owners of the few masks that had not been destroyed by the colonial government attempted to conceal their actual purpose and hence control the production of knowledge. The colonial actors likewise controlled the production of art and associated knowledge.

COMPETITION AND CONTROL

"And yet he has not even noticed that the country is full of treasures."⁴⁶

Hans Himmelheber was not the only one acquiring objects in the Congo. In addition to explorers and art dealers like him, there were also numerous colonial officials and officers, employees of plantations or mines, as well as missionaries, who were working as collectors. Among the various groups of collectors there was rivalry, distrust, and competition. In his diary Himmelheber criticizes the private collections he is shown, which were mostly new

43 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mushenge, March 4, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

44 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Kambungu, January 14, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

45 Unpublished manuscript of the fourth *Brousse* article by Hans Himmelheber, which was not released due to the war (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

46 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mweka, March 23, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

or of poor quality: Thanks to his regional and specialist knowledge, but also thanks to his mobility and associated lack of commitment, he was far more successful at collecting than the African and European population who lived there.⁴⁷ In his research and publications it was important to him both to acquire knowledge about the objects and to demonstrate his interpretive prerogative as an expert on African art.

In the 1930s some Belgian institutions and organizations were established to support the production of material culture, to preserve the associated knowledge, and to channel and control both as part of the colonial project.⁴⁸ From 1935 they included the *Commission pour la Protection des Arts et Métiers Indigènes* of the Belgian colonial ministry. In 1939 a law was passed to protect primarily the colonial sites and monuments, as well as indigenous art as a side note. Far more significant in the Belgian Congo was the *Association des Amis de l'Art indigène*, which was instituted in 1935 by enthusiastic volunteers, among them high-ranking colonial officials.⁴⁹ In order to reduce the export of artifacts abroad and promote art production in the Congo itself, the Musée de la vie indigène was founded in Léopoldville in March 1938. Up until independence, further regional museums were added on the initiative of the enthusiasts' association. Other activities by the association included running workshops to teach old and new art, and the publication of the magazine, *Brousse*.⁵⁰

To safeguard his position as a collector and researcher in the country, Himmelheber endeavored to establish a good relationship with the *Amis de l'Art indigène*. He also had a good connection to the artist and art historian Jeanne Maquet-Tombu, the driving force behind the association, and to Adrien Vanden Bossche, the future director of the museum. Shortly after his arrival in Léopoldville, he gave an illustrated lecture about his studies in the anthropology of art among the Inuit. In it he commended the association's attempt to promote indigenous art on various levels (research, conservation, and workshops for artists). After his successful lecture, he took stock: "So now I have their full protection and can continue to work undisturbed."⁵¹ In return for 300 free copies each, in 1939/40 Himmelheber published three detailed articles in French about his most recent research into the art of the Yaka, Chokwe, and Kuba in *Brousse* magazine. In addition, he supported the Musée de la vie indigène with several donations. Even though there was no legal export ban for art, Himmelheber chose the official path and presented his collection to those in charge at the museum before its export so that a few pieces could be selected for the Musée de la vie indigène [fig. 38]. Among the ten objects he donated were five masks by the Yaka and Suku, two Chokwe masks from the village of Mavamba in the Kahemba region, one Chokwe chair from Mwakango, and two dignitaries' staffs by the Suku from the Feshi region. The most impressive piece was the large, painted *mbawa* mask with horns from Menikongo, which Himmelheber captured in front of a flat hut on a field photo in 1938 and which was still exhibited in the museum in the 1940s but is now part of the Virginia Museum of Arts in the USA [figs. 39/40].⁵²

Furthermore, there were close connections between Himmelheber and the *Amis de l'Art indigène* in terms of the history of ideas. Both Himmelheber and the museum attempted to document artists' names where possible. At the same time, they both

47 A passage was envisaged on this in his fourth, unpublished *Brousse* article (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

48 See Van Beurden 2015, chapter 2.

49 Cf. Raymaekers 2017.

50 See Halen 1994. *Brousse* (1939–1959) magazine's precursor was called *Arts et métiers indigènes dans la Province de Léopoldville* (1936–1938).

51 His lecture was attended not only by the members of the association but also high-ranking representatives of the colonial state and the Church (letter to Basel, Léopoldville, July 28, 1938, archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel; as well as the article "Précieuse collaboration" on his lecture in *Arts et métiers indigènes dans la Province de Léopoldville* 1938, 9, p. 4f.). See also the unpublished manuscript of the lecture "Les Esquimaux et leur art," July 25, 1938, Kinshasa (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

52 See the reference to Himmelheber's donation in *Arts et métiers indigènes dans la Province de Léopoldville* (1938, 8, p. 5). On the history of the Musée de la vie indigène, which was handed over to the Congolese government after independence and closed in 1965, as well as the scattered fates of Himmelheber's donations on the art market, see Raymaekers 2016. According to Sarah Van Beurden, who cites an interview with Mobutu (2015, p. 129), many museum objects in Kinshasa were sold by the mayor in the 1960s.

believed that “traditional” African art was being destroyed by the effects of Western modernity and European influence and was in danger of disappearing. As such, collecting could be legitimized as “rescuing” an allegedly collapsing “authentic” culture and history. Photography could also be used to preserve the image of allegedly “traditional” Africa [see essays Geary and Guyer]. This perception of the demise of “genuine” Africa often went hand in hand with a promotion of African culture in the form of colonial humanism. In the workshops run by the *Amis de l’Art indigène* association, which Himmelheber endorsed, the intention was to return modern African artists to their roots—yet it was deemed necessary for Europeans to teach them how to do so.⁵³

Not only the cultural policy in the Belgian colony but also the global political situation shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War had an impact on Himmelheber’s collecting. In the Congo Himmelheber was constantly monitored by the colonial administration. He had to register with the competent territorial agent whenever he changed location. Moreover, Himmelheber suspected that this was why the Luxembourgian territorial agent Albert Hoffmann or the Belgian colonial official Delcroix were so generously driving him around: to control his collecting and research. Even the local population with whom Himmelheber came into contact was interrogated about him:

“In Mweka the reception by the administrators was noticeably cool. In the meantime, the Chef de District had been here and spent two days in Mushenge. There the king’s son [probably Kwete] told me this morning that he had interrogated him about me. Whether I buy a lot? Yes, more than all other white people. And whether I pay well? Yes, very well. So everyone is happy? Yes, said the prince, and now they could all pay their taxes.”⁵⁴

In addition to this sideswipe at the colonial taxes that were paid with the money from selling objects, this quotation also indicates the colonial administration’s distrust of Hans Himmelheber as a German citizen. Rumors circulated that he was a spy, and more than once Himmelheber was greeted with a hostile welcome due to his German nationality. Shortly after Himmelheber had returned to Germany in late July 1939, the Second World War broke out and he was drafted into the army. The second transport with his collection—four crates weighing 336 kilograms in total—was detained in Genoa. To avoid its confiscation, he asked the museum in Basel for help; the collection ultimately arrived in neutral Switzerland after the approval of the Ministry of Economic Warfare in London. Only after the end of the war in 1948 was the collection divided, with Himmelheber and Basel alternately selecting one item each. It was in this way that Basel received such impressive pieces as the imposing Songye power figure [see fig. 111] or the *kakungu* mask by the Suku with its long eyelashes [fig. 41].

CONNECTED ART WORLDS

In line with Howard S. Becker’s concept of art worlds, art should not be understood as the product of a single creator but as the result of a network of different actors. Spread across several continents, they are involved in art’s production, use, and—like Hans Himmelheber—its transfer and marketing, as well as knowledge

53 See also Monroe 2012, pp. 469–472.

54 Hans Himmelheber, diary, Mweka, February 7, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

Fig. 38
Hans Himmelheber
Presentation of his first Yaka collection before transport
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 158-29

Fig. 39
Hans Himmelheber
Field photo of the *mbawa* mask on the right, made by Tata ka sila from Menikongo, which Himmelheber donated to the Musée de Léopoldville in 1938
Mukumbi, June 25, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 158-4

Fig. 40
Photographer unknown
Musée de Léopoldville’s exhibition space with the *mbawa* mask on the wall
Kinshasa, 1940s
Private collection of Angelo Turconi

Fig. 41
Artist from Tsambotseke in the Suku region
***Kakungu* mask**
Before 1938, wood, fur, plant fibers, ochre, 132 × 80 × 41 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 1358
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 41



Fig. 40

production and imagination. As this essay has demonstrated, Hans Himmelheber's Congo sojourn in 1938/39 had two motivations. On the one hand, Himmelheber acquired thousands of objects for his sponsors in his role as a collector and dealer. With his contacts to the museums in Basel and Geneva, as well as to the art dealers Charles Ratton in Paris and Erhard Weyhe in New York, Himmelheber was actively involved in the global market for African art. On-site he was dependent for both his research and collecting on the cooperation of African actors who had a wide range of passive and active strategies—from producing for the art market to delaying tactics to silent resistance—in their dealings with European collectors. Nevertheless, the power imbalance between the colonized and the colonizers remained intact. The acquisition of objects and the associated production of knowledge in the case of Hans Himmelheber were actively influenced by the cultural policy of the Belgian colony of the Congo and simultaneously by global politics on the eve of the Second World War.

On the other hand, Himmelheber conducted anthropological analyses of Congolese art and its artists that provide important insights into artistic production in the late 1930s in artistic regions that had hardly been researched prior to that point. His universalistic understanding of art in the Western sense tied in with notions of aesthetic modernism. In contrast to his repeated sojourns in Liberia and the Côte d'Ivoire, Himmelheber's Congo journey remained a singular undertaking due to the political instability in the Congo after independence. To Himmelheber's lasting credit, and especially thanks to his later research, he steered the research interest toward questions of authorship and aesthetic principles in African art.



Fig. 42



Fig. 43

Fig. 42
Hans Himmelheber
Portrait of his shadow
Kingulu, June 18, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-26

Fig. 43
Hans Himmelheber
"Big Chief's village of Kingulu"
Kingulu, June 18, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-30

*
Captions in quotation marks are translations of Hans Himmelheber's original descriptions, which can be found on the contact prints (archive of Museum Rietberg).

FACTUAL MOMENTS, VISUAL FICTIONS: NOTES ON THE CREATION OF HANS HIMMELHEBER'S CONGO PHOTOGRAPHS¹

Nanina Guyer

On June 18, 1938 the inhabitants of Kingulu, a village in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), are met with the spectacle of a white man in a boonie hat being carried forward on a *tipoye*. His face is covered by a Leica camera with which he is photographing his shadow and hence capturing his arrival in the village [figs. 42/43]. The man is the German ethnologist Hans Himmelheber (1908–2003), who had entered the Congo from Gabon only a few days earlier. In the meantime he had obtained permission in Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) to travel further into the region southeast of the capital and not only purchase art unhindered but also take photographs. That he received this authorization was thanks to a letter of recommendation from the governor-general of French Equatorial Africa François Reste de Roca, formerly governor of the Côte d'Ivoire, whom he knew from his previous travels in West Africa. Over the following months Hans Himmelheber will insert some forty roll films with thirty-six pictures each into his Leica camera and take almost one and a half thousand photographs.

The visual archive of Hans Himmelheber's Congo expedition comprises some 1,400 black-and-white negatives taken between spring 1938 and summer 1939 in the area around the rivers Kwango, Kwilu, Kasai, Sankuru, and Lomami [see map, p. 19], as well as contact prints with handwritten notes and fourteen prints by the Congolese itinerant photographer Antoine Freitas. During his Congo expedition, Himmelheber published three articles in the specialist journal *Brousse* featuring fourteen of his photos, six of which bear masked figures, five are pictures of craftwork, and two show art that he has purchased *in situ*.² Himmelheber planned to sell his photographs of the Congo upon his return.³ For this purpose he organized his photographic archive by topic and furnished individual pictures with captions whose wording was intended to appeal to the readership of illustrated magazines like *Die Umschau*. In spite of his efforts, he was not ultimately able to generate widespread sales.⁴

Despite not being a trained photographer, Hans Himmelheber succeeded in producing iconic and impressive pictures that are still being reproduced today. In them we encounter masked dances, craftwork, and portraits of Congolese men and women.⁵ At first glance we see documentary snapshots of the rural Congo in the years 1938 and 1939. The same can be said of these images as of photographs in general: they possess a unique aura of authenticity and veracity that is virtually inescapable; their constructed

1 My thanks to Christraud Geary, Michaela Oberhofer, and Eberhard Fischer for their feedback on earlier versions of this text. The initial results of the subproject "Abseits der grossen Narrative. Hans Himmelhebers Kongo-Fotografien als Quellen für alternative Geschichte(n)," financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation, are published in this essay.

2 Himmelheber 1939a, b; Himmelheber 1940. Himmelheber sent the rolls of film to Germany to be developed by the company Foto Kino Veittinger and then had the developed negatives and/or prints sent back to the Congo. That means that he could not give his sitters any pictures, as earlier photographers had often done.

3 Himmelheber, diary, January 6, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

4 However, he did sell individual pictures via the Artikeldienst für Zeitgeschehen in Hamburg.

5 A great number of the photographs that document cultural practices were published in 1993 in the photographic volume *Zaire* (Fischer and Mayer-Himmelheber 1993). In addition, Himmelheber took many photographs of the traditional architecture in villages and in modern Kinshasa. These are not the subject of this essay and present a fascinating topic for future research.

nature does not reveal itself to the casual eye. This would have far-reaching consequences for the external perception of Africa at the time. A seemingly timeless and traditional Africa could be portrayed through a photography that evaded the question of Africans' active role in constructing such pictures.⁶ The late Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor remarked that “no medium has been more instrumental in creating a great deal of the visual fictions of the African continent than photography.”⁷ Thanks to its density, its serial nature, and good source material, Hans Himmelheber's photographic archive conversely grants us second glances, serial glances, intermediate glances, and side glances—and hence the opportunity to spotlight various moments, mechanisms, and actors that contributed to the creation of these photographs. The aim of this essay is to release these photos from their ethnographic present and to locate them instead in the historical context of their creation.

PHOTOGRAPHING AND BEING PHOTOGRAPHED SOUTHEAST OF KINSHASA, 1938/39

In the fourteen months that he spends in the Congo, Himmelheber often takes photographs while approaching villages, initially sitting in the *tipoye* and later from his car. Around ten percent of his photographs emerged in the context of approaching a subject. They elude any categorization; they are neither ethnographic photos nor does Himmelheber use them in his later publications.⁸

The population of the Congo was being exploited and oppressed by the Belgians in the late 1930s. In order to successfully purchase and research art under these conditions, Himmelheber had to communicate his role clearly to the population and distance himself from other Western actors in the region. He is not coming to preach; he is not an administrator nor a vaccinator; he is not there to trade nor to recruit workers; he is not a tourist with a cheap camera. He is coming to document and collect. This is precisely what he declares with his camera and the act of taking photographs.⁹ Once he has arrived in the village, Himmelheber emphasizes his buying power by introducing himself as a “rich white man.”¹⁰

For him the photographs that emerged from such situations were merely a means to an end, a by-product. Nevertheless, from a modern-day perspective these pictures are valuable and impressive testaments to the first meeting between Himmelheber and Congolese men and women, because he also captures the expressions of the inhabitants upon his arrival. They look friendly, wary, and approachable [see figs. 44–47].

Himmelheber regarded photography as a symbol that the village populations found easy to read. This implies the region's familiarity with photography at the time. Even in the early twentieth century, travelers, ethnologists, and African photographers like Herzekiah Shanu took, brought, and showed photographs in what is now the DRC.¹¹ Hans Himmelheber likewise had a photograph in his luggage, probably a portrait of his father Gustav Himmelheber, which was helpful when making contact with future sitters for his photographs [fig. 48].

There was a local market for photographs in West and Central Africa by the last third of the nineteenth century.¹² In the 1930s

6 Thoss 2000, p. 8.

7 Enwezor 1996, p. 20.

8 Himmelheber himself tags the pictures of his arrival as “Expedition” (subject index photos, archive of the Museum Rietberg).

9 In the early twentieth century, Western ethnographers and travelers frequently used photography as a Western technological achievement with which to articulate their superiority. See Vansina 1992, p. 201 for an overview of this topic.

10 Himmelheber, diary, February 5, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

11 Mack 1991, p. 65. For an excellent overview of the history of photography in Central Africa, see Geary 2002.

12 Schneider 2013, p. 53.

Fig. 44
Hans Himmelheber
“Woman with calabashes in her ear”
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 190-3

Fig. 45
Hans Himmelheber
“People at the entrance to the village”
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-7

Fig. 46
Hans Himmelheber
“A group watches Himmelheber”
Songye region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-8

Fig. 47
Hans Himmelheber
“Men looking into the car”
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 191-7



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47



Fig. 48



Fig. 49



Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52

Fig. 48
Hans Himmelheber
Children looking at a photograph
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 169-10

Fig. 49
Hans Himmelheber
Portrait of a chief
Kingulu (?), 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 157-3

Fig. 50
Hans Himmelheber
**"2 Bayaka chiefs with insignia
(sword & umbrella)"**
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-22

Fig. 51
Hans Himmelheber
Approaching dancing women
Byombo region, May 20, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-40

Fig. 52
Hans Himmelheber
"Bakuba Festival of the Dead"
Ichala, January 10, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 181-30

they were considered—at least by wealthier sections of society—a modern means of self-representation. Himmelheber's portraits of chiefs who had pinned photographs onto their hats [figs. 49/50] prove this. Photos could be found in the homes of better-off Congolese people and were a feature of burial rituals. The following photographers visited the region in the years 1938/39 alone: the missionary and doctor Émile Muller, the professional photographers Casimir Zagourski and Antoine Freitas, travelers like the Italian American Attilio Gatti, as well as various tourists who took home pictures as souvenirs of their experiences in the Congo. A film was even being shot with local extras in the Kuba region during Himmelheber's time there [see essay Geary]. Himmelheber also mentions the existence of a movie theater "screened by a man who travels along the railroad with his program."¹³

Chiefs who were familiar with photography were happy to have their photograph taken by Himmelheber. Sometimes they even demanded that he did so in return for permission to document the Yaka's *mukanda* dances, for example [fig. 49]. The chiefs orchestrated these shots themselves and the photographer had little say.¹⁴ The local posing conventions presented a problem for Himmelheber, as can be inferred from his account of a photographic encounter with two chiefs [see fig. 50 for the resulting photograph]: "That reminds me of my difficulties with the natives when taking photographs; when I had finally found an appealing scene, for example two chiefs in the council, and I approached them with my Leica, my chef or a policeman would shout: 'Stand up straight, the white man is going to take a photo.' As if given an electric shock, both chiefs would straighten up, every expression would drain from their faces, their legs and arms would become motionless, and I would take this photo out of politeness 'for the attention of the two natives.'¹⁵

Unlike the chiefs, Himmelheber understood the camera as a documentary tool for capturing a timeless, traditional Africa. This approach demanded as truthful, as genuine, pictures as possible. Himmelheber's colleague Hugo Bernatzik, who had ambitions of becoming an ethnologist, also attempted to achieve this ideal. Bernatzik recommended stealth, deception, and snapshots to obtain the most "authentic photographs" as possible.¹⁶ Where he could, Himmelheber also took spontaneous photographs. Such pictures sometimes came about with the sun behind him, as his own shadow in the picture indicates [figs. 51/52]. The length of the shadow cast both by Himmelheber and his subjects reveals that these pictures were taken early in the morning or late in the afternoon. During the day Himmelheber would travel and the people would work outside the villages. He gave his subjects little time to prepare for being photographed. This is evident in the portrait of a man who is still holding the bill in his hand that he had obviously received as payment for the photo [fig. 53].¹⁷ On the other hand, a series of four pictures shows Himmelheber's interpreter asking a man for permission to take his photograph [fig. 54].

The diverging interpretation of photography's purpose—documentary tool versus means for self-representation—is expressed in a series of pictures that Himmelheber took of King Pero. Despite being only a fleeting visitor in most places, Himmelheber spent three days in the king's village—enough time to build trust. Pero sells Himmelheber a cup and a mask. "Very unusually

13 Himmelheber, diary, March 12, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

14 Around 1910 King Okondo of the Mangbetu used a mirror to control his appearance in front of an audience and the camera. See Schildkrout 1991, p. 82, and Geary 2002, pp. 85–86.

15 Translated from French. Himmelheber 1939b, unpaginated.

16 Bernatzik 1947; Theye 1989, p. 260.

17 Previously salt, nails, or beads were offered in the Congo in return for photographs (Schildkrout 1991, p. 76).

for Africa, where at night one dances at most, he comes at 9 p.m. and stays until 10:30, telling me the history of the Bashilele—see my notes.”¹⁸

Pero makes an appearance in several of the photographs that Himmelheber took during these three days. In one, for example, he can be seen as a passerby in the background while Himmelheber is photographing a cup carver [fig. 55]. When Pero arrives for his own photo session, Himmelheber documents his approach from a different perspective than normal: it is Pero who is coming toward him, not the other way around. We can see Pero being handed a pipe as a symbol of his majesty with which he subsequently poses [figs. 56/57]. The day after, Pero makes another appearance; now he is wearing jewelry and ceremonial dress and portrays himself as a powerful leader by sitting on a chair directly in front of the camera [fig. 58]. This imagery is consistent with local portrait conventions.

LIKE PHOTOJOURNALISM: MASKED DANCES AND CRAFTS

Hans Himmelheber’s photographs can be located at the intersection of scientific documentation and photojournalism, which was emerging in the 1930s. When selecting his subjects, Himmelheber was informed by the preexisting pictorial arsenal of the region that had been created by the ethnologists who had gone before him. He was extremely well read and during his travels he also occupied himself with specialist literature, such as Emil Torday’s standard ethnography of the Kuba or Hermann Baumann’s study of the Lunda.¹⁹ Unlike photographers like Emil Torday with whom he was acquainted, Himmelheber eschews arranged group scenes and static full-body portraits—and hence the continuation of nineteenth-century type photography.²⁰ Rather, in his compositions he imitates the visual culture of illustrated magazines. Photojournalism about foreign peoples was a permanent feature of these periodicals and was an additional source of funding for ethnologists’ expensive travels. Himmelheber reports that he would flick through numerous illustrated magazines to pass the time during his travels in the *tipoye*.²¹

The new visual culture of these magazines demanded high narrative quality in the photos, an avoidance of staged pictures, and photojournalism’s serial character, in other words the descriptive portrayal of the respective events in a series of individual pictures.²² These design principles are identifiable in Himmelheber’s visual archive and can be demonstrated with the aid of a series of photos of masked dances.

Himmelheber traveled to the Congo at precisely the moment when the *mukanda* circumcision camp for the boys’ initiation was about to take place—a ceremony that only takes place once every ten years [see essay Strother]. It took place at the same time among the Yaka, Chokwe, and Pende peoples. It is thanks to this happy coincidence that Himmelheber was able to purchase numerous masks and to photograph masked dances and other rituals that occurred in the context of the *mukanda*. The conclusion and culmination of the time in the camp was a dancing tour of the villages by an orchestra, masked figures, and the boys to raise funds. Only shortly after his arrival Himmelheber came across such a masked ensemble of Yaka on tour in Kingulu near Kinshasa.

Fig. 53
Hans Himmelheber
“**Bapende ivory pendant**”
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 191-17

Fig. 54
Hans Himmelheber
“**Approaching a man**”
Lele region, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 179-23,
179-24, 179-27, 179-28

Fig. 55
Hans Himmelheber
“**Behind the cup carver King Pero of the
Bashilele**”
Lele region, January 4, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 177-16

Fig. 56
Hans Himmelheber
“**King Pero being handed a pipe**”
Lele region, January 4, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 177-25

Fig. 57
Hans Himmelheber
“**King Pero of the Bashilele**”
Lele region, January 4, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 177-26

Fig. 58
Hans Himmelheber
“**King Pero of the Bashilele**”
Lele region, January 5, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 178-21

18 Himmelheber, diary, January 4, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

20 Edwards 1992.

21 Himmelheber, diary, January 28, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

22 Theye 1989, pp. 32–33.



Fig. 53



Fig. 54



Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58



Fig. 59.1



Fig. 59.2



Fig. 59.3

Fig. 59
Hans Himmelheber
“Dance in Kingulu”
Kingulu, June 20, 1938, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-34
to 155-40, 156-1 to 156-41, 157-1, 157-2

Once he had presented the chiefs and singers with gifts, he was able to “attend the dances and take photographs at will.”²³ Subsequently he experiences another masked dance performed especially for him. Himmelheber systematically documents these two dances with his camera. He succeeds in creating iconic pictures whose dynamism and perspectives are striking [fig. 59]. If we look at the pictures of the dances in series, we can reconstruct how Himmelheber took photographs on such occasions. Unlike the male spectators who remain seated in the shade,²⁴ Himmelheber actively partakes in the goings-on as a photographer. He occupies various positions and hence repeatedly changes the perspective while approaching the masked figures and dancing initiands, gradually moving from the periphery into the center. In this way he also documents his movement as a social actor in the ritual space.²⁵ The masked figures also interact with the camera, thereby helping to create the photographs. They are aware of the photographer’s presence and are intentionally turning their bodies toward him.

In Mushenge, the residence of the king of the Kuba, masked dances that deeply impress Himmelheber are performed twice at his behest [fig. 60].²⁶ Though he always avoided close-up portraits, Himmelheber photographs these dances in unusually close proximity. For example, he shows himself “surprising one of the two dancers while he is dressing up”²⁷ [fig. 61] or an exhausted masked figure being fanned and water being poured down his throat [fig. 61.1].

It is interesting that there is no discernable difference for the viewer between the dances that Himmelheber photographed spontaneously and those that were performed especially for him.²⁸ This is probably because their appearance before an audience—with or without a camera—was part of the actors’ task.²⁹ Nevertheless, the staged and candid performances differ in terms of their audience. At the Kuba dance that was arranged especially for Himmelheber, only a few spectators are present; seemingly impassively they are standing in a line at some distance [fig. 60.2]. It is quite possible that the majority of the audience was behind the photographer and a select few men were posed as spectators for the photograph.

The photographic documentation of manufacturing processes is similar, a discipline that Himmelheber would refine and develop over the course of the four decades during which he documented the production of art in West Africa. In the Congo he photographs craft techniques like making pottery, weaving, embroidering raffia textiles, producing borders, carving a pipe stem and masks, cleaning wooden boxes, as well as weaving mats and sewing. A series of nine pictures of a Yaka artist reveal the pattern that underlies Himmelheber’s documentation of craftwork [fig. 62]. The series depicts an artist improving a mask and being given instructions by the person who commissioned it. With his camera Himmelheber approaches the artist who is sitting on a deck chair, circles him, and ends with a shot over the artist’s shoulder. At the time artists were used to working in public and in front of an audience.

23 Himmelheber 1939a, p. 13.

24 Fischer and Mayer-Himmelheber 1993, p. 148; Himmelheber 1939a, pp. 28–30.

25 Morton 2012, p. 48.

26 Himmelheber, diary, March 6, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

27 Himmelheber, diary, January 22, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

28 Himmelheber 1939a, p. 30; Himmelheber 1960, p. 323.

29 See also Guyer 2014.

PORTRAITS:
TRADITIONAL MEN, MODERN WOMEN

During his travels in the Congo, Himmelheber took portraits of many people, mainly as head-and-shoulders portraits. As when buying art, the aesthete Himmelheber was guided by what was “beautiful” when selecting his subjects—and what he found beautiful was often traditional [see essay Oberhofer]. He searched for men and women with “old” hairstyles and tattoos who reminded him of portraits on cups, figures, and masks. Then he would note in his diary: “One thing is immediately apparent: the women have the proper old Bakuba hairstyle that is on the cups”³⁰ [fig. 64]. In order to show the people and their features from every side, Himmelheber photographs them from various angles. While the way he approaches people at the beginning of his Congo expedition is still rather tentative [see fig. 54], nearing the end of his journey he advances toward them more resolutely. In the Pende region he comes across some chiefs who impress him: “The men frequently very tall and handsome, [...] lean, slender face, beards, clear-cut features. They frequently wear old glass necklaces and attractive hairstyles [...]”³¹ With these men he organizes photo shoots on village squares in front of at times deserted backdrops [fig. 63].

Many of the women whom Himmelheber met on his travels adorned themselves with Western attributes like perfume bottles, empty cartridge cases, or sardine can openers as body jewelry, or wore European clothing. Himmelheber had a hostile attitude to such appropriations. Highlighting what were believed to be corruptive influences of Western civilization on indigenous cultures was a common stereotype in the photojournalism of the time. Himmelheber likewise addressed this issue in many of his pictures. It was not least the readership of illustrated magazines whom he had in mind when doing so. When selling such pictures he supplied captions in which he names examples of modernity being falsely interpreted, virtually caricatures—an interpretive scheme that had been commonplace in the geographic north since the nineteenth century.

That other factors besides finance—such as eroticism—also played a part in the creation of such pictures, is demonstrated by three photographs that Himmelheber takes on May 20, 1939.³² From the car he catches sight of a young woman [fig. 65.1] who subsequently poses for him in various positions [figs. 65.2/65.3]. This photo shoot is reminiscent of those by local professional photographers, as described for Ghana by Tobias Wendl: the male photographers’ sessions with young women resemble a ritual comprising looking, joking, and touching.³³ It is easy to imagine that similar dynamics were at play in the case of the unmarried, just thirty-year-old Himmelheber and the young woman.

“PHOTOBOMBING”:
UNINTENDED SYMBOLS OF MODERNITY

Photography had a documentary value for Himmelheber. On the one hand, this means shooting spontaneously to produce “candid” photographs; on the other, the point was to capture those snippets of village life that were untouched by outside influences, that were traditional and harmonious. This also corresponded with the Belgian colonial administration’s official visual politics,

Fig. 60
Hans Himmelheber
“Ngedemoasch mask, worn by a woman”
Mushenge, March 6, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-20

Fig. 61
Hans Himmelheber
“Masked performance in front of the paralyzed king”
Mushenge, March 6, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-28, 182-32

Fig. 62
Hans Himmelheber
“Painting a mask’s hairstyle that has been woven from bast”
Yaka region, 1938/39, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 167-3 to 167-11

Fig. 63
Hans Himmelheber
“Old Bakuba hairstyle as on king figures!”
Kuba region, February 2, 1939,
b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-7, 185-8

30 Himmelheber, diary, February 13, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

31 Himmelheber, diary, May 24, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

Fig. 64
Hans Himmelheber
Male portraits
Pende/Chokwe region, May 24, 1939,
b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 190-11 to 190-14, 190-25, 190-26, 190-35

32 Fabian 2000 and Hahn 2018 make a case for including the emotional factors that played a part in the creation of knowledge and photographs in the field.

33 Wendl 1998, p. 13.



Fig. 60.1



Fig. 60.2



Fig. 61



Fig. 62



Fig. 61.1



Fig. 63



Fig. 64



Fig. 65.1



Fig. 65.2/65.3



Fig. 66



Fig. 67

Fig. 65
Hans Himmelheber
Photo session with a woman
Byombo region, May 20–22, 1939,
b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 189-15
to 189-17

Fig. 66
Hans Himmelheber
Orchestra
Luluwa region, April 9, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 186-39

Fig. 67
Hans Himmelheber
“Chokwe boys’ circumcision camp”
Chokwe region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 174-24

which propagated the ideal of a village population untouched by the modern era, timeless and harmonious, versus the modern city with its forward-looking population.³⁴ Akin to “photobombing,” elements nevertheless crept into his pictures that point to the way in which tradition and modernity, city and countryside were closely intertwined in the Congo at that time. By “photobombing,” I mean the intentional or unintentional action while the photograph is being taken, such as when a person pushes their way into the foreground or is clearly visible in the background, or an object unintentionally attracts the attention of the viewer.³⁵ In a photograph of an orchestra in the Luluwa region, three young men in modern dress—perhaps pupils at a mission school—can be seen in the background running through the picture at precisely the moment when Himmelheber released the shutter [fig. 66]. Judging by their cowering posture, they had clearly just been told to leave the background as quickly as possible. This example shows that Himmelheber was indeed anxious to lend his pictures as traditional an atmosphere as possible.

Two such “photobombs” can be identified in a photo from inside a Chokwe *mukanda* camp [fig. 67]. Here Himmelheber wanted to document a masked figure’s costume being laced up—but at the same time a mask appears unexpectedly on the right edge of the picture. Most important, however, is the man in Western clothing sitting under a parasol in the background who seems uninvolved in the action; he was not part of Himmelheber’s intended visual narrative. This example shows quite plainly that a wealth of readings is possible, some of which have the potential to undermine a picture’s original intention and purpose. In this case the desired visual fiction—a *mukanda* practice unaffected by modernity—is deconstructed at second glance by the picture itself [for a recent description of *mukanda*, see essay Strother].

TENTATIVE PRESENCE: REPRESENTATIVES OF COLONIAL POWER, LOCAL HELPERS, AND ACQUIRING ART

“Back to Mushenge by camion with Mr. Delalois in the morning where collection remains at the mission. Bathing with brother in the afternoon,” writes Himmelheber in 1939.³⁶ From the diary we can gather how heavily he depended on the infrastructure of the colonial administration, concession companies, and missionaries for the logistics and organization of his expedition and occupation. Yet hosts, companions, and forerunners—missionaries, colonial agents, interpreters, chefs, etc.—rarely make an appearance in his photographs.

In order to visualize the colonial power’s presence in the photographic archive, we must look at series such as that which Hans Himmelheber took in Dibanga on January 9, 1939. In this region Albert Hoffmann, representative of the *Huileries du Congo Belge*, was commissioned to accompany Himmelheber³⁷. In the pictures we see Hoffmann approaching the camera on a deserted square with the village leader [fig. 68]; meanwhile the chief appears to be negotiating the payment for the photograph. The square subsequently serves as the stage for the following compositions that show, in one, Himmelheber [fig. 69.1] and in another, Hoffmann [fig. 69.2] having the chief explain arrows to them,

34 Geary 2002, p. 52. The visual politics of the Belgian colonial government posed a counter-movement to the photographs taken by the English missionary Alice Seeley in 1904, which captured the mutilation of the Congolese by soldiers from the Force Publique and made a broad public in the USA and Europe aware of the abuse of the population in the Congo Free State.

35 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photobombing>, accessed on August 23, 2019.

36 Himmelheber, diary, February 6, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

37 Himmelheber, diary, January 2, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

which Himmelheber then purchases. The series resembles a theatrical display of colonial power. Various actors enter the stage and the two Europeans take turns photographing the action. Another man appears on the stage and poses with a cane [fig. 70]. He is still holding the bill that has been handed over for the shot; later a nearby police officer is standing alongside him as an extra [fig. 71]. Although police officers and other assistants often make an appearance on these pictures, they are rarely in focus. They mostly remain unnamed in Himmelheber's archive and have only a peripheral presence in his photographs, such as when he takes a picture of the richly decorated daughter of one of his employees and captures the interaction between father and daughter [fig. 72].

Another subject that only surfaces here and there in Himmelheber's photos is the acquisition of artworks [see essay Oberhofer]. Himmelheber purchased thousands of objects in the Congo and his diary provides unique insights into their acquisition. He photographs the art objects he has purchased arranged in an overview on Congolese soil, hence proving their authentic provenance [fig. 73]. Portraits of local salespeople can be found in just two series in his photographic archive. They show art being purchased in the village of a female Kuba chief and the acquisition of a power figure [see stories, p. 88 and p. 92]. In these series Himmelheber stages the purchase as a picture story for a readership whom he already had in mind while taking the photographs. He published the picture with the Kuba chief in a specialist article on the art of the Kuba that was aimed at collectors and that can also be read as a guide to the best way to buy art. Later he sent the photos of the power figure being bought to the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, which also acquired the figure.³⁸

DELIBERATE FICTION: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ANTOINE FREITAS (1901–1966)

Hans Himmelheber's visual archive contains fourteen black-and-white photographs printed on postcard paper that he had bought in Kinshasa and/or Port Francqui (now Ilebo) from the local professional photographer Antoine Freitas [figs. 74–82]. Antoine Freitas migrated to the Congo from Angola in 1919 and learned photography from an English missionary in M'Banza-Kongo. From 1935 he traveled around large parts of the Congo with a homemade camera in the role of a mobile instant photographer before opening the Antoine Photo studio in Kinshasa in 1947.³⁹ An astonishing picture shows Freitas taking a photograph of four women in front of a backdrop in the village of Bena Mulumba in 1936 [fig. 83]. The picture illustrates the spectacle that a photo shoot entails. Himmelheber's photography sessions would have been similar. The painted backdrop hung on the left edge of the picture is also identifiable in the photos purchased by Himmelheber. Such pictures were commissioned by private individuals, but simultaneously served the photographers as "postcard material."⁴⁰ The creative visual constellations and the sitters' playful poses make Freitas's pictures captivating. They testify to the fun had by the photographic subjects during the shoot. The intention behind these pictures stands in direct contrast to that of Himmelheber: Freitas's customers consciously wanted to orchestrate an idealized image. In Freitas's open-air studio his subjects could

Fig. 68
Hans Himmelheber
"Chokwe chief with administrator Hoffmann"
Chokwe region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 180-3

Fig. 69
Hans Himmelheber and A. Hoffmann (?)
"Chokwe chief explaining arrows to me, admin. Hoffmann"
Chokwe region, 1938/39, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 180-13, 180-14

Fig. 70
Hans Himmelheber
Man with staff
Chokwe region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 180-24

Fig. 71
Hans Himmelheber
Kneeling man and policeman
Chokwe region, 1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 180-25

Fig. 72
Hans Himmelheber
"Pipe-smoking girl"
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 166-23, 166-24

Fig. 73
Hans Himmelheber
"My collection"
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 158-23

38 Index card III 9510, archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel and Himmelheber 1940.

39 For information on A. Freitas, see Saint Léon 1999 and Fall 2001.

40 Geary 2001, p. 110.



Fig. 68



Fig. 69.1



Fig. 69.2



Fig. 70



Fig. 71



Fig. 72



Fig. 73



Fig. 74



Fig. 75



Fig. 76



Fig. 77



Fig. 78



Fig. 79



Fig. 80



Fig. 81



Fig. 82

present themselves as they wanted to be remembered by posterity.⁴¹ To achieve this, Freitas also used artistic techniques like collage. This can be seen in the portrait of a young woman signed “Photo Antoine, Port Franqui, July 22, 1938,” to which the depiction of a messenger pigeon has been attached [fig. 76].⁴²

Himmelheber felt a similar aversion to such photos as to his own portraits of women in European clothing and with European jewelry. He bought Freitas’s works to demonstrate that local photography was a manifestation of urban “pseudo culture”; he described the poses of the people depicted as “not free, in marked contrast to the villages where the genuine cultural property was to be found.”⁴³ From today’s perspective the fourteen photographs taken at the same time as Himmelheber’s pictures and in similar places, show a parallel visual universe and clearly prove the constructive nature of photography. Such pictures illustrate why, in Africa, photographers are now referred to as authors of a parallel historiography.⁴⁴

KWETE AS THE NEXUS OF LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY

Georges Kwete Mwana (1913–1970), a son of the King of Mushenge, posed for both Himmelheber and Antoine Freitas. On January 20, 1939 Himmelheber photographed Kwete in Mushenge [fig. 84].⁴⁵ In the photo, Kwete, who mostly wore European clothing at official appearances from 1936, is shown in ceremonial dress.⁴⁶ For Freitas, too, Kwete posed in traditional regalia [fig. 85]. In the photograph he is wearing a simple wraparound skirt, as well as a sword and small hat, thereby articulating his identity as a dignified Kuba [see also essay Geary]. Regarding the composition, however, the two pictures differ considerably. In Himmelheber’s photograph, Kwete appears from a distance with a proud, aloof bearing, his gaze turned away from the camera, and his arms crossed. In Freitas’s picture, in contrast, Kwete looks out at us with an open, friendly expression, his hands resting on his hips. Kwete’s body language makes him seem much more approachable and relaxed. Freitas nevertheless emphasizes Kwete’s status as the king’s son and an important partner of the colonial administration by shooting him slightly from below, a perspective that makes people look dominant.

“Ironically, in attempting to defuse the power of these historicist fictions, we must rely upon photography and its vast array of signs, which also stand at the juncture of this refutation.”⁴⁷

This essay has attempted to analyze a visual archive using the example of Hans Himmelheber. The results show which thought patterns and visual cultures—both local and European—as well as which economic factors, emotions, mechanisms, and genuine moments, had an influence on Hans Himmelheber’s photographic archive of the Congo. By reconstructing some photographic moments, we have clarified the contribution made to the creation of these pictures by the photographs’ subjects, in this case the inhabitants of southeast Congo. Indeed, studies on the photographic history of Central Africa have demonstrated that the Congolese people who were photographed were instrumental in creating

41 On the memory function of portraits in Africa, see, e.g., Wendl 1998.

42 The collage technique was also mastered by professional photographers in West Africa (Guyer 2016).

43 Caption for sale purposes, archive of the Museum Rietberg.

44 On the parallel imagery of colonial and local photography in 1950s Congo, see Colard 2019.

45 Himmelheber, diary, January 22, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

46 On Kwete’s biography, see Kwete 2010.

47 Enwezor 1996, p. 20.



Fig. 83



Fig. 85



Fig. 84

Fig. 83
Unknown photographer
**Antoine Freitas with his box camera
in the Kasai**
Bena Mulumba, 1936, picture postcard
Revue Noire

Fig. 84
Hans Himmelheber
“King’s son called Kwete”
Mushenge, January 22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-38

Fig. 85
Antoine Freitas
Portrait of Kwete
Kasai, 1936–1939, gelatin silver print
Museum Rietberg Zürich

the pictures taken by ethnologists and other photographers and were themselves also active producers of pictures.⁴⁸ By drawing attention to the coauthorship of the photographers’ sitters, we aim to counteract the desubjectification of these individuals that goes hand in hand with ethnographic photography. Moreover, visual subjects that are entirely missing or only marginally represented, give us an insight into the selective nature of photographic archives. This became all the more apparent in light of Freitas’s pictures, which reveal a parallel photographic universe at the same time and in the same places as Himmelheber’s works.

Today, Congolese artists like Sammy Baloji, David Shongo, and Michèle Magma are reappraising Hans Himmelheber’s ethnographic photographs [see stories, p. 96 and p. 104]. In the process they are bringing these photographs into the here and now, and creating new fictions for the future.

48 Schildkrout 1991; Mack 1991; Geary 2002.

Die sechste Figur wie sich die
Sengianer tragen lassen. 6



Seit in dem ganzen Reich Sengo keine Pferde zu finden/
 denn sie sich zum ersten sehr auch zu finden / auch die Jenseiter die Dohfen vom
 Joch oder Karren nicht wissen abzurühren / sich eine Lande damit führen gelassen/
 oder nötige Sachen ihnen aufzuladen / für sie die Nöthigste gelehret Menschen an
 hand der Thier anzuführen / bey ihnen so sie frageten weihen vorweisen wollten / las-
 sen sie sich von ihren Leibesgeigen Knöcheln oder andern hierzu gebührgen Leuten/
 gleichsam in einer Craften / darinnen sie entweder sitzen oder liegen tragen. Nach
 der geschickte fortkommen mit der nötigen Art Karren so er die vorrag. war sich / wechset mit beschick-
 ten als also das wo ein Dandey müde er andere an deren statt stellen / und kommen sie mit solchen
 Leuten so bey tragen gewohnt. also geschickte fort / daß sie auch die Tagere
 für dens so auß geschickter Post bey uns fortgehen
 können.



Die Sengianer tragen, wie oben zu sehen ist, in einem...

Fig. 87

Fig. 86

“Mwaleta lunanda, mwaleta lunanda
Wazunga masambazi, mwaleta lunanda
Wazunga ma lunanda!”

“You brought us the white people
But with them so much misery
Because the whites are always on the move!”¹

1 De Bouveignes 1948, p.100.



Fig. 88



Fig. 89

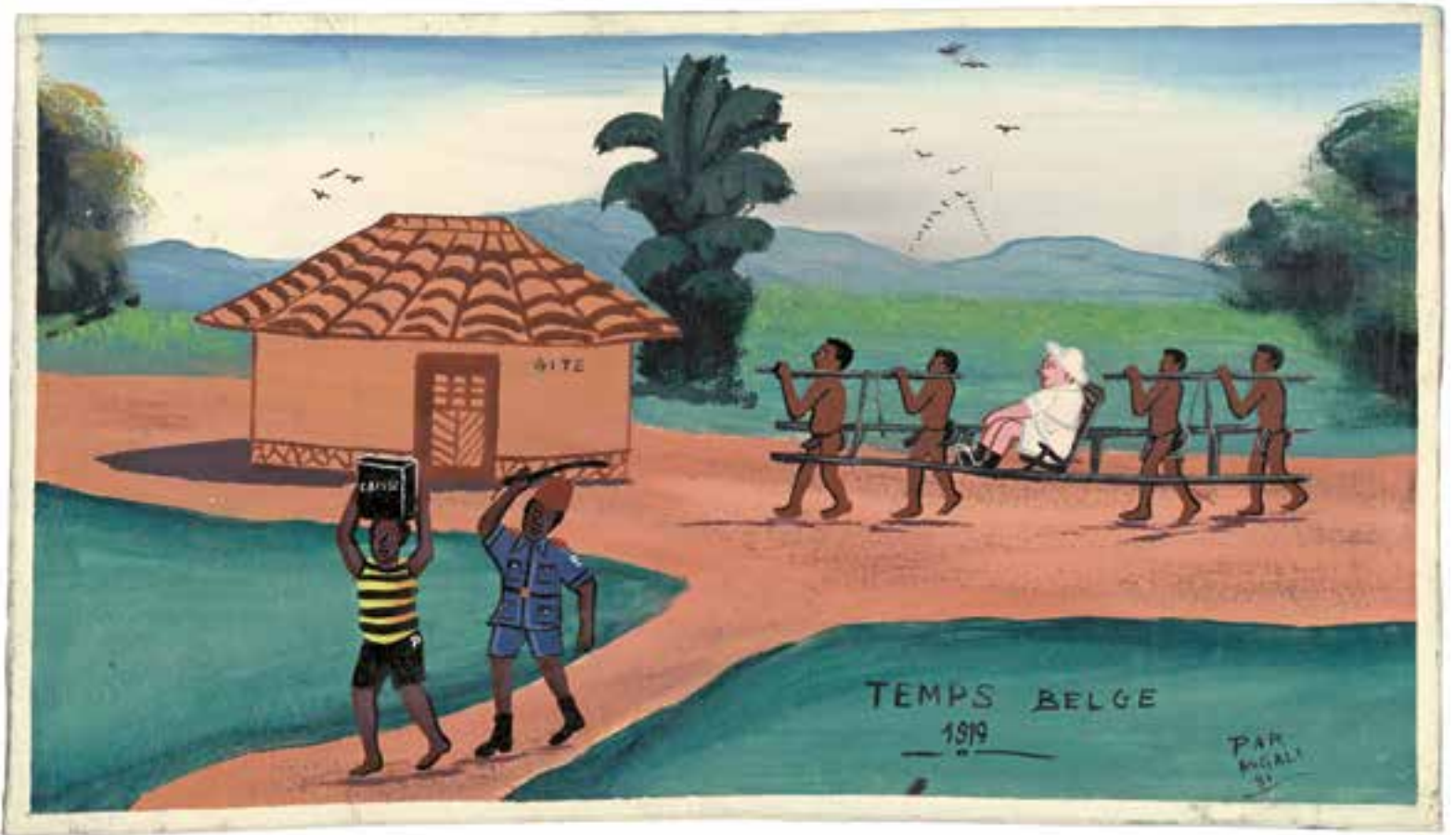


Fig. 90



Fig. 91



Fig. 92



Fig. 93



Fig. 94



Fig.95



Fig. 96



Fig. 97

Fig. 86
Duarde Lopez and Filippo Pigafetta
The sixth figure, how the Congolese are carried
From: *Regnum Congo hoc est Warhaffte vnd Eigentliche Beschreibung dess Königreichs Congo in Africa*. Frankfurt am Main 1609.
Zentralbibliothek Zürich, EE 1505

Fig. 87
Louis O'Hier de Grandpré
Tati, surnommé Desponts, courtier de Malembe, venant de sa petite-terre, en hamac
From: *Voyage à la côte occidentale d'Afrique, fait dans les années 1786 et 1787*. Paris 1801
Zentralbibliothek Zürich, NR 1710

Fig. 88
Artist of the Chokwe region
Tobacco pipe with tipoye motif
Before 1939, wood, metal,
51.5 × 8.5 × 7.2 cm
Kegel-Konietzko Collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 89
Artist of the Suku region
Mask with depiction of a tipoye
First half of the twentieth century, wood,
plant fibers, pigments, paper,
60 × 45 × 50 cm
Marc Felix Collection
Dr. de Winter, Jacques and Denise Schwob

Fig. 90
Angali
Temps Belge 1919
1991, oil on canvas, 46 × 80.5 × 2 cm
RMCA Tervuren, HO.2013.57.794

Fig. 91
Hergé
Tintin being carried in the tipoye
From: *Tim und Struppi. Tim im Kongo*,
Hamburg 1997 (first edition 1931/46)

Fig. 92
C. De Bruyne
Congo Belge. Maluku. Un chef Bafenunga au poste
Postcard c. 1925, dated July 6, 1931,
Maluku, colotype, 13.8 × 18.7 cm
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 93
Jean-François Audema
Le Tipoyé à 4 à Loango—Congo Français, Collection J. Audema
Photograph c. 1895, postcard c. 1904,
printed by A. Bergeret et Cie (Nancy,
France), Loango, Republic of the Congo,
colotype, 24 × 19 cm
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 94
Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Robert Visser
Congo. Phot. R. Visser, Déposé
Photograph before 1900, postcard c. 1905,
Republic of the Congo, colotype,
24 × 18.9 cm
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 95
Hans Himmelheber
Photographed from the tipoye
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-28

Fig. 96
Unknown photographer
Patrice Lumumba on a tipoye
Kisangani, May 1, 1960
Alamy Stock Photo, B9RM15

Fig. 97
Unknown photographer
The Ugandan president Idi Amin Dada being carried by four British businessmen
Uganda, 1975
Alamy Stock Photo, E115H9

TRANSPORTING THE POWERFUL: TIPOYE THROUGH TIME

— The *tipoye* is a means of transport that has been used in Central Africa for over 500 years.¹ The *tipoye* is a litter in the form of a hammock or palanquin, which was attached to one or two long pieces of wood and carried on the shoulders of two or four people. Its name comes from the Portuguese word *tipóia*, which in turn is borrowed from a language native to Brazil and originally referred to a sling for carrying children. Even the earliest travelers and missionaries in the sixteenth century reported that dignitaries and kings were carried around in a kind of hammock by slaves or servants [figs. 86/87]. The subject—a chief being transported in a hammock—was also frequently found in local art, as in the case with the Chokwe's prestigious pipe [fig. 88].

In the late nineteenth century the *tipoye* became a symbol of Africa's conquest and colonization by Europe. Colonial agents, officers, and missionaries had themselves transported from place to place by African bearers, some of whom were forced to carry out this hard work. The Suku mask portrays a white man sitting in a hammock that is being carried by two people who are standing in a canoe. In his hands the man is holding a book in which a piece of paper bearing Flemish words has been affixed [fig. 89]. The modern picture by Angali in the popular painting style depicts the power imbalance between the colonizers and the colonized [fig. 90]. While the Belgian man in his white suit is being carried by four men, another bearer is transporting the box containing the collected taxes. The picture of the supposedly superior white man and the servile African can also be found on postcards and in comics—as in Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo* [figs. 91–93].

Travelers and collectors like Robert Visser and Hans Himmelheber also used this means of transport [fig. 94]. According to Himmelheber, it was expected of him as a white man not to walk but to arrive by *tipoye* [fig. 95]. Being carried underlined his prestige and his economic superiority. Furthermore, he took numerous photographs of the landscape, the people, and the villages from this raised and simultaneously detached position.

Frequently the bearers sang special caravan songs during this hard work.² While they often served to entertain and followed the rhythm of their steps, there were also lyrics that referred directly to the person in the *tipoye*. The strenuousness of the work was criticized in particular. As the Europeans mostly did not understand the songs that were being sung about them in the local languages, it is possible to speak of a subversive form of criticizing the colonial power structure.

After independence, African politicians like Patrice Lumumba used the *tipoye* as a traditional and yet modern symbol of power [fig. 96]. The Ugandan ruler Idi Amin Dada even turned the situation on its head and had British businessmen carry him around [fig. 97]. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 On the history of the *tipoye*, see Etambala 2011/12.

2 De Bouveignes 1948, pp. 95–100.



Fig.98



Fig.99



Fig.100.1



Fig. 100.2



Fig. 100.3

Fig. 98
Léopold Gabriel
[Untitled] *Chef médaillé with his wife in the Belgian Congo*
Postcard c. 1930, Katanga Province (?),
gelatin silver print, 13.9 × 8.9 cm
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 99
S.N. Wellington
Kindu. Chef Lufungula avec sa famille
Photograph c. 1930, postcard published
c. 1935 by Nels, Brussels, Kindu,
Maniema Province, collotype, 13.7 × 8.7 cm
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 100
Muledi from Mukulu-Nzambi
Prestigious chair of a *chef médaillé*
Early twentieth century, Kwilu-Pende
region, wood, leather, metal, and glass,
97 × 49.5 × 70 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 804
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

ART AT THE SERVICE OF THE COLONIZER: THE PENDE CHAIR OF A CHEF MÉDAILLÉ — Art was not only used to oppose colonialization but also to support the colonial power. Among the traditional chiefs, the colonial administration in the Belgian Congo appointed so-called *chefs médaillés* who wore a medal on a chain as a distinguishing feature [figs. 98/99]. In the Belgian colonial system of indirect rule, these medal-wearing chiefs collected taxes and ensured that colonial law was enforced. Those who did not participate or who revolted were severely punished. In contrast to traditional chiefs, who were considered mediators between the population and the world of the ancestors, the “chiefs for the whites” possessed no ritual insignia of power. In the Kwilu region, where their position was especially contested, *chefs médaillés* consequently had bulky chairs made with carved backrests and feet that were intended to underline their social standing and their newly acquired political status.

The Chokwe are in fact more famous for their richly carved chairs than the Pende. Chokwe carvers reinterpreted Portuguese chairs as aesthetic emblems of chiefs’ power and adorned them with scenes of social and political life. Soon after Chokwe groups had settled in the Pende region in the 1890s, Pende carvers copied their style and adapted it for the emblems of the new political class. Later they also produced such chairs for the Western art market.

This chair is a particularly impressive example. Carved for his patron by the renowned artist Muledi from the village of Mukulu-Nzambi [fig. 100],¹ the chair’s imagery emphasizes the power of the new holders of office and their proximity to the colonial government. The mask and figures on the backrest have their eyes wide open, and as with *mangaka* power figures they are highlighted with glass. Their aggressive expression is a reference to the occult powers that *chefs médaillés*—so the chair implies—knew how to use to their own advantage. In this way the new chiefs came close to witchcraft. The dots spread over the entire chair and the chair’s paw-shaped feet refer to leopards and hence to the ambivalent position of the *chefs médaillés* as tax collectors and colonial agents: like a leopard they seized everything for themselves without doing anything in return. On the side of the chair, two scenes depict adultery, a dispute likewise arbitrated by the “chiefs for the whites.” Their identification and collaboration with white people are further stressed by the portrayal of one of the power figures on the backrest as a hat-wearing European. On the base another colonial official can be seen sitting in a *tipoye* and being carried by several armed soldiers. The chair’s menacing message is clear: the chief is acting on behalf of the colonial government and has its full support. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 See Strother 2016, pp. 207–219, as well as Strother 2008, pp. 41ff. Muledi died in 1946. Another chair from the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren is also attributed to him.



Fig.101



Fig.102

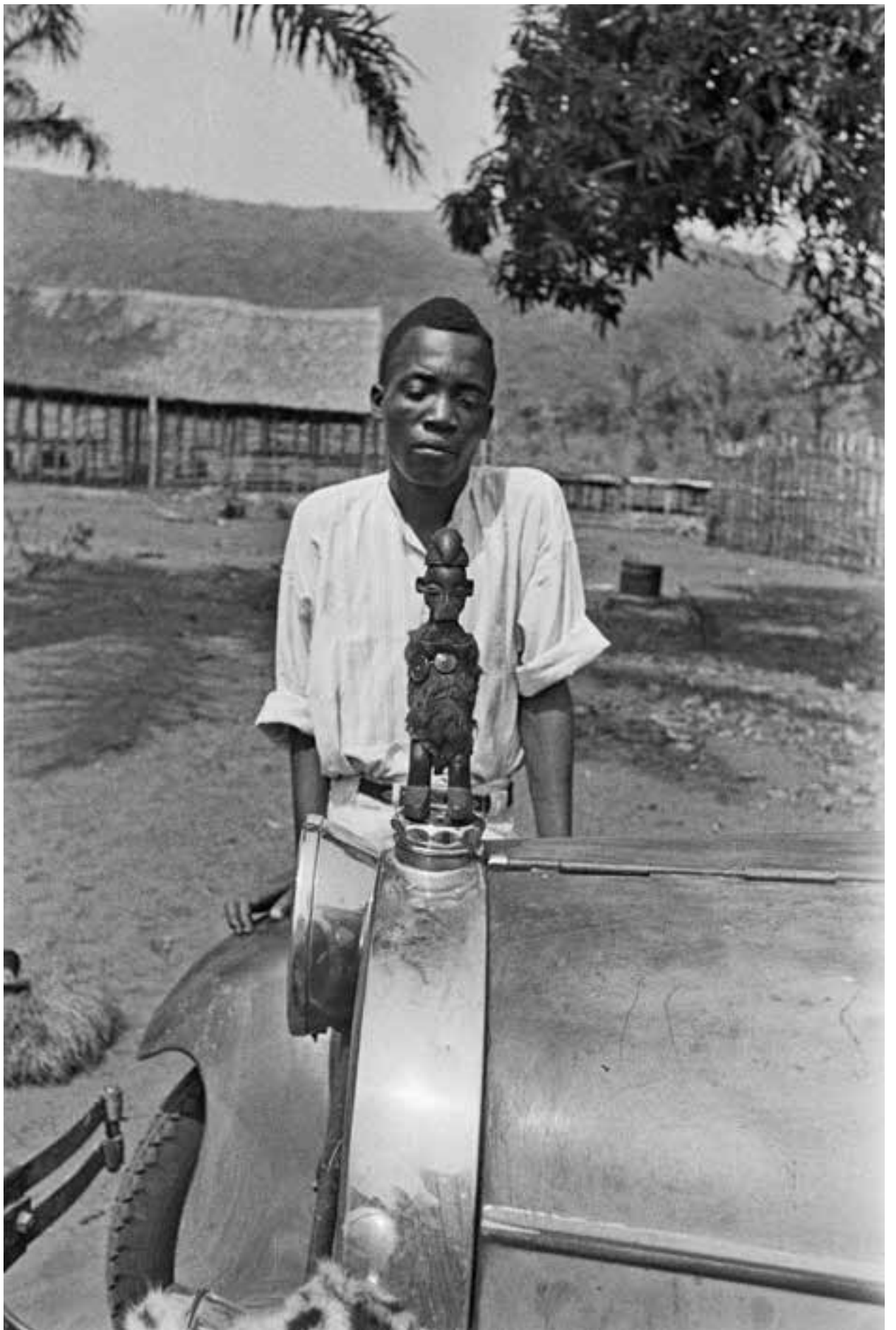


Fig.103



Fig. 104



Fig. 105

Fig. 101
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Ngolo mask with horns
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers, pigments,
67 × 29 × 36 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 19
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 102
Hans Himmelheber
Masked figure and men
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 190-37

Fig. 103
Hans Himmelheber
Yaka figure on car hood
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 158-28

Fig. 104
Hans Himmelheber
Figure on the roof of Himmelheber's car
Luluwa region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 186-3

Fig. 105
Artist of the Luluwa region
Stool in the form of a human figure
Before 1939, wood, 42 × 19 × 18 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.110
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

MAN AND MACHINE, AUTOMOBILE AND ART — “So stupid that I don't have a car. I know that there's nothing to be got from being here, but I'm stuck ...”¹

For over half a year Hans Himmelheber tried to buy his own vehicle—to no avail. Instead he had to rely on chiefs, colonial officials, and missionaries offering him a ride. Only in January 1939 was he successful, becoming the owner of a Chevrolet 1936. Himmelheber now covers up to 270 kilometers a day on potholed roads in his search for art, systematically working his way through the road network using a map from the automobile club. On his way he takes photographs from his car of whatever he encounters, for example, a masked figure from the Pende people's *mukanda* circumcision camp [fig. 101/102].

His preoccupation with and concern about the car, which was constantly in need of repair due to the bad roads and dust, becomes the main theme in the thirty-year-old's diary. In a broader context, Himmelheber's intensive preoccupation with the car can also be situated in the contemporary zeitgeist.

In the interwar period, car rallies that crossed Africa became fashionable. Such modern versions of the nineteenth century's great expeditions symbolized the subjugation of foreign lands and the superiority of Western technology.² One of the most famous rallies was the *Croisière Noire*, which took eight cars from Algeria to the Cape of Good Hope on South Africa's southern tip in 1924/25. The 8,000 photographs taken during the expedition include the portrait of a woman from the Congo, Princess Nobosodrou. The picture served as the model for a well-known Art Deco hood ornament designed for Citroën by François Bazin (1897–1956).³

Similarly, Hans Himmelheber also adorned cars in the Congo with art. When presenting the pieces he had acquired in the Yaka region, he mounted one of the figures on the hood of a car in the style of the *Croisière Noire* car mascot and photographed it [fig. 103].⁴ On another photograph leopard skins can be seen draped over the car [fig. 38]. There are other photographs of automobiles and art in Himmelheber's photographic archive, including the picture of a stool on the roof of his Chevrolet, which is now in the collection of the Museum Rietberg [figs. 104/105].

— Nanina Guyer

1 Himmelheber, diary, January 14, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

2 Geary 2002, p. 49.

3 My thanks to Sammy Baloji for this reference.

4 The figure was later sold to Weyhe Gallery in New York. See the catalogue *African N— Art*, Weyhe Gallery 1940.



Fig.106



Fig.107



Fig.108



Fig.109



Fig.110

Fig. 106
Artist of the Kuba region
Harp
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers,
66 × 24 × 20 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.101
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 107
Artist of the Kuba region
Cup for palm wine
Before 1939, wood, 19 × 15 × 12 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.14
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 108
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Textile with embroidery
Before 1939, raffia, 66 × 62 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2014.138
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 109
Hans Himmelheber
**Portrait of a Kuba woman selling art
with son**
Kuba region, March 8, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-30

Fig. 110
Hans Himmelheber
**A Kuba woman and Hans Himmelheber
in a staged purchasing scene**
Kuba region, March 8, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-35

THE FEMALE CHIEF, ART, AND PHOTOGRAPHY — In quest of everyday art, such as cups, boxes, or fabrics, Hans Himmelheber visited a large village between Mushenge and Port Francqui on March 8, 1939. There he met a female chief of the village who impressed him. Himmelheber documents this encounter in his diary:

“She is a very impressive aristocrat, tall and reserved with elegantly lowered eyelids. She sat down in front of me. All the others have to stand, and she was greeted like the male chiefs by the assembly, with everybody kneeling down and clapping in the familiar way while she sat still and didn’t reply.”¹

In the portrait Himmelheber takes of her and her son, an aloof, dignified woman looks out at us while the men in the background critically observe the goings-on [fig. 109]. Women in the Kuba region were held in high esteem and many of the artworks Himmelheber was looking for were owned by women [see essay Oberhofer]. In the village Himmelheber purchased two harps, several carved cups, crescent-shaped boxes, and raffia textiles [figs. 106–108]. Himmelheber has this transaction reenacted for a photograph and chooses the female chief as his sales partner [fig. 110]. This he also describes in his diary:

“Afterward I tried to have a photograph taken by one of my men of me with the female chief in a staged purchasing scene. However, while the semi-educated boys did not grasp in the slightest why we were taking this photograph, she immediately understood what it was all about and stretched out her hand for the money I was offering her as if we were bargaining.”²

The photograph shows Himmelheber sitting on a chair, a cup and textiles in his one hand, a coin in the other. The purchased works of art are spread out in front of him. The woman is seated lower than Himmelheber on a broad stool and is stretching out her hand toward the money he is offering. The male population of the village serves as a kind of frame around the main action.

This is one of the few times Himmelheber handed over his camera and had a photo taken of himself. The fact that he would do this while purchasing art, an activity to which he normally does not necessarily draw attention, is significant. What was Himmelheber’s intention with this photo? Himmelheber staged the image for the readers of the magazine *Brousse*, in which he would soon publish an essay on the art of the Kuba that was targeted explicitly at the collectors of Congolese art. He also printed this picture in the essay and gave it the caption “Achat d’objets par l’auteur, chez les Bakele” (“Purchase of objects by the author from the Bakele”).³ The photograph can be viewed as a visual instruction on how to buy art “correctly,” i.e., with money, publicly, and by mutual agreement.

And the woman whose name we do not know? The image can be interpreted in many different ways. Although the art was purchased and the photograph taken in a climate of general suppression, she was in fact able to increase her own standing with this performance as a salesperson and actor. — Nanina Guyer

^{1/2} Himmelheber, diary, March 8, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

³ Himmelheber 1940.



Fig.111



Fig.112



Fig.113



Fig.114

Fig. 111
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure “Yankima”
Before 1939, wood, antelope horn,
plant fibers, sheet copper, brass studs,
snakeskin, cord, 164 × 65 × 54 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9510
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 112
Hans Himmelheber
The power figure is carried over
Songye region, April 28, 1939,
b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-21,
FHH 188-22, FHH 188-18

Fig. 113
Artist of the Songye region
Cap
Before 1939, feathers, glass beads, plant
fibers, 21 × 16 × 18 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9496
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 114
Hans Himmelheber
**The Chevrolet in a ditch, the figure in
focus**
Songye region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-23

FROM POWER FIGURE TO MUSEUM PIECE: THE TURBULENT HISTORY OF “MITEMBE’S YANKIMA”¹ — Hans Himmelheber’s archive offers the opportunity to link together objects, photographs, and texts to create object biographies. This can be demonstrated by the example of the power figure called Yankima [fig. 111]. From Himmelheber we know that this imposing and unusually large figure’s task was to help Chief Mitembe’s village to produce a large number of children. He states: “They literally say he brings the children into the world.”² It follows that the object was a charged figure that was believed to have agency. The materials affixed to the figure like copper, upholstery nails, beads, snakeskin, or the medicine in its navel served to activate the object [cf. the essay by Oberhofer/Mannes/Stenger]. According to Himmelheber, as a rule he was only able to purchase power figures that had become ineffective.³

Hans Himmelheber bought the Yankima figure from Chief Mitembe on April 28, 1939 in a village on the main road not far from Kabinda. Like a film sequence, he documents how the figure is carried along the main road [fig. 112, see also p. 222]. The ethnologist leaves the village around three o’clock. Beforehand he is warned that there is disagreement in the village about whether the Yankima’s power really has expired.⁴ Shortly afterward, his vehicle leaves the road and slides into a ditch. In his diary he writes: “The natives said to themselves that it was because the great Mukishi doesn’t want to let me cross the bridge (twenty meters away).”⁵

The scene with the car in the ditch is also captured by Himmelheber on camera [fig. 114]. The photograph shows a missionary who has rushed to his aid with personnel, the unloaded car, and the large figure in focus. For the photo the figure has been adorned with an unusual cap made of glass beads and clipped feathers, only two examples of which Himmelheber encounters on his travels [fig. 113].⁶

Hans Himmelheber acquired the figure for the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. A comparison between its modern-day appearance and the way it looked in 1939 reveals that it was further manipulated after its arrival at the museum in Basel. Today the power figure wears a raffia skirt and an antelope horn that has been affixed to its head the wrong way around. As such the figure has been aligned with Western notions of the artistic canon of Songye figures, which are customarily adorned in this way.⁷ — Nanina Guyer

1 Himmelheber, diary, May 12, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

2 Index card III 9510, (archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel).

3 Index card III 9510, (archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel).

4 Himmelheber 1960, p. 406.

5 Himmelheber, diary, April 28, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

6 Index card III 9496, (archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel).

7 Index card III 9510, (archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel).

EVOLVE: MEMORIES OF AN *ÉVOLUÉ*

Michèle Magma

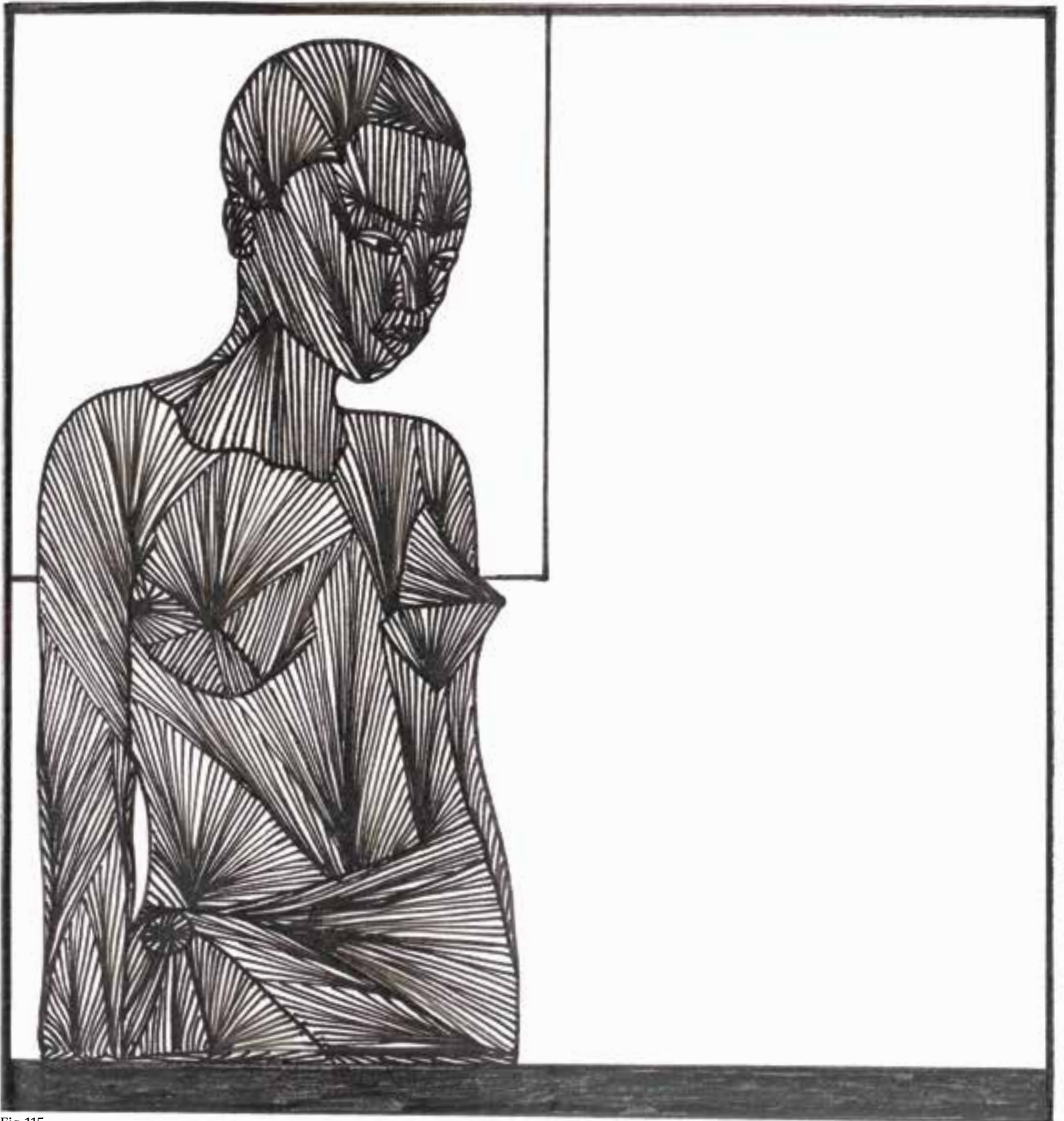


Fig.115

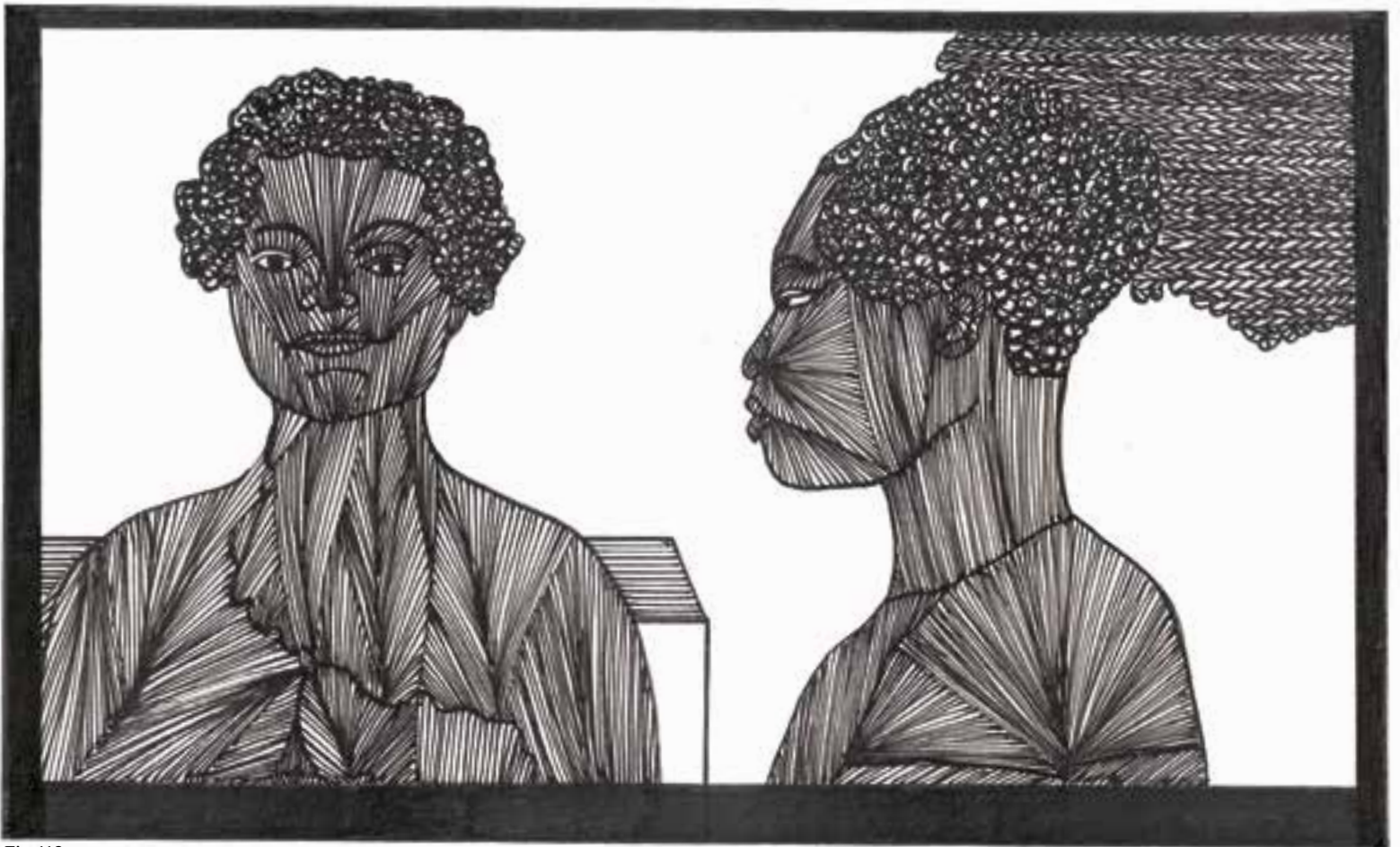


Fig.116



Fig. 1171



Fig.1172

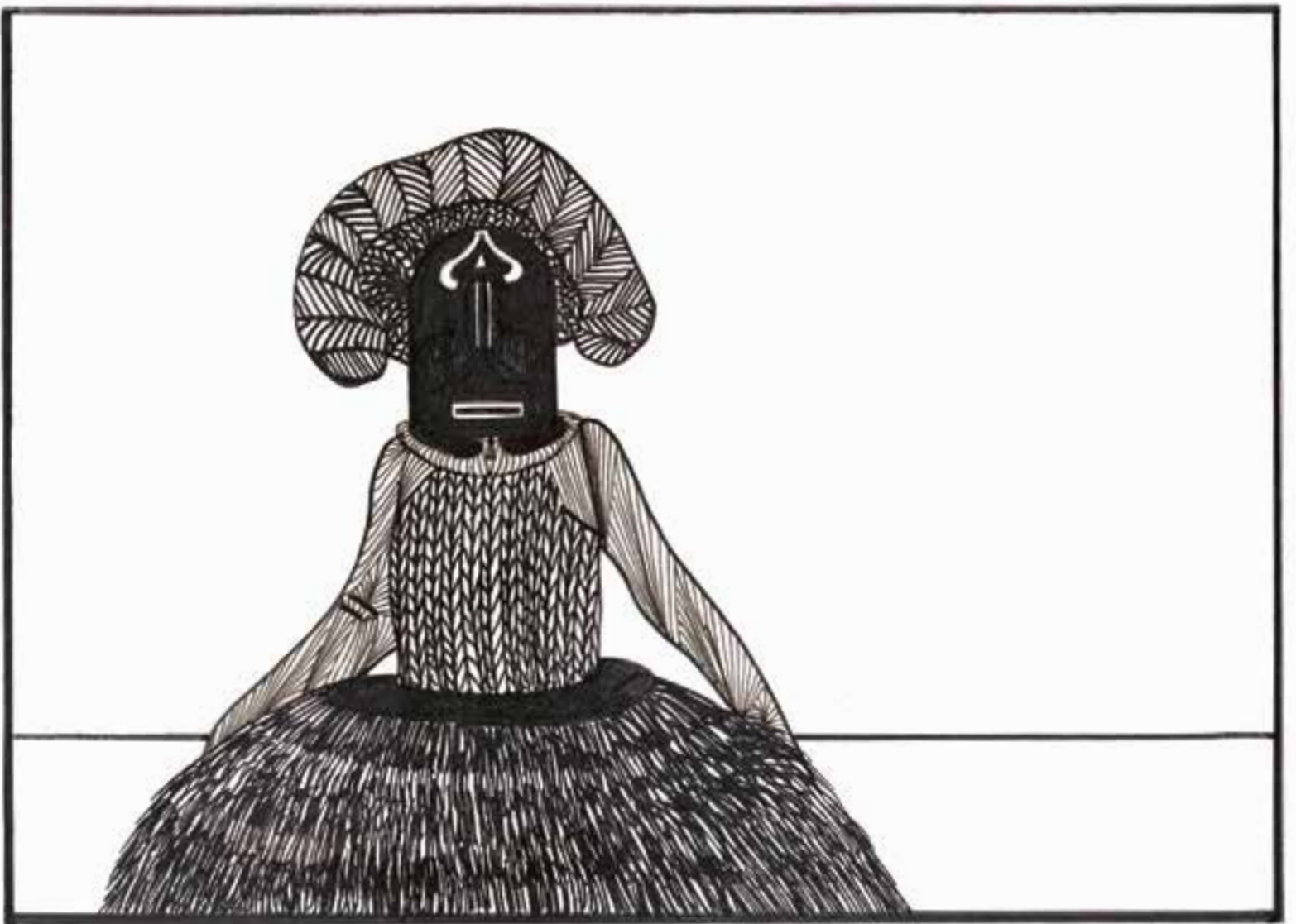


Fig. 118



Fig. 119

Fig. 115/116/118/119
Michèle Magma
EVOLVE
2019, drawings
Michèle Magma, commissioned by
Museum Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 117
Studio Photo Guye, Kinshasa
**Malongo Isaac Magma and
Ndenga Mpuntu Marie**
1967, photo paper, 20 × 30 cm
Personal archive – Michèle Magma

Fig. 120
Hans Himmelheber
Portrait of a young woman
Kuba region, January 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-13

Fig. 121
Hans Himmelheber
Women with traditional hairstyles
Kuba region, February 2, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-8

Fig. 122
Hans Himmelheber
Chihongo guardian mask
Lele region, January 6, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 178-32

Fig. 123
Hans Himmelheber
Chief with feather cap and sword
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-23

In *Le Monde d'hier: Souvenirs d'un Européen*, Stefan Zweig traces the destiny of a generation brutally confronted with a changing history and to some extent with the failure of civilization. The conflicts in Germany, which would change Europe with the Second World War, climaxed in 1938. Hans Himmelheber carried out his ethnological journey to the Belgian Congo in this charged situation, in 1938/39. At this point in time, when colonial ideology had reached its peak, racist thinking dominated, which preached the inequality of colonists and the colonized.

In 1938/39 Michèle Magma's grandfather Malongo Isaac Magma was twenty years old and worked for the Belgian Congo administration, where he strove to become what was known by the colonial government and the colonized population as an *évolué*. Did Hans Himmelheber and Malongo Magma cross paths in Congo? No! So what sort of view could an ethnologist have had of a colonized civilization while his own was in the process of sinking? What sort of opinion, as a future *évolué*, could Malongo Magma have been expected to form of Hans Himmelheber?

For the exhibition *Congo as Fiction*, Michèle Magma has chosen to create an installation that explores the complex legacies from the Belgian colonization on the *évolué* generation. Michèle Magma has delved into the ethnologist Hans Himmelheber's photographs and created an installation combining drawings, photographs, and texts.

The *EVOLVE* project explores the years 1938/39 within a colonial context and, in doing so, connects Himmelheber's ethnologic travels and the history of the Magma family. The artist gathers therein Himmelheber's ethnological photographs, her own drawings, photographs of her (educated) grandparents, and pieces written by her father, the son of an *évolué*.

The drawings are inspired by Hans Himmelheber's photographs, including the one from the *Zaire* catalogue, 1938–1939 [figs. 120–123]. Each photograph is drawn in Indian ink. The drawings are always composed of tightly drawn continuous lines depicting bodies or spaces. Each of these scarrings of the “paper/skin” is evidence of the artist's repeated gesture. Michèle Magma draws as if carrying out a ritual designed to repair a truncated, forgotten, obliterated ... colonized history.

“At that time being an *évolué* was the tops! We knew our *évolué* parents were going to wrest the country from the whites.” — Dieudonné Isaac Magma

“I did not inherit any of the pride my father might have felt during the colonial period, I did not inherit the shame of being the granddaughter of an *évolué*. I feel neither shame nor pride. I incorporate the plurality of my forebears—they are what makes me who I am. My name is Malongo, like my grandfather. This Christian name has been passed down to me along with a thirst for knowledge, a constant need to question the world and its societal components, and art has become their permanent receptacle.” — Michèle Magma



Fig. 120



Fig. 121



Fig. 122



Fig. 123

BLACKOUT POETRY, IDEA'S GENEALOGY

David Shongo

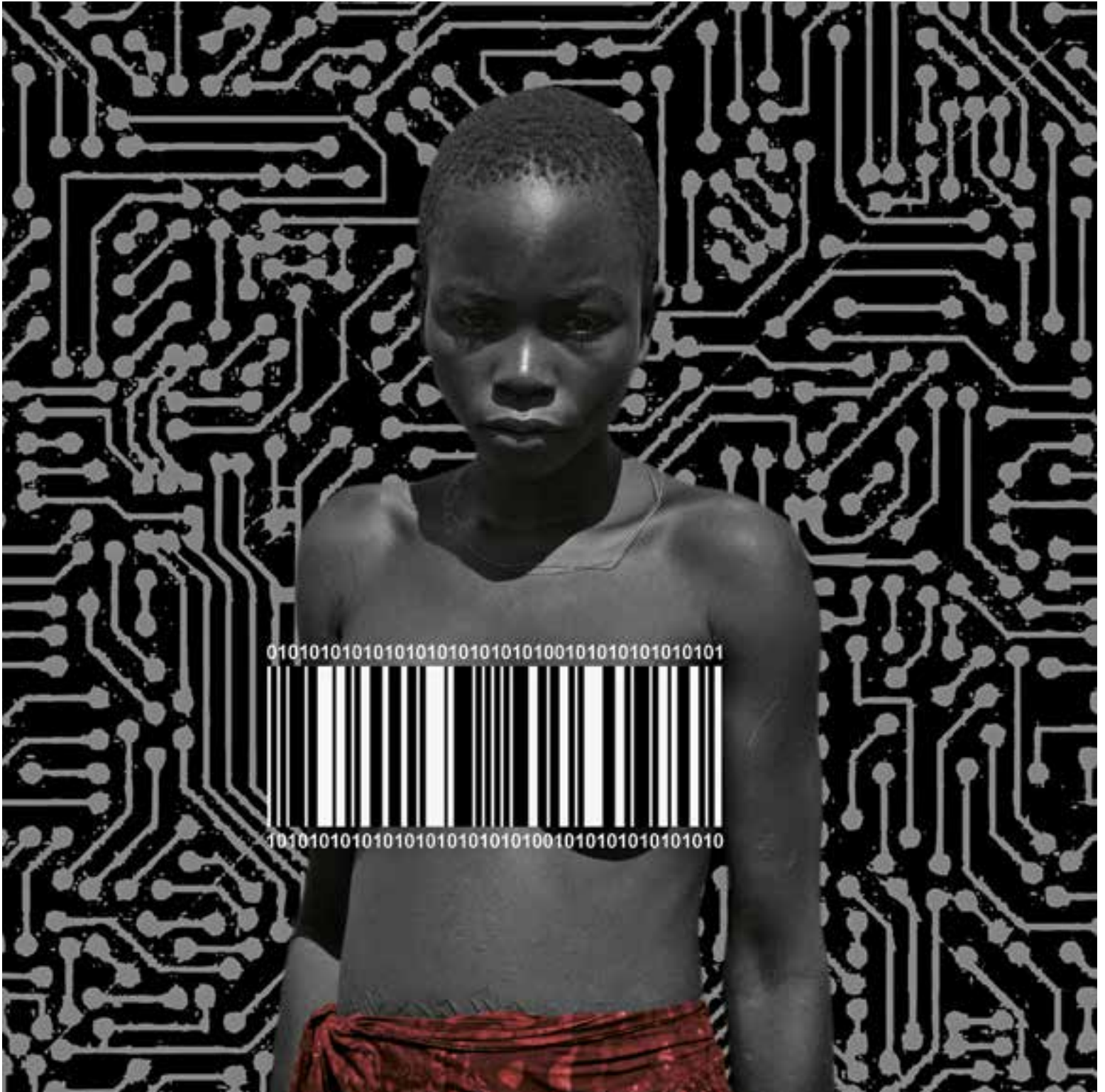


Fig. 124.1



Fig.124.2



Fig.124.3

I was in contact with the archives at the Salesians of Don Bosco in Lubumbashi for the first time in 2017. At that time, I began my research on the link between languages and ethnic musical harmonies of the Congo. Father Léon Verbeek, with whom I worked, had presented to me the hunting songs of southeastern Upper Katanga also preserved at the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, and photos of the colonial era. After listening to the songs and seeing the pictures, I was fascinated as a musician, composer, and visual artist, to see how the contents of the archives were ‘encrypting’ and complex for me. Very quickly, my research turned to the issue of the decomposition of memory and the colonial inheritance. That is how I started to focus on super-centenary archives. By this, I mean archives of the Congo that have lived and carried data of 100 years or more.

For me, archives are not only tools that carry values and information, but are also benchmarks for understanding problems related to the colonial past. They are traces of history and a guiding thread back and forth. In parallel, they served and serve colonialist and anti-colonialist propaganda and continue to be used to shape the image of Congo in the world. As a Congolese artist, manipulating archives thus amounts to disrupting the psychology of thinking about the colonial Congolese image constructed by colonial narratives.

It was in this process that I first became interested in the photographs of Himmelheber. Himmelheber’s photographs, in particular, carry an interesting contradiction. Although this material expresses the will to highlight the art and the people photographed, it still inherently carries Himmelheber’s colonial gaze. It is from this perspective that I began to break down the colonial perspective on the photos, erase it in order to leave the photos a power of questioning, and also build a genealogy of ideas from these photos. — David Shongo

Fig. 124.1+3
David Shongo

Bugs

From the series *BLACKOUT POETRY, IDEA'S GENEAOLOGY*
Lubumbashi, 2019, digital print on aluminium, David Shongo, commissioned by Museum Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 124.2

Hans Himmelheber

Portrait of a young woman

Kuba region, January 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-11

Fig. 125.1

Hans Himmelheber

Dignitary

Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 163-35

Fig. 125.2

David Shongo

Colonial Binary

From the series *BLACKOUT POETRY, IDEA'S GENEAOLOGY*
Lubumbashi, 2019, digital print on aluminium, David Shongo, commissioned by Museum Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 126.1

Hans Himmelheber

Woman with cartridge cases as necklace

Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 158-10

Fig. 126.2

David Shongo

Ma Nkaki

From the series *BLACKOUT POETRY, IDEA'S GENEAOLOGY*
Lubumbashi, 2019, digital print on aluminium, David Shongo, commissioned by Museum Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 127.1

Hans Himmelheber

Male portrait

Pende/Chokwe-Region, 24.5.1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 190-35

Fig. 127.2

David Shongo

Untitled

From the series *BLACKOUT POETRY, IDEA'S GENEAOLOGY*
Lubumbashi, 2019, digital print on aluminium, David Shongo, commissioned by Museum Rietberg Zürich



Fig. 125.1



Fig. 125.2



Fig. 126.1

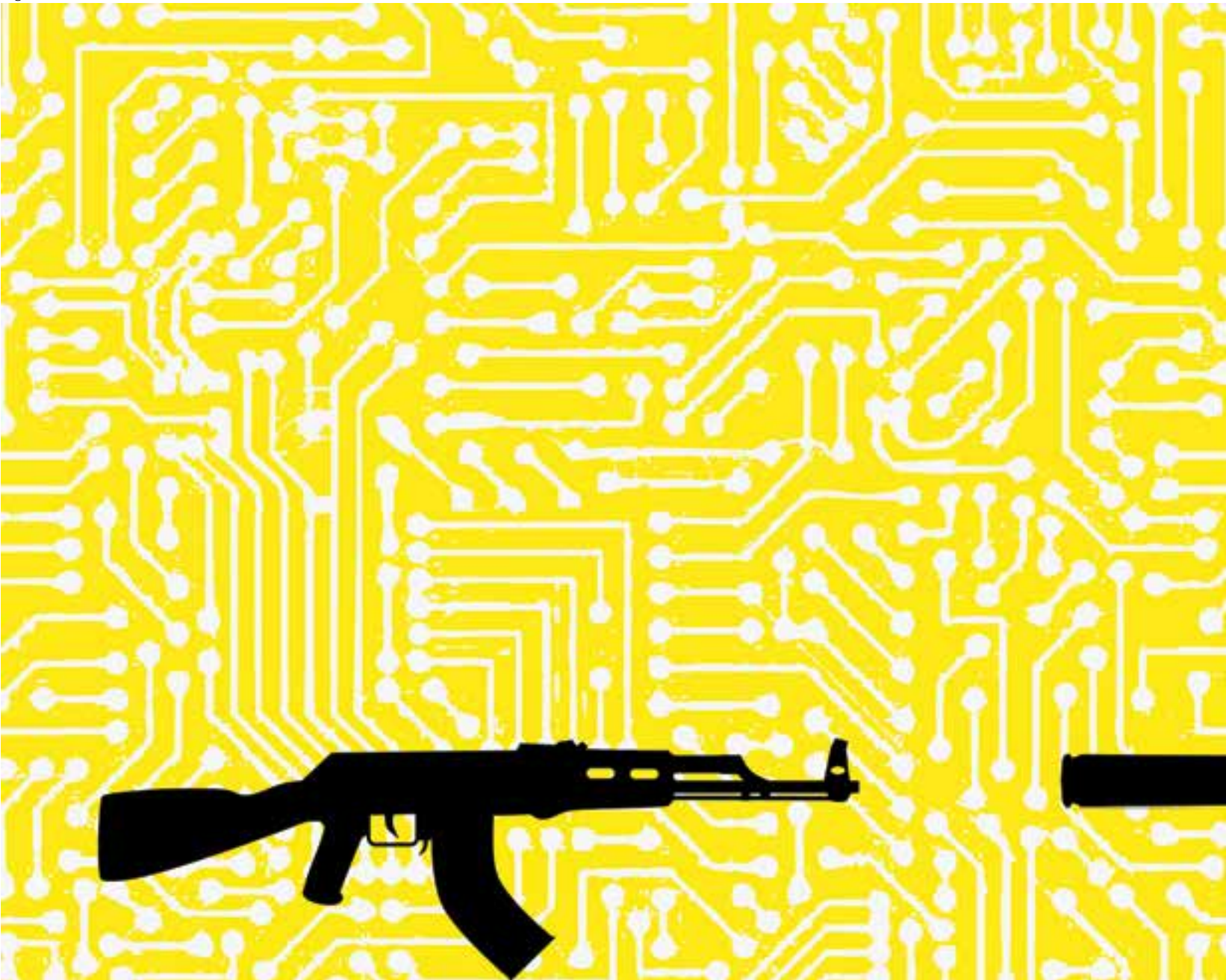


Fig. 126.2



Fig.1271



MUSTERKOLONIE

Fig.127.2



DESIGN AND ELEGANCE

VISITEZ LE CONGO BELGE



Tableau de Renseignements Pratiques

ÉDITÉ PAR

L'OFFICE NATIONAL
DU TOURISME DE BELGIQUE
Place de Broeckère, 48 - Bruxelles

N° 4

JANVIER
1938

Fig. 128

PERPETUATING A MYTH: IMAGES FROM THE KUBA KINGDOM AND WESTERN FANTASIES (1920s TO 1950s) Christraud M. Geary

In January of 1938, five months before Hans Himmelheber embarked on his collecting endeavor to Central Africa, the *L'Office national du tourisme de Belgique* in Brussels issued a map brochure titled *Visitez le Congo belge* (Visit the Belgian Congo). It belonged to a series of publications stimulating tourism to and in the Belgian colony [fig. 128]. The cover design by painter Roger van Gindertael (Belgian, 1899–1982) presents iconic sights and works of art associated with the colony. The black and white rendering of a towering male sculpture is modeled on a master carving by an unidentified artist of the Teke people; an elephant pulling a cart in front of a palm tree reminds viewers of ongoing projects to domesticate African elephants; and a lava-spewing volcano in the colony's northeast looms in the background. A strip resembling the patterns of decorated textiles from the realm of the Kuba kingdom stretches across the bottom of the cover.¹

The inclusion of the wooden figure and the textile strip reflected the fame and reputation of several iconic peoples and their art in the colony and abroad. Among them were the Bushoong, in older writings Bushongo, whose kings in the capital of Nsheng, also Mushenge, ruled over a confederacy of related peoples in the Kasai Province. Their indigenous neighbors and foreigners referred to the confederacy as the Kuba or Bakuba kingdom. Its fame in the geographic north dated back to the late nineteenth century, when explorers and missionaries heard from neighboring peoples about this large kingdom in little traveled parts of the Congo Free State, established in 1888 as a private holding under the harsh rule of Léopold II, King of the Belgians. Stories about the mythical kingdom soon told of a people superior to others in Africa. Such tales resonated with age-old stereotypes according to now debunked hierarchies of race and political organization, which classified Africans as ranging from “ignoble savages” at the lowest level to “noble savages” at the apex.

Under King Léopold's regime, the Kuba peoples and their rulers experienced hard times. Unwilling to open the kingdom to the cruel exploitation of resources, and the abuses and atrocities by some of King Léopold's agents, the monarchs rejected any outside interference. The first foreigner to enter the forbidden kingdom and its capital Nsheng in 1892 was the African-American Protestant missionary Dr William Henry Sheppard.² Soldiers of King Léopold's Force Public attacked Nsheng in 1900,

1 *Visitez le Congo belge. Tableau de Renseignements Pratiques*, no. 4, Brussels: L'office national du tourisme de Belgique, January 1938.

2 Sheppard 1917.

and further efforts by the Belgians to subjugate the kingdom followed. Inhabitants of the Kuba realm and elsewhere were pressed into labor for European companies that had opened establishments in the area in order to capitalize on the riches of rubber, palm oil, and minerals; they were forced to build roads, provide portage, and many other services.³ After the Belgian parliament annexed King Léopold's private fiefdom, which became the Belgian Congo in 1908, the storied Kuba kingdom and its capital were impacted by various reforms in the expanding colonial administration.

While these momentous changes occurred, prolific writing by visitors, among them German ethnologist Leo Frobenius who traversed the Kasai central region in 1905 and the Hungarian ethnographer Emil Torday who did so in 1907/08, nevertheless contributed to consolidation of the Kuba myth and promotion of Kuba arts.⁴ Before turning to ethnology, Torday had worked as a trader for the Belgian Compagnie du Kasai and was thus familiar with the Congo Free State. When he reached the Kuba kingdom, he was received by King Kot aPe (ruled 1902–1919), an indication that the relationship between the Kuba, foreigners, and the Belgian colonial administration and economic enterprises was changing. Books, popular reports, and visual media such as illustrated magazines, picture postcards, and even trade cards contributed to the longevity of the myth and its elements in the following decades.⁵

What elements shaped the core of this myth fostering Westerners' belief in the exceptional nature of the Kuba, and according to eminent historian Jan Vansina contributed to the survival of the kingdom through turbulent times?⁶ One narrative focused on the all-powerful paramount rulers (sing. *nyim*, referred to as *lukengo* in older literature), who possessed sacred attributes and governed an orderly and hierarchically structured state. The arts, which included stunning dances and performances of masks, also played a major role in these constructions [see story, p. 128]. Unique wooden sculptures (*ndop*), thought to be portraits of ancient kings, and utilitarian artifacts of wood with rich surface decoration created in the kingdom gained attention in Europe and the USA early on. Kuba fine palm fiber textiles with bold geometric designs resonated with artists of the Art Nouveau and the Jugendstil movements such as Gustav Klimt, and drew the attention of Paul Klee and Henri Matisse [figs. 166/167]. The artists were inspired by and admired the Kuba aesthetics of abstraction, which broke with Western representational practices.⁷ By the 1930s, Kuba cloths were all the rage among collectors including Matisse, who actually owned Kuba textiles. Hans Himmelheber was aware of this fascination when he remarked, "Every collector is familiar with the beautiful raffia fabrics, which the Bakuba decorate in various techniques."⁸

ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Hans Himmelheber, who departed on his trip some thirty years after Frobenius's and Torday's ethnological and collecting missions, was familiar with the writings and illustrations in their books. According to his diary, he considered Torday's and the others' undertakings as roadmaps for his own efforts, when he

3 Geary 2002, pp. 29–43.

4 Torday 1925; Torday 1925a; on Torday see Mack 1990; Sheppard 2017.

5 About the visualization of the Kuba myth, see among others, Darish 2015, pp. 14–20; Geary 2002, pp. 97–102; Geary 2015, pp. 56–67.

6 Vansina 2007, pp. 5–29, esp. p. 7.

7 On Klimt see Traeger 2015, pp. 68–79. On Matisse see Mack 2012.

8 "Jedem Sammler sind die schönen Raffiastoffe vertraut, die die Bakuba in verschiedenen Techniken verzieren." Himmelheber 1960, p. 365; see also Fischer and Mayer-Himmelheber 1993, p. 101, figs. 133/124.

traveled to the kingdom in order to acquire objects and textiles for his various clients and sponsors financing the stay.⁹ However, by the time of his voyage, the infrastructure in the region had changed considerably since earlier days. The establishment of rail services between Port Francqui (now Ilebo) and Lulua-burg (now Kananga) in 1928 presented a watershed, and smaller connecting lines facilitated movement for non-Africans. Railroad stops, which offered economic opportunities, developed into settlements where African peoples of many ethnic origins congregated.¹⁰

Auto routes existed as well, although their condition during the dry and rainy seasons was unpredictable. Initially, Himmelheber relied on transportation from European and American residents who owned vehicles, until he finally acquired his own car, which—due to its frequent breakdowns—caused him constant headaches [see story, p. 84]. Travel to smaller places in the so-called *brousse* (bush) off the main routes remained difficult, and Himmelheber often conducted such excursions either on foot or in a *tipoye*, that is, a litter carried by indigenous porters [fig. 95]. European companies had expanded their enterprises and reach, while churches and stations of various missionary societies dotted the landscape. As Himmelheber reported in his diary, Europeans and Americans accommodated him privately throughout his travels. He also stayed in rest houses (*gites*) established by the colonial administration, in hotels, or in lodgings provided by local chiefs.

One wonders whether under these different circumstances Himmelheber's and other visitors' accounts, and in particular their photographs and films, reinforced or challenged pre-existing notions about the Kuba peoples and their arts. The following explorations in this essay suggest that many travelers remained determined to document their encounter with a mythical people. And how did local Kuba actors, including the king, respond to these desires? Did they fulfill their visitors' expectations, thus consciously reinforcing Western fantasies? In other words, did they become coproducers and create scenarios that helped maintain the myth? We will see that this was indeed the case, for they profited from reenacting and perpetuating the myth.

VISITING THE KUBA REALM IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

In the interwar years, visitors and collectors of various backgrounds arrived in the kingdom and its capital Nsheng, the residence of its monarch *nyim* Kot Mabiinc who had succeeded his predecessor *nyim* Kot aPe in 1919. The colonial administration had supported his enthronization even though he was paralyzed, and made him a *chef médaillé* by awarding him the medal bestowed upon traditional leaders in recognition of their authority over their subjects. Their loyalty helped the administration in the effort to establish indirect rule over indigenous peoples.¹¹ Foreigners yearned to meet or just see this famous paramount ruler, bought carvings, textiles, and metal objects, and witnessed splendid performances, which included dances and at times performances by maskers [fig. 129].

9 Himmelheber, diary, January 19 and March 5, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg Zürich). At times, though, he corrected errors in Torday's earlier accounts.

10 Yelengi 1997, pp. 182–211.

11 Vanhee 2005, pp. 79–82, esp. p. 79.



Fig. 129



Fig. 130

Fig. 129
Unidentified photographer, provided by
Émile Muller
The king with dancers
Mushenge, 1927–1935, b/w negative
Pierre Loos, Brussels

Fig. 130
Unidentified photographer, provided by
Émile Muller
**The king with display of objects and
maskers**
Mushenge, 1927–1935, b/w negative
Pierre Loos, Brussels

Among the image makers attracted to the Kuba realm were Émile Muller or professional photographer and amateur ethnographer Casimir d'Ostoya Zagourski (1883–1944), a Polish émigré in the Congo, who had established a photographic business in Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) around 1925. By the mid-1930s, he began to offer photo prints and a series of around 400 postcards titled *L'Afrique qui disparaît* (“Vanishing Africa”), featuring peoples in the Belgian Congo and neighboring colonies. He traveled the colony by car and took images of the Kuba sometime between 1929 and 1937.¹² Beautifully exposed and composed, the black-and-white pictures of his visit to Nsheng have been widely published to this day, among them a famous portrait of *nyim* Kot Mabiinc [fig. 138].

When Himmelheber arrived in Léopoldville in late 1938, Zagourski was at the peak of his career. A year earlier he had displayed his images at a colonial exhibition in Paris and also won a *Medaille d'Or, Grand prix* (Gold Medal, Grand Prize) for his work during a show in Brazzaville in the neighboring French Congo. It remains an open question whether Himmelheber saw Zagourski's widely distributed postcards while in Léopoldville and throughout his travels. He was aware of the work by other image makers living in the Congo, among them African photographer Antoine Freitas [see essay Guyer].¹³ One can be certain that many pictures and postcards made their way back to Kuba country, where rulers, local people, as well as residents from various countries in the geographic north became familiar with them.

Other image makers included the Americans Ray Garner (1913–1989), a documentary filmmaker, and his wife Virginia Garner (1915–2007), a photographer. Together they produced several short propaganda films for the African Motion Picture Project (AMPP) established by the American Emory Ross of the Disciples of Christ Mission in order to find donors and recruits back home in the USA for Presbyterian missions abroad. The couple arrived in the Congo in May 1938 and left in August 1939, overlapping almost entirely with Hans Himmelheber's stay, although they apparently never met. Virginia Garner's diary and other project notes, published in 2011, provide important insights into the social conditions and everyday life in an era of consolidated colonialism.¹⁴ Similar to Himmelheber's diary, these private writings present an unfiltered look at challenges and realities, among them the ways in which Congolese at the time responded to being photographed and filmed.

The Garners' silent movies, which were the public and carefully edited results of their project, celebrated progress and the civilizing aspects of missionary activity according to scripts mostly prepared for them by a writing team in the USA. While in Kuba country, the couple enjoyed the support of the Reverend Hezekiah M. Washburn (1884–1972) of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission in Bulape, located in the kingdom of the Kete peoples, who were closely associated with the Kuba. The missionary became the main white protagonist in two short movies filmed in Nsheng and Bulape. Besides enlisting missionaries, the Garners hired mission-educated Congolese to act in the filmic episodes and paid in kind or with money for their and other local people's services.¹⁵

12 Pluskota 2002, pp. 58–67.

13 My special thanks to Nanina Guyer for sharing this fascinating information with me.

14 Garner 2011; Reynolds 2010, pp. 459–479. Reynolds's introduction to Garner's *Diaries* is a reprint of this article.

15 Garner 2011, pp. 211–212; Reynolds 2010, p. 472.

The Garners' focused on visualizing the progress of converting the Kuba to Christianity and demonstrating the advance of Western civilization. Their agendas differed from those of Himmelheber and others, who sought to create images of a primordial people, thus maintaining part of the myth. Some elements in the Garners' films nevertheless reflected and reenacted the Kuba myth, such as the opening passage of the film *The Light Shines in Bakubaland. An Epic of the Mission Field*, Part I. It presents the intertitle "Bakubaland is a unique African kingdom in south-western Belgian Congo" with scenes of landscapes, a masker dancing, weavers, and some of *nyim* Kot Mabiinc's "900 wives" singing and rhythmically striking gourds while the king looks on. Another intertitle—"The arts and crafts of the Bakuba excel those of most African tribes"—precedes scenes of weaving and the making of mats and baskets. Yet a third intertitle—"For over four hundred years, the kingdom has had its own established laws and courts of justice, including higher courts of appeal"—alludes to the centralized state with the omnipotent ruler.¹⁶ In the following, comparisons of Himmelheber's experiences with those of the Garners, Zagourski, and various other contemporaries cast an interesting light on image-making among the Kuba and their reaction to being photographed. Our focus here will be on the visualization of two elements of the myth: the dances and performances by maskers and the efforts to portray *nyim* Kot Mabiinc.

WITNESSING PERFORMANCES

Staging spectacular displays was one of the local actors' strategies to satisfy the visitors' desires and preconceived notions about the mythical Kuba. Dances with and without maskers often occurred during holidays and official events, such as visits by administrators and high-ranking officials, and even royals from Belgium. Both Belgian and other foreign professional and amateur photographers were present to record them. In these displays, local men, women, and youngsters in splendid costumes followed prescribed choreographies and expected to be photographed. Among the pictures of such events are images in the personal archive of Belgian medical doctor Émile Muller (1891–1976) who lived and worked in the Congo from 1923 to 1938. Sometime after 1928, he and several other Belgians officials visited Nsheng for a "ceremonial interview" with *nyim* Kot Mabiinc, likely in Muller's capacity as a doctor. In one of the encounters, the king, surrounded by a group of dancers, rested in a deckchair and wore exquisite ceremonial attire. A performer in a beaded costume with an elaborate headdress can be seen between two pith-helmeted Europeans standing close to the ruler [fig. 129]. A picture of another meeting shows the king receiving the official delegation while sitting behind a display of metal and wooden objects in front of the visitors—likely royal gifts or perhaps items for sale. Seven young men and a child, wearing new masks without costumes, line up while a man at the side holds a mask in his hand [fig. 130].¹⁷ The masks could also be purchased.

Occasionally, the hopes of visitors to document such stunning festivities were dashed. This may have been the case when Zagourski traveled through the core Kuba region. Actual performances and dances in the kingdom's capital are missing in his

16 *The Light Shines in Bakubaland. An Epic of the Mission Field*, Part I. Short film, *images commercialisées par l'atelier des archives* (<http://www.atelierdesarchives.com>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwvOBqDwl-8>, accessed April 20, 2019).

17 Loos and Buch 2007, pp. 74–79.

series *L'Afrique qui disparaît*. There are, however, at least three photos of a Kuba performance that can be attributed to Zagourski. The event seems to have taken place during a public spectacle—perhaps in Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi) or even in Léopoldville—judging by the stand filled with spectators in the background and other performers at a distance, directed or perhaps photographed by a European man [fig. 131].

Himmelheber had good luck when he arrived in a village called Ichala on January 10, 1939, where he came upon a woman's funeral. He was allowed to photograph the ceremonies, which included dances accompanied by an orchestra. Whether all participants in the ongoing funerary rites welcomed his presence remains open, given the way women in mourning, who surrounded the corpse, looked at him and the camera [fig. 132]. From Ichala, he continued on to Mweka, a multi-ethnic settlement in Kuba territory, which had sprung up around a railroad stop and was the seat of the Belgian territorial administration. During another chance encounter near Mweka, on January 16, Himmelheber witnessed and photographed a second funeral, this time the commemorative rites for a deceased man, which included dances [fig. 133]. Here, the local participants were well aware of the photographer's presence and actually played to his camera. An image in a series of postcards distributed by the publishing company Photo Home in the early 1950s offers an interesting comparison because it resembles Himmelheber's photographs of the man's funerary celebration. It, too, captured a spectacle in town, perhaps organized just for the photo shoot. The performers aptly staged themselves for the camera [fig. 134].

Nyim Kot Mabiinc had a residence near Mweka where Himmelheber's first brief encounter with him took place. By early 1939, the monarch was gravely impaired and passed away ten months later, a death that caught the attention of the Belgian public.¹⁸ René Van Deuren, the *administrateur territorial* (territorial administrator) for the Kuba kingdom, who was stationed in Mweka, introduced Himmelheber to the ruler. Four months earlier, the Garners had enjoyed the help of the Reverend Washburn, when he arranged for an audience with the king so that they could get the monarch's consent to film in Nsheng.¹⁹ Himmelheber, too, may have sought royal permission to continue on to Nsheng in order to buy Kuba artworks and take photographs. Two days later, he saw *nyim* Kot Mabiinc again, and was informed that the king had sent a message to the capital about his visitor's imminent arrival and delegated an attendant to accompany him on the voyage.²⁰

When Himmelheber reached Nsheng on January 20, 1939, he was greeted by a man named Kwete, who arrived on a bicycle and sported Western garb. In his diary he describes him as a young, smart lad, son of the king and his designated successor. Kwete is none other than Georges Kwete Mwana (1913–1970), a prince of the Kuba whose memoir appeared in 2010.²¹ Prince Kwete, an experienced guide, immediately offered Himmelheber works in metal, fiber textiles, and a few carved items for purchase, which, however, did not meet the new arrival's expectations of authenticity and age.²²

A couple of days later, Prince Kwete organized one of the famous dance performances with maskers for the visitor and collector—a perfect photo op, although the king was absent. How-

18 Wannijn 1939, pp. 7612–7614

19 Himmelheber also spent time with Washburn and appreciated his knowledge about the Kuba: “Washburn ist ein hervorragender Kenner der Bakuba und gibt mir allerhand wertvolle Informationen (Washburn is highly knowledgeable about the Kuba and gives me all sorts of valuable information).” Himmelheber, diary, January 19, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

20 Himmelheber, diary, January 18, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

21 Himmelheber, diary, January 20, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg); Kwete Mwana 2010.

22 Himmelheber, diary, January 20, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg); in his 1960 book Himmelheber refers to the crown prince as Kwete Moana, who knew how to make fiber borders used for wrappers and shirts. Himmelheber 1960, p. 371.



Fig. 131



Fig. 134



Fig. 132



Fig. 133



Fig. 135

Fig. 131
Attributed to Casimir d'Ostoya Zagourski
Performance by Kuba dancers during an official event
Kasai, Katanga, or Léopoldville, 1937,
postcard, gelatin silver print
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 132
Hans Himmelheber
Dead body of a woman at a funeral
Ichala, January 10, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 181-20

Fig. 133
Hans Himmelheber
Dancing men at a funeral
Mweka, January 16, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-24

Fig. 134
Unidentified photographer
Danses chez les Bakuba
Mweka, c. 1952, gelatin silver print
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 135
Hans Himmelheber
Masker mwaash a mboy
Mushenge, January 22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-34

ever, in some pictures of the shoot one notices local spectators in European style dress, intrusions which did not please photographers [fig. 135]. The prince finally presented himself in local attire, much to Himmelheber's delight, who noted in his diary "There is a large audience here and Kwete appears now, too, as a native with very beautiful woven overskirt rather than his well-ironed khaki pants. He looks quite good." [see fig. 84].²³ Like many of his contemporaries, among them Zagourski, Himmelheber preferred to depict a timeless, unchanging universe of the Kuba with no disruption and perceived degradation of these noble Africans through modern ways of life. During a second stay in Nsheng from March 3–6, Himmelheber witnessed and photographed another display with maskers, this time in the presence of the ruler. Since the event was similar to the earlier performance, he took fewer pictures. In his 1960 book *N—kunst und N—künstler*, he praised these two spectacles and wrote "The [Kuba] mask dancers thus offer a fantastical-grand view; I have never seen anything like that in Africa."²⁴

PORTRAYING THE KING

According to many observers, *nyim* Kot Mabiinc was in charge of his image and one would assume had seen many pictures of himself sitting in state, which circulated widely in the colony and abroad.²⁵ In 1923, for instance, Belgian Commandant Charles Godefroid Félix Delhaise (1872–1932) captured an iconic portrait of the king, which to this day appears in publications [fig. 136]. It shows him in his deckchair, carefully dressed in a fine cowrie-trimmed skirt and belt and wearing a small hat (*laket*) with an eagle feather, denoting Kuba cultural identity²⁶

In 1928, the king, many of his wives, and his noble entourage traveled to Domiongo, a small railroad stop some twenty kilometers from Nsheng, to greet Albert I and Elisabeth, King and Queen of the Belgians, during their tour of the Congo. Pictures of the event show the Kuba monarch dressed in the ceremonial state ensemble that he donned for official and ritual occasions.²⁷ The famous state attire of the Kuba kings, which was so heavy that they could barely move, appeared on a trade card published by the Liebig Extract of Meat Company in a 1955 series titled *Les peuplades du Congo belge* (The Peoples of the Belgian Congo). It depicts *nyim* Kot Mabiinc's successor *nyim* Mbop Mabiinc maMbeeky, who ruled from 1939 until he joined ancestors in 1969 [figs. 137/149]. To return to the images of *nyim* Kot Mabiinc: A postcard with another classic photograph of *nyim* Kot Mabiinc portrays him reclining in his deckchair surrounded by attendants. He did not appear in one of his sumptuous outfits for this occasion, although copper anklets adorned his legs and he wore necklaces. He looked directly at the camera, placed at a low angle by the photographer—none other than Casimir Zagourski [fig. 138]. This portrait is now one of the photographer's *and* the monarch's best-known pictures.

The Garners were also determined to film *nyim* Kot Mabiinc in full regalia. Virginia Garner's diary reveals the painstaking efforts to accomplish this task with the help of the Reverend Washburn. After they had received the king's consent for their movie project while in Mweka, he informed them that they could only film when he was back in Nsheng.²⁸ The ruler finally met them in

23 "Es sind viele Zuschauer da und Kwete erscheint nun auch als Eingeborener mit sehr schoener Matte statt seiner wohlgebuegelten Kakihose. Er sieht sehr gut aus." Himmelheber, diary, January 22, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

24 "Die [Kuba] Maskentänzer bieten so einen phantastisch-prächtigen Anblick; ich habe in Afrika nie dergleichen gesehen." Himmelheber 1960, pp. 367–68. See also Himmelheber 1940, pp. 17–30, esp. p. 25.

25 He was among several prominent African kings and leaders in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries who embraced photography as a means to further their own agendas. See Geary 2018, pp. 85–97.

26 Geary 2015, p. 60, fig. 2; Vanhee 2005, p. 80.

27 *Le voyage de leurs Majestés le Roi et la Reine des Belges; 5 Juin–31 Août 1928*, Brussels: L'illustration Congolaise, 1920, pls. LVII, LVIX.

28 Garner 2011, p. 123.

the capital eleven days later, insisting that he had to give renewed approval for scenes in the movie. Then they waited for the king to appear outside in daylight for filming. Frustrated, Virginia Garner wrote in her diary, “No king... It seems the king wanted to wear a certain costume for the picture and no other would do. His attendants brought him twenty before he found the one he wished to wear. With all his fancy clothes to choose from he had to keep us cooling our heels for so long that the sun went in. And it [the sun] stayed [in] for the rest of the day!! We did not even expose one foot of film.” The next day, the Garners “got the king out this afternoon” and also filmed so-called “idols” [fig. 139].²⁹ They finished their shoot a few days later when the monarch, who by then had grown weary of their presence, appeared once more for a staged display with his wives, which became part of the opening scenes of *The Light Shines in Bakubaland. An Epic of the Mission Field*, Part I, mentioned above. The film’s Part II depicts dances and an audience of the Reverend Washburn with “King Lukenga” [sic] whom the intertext describes as the “most powerful African monarch in all Congo.” The storyline presents the scene as the king granting the missionary permission to build a mission station in the Kuba realm.³⁰

Himmelheber’s experiences in Nsheng were similar. During his first stay in the capital in January, he had eagerly awaited the arrival of the king, but was also disappointed.³¹ Finally, he encountered the monarch in the capital during the above-mentioned performance of maskers and dances in March, but left without a picture of the ruler, which would have been an important addition to his photographs. According to his diary: “Lukengo was carried here, and everyone kneeled and clapped their hands in beat to the drum, three or four times, every third or fourth time with decreasing strength. It somehow sounded celebratory.”³²

CONCLUSION

This brief exploration of visual and written records left behind by Hans Himmelheber and some of his contemporaries demonstrates that elements of the Kuba myth remained influential during the interwar period, even though conditions had changed since the beginning of the twentieth century. From the perspective of Kuba leaders, perpetuating the myth enhanced the reputation of the kingdom in the colony and the geographic north, and consolidated its prominent position in the colonial state. Within this framework, the production and circulation of visuals, such as photographs that illustrated print media and were reproduced on postcards, supported the kingdom’s political and economic agendas.

Performing Kuba identity and resurrecting the past for visitors and their cameras during large and small stagings in and outside of the kingdom required careful preparation under the guidance of men and women aware of the importance of such events. The participants had to execute choreographed routines to the accompaniment of an orchestra and appear in traditional attire, even though many of them no longer wore such clothing in everyday life. Even in remote areas, ordinary folks had learned how to dress and pose for images and often expected remuneration for their services. Dances and masquerades had also developed into marketing events for Kuba arts because foreign visitors

Fig. 136
Commandant Charles Godefroid Félix Delhaise
Le roi des Bakubas et une partie de cour à Mushenge
Mushenge, 1923, gelatin silver print
AfricaMuseum, A.P.O.O. 27794
RMCA Tervuren

Fig. 137
Published by the Liebig Extract of Meat Company
Les Bushongo
(*nyim Mbop Mabiinc maMbeeky*)
Circa 1955, chromolithograph trade card
Christraud M. Geary Collection

Fig. 138
Casimir Zagourski **Le Roi Bakuba Lukengo**
(*nyim Kot Mabiinc*)
Mushenge, 1929–1937, gelatin silver print on postcard
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2012.3269

Fig. 139
Virginia Garner
Ray Garner filming nyim Kot Mabiinc
Mushenge, September 17, 1938
Gay Garner Mackintosh

29 Garner 2011, p. 127f.

30 *The Light Shines in Bakubaland. An Epic of the Mission Field*, Part II. Short film, *images commercialisées par l'atelier des archives* (<http://www.atelierdesarchives.com>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOS-Qcn9B64>, accessed April 18, 2019).

31 Himmelheber, diary, January 24, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

32 “Lukengo wurde hergetragen und alle hockten hin und klatschten im Takt zur Trommel in die Haende, 3 oder 4 mal, je drei oder viermal mit abnehmender Staerke. Es hoert sich irgendwie feierlich an.” Himmelheber, diary, March 6, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).



Fig. 136



Fig. 138



Fig. 137



Fig. 139

could often acquire masks and other objects at the end of the festivities. The fact that newly produced pieces appeared during such performances lent them an aura of authenticity in the eyes of spectators unfamiliar with ongoing discourses among collectors such as Hans Himmelheber, who preferred and searched for ancient works made for local use. For the buyers of new creations and foreign viewers, the photographs depicting spectacles cum sales events became reference points of authenticity. For the Kuba and their leaders these pictures played an important role in promoting the arts to the economic benefit of the kingdom.

Nyim Kot Mabiinc embodied the Kuba state and reinforced the myth whenever he appeared in public to be seen and photographed by audiences from Europe and the USA. At the same time, his public appearances helped him to bring together the peoples within the kingdom and elevate his role in the colony. He was fully cognizant of, and controlled the power of visual representation. The ruler's presences and absences during grand displays and special photographic occasions were well-timed and orchestrated. In fact, his perceived "failures" to show up may have heightened anticipation and his impact as a leader, when he finally sat in state and met the expectations of visitors and image makers.

These observations confirm the suggestions at the beginning of this essay, that the king and Kuba actors of all backgrounds had become coproducers of the myth. Indeed, they had! As far as Hans Himmelheber is concerned, the strategies of *nyim* Kot Mabiinc and his subjects in the Kuba kingdom had the desired effect. When Himmelheber compared the Kuba to some of their neighbors such as the Yaka and Chokwe, he mused: "It is twice as nice with the Bakuba, because they are so kind and approachable."³³

33 "Doppelt so schoen ist es bei den Bakuba, weil sie so nett und zugaenglich sind." Himmelheber, diary, February 1, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

Nanina Guyer shared images and the diary of Hans Himmelheber with me, and she and Michaela Oberhofer provided helpful suggestions and comments throughout the writing process. Elisabeth L. Cameron kindly identified the design of the figure on the cover of the 1938 travel brochure as based on sculptures by Teke artists. Publications coordinator Mark Welzel oversaw the production, copy-editor Lisa Rosenblatt, translator Kurt Rehkopf and Laura Falletta, who took care of ordering the images, helped with finalizing the essay. My sincere thanks go to all.





Fig. 141





Fig. 143



Fig. 144

Fig. 145





Fig. 146



Fig. 147



Fig.148

Fig. 140
Artist of the Bindji region
Isbyeen imaalu mask with protruding eyes
Before 1939, wood, 26 × 19 × 11.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 15
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 141
Artist of the Kuba region
Helmet mask
Circa 1900, wood, feathers, hair, pigment, plant fibers, 81 × 30 × 40 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 401
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 142
Artist of the Kuba region
Ngady mwaash female mask
Circa 1900, wood, glass beads, cowries, textile materials, plant fibers, pigments, 39.5 × 21 × 22 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 404
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 143
Hans Himmelheber
Ngady mwaash masked figure
Mushenge, March 6, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-21

Fig. 144
Hans Himmelheber
Drummer
Mushenge, January 22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-39

Fig. 145
Artist of the Kuba region
Tall drum
Circa 1900, wood, leather, 108 × 22 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 473
Han Coray collection

Fig. 146
Artist of the Kuba region
Mwaash a mboy mask
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers, textile, leather, cowries, glass beads, 31 × 27.5 × 29 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 26
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 147
Artist of the Kuba region
Mukenga mask
Circa 1900, wood, plant fibers, glass beads, cowries, leather, 47 × 33 × 43 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 402
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 148
Hans Himmelheber
Masked figure
Mushenge, January 22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 183-4

STRATEGIC SPECTACLE: THE ROYAL MASKS OF THE KUBA

— The royal dances of the Kuba with their brightly colored masked figures were one of the highlights of Hans Himmelheber's journey. The helmet mask *ngady mwaash* was, rather unconventionally, danced by a woman [fig. 142]; *mwaash a mboy* had a face depicted with beads on leopard or elephant skin and was richly decorated with eagle feathers [figs. 146/147]. Their costumes resemble a "shield" made of glass beads with furs, a feather head-dress, beaded gloves, and shoes.¹

Accompanied by a drummer [figs. 144/145], such masked figures danced for Himmelheber twice in the capital Mushenge and deeply impressed him [figs. 143/148]:

"I have never encountered anything comparable in Africa; it is simply magnificent! Two or even more masked figures always perform at the same time and engage in a kind of competition. Every masked dancer is supported by his surroundings, is surrounded by his accomplices and cheered on by their calls. Then he gets up and dances a few steps to the beat of the drums but the heavy, pompous costume makes actual dancing impossible. After merely a few artful jerks, the dancer soon retreats to the care of his two helpers, stretches out on the ground, catches his breath, and is fanned and handed water by his companions. Then, after a few minutes, he again prepares to dance."²

The Kuba were aware of the fascinating effect of these dances, which were not only a colorful spectacle for travelers but, first and foremost, served to display the power of the king, the princes, and the aristocrats [see essay Geary].³

The Kuba allowed Himmelheber to photograph these performances. However, it was not easy to acquire the rare masks. The dignitaries were not willing to sell them as the masks would lend them splendor and prestige at the performance for their own funeral.⁴ — Nanina Guyer

1 Himmelheber 1960, p. 367.

2 Himmelheber 1940.

3 Vansina 2010, p. 47.

4 Himmelheber 1960, p. 368.



Fig. 149



Fig. 151



Fig. 152



Fig. 150



Fig. 153



Fig.154



Fig.155



Fig. 156



Fig. 157



Fig.158



Fig. 159

Fig. 149
Eliot Elisofon
Kuba nyim Mbopey Mabiintsh ma-Kyeen
1947, gelatin silver print
Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives,
EEPA EENG 01138
National Museum of African Art
Smithsonian Institution

Fig. 150
Artist of the Kuba region
Laket mishiing men's cap
Before 1939, plant fibers, 15 × 14 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9495
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 151
Artist of the Kuba or Lele region
Mpaan headdress
Before 1950, plant fibers, cowries, glass
beads, cotton, 14.7 × 19 × 19 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2017.253
Gift of François and Claire Mottas

Fig. 152
Artist of the Kuba region
Hat with feathers
Before 1939, plant fibers, feathers,
15 × 17 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.175
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 153
Artist of the Kuba region
Nkody mupaap pendant for a belt
1890–1930, plant fibers, cowries, glass
beads, 2 × 13.5 × 52.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2017.123
Gift of François and Claire Mottas
Guy Smal

Fig. 154
Artist of the Kuba region
Nkody mu-ikup lakiing belt
Before 1981, fabric, plant fibers, cowries,
glass beads, 2.5 × 85 × 5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2017.282
Gift of François and Claire Mottas
Dorothy Wiseman

Fig. 155
Artist of the Kuba region
Nkody mu-ikup lakiing belt
1930–1960, plant fibers, cowries, glass
beads, 2.8 × 110 × 4 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2017.124
Gift of François and Claire Mottas
Guy Smal

Fig. 156
Artist of the Kuba-Bushoong region
Tobacco pipe
1890–1930, wood, 8.5 × 53 × 5.5 cm
Private Collection Lausanne
Baptist Missionary Society, Thomas
Hooper

Fig. 157
Artist of the Bindji region
Tobacco pipe
Before 1939, wood, metal, 57 cm
Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 158
Artist of the Kuba region
Prestigious sword
Before 1939, wood, 41 × 11.5 × 5.8 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.118
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 159
Pathy Tshindele
**Untitled [Portrait of the former
president of the People's Republic
of China, Hu Jintao]**
From the series *It's my kings*
2012, acrylic on canvas, 127 × 90 cm
MAGNIN-A gallery, Paris

**OLD AND NEW KINGS: PORTRAIT OF MBOPEY MABIINTSH
MA-KYEEN AND PATHY TSHINDELE'S IT'S MY KINGS** — For
the series *It's my kings*, the artist Pathy Tshindele Kapinga inves-
tigated the history and culture of the Congo from colonial times
to the present. While doing so, he came across the various kings
and dignitaries who shaped the history of the Congo.

In *It's my kings* Tshindele refers directly to the appearance of
the kings of the Kuba, a once powerful kingdom in today's Kasai
province. In the Kuba kingdom there was a longstanding tradi-
tion of portraying monarchs that ranged from *ndop* carved wooden
sculptures of kings to photographic portraits.¹ The Kuba king
Mbopey Mabiintsh ma-Kyeen, whose reign lasted from 1939 to
1969, for example, posed in his spectacular robe for American
photographer Eliot Elisofon in 1947 [fig. 149]. The king is wear-
ing a costume embroidered all over with beads, a leopard skin is
lying on his knee, and in his hand he is holding a lance and a
sword. It took three hours and numerous assistants to put on the
costume.² Members of the royal court also demonstrated their sta-
tus with various attributes, such as belts, pipes, and headdresses
richly adorned with beads, or a sword [figs. 150–158].

For *It's my kings* (2012) Tshindele portrayed the ruling heads
of state of international great powers at the time—such as Nicolas
Sarkozy, Barack Obama, David Cameron, and Hu Jintao—in
the brightly colored robes of the Kuba kings and in the style of
Congolese popular painting [fig. 159]. Just as in the photograph,
Tshindele's king is wearing a magnificent costume and is holding
a kind of scepter in his hands. However, the artist decorates the
face—here that of the former president of the People's Republic of
China, Hu Jintao—with face painting that is unusual for the Kuba.
The past visual repertoire of the Kuba is linked to elements from
the present and to others from the artist's imagination to create
a vision of future kings. In doing so, Tshindele is criticizing the
dubious role played by rulers from the geographic North in Afri-
can politics and, at the same time, claiming a voice in future pol-
itics of the Congo with the title of the series *It's my kings*. —
Nanina Guyer

1 Geary 1993, pp. 72–77.

2 Geary 1993, p. 72.



Fig.160



Fig.161



Fig. 162.1



Fig. 162.2



Fig. 163



Fig. 164.1



Fig. 164.2



Fig. 164.3



Fig. 164.4

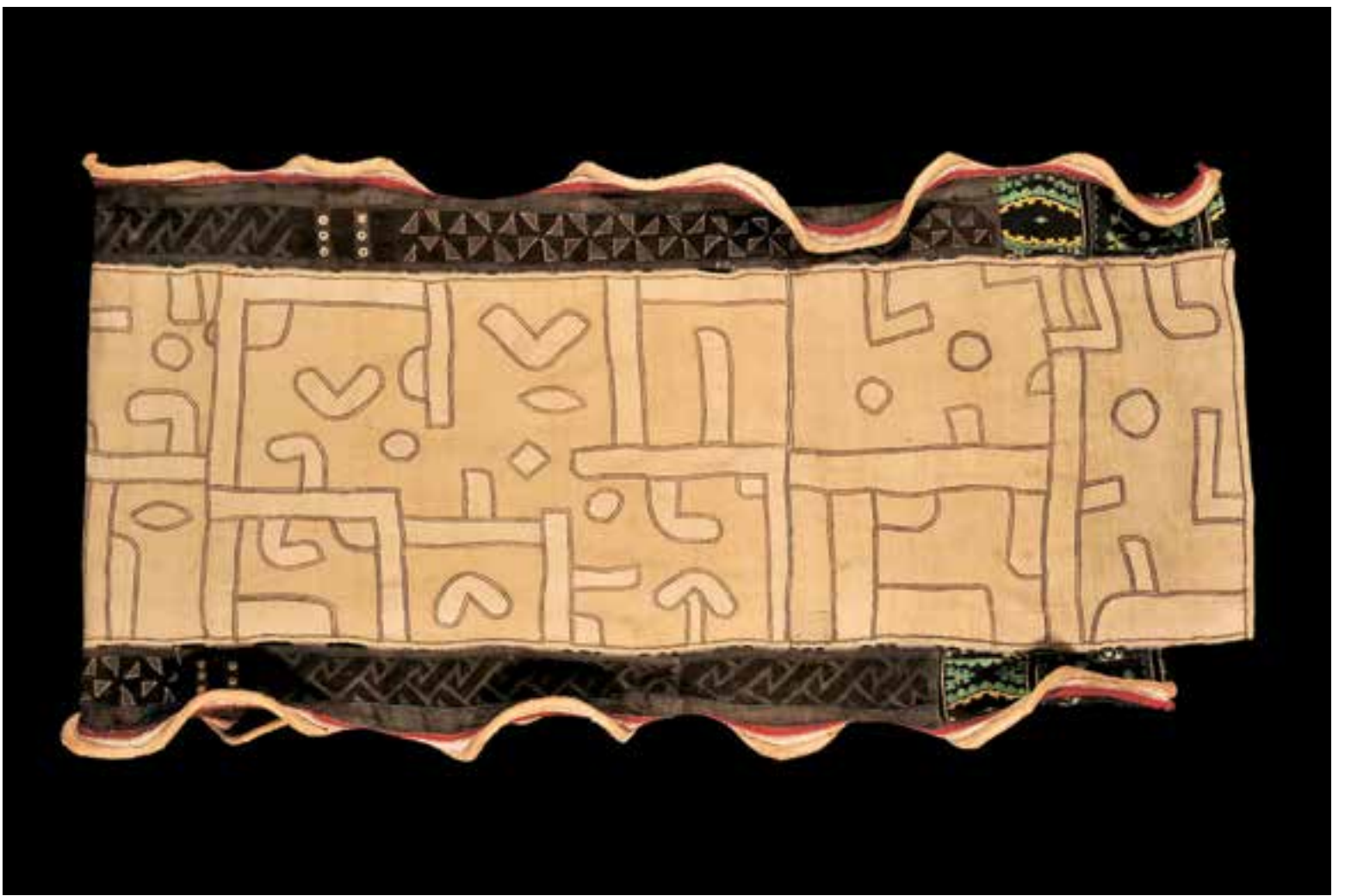


Fig. 165



Fig. 166



Fig. 167

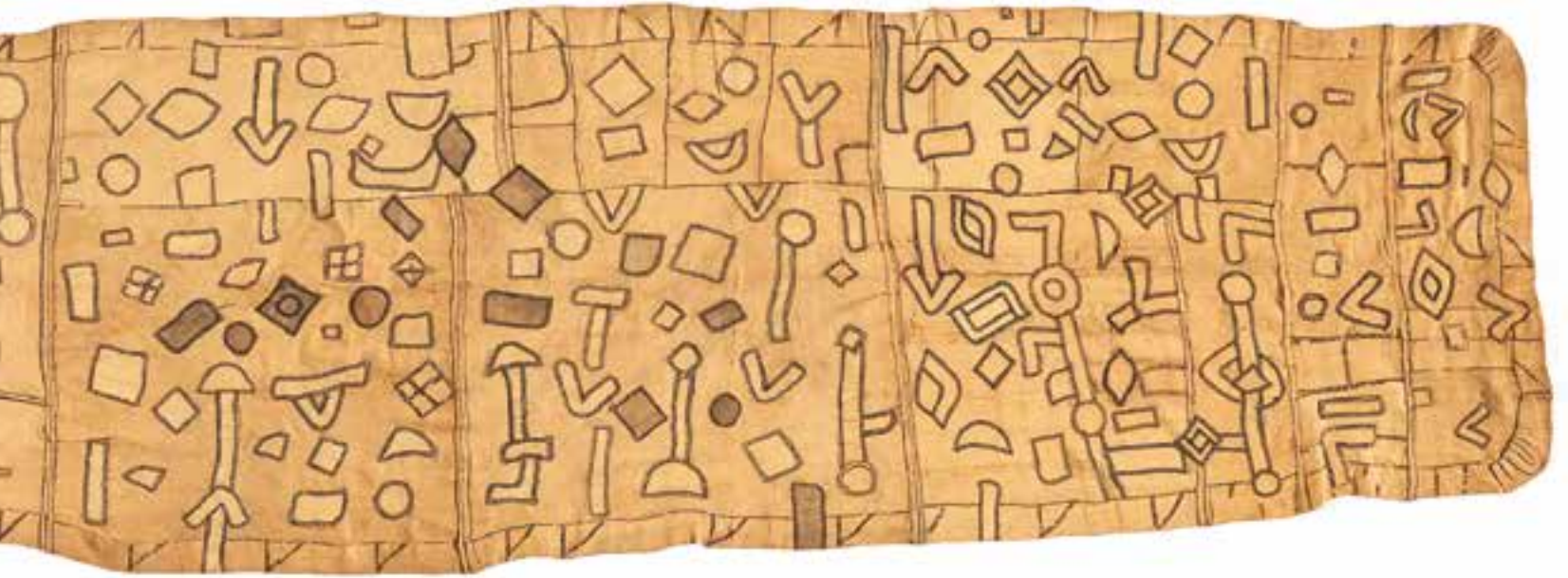


Fig. 168



Fig. 169



Fig. 170



Fig. 171



Fig. 172



Fig. 173



Fig. 174



Fig. 175



Fig. 176



Fig.177



Fig.178



Fig.179



Fig.180



Fig. 181



Fig. 182

Figs. 160/161
Hans Himmelheber
Men's vertical loom used to produce raffia fabrics
Lele and Kuba region, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 178-27, FHH 184-6

Fig. 162
Hans Himmelheber
Production of borders
Mushenge, January 24, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 183-8, FHH 183-9

Fig. 163
Hans Himmelheber
Elderly woman embroidering a raffia textile
Kuba region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 184-5

Fig. 164
Hans Himmelheber
Dancing women at a funeral
Ichala, January 10, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 181-4, FHH 181-6 and 7, FHH 181-18 and 19, FHH 181-31

Fig. 165
Male and female artist of the Bushoong region
Ncák minen'ishushuna overskirt for women
Before 1924, raffia, cotton, and wool, 72 × 191 cm
RMCA Tervuren, EO.O.O.27927
Acquired by René Paul Preys

Fig. 166
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Mapel skirt for men
Early twentieth century, raffia, 130 × 653 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.417
Acquired with municipal funds

Fig. 167
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Mapel skirt for men
Early twentieth century, raffia, 90 × 435 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.416
Acquired with municipal funds

Fig. 168
Hans Himmelheber
Dancing men at a woman's funeral
Ichala, January 10, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich; FHH 181-10

Fig. 169
Hans Himmelheber
Dancing men at a funeral
Near Mweka, January 16, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-19

Fig. 170
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Panels of a skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 43 × 16.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.6
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 171
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Panels of a skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 23 × 56 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.2
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 172
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Fragment of a skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 46 × 25 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.29
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 173
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Women's skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 137 × 57 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.35
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 174
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Fragment of a skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 65 × 12 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.37
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

fig. 175
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Border for a skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 10 × 181 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.163
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 176
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 82 × 54 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.27
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 177
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Bark cloth ncák ishyiin
Before 1939, plant fibers, 200 × 38 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.154
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 178
Artist of the Bushoong region
Mat
Before 1927, raffia, 110 × 302 cm
RMCA Tervuren, EO.O.O.29214
Acquired by René Paul Preys

Fig. 179
Hans Himmelheber
Woman's body covered with valuable raffia textiles
Ichala, January 10, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 181-22

Fig. 180
Hans Himmelheber
Funeral with mat as covering
Near Mweka, January 16, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 182-22

Fig. 181
Hans Himmelheber
Tire tracks
Songye region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-28

Fig. 182
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Dance skirt with tire track motif
First half of the twentieth century, woven raffia, applications, 290 × 67 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 26550

Fig. 183
Male and female artist of the Kuba region
Border for a skirt
Before 1939, raffia, 11 × 528 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2013.165
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber



Fig. 183

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN KUBA TEXTILES — Among the various subgroups of the Kuba, architecture, masks, and body art, as well as everyday and prestigious objects, were decorated with geometric motifs.¹ Yet the Kuba are most famous for their textile art. Due to their graphic patterns, these raffia fabrics became popular among painters like Gustav Klimt, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse. Not only Kuba men but also Kuba women were engaged in the production of raffia textiles, with the men focused on the preproduction. They worked on a vertical loom [figs. 160/161] whose dimensions were determined by the approximately one-meter-long fibers obtained from the raffia palm. Even the borders were made by men [fig. 162]. However, the fine embroidery and appliqué were produced by women, who would sometimes spend months working together on one piece [fig. 163]. The cut pile technique was particularly time-consuming, as the threads had to be drawn through the woven base material using a curved needle and then cut off shortly above the surface.²

When Hans Himmelheber visited the Kuba region in 1939, not only was he able to observe an active creative industry in the villages, but he also noted that the wearing of raffia clothing was still commonplace. The square pieces of fabric were sewn together in long strips, decorated, and worn as skirts on special occasions, such as funerals [fig. 164]. The women wrapped their skirt—called *ncák*—layer by layer around their hips and in some cases wore a shorter overskirt with a border over the top [fig. 165]. The men's wraparound skirts (*mapel*) were sometimes over ten meters long [figs. 166/167], but they were worn differently from those of the women. The men folded the long length of fabric around their hips and fastened it with a belt, over which the upper edge of the fabric was turned [figs. 168/169]. In this way the men's legs had enough space for their energetic dance moves. While the women's silhouettes remained slender, the men's were wide and dynamic.

Textiles indicated the wearer's social standing and wealth. Particularly fine and old embroideries with pile—of which Hans Himmelheber was able to purchase a number of examples—used to be worn only by the women of the Kuba king's court [figs. 170–176]. To pay homage to the deceased, it was customary to lay several layers of raffia fabric over the body at funerals [fig. 179]. In a few villages one of the burial objects was also a bark cloth (*ncák ishyiin*) sewn together from small light and dark triangles [fig. 177]. While Western clothing was gradually replacing traditional fabrics in everyday life, these elaborately decorated textiles were still used at funerals into the 1980s.

Kuba design is characterized by irregularities and asymmetries, as well as the juxtaposition of blocks of different colors and motifs. An especially attractive example is the mat shown here, which was displayed at funerals, among other occasions [figs. 178/180]. The invention of new design variants increased the artist's prestige. For example, after a missionary's visit in the 1920s, the Kuba king was inspired to create a new pattern by his motorbike's tire tracks [figs. 181/182]³ — Michaela Oberhofer

- 1 As Hans Himmelheber rightly noticed, the term “Bakuba” or “Kuba” is a foreign appellation given by the neighboring Luba (1940, pp. 18f.). The various Kuba subgroups had their own chiefs but they all recognized the authority of the Bushoong king (*nyimi*) and called themselves “the king's people.” According to Himmelheber, subgroups famous for their textile art were the Shoowa (“Bashowa”), Bushoong (“Bushongo”), and Ngoombe (“Bangombe”). On Kuba textiles, see Brincard 2015 and Mack 2012.
- 2 Owing to their fluffy surface, the Kuba textiles were also called “velours,” “velvets,” and “plush.”
- 3 According to Mack 2012, p. 8.



Fig. 184



Fig. 185



Fig. 186



Fig. 187



Fig. 190



Fig. 191



Fig. 192



Fig. 193

Fig. 188



Fig. 189





Fig. 194



Fig. 195



Fig. 196



Fig. 197

Fig. 198





Fig. 199



Fig. 200



Fig. 201



Fig. 202



Fig. 203



Fig. 204



Fig. 205



Fig. 206



Fig. 207



Fig. 208



Fig. 209



Fig. 210



Fig. 213



Fig. 211



Fig. 212



Fig. 214



Fig. 215



Fig. 216



Fig. 217



Fig. 218



Fig. 219



Fig. 220



Fig. 221

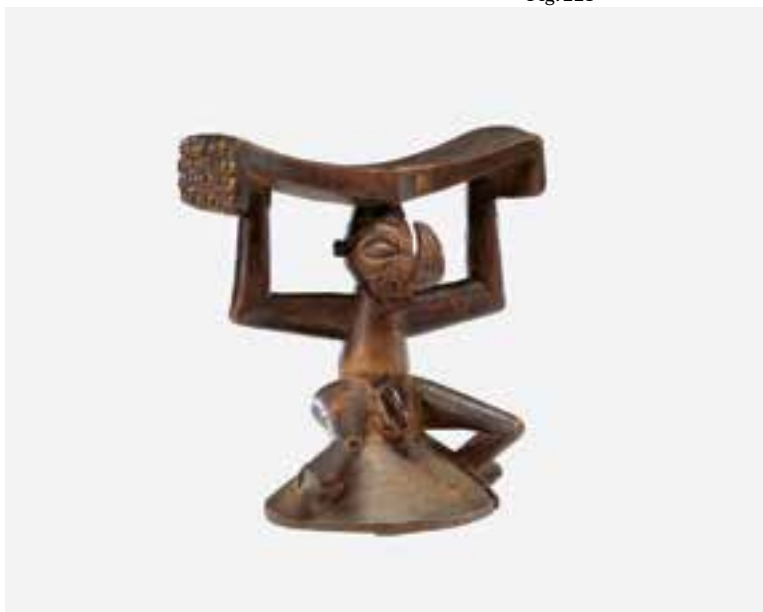


Fig. 222



Fig. 223

Fig. 184
Artist of the Pende region
from Nioka Munene
Palm wine cup with two human faces
Before 1939, wood, 11 × 8 × 6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.36
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 185
Artist of the Kuba region
Palm wine cup in the form of a head
Before 1939, wood, 19 × 12 × 15 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2015.237
Gift of Hans Himmelheber's heirs
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 186
Artist of the Kuba region
Figural cup
Before 1939, wood, 27 × 11 × 10 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 10
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 187
Artist of the Kuba-Kele region
Cup in the form of a female figure
Before 1939, wood, 26.5 × 11 × 11 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 12
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 188
Hans Himmelheber
Portrait of a woman with striking hairline
Kuba region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 185-6

Fig. 189
Hans Himmelheber
Production of wooden boxes
Mushenge, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 184-32

Fig. 190
Artist of the Kuba region
Oblong box for razors
Before 1939, wood, 28 × 8 × 6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.20
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 191
Artist of the Kuba region
Crescent-shaped box
Before 1939, wood, 30 × 14 × 6.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.22
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 192
Artist of the Kuba region
Rectal syringe
Before 1939, wood, 31 × 8 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.35
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 193
Artist of the Kuba region
Crescent-shaped box with face
Before 1939, wood, 36 × 15.5 × 8 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.42
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 194
Artist of the Kuba region
Cylindrical box in the form of a small basket
Before 1939, wood, 17 × 19 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.97
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 195
Artist of the Kuba region
Spherical ointment vessel
Before 1939, wood, 14.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.83
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 196
Artist of the Kuba region
Solid copy of a box
Before 1939, wood, 13.9 × 14.5 × 14.5 cm
Barbara and Eberhard Fischer Collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 197
Artist of the Kete region
Box in the form of a house
Before 1939, wood, 18 × 18 × 13.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.120
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 198
Hans Himmelheber
Young man painting patterns in the sand
Kuba region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 183-23

Fig. 199
Artist of the Kuba region
Box with hand as the handle
Before 1939, wood, 17 × 31 × 14.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.104
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 200
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Vessel
Before 1939, clay, 8.5 × 10 × 10 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2015.236
Gift of Hans Himmelheber's heirs
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 201
Artist of the Kete region
Square box with hook
Before 1939, wood and metal,
14 × 14.5 × 15.6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.15
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 202
Artist of the Kuba-Bindji region
Drinking horn
Before 1939, horn, 28.5 × 16.5 × 8.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.40
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 203
Artist of the Kuba-Kete region
Drinking horn
Before 1939, cow horn, 78 × 9.5 × 9.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.439
Gift of Eberhard and Barbara Fischer/
Susanne Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 204
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Mboong itool in the form of an ingot
Before 1939, redwood powder,
37 × 11 × 4 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.109
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 205
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Mboong itool in the form of a palm wine cup
Before 1939, redwood powder, 6 × 6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.106
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 206
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Mboong itool in the form of an anvil with small birds
Before 1939, redwood powder, 5 × 7.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.105
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 207
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Mboong itool in the form of an ingot
Before 1939, redwood powder,
20 × 6.5 × 4.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.19
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 208
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Mboong itool in the form of a small headrest
Before 1939, redwood powder,
2.7 × 9 × 4.3 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.107
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 209
Woman artist of the Kuba region
Mboong itool in the form of a lizard
Before 1939, redwood powder,
19 × 9.5 × 5.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.34
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 210
Artist of the Kuba region
Palm wine cup with human face on the handle
Before 1939, wood, 15 × 10.5 × 9 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.102
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 211
Artist of the Kuba region
Palm wine cup
Before 1939, wood, 17.5 × 13 × 11 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.95
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 212
Artist of the Kuba region
Cylindrical box
Before 1939, wood, 20 × 17.5 cm
Barbara and Eberhard Fischer Collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 213
Artist of the Kuba region
Crocodile figure for divination
Before 1939, wood, 30 × 6.2 × 5 cm
Barbara and Eberhard Fischer Collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 214
Artist of the Kuba region
Sculpture in the form of a bottle
Before 1939, wood and plant fibers,
26.3 × 12.8 × 12.8 cm
Barbara and Eberhard Fischer Collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 215
Artist of the Songye region
Comb with colon figure
Nineteenth/twentieth century, wood,
metal, 17.2 × 7.3 × 2.6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 918
Gift of Wally and Udo Horstmann

Fig. 216
Artist of the Pende region
Figural decorative comb
Before 1939, wood, 17.2 × 3 × 1.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.86
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 217
Artist of the Kuba region
Decorative comb with man's face
Nineteenth/twentieth century, ivory,
9.1 × 2.5 × 1 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 240
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 218
Artist of the Yaka region
Figural decorative comb
Nineteenth/twentieth century, wood,
18 × 2 × 2.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 524
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 219
Artist of the Yaka region
Zoomorphic decorative comb
Nineteenth/twentieth century, wood,
20.2 × 3.2 × 3.4 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 523
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 220
Artist of the Yaka region
Yisanuma figural decorative comb
Before 1925, wood, 17.5 × 3.1 × 1.7 cm
Private Collection Lausanne
Paul Guillaume, André Lhote

Fig. 221
Artist of the Yaka region
Headrest with female figure
Nineteenth/twentieth century, wood,
18.5 × 16.6 × 14.1 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 528
Han Coray Collection

Fig. 222
Artist of the Yaka region
Headrest with male figure
Before 1938, wood and brass upholstery
nails, 22.8 × 21.6 × 14.6 cm
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 84.81
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 223
Artist of the Yaka region
Headrest
Before 1939, wood, 12.8 × 15.5 × 12.5 cm
Barbara and Eberhard Fischer Collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

KUBA DESIGN: TRANSFORMING THE WORLD IN LINE WITH AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES —

In the third article based on his research in the journal *Brousse*, Hans Himmelheber reveals himself to be fascinated by the diversity and vibrancy of the art by the various Kuba subgroups. The desire to aesthetically transform the world was the credo of the Kuba's visual culture.¹ Regardless of age, gender, or rank, making art was important and improved a person's reputation [fig. 198]. The more carefully an object was realized, the more valuable it was in the eyes of the Kuba. Richly decorated everyday and prestigious objects denoted a person's social standing in the hierarchical society of the Kuba and also played a central role in celebrations and in ceremonies like funerals.

Among the most famous types of object that were acquired in large numbers by collectors for European museums are the carved wooden cups from which palm wine was drunk. Their iconography varied from purely geometric patterns to anthropomorphic shapes [figs. 184–187]. Even drums were reproduced [fig. 107]. Vessels in the form of a human face or a mask with horns were the preserve of the royal family. The cups designed as fine faces with hairlines shaved in angular shapes were believed by Himmelheber to be portraits [figs. 185/188]. Whether some forms could be traced back to European models, as Himmelheber speculated, has not been proven conclusively [fig. 210].² Even Islamic scrolls were used as ornaments and, as on the cup and rectal syringe shown here, transformed into Kuba iconography [figs. 192/211].

Equally popular as collectors' items were richly decorated, lidded wooden boxes in a wide range of shapes, whether oval, square, or crescent-shaped [figs. 191/193/199/201]. The architecture (houses), masks, and basketwork of the Kuba were likewise recreated in the form of boxes [figs. 194/197]. Himmelheber purchased numerous examples and also documented their production in detail [fig. 189]. In the vessels, blended redwood powder was used both for hair and body care and to dye fabrics or carvings. Furthermore, it served ritual purposes, for example at funerals.³ The oblong containers were intended for storing razors [fig. 190]. In compliance with the *horror vacui* that is characteristic of Kuba art, the entire surface was covered with geometric, entwined patterns that are reminiscent of the Kuba's textile art. Other everyday objects, too—like the small ointment jar [fig. 195], the wonderfully curved drinking horn [fig. 203], and the little clay pot [fig. 200]—were adorned all over with motifs. The latter was produced by a woman potter.

Another type of object created by women is the so-called *mboong itool* (called *bongotol* by Himmelheber).⁴ These are small geometric or figurative sculptures shaped from the powder of redwood, sand, and water, dried, and then smoked over a fire [figs. 204–209]. At funerals *mboong itool* served as gifts for the deceased that were laid under their heads and bodies—and later alongside them in their graves. These miniatures were an expression of social status and economic wealth. In Himmelheber's eyes, they were small artworks created by women—very unusual in African art. Made of redwood, the imitation of a wooden box as a sculpture in the round whose lid would no longer open was an object that he classified as purely *l'art pour l'art* [fig. 196]. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 Himmelheber 1940, p. 22. On the art of the Kuba, see Binkley/Darish 2009.

2 Himmelheber 1960, p. 374.

3 The red paint that was widespread in the Belgian Congo as *tukula* or *ngula*, was either plant or mineral-based. The Kuba used redwood (*Pterocarpus*) that they imported from the north. See Volper 2015.

4 See Volper 2015.

SAPEURS THEN AND NOW IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Yves Sambu, Hans Himmelheber



Fig. 224



Fig. 225



Fig. 226



Fig. 227



Fig. 228



Fig. 229



Fig. 230



Fig. 231



Fig. 232



Fig. 233



Fig. 234



Fig. 235

Fig. 224
Hans Himmelheber
Portrait of King Kasongo Lunda
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-21

Fig. 225
Yves Sambu
Mobutu
From the series *Vanité apparente*
Kinshasa, 2015, photograph, 80 × 120 cm
Yves Sambu

Fig. 226
Hans Himmelheber
Two Bayaka chiefs with sword and umbrellas
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 155-22

Fig. 227
Yves Sambu
Parasoleil
From the series *Vanité apparente*
Kinshasa, 2018, photograph, 120 × 80 cm
Yves Sambu

Fig. 228
Hans Himmelheber
Old dignitary with cane
Kuba region, 1939, digitized b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 184-17

Fig. 229
Yves Sambu
Untitled [young sapeur with suit and cane]
From the series *Vanité apparente*
Kinshasa, 2016, photograph, 120 × 80 cm
Yves Sambu

Fig. 230
Hans Himmelheber
Three men with head coverings
Yaka region, 1938/39,
digitized b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 169-4

Fig. 231
Yves Sambu
Sapeur Nd'jili
From the series *Vanité apparente*
Kinshasa, 2019, photograph, 75 × 130 cm
Yves Sambu, commissioned by Museum Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 232
Hans Himmelheber
King Pero of the Lele
Kuba region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 177-26

Fig. 233
Yves Sambu
Untitled [man with pipe]
From the series *Vanité apparente*
Kinshasa, 2018, photograph, 120 × 80 cm
Yves Sambu

Fig. 234
Hans Himmelheber
Portrait of a chief
Yaka region, 1938, digitized b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 157-3

Fig. 235
Yves Sambu
Kadhitoza Emperor
From the series *Vanité apparente*
Kinshasa, 2016, photograph, 80 × 120 cm
Yves Sambu

The *sapeurs'* daily public appearances make Kinshasa and Brazzaville “spectacle cities” and *la sape* (the abbreviation of *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*) a veritable art of living. *Sapeurs* are extravagantly dressed men and women from the megalopolis of Brazzaville/Kinshasa whose external appearance contrasts with their living conditions. Unlike the rather reserved Brazzaville, an eclectic style has developed in Kinshasa in which the finest fabrics by Versace are combined with the best Japanese leather and chunky English boots.¹ At fashion competitions and funerals, the Congolese photographer and artist Yves Sambu shot impressive portraits of such eccentrically clad men and women from Kinshasa that make them look like heroic urban figures [figs. 225/227/229/231/233/235]. Thanks to their clothing and poses, the *sapeurs* in Sambu’s photos have a strong presence that goes beyond mere vanity.² After all, *la sape* is much more than just clothing: with their outer and public appearance, the *sapeurs* are articulating their need for a new social identity that the cities deny them.³

The origins of the *sapeur* movement can be found in the colonial period, when chiefs and domestic staff received used clothing from Europeans as gifts and as wages. In the 1920s men known as *popos* from West Africa who were employed by the palm oil companies in the Belgian Congo set new trends with their clothing style. Even Hans Himmelheber photographed men during his travels whose poses and appearance are in no way inferior to the modern *sapeurs* [figs. 224/226/228/230/232/234]. When Yves Sambu first saw the photos of the men shown here, he exclaimed: “Mais ils sont contemporains!” The historical and contemporary photographs are indeed uncannily similar. Just like the present-day *sapeurs*, the chiefs used clothing, attributes, and Himmelheber’s camera to give expression to a modern self. A connection between *sapeurs* then and now is also revealed by the example of the “king” dressed in red [fig. 235]. He is wearing a pendant around his neck that is modeled on a Chokwe mask. This is reminiscent of men in the Pende region who wore similar pendants in the 1930s as a symbol of resistance to the colonial regime [see story, p. 206]. — Nanina Guyer

1 Gondola 2019, p. 188.

2 Gondola 2019, p. 207.

3 Gondola 1999, p. 23.

***MVUATU-MBOKA NA BISO –
ET LA SUISE:***
**THE CONGOLESE DIASPORA
ON FASHION AND
IDENTITY IN SWITZERLAND**

Fiona Bobo



Fig. 236



Fig. 237



Fig. 238



Fig. 239

Fig. 236
Fiona Bobo
Kabongo
From *Mvuatu-Mboka Na Biso—
et la Suisse*
2019, photograph
Fiona Bobo, commissioned by Museum
Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 237
Fiona Bobo
Kabongo
From *Mvuatu-Mboka Na Biso—
et la Suisse*
2019, photograph
Fiona Bobo, commissioned by Museum
Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 238
Fiona Bobo
Toko
From *Mvuatu-Mboka Na Biso—
et la Suisse*
2019, photograph
Fiona Bobo, commissioned by Museum
Rietberg Zürich

Fig. 239
Fiona Bobo
Toko
From *Mvuatu-Mboka Na Biso—
et la Suisse*
2019, photograph
Fiona Bobo, commissioned by Museum
Rietberg Zürich

The multimedia installation *Mvuatu-Mboka Na Biso—et la Suisse* (*Style, Our Country, and Switzerland*) is the work of the Zurich-based artist Fiona Ndetani Bobo (1992) in collaboration with Fabrice Mawete (1983) and Antonin Wittwer (1992). It addresses fashion as a cultural aspect of the Congolese diaspora in Switzerland and hence is part of the “Design and Elegance” section of the *Congo as Fiction* exhibition. *Mvuatu-Mboka Na Biso—et la Suisse* [figs. 236–239] is the result of several months’ research into the Congolese community in Zurich and environs. It soon became clear that external appearances and their presentation play a prominent part in Congolese society and are a way of asserting oneself in the community—not only in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also in the European and Swiss diaspora. Yet how is this phenomenon manifested and what are the differences between the DRC and the diaspora in Switzerland?

Raised in the canton of Zürich, Fiona Bobo has a Congolese father and a Swiss mother. She is studying social work at the ZHAW (Zurich University of Applied Sciences), and from 2012 to 2016 she was a student of media arts in the Department of Art & Media at the ZHdK (Zurich University of the Arts). During her art degree she mainly focused on issues surrounding her Congolese roots and the cultural differences between Switzerland and Congo. Fiona Bobo’s interest in people and their histories has always been crucial and served as her key to these respective spheres. When she traveled to Kinshasa with her father and brother in 2012, she was fascinated by the urban architecture and lifestyle in the capital. Over the following years she increasingly explored this kind of subject. Her journey and family connections have led to close communication with friends and relatives in Congo with whom she collaborates across national borders on her art projects. This is how the work *Chaises bleues* [figs. 240/241] emerged, for example, for which she asked her cousin via Facebook to take photographs of all the blue plastic chairs that stand on every corner in Kinshasa and have a formative influence on the cityscape. Central to this work is her cousin’s unique view of the objects, as well as his approach to the task and handling of the camera. In a sense, the artist’s final project at university, *BWANIA* [figs. 242/243], is a combination of her earlier works that now features herself more prominently as an individual. At the core of this installation is a video of her grandmother’s funeral in Kinshasa [fig. 244]. Commissioned by her relatives, the video shows the entire twenty-four-hour burial ceremony, at which all family members wear custom-made mourning clothes cut from the same fabric [fig. 245]. At her request, one of the artist’s aunts made her a dress from the fabric and sent it to her in Switzerland. Fiona Bobo portrayed herself wearing this dress in various photos, which are likewise part of the installation [fig. 246]. Another element of the artwork focuses on the way the Congolese population presents itself. Here her cousin photographed people on the street in conspicuous branded clothing [figs. 247/248].

The themes of fashion, presentation, and identity are a recurring theme in Fiona Bobo’s work and to a certain extent constitute the red thread in her oeuvre. Her collaboration with others and the participatory approach as an explicit creative practice are key to her artworks and are also expressed in her cooperation with the Congolese diaspora in Switzerland.

Fig. 240
Fiona Bobo
Chaises bleues
2015, installation view
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 241
Fiona Bobo
Untitled
From *Chaises bleues*
2015, cellphone photo, C-print,
approx. 20 × 14 cm
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 242
Fiona Bobo
BWANIA
2015, installation view
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 243
Fiona Bobo
BWANIA
2015, installation view
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 244
Fiona Bobo
Untitled
From *BWANIA*
2015, video still
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 245
Fiona Bobo
Untitled
From *BWANIA*
2015, video still
Fiona Bobo



Fig. 240



Fig. 241



Fig. 242



Fig. 243



Fig. 244



Fig. 245



Fig. 246



Fig. 247



Fig. 248

Fig. 246
Fiona Bobo
Me in African dress
From *BWANIA*
2015, C-print
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 247
Fiona Bobo
Marques
From *BWANIA*
2015, cellphone photo, C-print
Fiona Bobo

Fig. 248
Fiona Bobo
Marques
From *BWANIA*
2015, cellphone photo, C-print
Fiona Bobo

Raised in the canton of Schwyz as the son of Congolese parents, Fabrice Mawete is a qualified social pedagogue with a HEB coaching diploma. During his collaboration with the Congolese people living in the diaspora here for the exhibition *Congo as Fiction*, he took on the important role of mediator: he established contact with Congolese representatives of *la sape* and with other members of the Congolese community in Switzerland and conducted conversations with them in French/Lingala to elicit their attitudes to the topic of the *sapeur* in the Swiss-Congolese community. Starting points for his research were key community meeting places, such as the Flory hairdressing salon and other establishments in Zurich's Langstrasse district. Via this work Fabrice Mawete saw the community from a different angle and was able to explore his own identity in more depth.

Antonin Wittwer, who completed a bachelor's degree in Design, Film and Art at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, was responsible for the filming of the project. He focuses on developing documentary film portraits of people in extraordinary circumstances. For example, in his final degree project *Anders Als Andere* (Different than Others, documentary film, 20 minutes), he portrayed the regulars at his grandmother's pub. During his many years of freelance work, he also gained experience in documentary filmmaking and music videos. For this project he captured on film the opinions and voices of the Congolese community, as well as his impressions of community life and festivities.

At the foreground of *Mvuuatu-Mboka Na Biso—et la Suisse* was the question of what value is given to style and elegance in the diaspora, how these aspects are expressed, and to what extent they might form a cultural identity. On the basis of interviews with "key figures" like the *sapeurs*, but also more generally by attending the community's parties and weddings with their ostentatiously dressed guests, those involved in the project attempted to gain an insight into the subject. This process is a subjective approach.

La sape (*Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*) is a fashion phenomenon from the urban centers of Brazzaville and Kinshasa. The members of this fictitious society call themselves *sapeurs* and feel obliged to dress elegantly or outlandishly. Their history can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century, to the age of the first encounters with the French and Belge in a colonial context. Given the Europeans' debasement of the African body, Western clothing was seen as an opportunity to increase one's status in colonial society. On the other hand, even at that time items of clothing were used as a medium of exchange between the local population and diverse European expedition leaders. By the 1920s at the latest, Congolese domestic workers were increasingly being remunerated in secondhand clothing. Viewed in this light, today's generation is actually the fourth or even fifth generation of *sapeurs*.¹

The *sapeurs* in the Congo-Kinshasa enjoy an almost heroic status that is often associated with Christian moral values, as Daniele Tamagni writes: "Non-violence, good education, the dialogue of generous spirit and a passion for all the values that must be integral to be a true *sapeur*."² Consequently, among the Congolese *la sape* represents an elegant attitude accompanied by equally elegant behavior and appearance, as Tamagni explains: "In the Congo elegance is very important. Perhaps in no other

1 Gondola 2010, pp. 157–173.

2 Tamagni 2009, unpagued.

country is a sense of style so crucially identified with its own cultural history. A significant part of this heritage is the *sape* and the *sapeurs*.³ *La Sape* embodies the pride and self-confidence of Congolese culture and is an influential aspect of identity and belonging in the community. The reportage photography *Gentlemen of Bacongo* by Daniele Tamagni and the impressive photo series *Vanité apparente* by Yves Sambu provide an authentic insight into the *sape* scene in Congo [see story, p. 166]. The viewer soon becomes aware that the aesthetic and visual contrast between the *sapeur* and their tidy surroundings here in Switzerland is very different from that in the Congo, where the elegance of the *sapeurs* clearly contrasts with the urban context of the cities where infrastructure is sometimes lacking. In Switzerland the contrast is instead between the *sapeurs* and even other members of the Congolese diaspora and the local, rather modest clothing culture.

During the project there was also a discussion of the—in part fierce—criticism of the *sapeurs* that comes from the members of the diaspora themselves. For many Congolese people living in the diaspora, *la sape* symbolizes a degree of superficiality and they disapprove of the fact that fashion seems to be considerably more important to the *sapeurs* than family and community values.

What became apparent during the research was that the Swiss *sapeurs* have perhaps adopted a touch of local restraint: although their outfits come from the latest collections of the big fashion brands and are very elegant, they also conform to the contemporary clothing style in Switzerland. Perhaps the *sape* movement ultimately lives off paradoxes, and possibly it is the contrasting backdrop that lets creativity bloom, as Paul Goodwin states: “It is at once a throwback to a lost world of precolonial elegance and decadence. At the same time it is also futuristic and even a little freakish given the extremity of the urban conditions in which many of the *sapeurs* live, particularly in the Congo. *La sape* is a movement of contradictions and paradoxes.”⁴

Finally, the project aims to open our eyes to society and culture:

Mvutu-Mboka Na Biso—et la Suisse offers an opportunity to amplify the voice of local Congolese people about the subject of design and elegance and to gain an overview of this very prominent community in Switzerland. From this, a thought-provoking work emerged: thoughts about individual stories of identity, migration, and local coexistence—and even moral issues. Maybe the project will even succeed in making us aware of extravagance in new contexts in our everyday lives. — Laura Falletta

3 Tamagni 2009, unpagued.

4 Tamagni 2009, unpagued.

POWER AND POLITICS



Fig. 249



Fig. 250



Fig. 251



Fig. 252

Fig. 249
Hans Himmelheber
An instrumental ensemble
Luluwa region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 186-40

Fig. 250
Hans Himmelheber
Two women
Luluwa region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 186-9

Fig. 251
Hans Himmelheber
Cimwana masker and musicians
Byombo region, May 20–22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 189-18

Fig. 252
Hans Himmelheber
Cimwana masker
Byombo region, May 20–22, 1939
Museum Rietberg, FHH 189-31

HANS HIMMELHEBER IN LULUWALAND, MARCH 24 – MAY 22, 1939

Constantine Petridis

Although the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin and the Museum of the Belgian Congo in Tervuren, today's AfricaMuseum, had already established the essence of their impressive and comprehensive Luluwa collections, when Hans Himmelheber visited the region in 1939, research on the (Beena) Luluwa and their art had been limited and publications on the subject were barely available. Obviously, Himmelheber was familiar with the published accounts of the late nineteenth-century German explorers Hermann von Wissmann and his co-travelers in which Luluwa art is occasionally mentioned and illustrated.¹ These writings and the Luluwa works Wissmann and his team members had acquired in the late 1880s, which ended up in the museums of Berlin, and to a lesser extent Leipzig, must have inspired Himmelheber as he undertook his Congo voyage.²

What has survived from Himmelheber's field notes is limited but the works he acquired during his travels along with the data that accompany them are invaluable documents for our understanding of the history of Luluwa art. And even though the first European exploration of the country's interior had happened half a century earlier, in-depth art-focused research in the Congo, whether by anthropologists or art historians, had only just started at the time of Himmelheber's visit. As such, Himmelheber's pioneering work constitutes an important precursor of the later research conducted by Albert Maesen (1982) and by Paul Timmermans (1966).³ Adding further to the merits of his legacy, Himmelheber's photographic record comprises a few interesting images of musicians playing various instruments during some type of performance, possibly specifically organized for the entertainment of the German visitor, and a set of photographs of two Luluwa women with striking abdominal scarifications [figs. 249/250].

His photographic record is most interesting for the set it contains of images of a masquerade scene, possibly taken in a village named Ngandu, with wooden masks called *cimwana* ("tshimoana") and *mulwala* ("muluala") and a type of hood from knotted fibers of a genre identified as *munyinga*—Himmelheber⁴ spells it "munjinga" [figs. 251–256].⁵ Attributed to the (Beena) Byombo (Biombo), the masks captured in these photographs were actually acquired by Himmelheber, with much of their accoutrements intact and a handsome dusty red surface coloring preserved on the wooden examples.⁶ Himmelheber⁷ noted a stylistic connection with the carved masks of the Eastern Pende and those of the Chokwe. And the wooden *mulwala* type with striking chameleon-like eyes belonged to a genre that Himmelheber had already witnessed among neighboring peoples, such as the Kuba, Bindi, and others.⁸

Field-based documentation on Byombo masking is meager but thanks to research by David Binkley in the 1980s among the Northern Kete and the Southern Bushoong, close neighbors of

1 Himmelheber knew of the work on the Luluwa and their art by Leo Frobenius, who had visited the area during his expedition of 1905/06, and whose field collections were primarily deposited in the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology (today's Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt), but Frobenius's research is never cited in Himmelheber's writings. We should of course not forget that Frobenius's field notes, which have proven of such great help to Congo art scholars, were not published until the late 1980s in the series edited by Hildegard Klein.

2 Part of the extensive Luluwa holdings of what is today the Royal Museum for Central Africa, or AfricaMuseum, in Tervuren, and largely synchronic with Himmelheber's acquisitions, the hundreds of works field-collected by the Belgian medical doctors Jules-Auguste Fourche and Henri Morlighem between 1933 and 1936, were not offered to the museum until 1946, and were therefore not accessible to Himmelheber prior to his Congo travels. And the many writings by the prolific author duo, with their sporadic references to Luluwa art, were apparently not known to Himmelheber either. See, e.g., Fourche and Morlighem 1937, pp. 189–202; Fourche and Morlighem 1938, pp. 616–672; Fourche and Morlighem 1939.

3 Timmermans's 1966 article is based on research he conducted among the Luluwa and other peoples in the Kasai region from 1955 to 1962. Maesen's research in Luluwaland in 1954 was conducted in the context of the collecting expedition he organized for his employer at the time, the Tervuren museum, from 1953 to 1955. In addition to his 1982 essay and some other succinct contributions in various collective publications, Maesen's unpublished notebooks from this expedition have proven valuable resources for the study of the arts of many of the peoples he visited.

4 Himmelheber 1960, p. 354.

5 Even though the name Ngandu is not cited in Himmelheber's 1960 publication and does not appear in his diaries, I located Himmelheber's photographs of this village on the basis of documentation accompanying a Byombo *cimwana* mask that, according to William Fagg (1980, p. 140) was probably acquired in the field by Himmelheber before it was purchased by the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva through Charles Raton in 1939. It should also be noted that in Himmelheber's 1960 text, the name *munyinga* is erroneously given to a wooden mask of this *cimwana* type ("tshimoana" in his spelling).

6 Himmelheber 1960, figs. 277 and 278, p. 355.

7 Himmelheber 1960, p. 353.

8 Himmelheber 1960, p. 354.



Fig. 253



Fig. 254



Fig. 255



Fig. 256

Fig. 253
Artist of the Byombo region
Mask with collar, *cimwana*
Pre-1939, wood, plant fibers,
50 × 47 × 40 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 21b
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 254
Artist of the Byombo region
Large mask with collar, *mulwala*
Pre-1939, wood, plant fibers,
79 × 40 × 34 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 22
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 255
Hans Himmelheber
**Masked figure with beak and crown of
feathers, *munyinga***
Byombo region, May 20–22, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 189–32

Fig. 256
Artist of the Byombo region
**Mask with beak and feather crown,
*munyinga***
Pre-1939, plant fibers, horn, feathers,
90 × 55 × 50 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.426
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

the Byombo, we know that *munyinga* presides over the hierarchy of masks that comprise *mulwala* and its female counterpart *cimwana*, which together play a central role in the boys' puberty ritual named *buadi* among the Northern Kete and *nkaan* among the Southern Bushoong.⁹ Also documented and field-collected by Leo Frobenius in 1905/06,¹⁰ the culture to which masks of this style belong was actually presented as a Luluwa subgroup in Frobenius's field notes. Today, however, the Byombo are generally considered an autonomous group with closer ties to the Kuba confederacy than to the Luluwa. In fact, while the writings on the Luluwa by Frobenius as well as by later authors such as Maesen and Timmermans place great emphasis on the various subgroups that form the Luluwa culture or ethnic group, none of these subdivisions appears in Himmelheber's writings.

COLLECTING POWER OBJECTS

Although he apparently did not acquire any Luluwa masks other than these Byombo examples of wood and knotted fibers, his diaries indicate that during his relatively short visit in Luluwaland of less than two months, Himmelheber field-collected about 200 figure sculptures, or perhaps even more.¹¹ According to his notes, which indicate that he was indeed primarily interested in the Luluwa peoples' figures, in addition to those he shipped home for his personal collection, the works he collected in the field were sent off to the dealer Charles Ratton in Paris and the Weyhe Gallery in New York and to the museums of Geneva and Basel.¹² From the catalogue cards for various figures in the Basel Museum of Cultures (e.g., III 6819 and 6885), we learn that such sculptures were only carved in six of the Luluwa villages Himmelheber visited.¹³ The collector also comments that at the time, Luluwa people did not bear scarifications any longer and that the coiffures as seen in the figures were also of the past.

Generally speaking, Luluwa figure sculptures pertain to the broad class of power objects, once pejoratively labeled as "fetishes," which comprise both human-made and natural receptacles or recipients, such as horns, snail shells, gourds, or even animal skulls, meant to be filled with substances or ingredients that provide them with special, supernatural powers. The local term for such power objects, *bwanga* (singular of *manga*), is the equivalent of the terms *nkisi* (singular of *minkisi*) and *nkishi* (singular of *mankishi*) used in other parts of Central Africa. Most of these power objects are considered to possess both positive and negative qualities, and can serve to protect and help as much as they have the capacity to harm and damage. Ambivalence and ambiguity indeed seem to be a power object's most pertinent characteristics. In addition to the power object, the term *bwanga* also relates to the cult surrounding the object, a system of magico-religious beliefs and practices that centers on communication between the living and the spirits (of the dead). Power figures among the Luluwa, as among many other Central African peoples, acquired their special status as conduits between the world of humans and that of spirits only after they were charged by a ritual expert with ingredients or substances known as *bishimba*. Comprising materials of mineral, plant, animal, or even human origins (e.g., bits of hair, nail clippings, and teeth), the *bishimba* that defined the power object's efficacy and success had to be

9 Binkley 1990, pp. 157–176.

10 Frobenius 1988, pp. 7/126, fig. 129.

11 Himmelheber, diary, March 24 – May 22, 1939. His trip brought him to Demba, Luluabourg (present-day Kananga), Lwebo, and Charlesville (now Djokupunda). Other than the (Beena) Luluwa (or Bashilange, as they preferred to call themselves at the time) and the (Beena) Byombo, Himmelheber also encountered the related Luba and (Beena) Kosh peoples. However, despite his desire to do so, he did not succeed in meeting with the most powerful Luluwa chief of the day, Kalamba-Mukenge.

12 On Himmelheber's role as collector and trader, see the essay by Oberhofer in the present publication.

13 See the card catalogue at the Museum der Kulturen Basel.

recharged regularly, most notably at the appearance of a new moon, a sign of hope and renewal after a period of darkness and uncertainty. *Mupaki wa manga* or *mpaka manga* was the title of the said ritual expert with the special knowledge capable of manipulating the life-force or life-energy contained within the *bwanga*. This man or woman was considered the real creator of the charged figures and it was their name that was remembered more commonly than that of the carver who had provided the wooden receptacle to contain the *bishimba*.

Of the Luluwa figures included in this publication—six of which were field-collected by Himmelheber—a few are remarkably different in style and iconography from what we have come to consider more typical examples. One is the burned fragment of what must have been a chiefly figure, which he acquired on May 18, 1939, in a village named Basangana [fig. 10]. This sculpture belongs to a genre called *bwanga bwa bukalenga*, a rare category of male figures charged with magico-medicinal substances that are responsible for the protection and guidance of the ruler they portray, and by extension, of the people under his authority.¹⁴ These figures might be interpreted as commemorative portraits that refer to historical individuals. Several examples of this rare genre are to be found in the Tervuren museum, but one of the most famous is undoubtedly the imposing figure acquired in the village of Tshiweewe in 1885 by Ludwig Wolf, one of Hermann von Wissmann's travel companions, now in the Berlin museum [fig. 257].

Interestingly, Himmelheber¹⁵ noted the name *kalongo*—in his diary he notes “kalombo” (May 18, 1939)—for the figure he acquired, a proper name that has also been associated with figures of the female gender belonging to a different genre or typological category.¹⁶ That this *kalongo* figure was owned by a priest, as Himmelheber reports, is difficult to confirm. Rather, such figures were most typically the exclusive property of a high-ranking chief of the distinctive *mukalenga wa nkashaama*, or leopard rank, whose image they portrayed. Upon his investiture into this prestigious title, such a leopard chief was believed to be capable of partaking in the special and fearsome powers of the animal, which lent him special supernatural qualities that enabled him to intervene on behalf of his community. Although they were largely damaged as a result of the fire the Himmelheber *kalongo* figure suffered from, various attributes in addition to the helmet indicate the sculpture's relationship with the leopard rank, including the carved imitation of a leopard skin (or the spotted skin of another feline), a cutlass or sword, and the attachment of a medicine-filled gourd or a shell on the figure's back or chest. The *bwanga bwa bukalenga* was indeed one of the Luluwa people's most important cults and related power objects with collective responsibilities. Like among the neighboring Songye, the Luluwa distinguish between small *manga* for personal use and large *manga* for communal purposes; that the former category is better represented in collections in the West reflects its wide popularity.

Fig. 257
Artist of the Beena Beele Luluwa region
Male figure, *bwanga bwa bukalenga*
Pre-1885, wood, pigment,
73.5 × 19.5 × 17.5 cm
Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche
Museen, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin,
III C 3246
Acquired by Ludwig Wolf

Fig. 258
Artist of the Luluwa region
**Stool in the form of a human figure
(detail of fig. 105)**
Pre-1939, wood, 42 × 19 × 18 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.110
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 259
Artist of the Luluwa region
Caryatid stool
Possibly late nineteenth or early twentieth
century, wood, pigment, and fiber, 43.2 cm
Paul Tishman (by 1968), current collection
unknown

14 Much of the contextual information provided here stems from my recent monograph (Petridis 2018), which summarizes my doctoral dissertation and many of my earlier publications on the subject, and also includes many of the illustrations reproduced here.

15 Himmelheber 1960, p. 399.

16 The succinct data presented in Himmelheber's unpublished French essay destined for the now defunct colonial magazine *Brousse* are basically the same as those published in his *N—kunst und N—künstler* of 1960.



Fig. 257



Fig. 258



Fig. 259



Fig. 260



Fig. 261



Fig. 262



Fig. 263

CARYATID STOOLS AND CARYATID MORTARS

Fig. 260
Artist of the Luluwa region
Crouching figure
First half of the twentieth century,
wood, 13.5 × 4.2 × 4 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 314
Gift from Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 261
Artist of the Luluwa region
Tobacco mortar
Pre-1950s/60s, wood, 16.6 × 3.7 × 4 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2017.706
Bequest Dr. François Bochud
Acquired by Paul Timmermanns

Fig. 262
Artist of the Luluwa region
Tobacco mortar
Nineteenth/early twentieth century,
wood, 16.5 × 4 × 5.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 315
Gift from Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 263
Artist of the Luluwa region
**Crouching figure, possibly *bwanga*
*bwa cilembi***
Possibly late nineteenth or early twentieth
century, wood, pigment, and antelope
horn, 24 cm
Musée Barbier-Mueller, Geneva, 1026-11
Former Essayan Collection

A strikingly unusual Luluwa acquisition by Himmelheber is the caryatid stool with a crouching supporting figure [fig. 258]. The only other Luluwa caryatid stool we know of is the one formerly in the collection of Paul and Ruth Tishman in Los Angeles [fig. 259]. The genre of stool to which the Himmelheber example belongs was quite widespread in southern Congo. Aside from the Songye and to a lesser extent the Chokwe, we are especially familiar with the diverse range of sculptures of this type that stem from the Luba king- and chiefdoms in southeastern Congo. Despite the lack of any field-based information to confirm this, such stools most probably had the same connotations of rank and prestige among the Luluwa as they had among their neighbors. That only few stools in Luluwa style have been acquired possibly underscores their rarity and elite status but it may also suggest that such chiefly attributes were more frequently imported from neighboring cultures rather than locally produced. Thus, when I traveled in the region in the mid-1990s, I actually witnessed a similar practice with regard to other political emblems, such as axes of Songye origin, skirts of Kuba origin, and staffs of Luba origin. When these works of various origins are acquired without any first-hand data, as is so often the case when they end up in museums or private collections, they are not automatically associated with the Luluwa.

A remarkable trait of the Himmelheber Luluwa stool is the rendering of ribs on the chest of the supporting caryatid figure. The same pronounced bones can actually be observed in several of the miniature sculptures of crouching or squatting figures for which the Luluwa are quite famous. Some of these figures, with their elbows touching or resting on the knees and their hands holding the cheeks, are integrated in what the literature has commonly identified as mortars for either tobacco or cannabis, or a combination of both [figs. 261/262]. Daniel Biebuyck¹⁷ and other scholars in his wake have suggested that such mortars, filled with medicinal or magical substances, may actually have been used as power objects for therapeutic purposes with their contents being snuffed, inhaled, or otherwise consumed by the patient. It is not impossible that pounded dried tobacco leaves were part of such therapeutic concoctions. Ever since its introduction from the Americas to Africa by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, tobacco has actually been praised for its medicinal and magical properties. According to this viewpoint, the image of a caryatid figure with skeletal features would hint at the health issues that the mortar as a power object was meant to cure. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Wissmann already named the mortars “fetish snuff tobacco boxes.”¹⁸

In some of the earlier literature the depiction of an emaciated figure has specifically been related to the health problems caused by the excessive use of cannabis (or marijuana; *Cannabis sativa*). However, while the reports on the damaging effects of cannabis consumption cannot be dismissed, the recognition of this causal relationship in Luluwa carving, though appealing, is not based on first-hand data. In fact, even if one were to reject the possible therapeutic use of such mortars, it cannot be determined that the mortars were indeed used for cannabis, known as *dyamba*, rather

17 Biebuyck 1992, p. 315.

18 Wissmann 1891, p. 218.

than for tobacco, called *mfwanka*. For the same reason, it is difficult to assert the connection between the popularity of caryatid mortars and the religious movement called *bwanga bwa dyamba* that centered around the consumption of cannabis promoted in the late nineteenth century by the chief Kalamba-Mukenge. Truth is, the smoking of cannabis, most typically with a water pipe made of a gourd, has always had religious meaning among the Luluwa and occurred in the context of ancestor worship up to at least the 1960s.

The knee-to-elbow position with hands on the cheeks that is shared between these miniature carvings and the two known stools is not unique to the Luluwa corpus. But because it seems to have been more prominent here than among some of their neighbors, it is mostly associated with the Luluwa. Even though crouching is a common way of resting in places where stools or chairs are not widely used, various meanings have been proposed to explain this striking posture. One opinion is that it represents a chief or someone of high rank who reflects on his duties and responsibilities. Another opinion views it as an expression of pain and sickness or even sorrow. A more popular interpretation associates it with a hunting ritual imitating how a hunter crouches in front of the sculpture and blows smoke on it in order to activate the inhabiting spirit and to ensure its positive intervention. Small caryatid figures with this position were carried attached to a hunter's belt for continued protection and good luck or, like in the case of the Berlin figure illustrated earlier [fig. 257], to a necklace. Crouching figures that are slightly taller than those integrated into the average mortars and that bear a small antelope horn inserted in their head, are typically identified as power figures for the hunt, known as *manga wa cilembi* (plural of *bwanga bwa cilembi*) [fig. 263].

BWANGA BWA BWIMPE: FOR BEAUTY AND GOOD HEALTH

The four other standing figures included in this publication are different examples of the broad *bwanga* power object category. Three specifically pertain to a genre known as *bwanga bwa bwimpe* [figs. 264/265/267]. Recognizable by the little cup in one hand that was originally filled with chalk, this is perhaps the most popular genre of Luluwa power object. The fourth example [fig. 266] is somewhat unusual in that it holds a hard-to-identify tool in one hand and carries a child in the other. Indeed, the maternity theme is typically reserved for yet another type of power cult known as *bwanga bwa cibola* that addresses questions of childbirth and fertility. Mother-and-child figures related to this *cibola* cult are among the best-represented and most beloved Luluwa sculptures in collections in the West. Still, the categories of *cibola* and *bwimpe* (I will return to them later) share a common philosophy that is actually encapsulated by the term *bwimpe*. Uniting our Western notions of ethics or morality, and aesthetics or beauty, the fusion of the *bwimpe* and *cibola* categories into one single work with the intention to protect unborn or new life, should not come as a surprise.

According to Himmelheber,¹⁹ smaller figures of the *bwimpe* type were owned by almost every man and woman, and his informants told him that they were “idols” carved upon the recom-

Fig. 264
Artist of the Luluwa region
(probably Bakwa Mushilu)
Female (?) figure, *bwanga bwa bwimpe*
Probably early to mid-nineteenth century, wood and pigment, 45 cm
Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, EO.0.0.7158
Acquired by De Bruyn

Fig. 265
Artist of the Luluwa region
(probably Bakwa Mushilu)
Male figure with stamper, *bwanga bwa bwimpe*
Pre-1939, wood, 30 × 6.5 × 8 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 8
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 266
Artist of the Luluwa region
Mother with child, *bwanga bwa bwimpe* or *bwanga bwa cibola*
Pre-1939, wood, 28 × 5.5 × 7 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 7
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 267
Artist of the Luluwa region
Male figure, *bwanga bwa bwimpe*
Pre-1939, wood, 37.1 cm
Jan Calmeyn, Sint-Niklaas
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

19 Himmelheber 1960, pp. 395–399.



Fig. 264



Fig. 265



Fig. 266



Fig. 267

mentation of a “sorcerer.”²⁰ Each figure would originally have been made for a specific purpose but could subsequently be used to help with any possible challenge or concern. In order to activate it, the figure was rubbed with red camwood powder while white chalk was placed in the cup it held. Its most important task was to intervene at the time of a woman’s pregnancy and to assist with the delivery. The last day before a future mother would give birth, she placed the figure in front of her house so that passersby might sprinkle white chalk in its hand-held cup to ensure that the woman would be supported during the painful process.

One of the Himmelheber *manga wa bwimpe* examples illustrated here [fig. 265] is stylistically very similar to a figure currently in the Tervuren museum, which was acquired in the field by a man called De Bruyn by 1912 [fig. 264]. The Tervuren and Rietberg sculptures are in a popular substyle called Bakwa Mushilu, which originated in the region around the town of Demba in northern Luluwaland, where Himmelheber spent the night on March 27, 1939. The Tervuren example, which is possibly female rather than male but also slightly taller and more refined, may in fact be a generation older than the Rietberg one. Perhaps the latter was even especially carved as a replacement for the former. Although the practice of replacing works that were discarded, sold, or otherwise relinquished has not been recorded in the Luluwa literature, it seems reasonable to assume that it was done here as it was elsewhere in Central Africa.

The name which Himmelheber recorded for the figures he acquired of this general type, *bulenga*, is currently also used as a synonym of *bwimpe* but it appears to have originally been proper to the neighboring Luba-Kasai culture. Both terms, *bulenga* and *bwimpe*, have the same meaning in that they both combine our Western notions of beauty and goodness. What the concept of *bwimpe/bulenga* implies is the human or cultural intervention in a person’s biological or natural appearance and anatomy. Among the means to accomplish the realization of this aesthetico-moral ideal are the application of various body beautifications in the shape of elaborate hairdos and hairstyles, jewelry and other accessories, and, most significantly, scarifications, locally known as *nsalu*. The often complex curvilinear and geometric patterns incised into the skin that decorate the surfaces of wooden figures imitates the practice of cicatrization that was in vogue until a recent past. Rubbing the skin with a paste made of red camwood powder and clay mixed with chalk, water, and palm oil in order to make it look healthier and thus more attractive, was also copied on the wooden figures.

The leadership attributes, overall size, and male gender of the *bwimpe* sculptures illustrated here, however, suggest that these figures had a purpose that extended beyond the protection of the beauty and health of a mother and her offspring. Indeed, the spotted feline skirt along with the cutlass or sword that replaces the more common pestle or stamper, are references to prestige and status similar to the carved accessories of the category of power objects called *bwanga bwa bukalenga* mentioned earlier in this essay. Himmelheber²¹ actually also distinguished such figures of larger size (20 to 30 centimeters) from the smaller works that made up the *bwimpe* category *stricto sensu*, and he associated them instead with the term *mukenge*. Based on earlier speculations offered by the then Tervuren museum curator Joseph Maes

20 The conception of such figures as idols in the sense of the representations of gods that are used as objects of worship has long been dispelled in the scholarly literature, and the character Himmelheber identified as a sorcerer was most likely a diviner, locally known as *mubuki* or *mwenalubuku*.

21 Himmelheber 1960, p. 399.

(1940), Himmelheber identified them as ancestral figures that belonged to chiefs and their spouses.²²

Because of their status as power objects, that is, as sculptures charged with supernatural qualities that could serve defensive or offensive purposes, Luluwa figures were not only persecuted by local religious reform movements, during the Belgian colonial period they were also targeted by Church and State. As expressions of a society that colonial officers and missionaries believed had to be “civilized” and liberated from “paganism,” they were likely driven underground to adopt a new, secret life, out of public view. Even more often, however, they were either destroyed or seized and exported to Europe and later the USA. We lack descriptions of any of these iconoclastic activities when the country was under Belgian rule but when Albert Maesen explored the region in the mid-1950s, much of the local art production had already waned. And by the time of my own visits in 1994 and 1996, there were hardly any traces of traditional sculpture to be found, except for some masks. In light of such historical transformations and their negative impact on Luluwa culture, the art-historical interest of survivals, such as the objects acquired by Hans Himmelheber and now preserved in the museums of Basel and Zurich, and the documentation that accompanies them, can simply not be overstated.

22 Himmelheber cannot be faulted for his reliance on Maes's writings as it would not be until much later that the latter's problematic analyses and interpretations would be questioned, critiqued, and ultimately rejected.



Fig. 268

Fig. 268
Artist of the Pende region
Female figure
Early twentieth century, wood, pigments,
56.8 × 15.5 × 15.6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 802
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: A FEMALE POWER OBJECT BY THE CONGOLESE CENTRAL PENDE

Michaela Oberhofer,
David Mannes and Jens Stenger

Above all, the Pende people are famous for their spectacular masks. Freestanding, anthropomorphic sculptures by them are comparatively rare. The latter are often power objects owned by high-ranking chiefs.¹ While masks should not resemble any living people, the Pende's power figures had a relatively naturalistic design. In the context of the Pende revolt during the colonial period, some power figures emerged that were furnished with bundles of animal or plant materials. This "medicine"—and most importantly the words uttered by the ritual expert—invoked the vital energy or the spirit of a deceased person. Charged with these supernatural powers, a power object identified various tasks related to the concerns and hardships of both individuals and communities. Until now it was these two aesthetic principles—the relative naturalism and accumulation of materials—that had been typical of the Pende's power objects. Both were aimed at eliciting from the viewer a combination of astonishment, awe, and fear. While the power objects' external features immediately catch the eye, their interiors long remained concealed.

At the heart of this essay is a female sculpture from the central Pende region that is owned by the Museum Rietberg.² Enabled by modern imaging techniques, the view into its interior yielded surprising findings.³ Previously acclaimed above all for its balanced design, this sculpture is a power object filled with substances. Only its holistic study in the context of a complementary art historical and scientific analysis has been able to reveal new insights into the material, technical, and cultural processes used for the Pende's power objects [figs. 268/269].

SEEN FROM OUTSIDE: THE EPITOME OF COOL FEMININITY

The Museum Rietberg's Pende figure was part of the collection of Eduard von der Heydt, who had acquired it from the Parisian art dealer Charles Ratton. It was published by Eckart von Sydow as early as 1932 in *Kunst der Naturvölker*, which means that it was made in the 1920s or earlier [fig. 270].⁴ The first female director of the Museum Rietberg, Elsy Leuzinger used effusive terms to describe the sculpture's beauty: "The statue, a felicitous stylistic combination of realism and schematism, stands out for its expressive head and very summarily treated limbs. [...] The simplicity of the body, the frontality, and not least the simplified, straight fall of the arms, which emphasize the cohesive silhouette, lend the statue its great composure and concentration."⁵ Seen from the side, the balance between rising and sinking forms and the zigzag line of the body are striking.

1 On power objects among the Pende, see Strother 1993, 2014/15, 2016. Power objects could have very diverse forms. In the 1980s there were, e.g., miniature portrayals ranging from airplanes and cars to small robot-like sculptures (Strother 2014/15, p. 140).

2 We would like to express our huge gratitude to Z. S. Strother for so generously sharing with us her knowledge of the art of the Pende. The elaborations on the Pende are based in large part on her comprehensive publications (Strother 1993, 1998, 2000, 2014/15, 2016). We would also like to thank Kilian Anheuser (Geneva Fine Art Analysis GmbH, Lancy), Martin Ledergerber (Museum Rietberg), Adriana Rizzo (Metropolitan Museum), Richard Woodward and his team (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts), and the Paul Scherrer Institut in Villigen.

3 See the findings of similar analyses in Bouttiaux and Marc Ghysels 2008; Hersak 2013; Howe and Rizzo 2015 and LaGamma 2008.

4 In this first publication from 1932, the figure was still wearing a necklace made of blue and green glass beads, which was later removed (e.g., Leuzinger 1963).

5 Leuzinger 1963, p. 204, figs. 153 a, b.

The compact body emphasizes the expressive face, which has numerous parallels with the design of mask faces. Among the Pende the physiognomy of masks is especially important.⁶ Gender roles and characteristics are expressed in the facial features that cover a spectrum from female to male to hypermasculine. In the Museum Rietberg's Pende figure, we can identify the typical attributes of a feminine mask face, such as the downward gaze with lowered eyelids known as *zanze* and the heart-shaped face with a small chin and slightly curved forehead. Though the closed mouth with thin lips is unusual, it is reminiscent of a female mask in the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren that was acquired by the Belgian colonial official Delhaise prior to 1924.⁷ The smooth hairstyle is reminiscent of the *mukoto* style.⁸

Like the masks, the Rietberg figure represents the ideal of femininity and beauty that the Pende associate with "coolness."⁹ The essence of femininity that is expressed in the sculpture's face is stressed by its unusually erotic and youthful body with its shapely breasts, pronounced vulva, rounded stomach that perhaps indicates a pregnancy, and the scarifications under the navel that served the sexual pleasure of men and women alike.¹⁰ Its interpretation as a "fertility figure," as advocated by Elsy Leuzinger, seems obvious. Women were revered by the matrilineal Pende as givers of life, in relation to both their own progeny and their work cultivating the land.

However, Léon de Sousberghe had already conjectured that the Rietberg figure might be a child figure that accompanied female masks.¹¹ We thank Z. S. Strother for drawing our attention to a photograph of a village mask (*mbuya jia kifutshi*) performance taken by Vanden Bossche before the Second World War [fig. 271]. In contrast to initiation masks, village masks generated an atmosphere of joy and gratitude as a link between the living and the dead.¹² The female gendered mask on the photo is holding a child figure in its arm that constitutes an exact copy of herself, down to the white fabric slung around the hips, the face painting, and even the wig.¹³ During her field research in the late 1990s, Z. S. Strother documented the Pende's memories of female masked performances with such figures known as *mona* (child) or *gakishi* (small three-dimensional carving).¹⁴ Occasionally, the dance of the mother and child ensemble portrayed a woman being initiated into the women's health society after the birth of her child. The female audience in particular was fond of this performance that commented on their own realm of experience.

The body and face of the Pende figure from the Museum Rietberg are very similar to the child figure on the photo. There are also temporal and regional congruencies, which indicates that it could be just such an entertaining accessory for masquerades. However, the naturalistic design and the latest scientific analyses suggest that the sculpture was in fact a power object owned by a chief. The clue came from the discovery of small holes in the Rietberg object that resemble those of the power figure of a colonial officer at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond.

6 See e.g., Strother 1998, chapters 5 and 6 in this catalogue.

7 Cf. de Sousberghe 1958, fig. 37.

8 Using the example of a mother and child figure from the Cleveland Museum of Art, the art historian Constantine Petridis (2002) discovered that many Pende carvings had been erroneously attributed to the Mbala on the basis of the lobed coiffures, even though this headdress can also be found in sculptures from the Kwilu-Pende region.

9 See Strother 1998, 2016.

10 Many thanks to Z. S. Strother for this information (email from May 3, 2019).

11 See de Sousberghe 1958, p. 151.

12 See Strother 2008, p. 18.

13 Mother and child depictions were also popular for the wooden figures (*kishikishi*) on the roofs of powerful chiefs from the 1940s at the latest, after the artist Kaseya Tambwe Makumbi had invented the subject—possibly inspired by the Virgin Mary with child (Strother 2014/15). However, *kishikishi* were unclothed and did not wear any wigs.

14 Our thanks to Z. S. Strother for these references.

RELATIVE NATURALISM:
RESISTANCE AND DETERRENCE

In the Museum Rietberg's Pende figure, which can be seen from the outside, there are seven holes slightly above the navel, whose almond shape and measurements resemble the vertical holes in the figure from Richmond [cf. fig. 279]. The latter is a depiction of a Belgian colonial officer that is unique among the Pende.¹⁵ Z. S. Strother's research led to the surprising finding that this is in fact a naturalistic portrait of Maximilian Balot. The Belgian colonial administrator was embroiled in a dispute between the Pende chief Matemo a Kelenge and the territorial agent Edouard Burnotte. Burnotte had abused Matemo's wife in order to impose forced labor during a tour of inspection. Shortly thereafter Balot was instructed to investigate this sadistic incident. In the process he was killed by Matemo—who probably mistook him for Burnotte—on June 8, 1931 in Kilamba near Gungu. Balot's death was the catalyst for the Pende revolt, which was led by Matemo. The Belgian colonial government reacted ruthlessly and sent an armed punitive expedition to the insurrectionary region.

There are various reasons why the death of a lowly colonial official was able to trigger a revolt. The Pende in the Kwilu and Kasai region suffered particularly severely under the economic conditions of colonial rule and the global financial crisis, which made the price of palm oil plummet. For this reason, the Pende in rural regions in particular resisted the pecuniary per capita taxation and the labor for the Belgian colonial government. After Balot's death the revolt spread quickly. At first the religious movement against the whites (*Tupelepele*) was very successful. Its followers believed that they could regain control of their country and lives. Collection points for European goods were established in the hope that the ancestors would replace these wares with products of African design. Only a few months later Belgium quelled the revolt with incredible severity.

In remembrance of this historical event, a carver created this portrait of Maximilien Balot. His long, thin face, his angular chin, parted hair, and large eyes have been faithfully reproduced. Even the uniform with buttons, belt, collar, and insignia has been recreated with utmost care. Yet at the same time, the artist depicted Balot as a *ngunza* (killer), meaning as a violent man, characterized according to the aesthetic criteria of the Pende by an especially long face and wide-open *meso abala* (dangerous eyes). The sculpture of Balot is a power object to transform the Belgian aggressor's spirit into a watchman and to use it for the benefit of the community.

A characteristic feature of anthropomorphic power objects by the Pende is their style, which Z. S. Strother describes as "relative naturalism."¹⁶ Visible to everyone, figures over a meter high (*kishikishi*) were installed on the roofs of important chiefs' houses. They signaled to the visitor that s/he was entering a dangerous place protected by a spiritual being. Another category of freestanding, figurative sculptures was the *tungulungu* (sing. *kan-gulungu*), which were likewise reserved for high-ranking chiefs and were stored inside the ritual buildings (*kibulu*).¹⁷ It was their task to stand watch over the homestead and to catch thieves, as well as to heal gynecological disorders. The portrait-like appearance was intended to remind the viewer that the figures were

15 On the history of the Balot figure and the Pende revolt, cf. Weiss, Woodward, and Strother 2016 and Strother 2016, pp. 219–234. The American political scientist Herbert F. Weiss was able to purchase the old figure along with a female sculpture in Gungu during his research in 1972. The owner informed him that the figure—stored in the clan house as a sacred object—represented a white man who was killed in 1931.

16 Strother 2014/15, p. 140.

17 It was possible for the outside of the ritual building to be adorned with other carvings. On ancestral shrines in the chief's house, head sculptures (*mahamba*) were also installed, but these are not categorized as power objects.

containers for the spirit of a deceased family member, mostly a younger relative, whose journey to the next world had been interrupted in order to protect the community for a limited time. The relative naturalism of power objects among the Pende emphasized this ambivalent position of the chiefs with their connection to the spirit world and evoked anxiety in the viewer. The realistically designed Pende figure from the Museum Rietberg could also be a power object that had served a chief as the vessel for the spirit of a female relative.

INSIDE INSIGHTS: CHANNELS AND CHARGES

In addition to this stylistic and art historical analysis, the Pende figure was examined using scientific methods. X-ray tomography¹⁸ is a noninvasive, nondestructive investigative method that makes the internal structure of the object visible: Fig. 272 contrasts a conventional photograph with the three-dimensional surface visualization of the X-ray tomography data set and a longitudinal section. The grayscale variations visible in the middle image arise from greater absorption of the X-radiation depending on the chemical composition and density of the material in the respective area. Light areas suggest the presence of materials that absorb more X-radiation. In this way it is possible to identify the wood grain created by growth rings, as well as paint residues on some uneven surfaces.

Wood grain and paint residues likewise emerge in the longitudinal section on the right of the illustration, and in addition the internal structure of the object becomes visible. A vertical channel runs along the entire height of the sculpture from which several horizontal channels branch off at navel height. This arrangement is consistent with the type of wood known as *Alstonia boonei*.¹⁹ About halfway up, the main channel is sealed with a material that absorbs more X-radiation. The inside wall of the channel above this point is covered throughout with a material that exhibits grayscale values comparable to this sealed section, which indicates the material's similar or same composition. Chemical analyses confirm this hypothesis.

Three samples—from the upper entrance to the channel and from the points above and below the seal—have been analyzed.²⁰ All three have proven to be a combination of kaolin, quartz sand, and triterpene resin. It was possible to identify the latter element as the resin of the tree *Symphonia globulifera*, thanks to reference data²¹ from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This substance was also found on a nineteenth-century Yombe sculpture in the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève.²² In the white, black, and red paint residues on the surface of the figure, this resin could not be detected; instead, a binding agent that contains carbohydrate (probably gum) was discovered. The pigments have been proven to be kaolin and red ocher.

Fig. 273 shows another longitudinal section through the upper section of the sculpture. The mass formed by the approximately three-centimeter-long seal in the chest area exhibits great inhomogeneity, which suggests that the individual components were not well mixed. Continuing downward this section ends with a concave area. Above the seal it is possible to identify a screw-like structure in the hollow space. In order to better illus-

Fig. 269

Radiograph and photograph as additional levels of analysis.

The radiographs are transmission images; the more X-radiation is absorbed by a picture area, the lighter it appears. Higher absorption can be attributed to a higher density and/or the presence of "heavier" elements.

Fig. 270

First publication of the Pende figure, with the necklace still in place.

Eckart von Sydow, *Kunst der Naturvölker* 1932, p. 73.

Fig. 271

Adrien Vanden Bossche

Female mask with child figure

Pende region, 1950s, b/w negative
Charles Hénault, Marc Felix, Archives du Congo Basin Art History Research Center

Fig. 272

From left: conventional photograph, three-dimensional surface visualization of the X-ray tomography data set, longitudinal section

2018, Paul Scherrer Institut Villigen, Museum Rietberg Zürich

18 The X-ray tomographic data were recorded at the Paul Scherrer Institut. The X-ray source was operated with 100 kV and 15 A. The analysis of the sculpture took place in two rounds of tomography (first section: head and thorax, second section: abdomen and legs). For every tomography scan 375 radiographies were detected by a scintillator digital camera system with 2160 x 2560 pixels at an exposure time of 15 s. The individual projections were reconstructed using the software Muhrec and the two tomography data sets combined with Kiptool. The subsequent evaluation and visualization were conducted with VG Studio max.

19 Our thanks go to Casey Mallinckrodt from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for this information.

20 Analyses of this and other samples were carried out with Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (Perkin Elmer Spotlight 400—Frontier), gas chromatography—mass spectrometry (Focus GC, coupled with Thermo Electron DSQ II instrument), and Raman spectroscopy (Renishaw inVia). We would like to thank Carolina Zanchet and Nadim Scherrer for their assistance.

21 Our thanks to Adriana Rizzo for the FTIR reference spectra.

22 See http://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/musinfo_public.php?id=021316, accessed June 20, 2019.

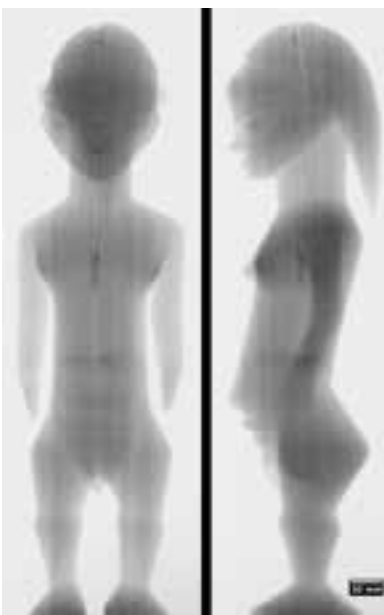


Fig. 269.1



Fig. 269.2



Fig. 270



Fig. 271



Fig. 272.1



Fig. 272.2



Fig. 272.3



Fig. 273



Fig. 274



Fig. 275

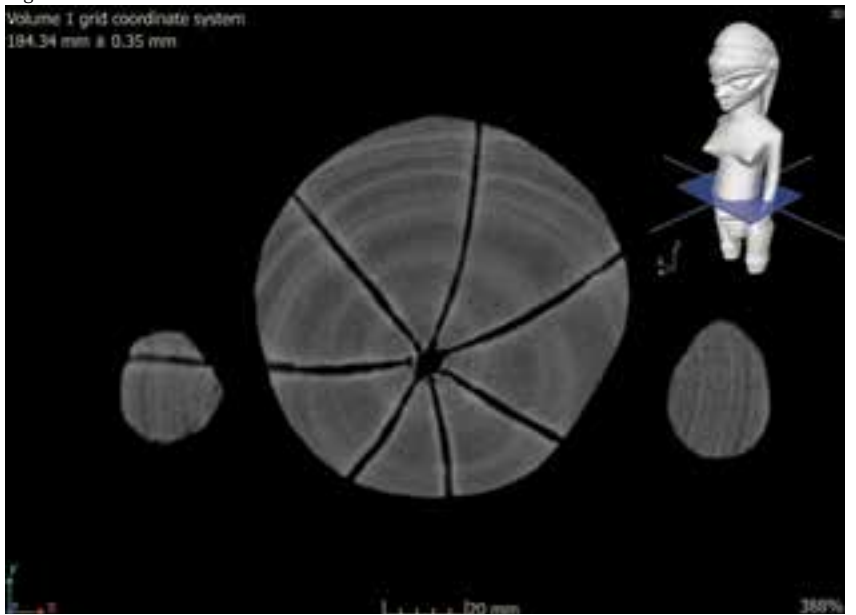


Fig. 276



Fig. 277



Fig. 278

Fig. 273
X-ray tomographic longitudinal section, detail

Fig. 274
Visualization of the hollow spaces inside the figure

Fig. 275
Visualization of the hollow spaces inside the figure, overview

Fig. 276
X-ray tomographic cross section at navel height.
Seven horizontal bent channels radially converge on the central vertical channel.

Fig. 277
Photograph of the sculpture from below
In addition to the two openings in the genital region, the restorations to the feet can also be seen.

Fig. 278
X-ray of the feet, lateral
2018, Paul Scherrer Institut Villigen, Museum Rietberg Zürich

trate this and the other hollow spaces, figs. 274/275 show negative forms. Here the corkscrew-like geometry of the upper cavity is particularly clear.

Furthermore, below the seal it is possible to see how the vertical channel splits off into seven horizontal branches at navel height that protrude up to the surface. These branches have a spindle-shaped cross section and are bent upward toward the central channel. Fig. 276 shows a cross section of these branches. Here it becomes clear that the horizontal channels are not straight but bent. One of the channels continues in one of the figure's arms, while another ends at the surface with a thread-like structure. This image also makes plain that the wood's growth rings run concentrically around the vertical channel.

On the lower exit of the central channel, two conical holes have been drilled in the genital region as the vagina and anus. These openings have the same shape, the same length, and are at the same angle to the vertical channel, which implies that the same tool was used.

Figs. 277/278 show a photograph of the sculpture from below and an X-ray of the feet from the side. In the photograph one can see supplementary wooden restorations that have been inserted with glue. In the X-ray numerous light lines are visible, probably material from the glue that absorbs more X-rays than the wood. An analysis under the stereomicroscope also suggests that large parts of the feet have been restored and little original material remains here. A chemical analysis identified the glue as protein. The use of wood and protein glue does not provide any clue—at least at this time—as to when and where the restoration was carried out.

SUMMARY

The combination of art-historical and scientific analysis emphasizes just how much effort went into manipulating the sculpture. This indicates that the Museum Rietberg's Pende figure is indeed a power object. When comparing the object's outer appearance with its internal channel structure, it is noticeable how closely the carver correlated his composition with the natural anatomy of the wood. The central vertical main channel is aligned with the sculpture's axis from the part in the hair to the lower exit between the legs. This channel along with the seven horizontal branches was not made artificially but rather corresponds to the way the wood grew. Perhaps the carver intentionally positioned the small holes at the height of the stomach in order to foreground it as the spiritually important center. It is probable that soft, natural material was initially removed from these cavities.²³

The carver or ritual expert used the vertical channel, which he positioned centrally, for other purposes, too. On the lower end he expanded the channel's opening with a tool to create a kind of vagina and also added an anus. Such artificial channels were previously known from figures by the Songye, for example, but not by the Pende. Among the Songye, *mankishi* serve as containers that are activated with supernatural powers by substances applied outside and inside. These powers are concentrated in the head or stomach, whose openings were closed, whereas the channels from the mouth, ears, and anus were left open in order to admit libations or medicine, for example.²⁴ In our Pende figure the upper vertical cavity was filled with a mixture of kaolin, sand

23 In contrast, the channel in the Balot figure runs slightly obliquely and ends in the foot. The cavity is filled, though the analysis of the filling material is not yet complete.

24 Hersak 2013

(quartz), and the resin from another tree. The plug in the chest area was likewise thickened with these materials. The mixture now only sticks to the walls of the upper channel. The corkscrew-shaped impression inside suggests that the filling was twisted in and out like a screw.²⁵

However, it is not only the inside but also the surface of the figure that was elaborately treated, with the latter being painted red, black, and white. The white highlights the body decoration, such as the scarifications on the cheek and the lower abdomen, as well as the line of the head and the mouth. Black was applied to emphasize the hair, eyebrows, nipples, navel, scarifications, and vagina; yet it was also used to paint the insides of the two openings in the genital region, even though they are not visible. The body was covered in a red paint of which only residues remain. Red (*misege*) was obtained from redwood of the genus *Pterocarpus* and used to be rubbed into the skin to make it shine, and with reference to this cosmetic effect it was also applied in several layers to masks or figures. In addition to redwood, the pigment *mungundu*—as in the case of the Pende figure—was also extracted from ocher, i.e., red soil containing clay, which was easier to obtain and longer lasting.

Among the Pende, kaolin, called *pemba*, is frequently used for ritual purposes. The kaolin, which comes from riverbeds, features in healing rituals, for example.²⁶ It is said that its white color has a positive “cooling” effect, whether for a healer to reduce his patient’s fever or to bless someone with good wishes before a journey. Moreover, as a color from another world that is associated with a positive connection to the ancestors, kaolin can also be used to weaken or “cool off” the powers of a dangerous opponent. Indeed, chiefs kept pieces of kaolin in their house so as to be ready for any emergency.²⁷ We consider the kaolin mixture inside the Rietberg figure to be more evidence of it having been used as a chief’s power object in the ritual context.

The restoration of the feet is another argument for the Pende figure being less a child figure for a masked performance than a power object. As power figures (*tungulungu*) were stored on a kind of shrine on the floor of the chiefs’ ritual building, some of them bear evidence of termite damage or have been eroded by moisture. The feet of the Rietberg figure had probably also been damaged up to the ankles and had thus been restored—perhaps prior to the figure’s purchase.

The findings of the scientific analysis in combination with the stylistic evaluation of the relative realism of the figure from the Museum Rietberg suggest that it was a power object that belonged to a high-ranking Pende chief. Yet the new insights into the inside of the figure have also given rise to questions that it has not been possible to answer in full. Thus while it is clear that the inside of the figure was filled with something, precisely how this was carried out is unknown. Perhaps further complementary examinations of similar figures in other museums and collections in the future will deliver new findings that will enable us to see the connection between the visible and invisible, the outside and inside of Pende sculptures in an entirely new light.

25 It might have been a cord or a soft, oblong object. If it had been a stick or a metal rod, the corkscrew structure would have been destroyed when it was removed.

26 See Strother 1998, p. 149.

27 Our thanks to Z. S. Strother for this information (email from May 20, 2019).



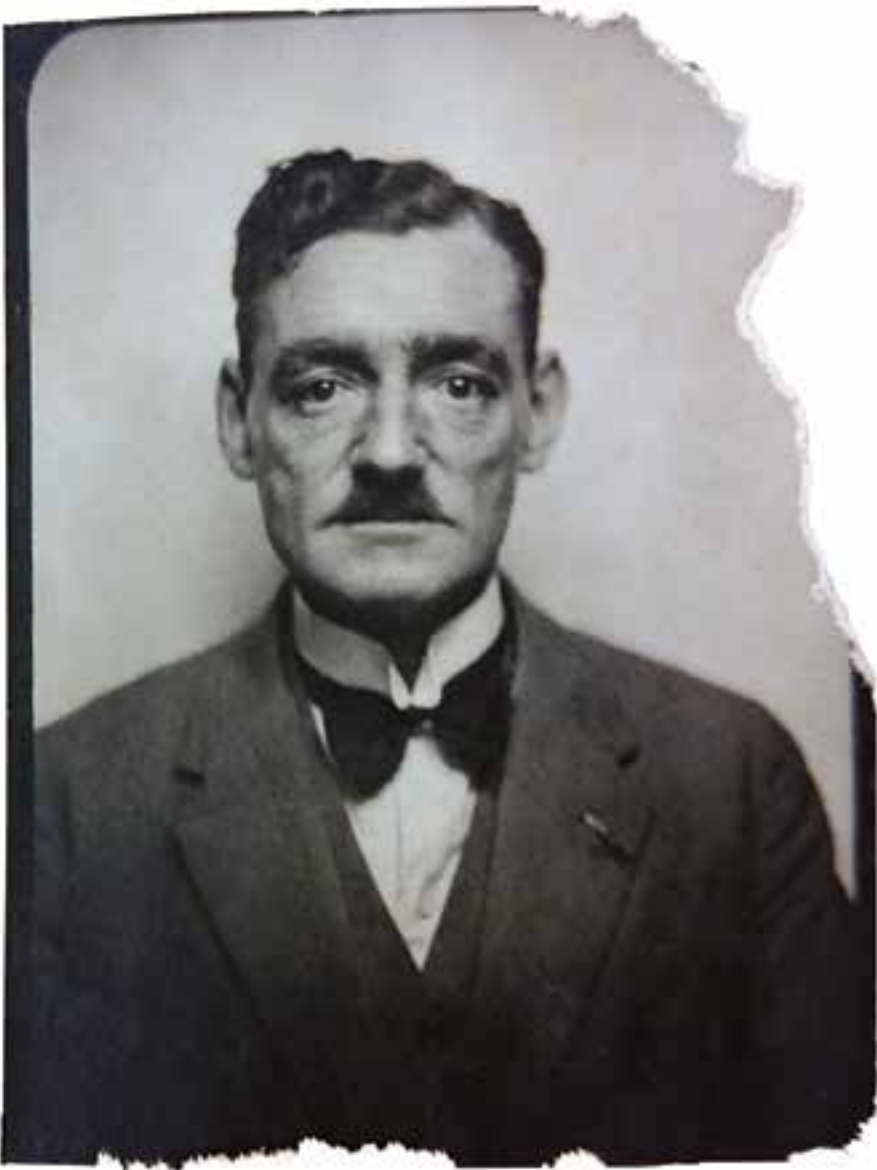


Fig. 280

Fig. 279



Fig. 281

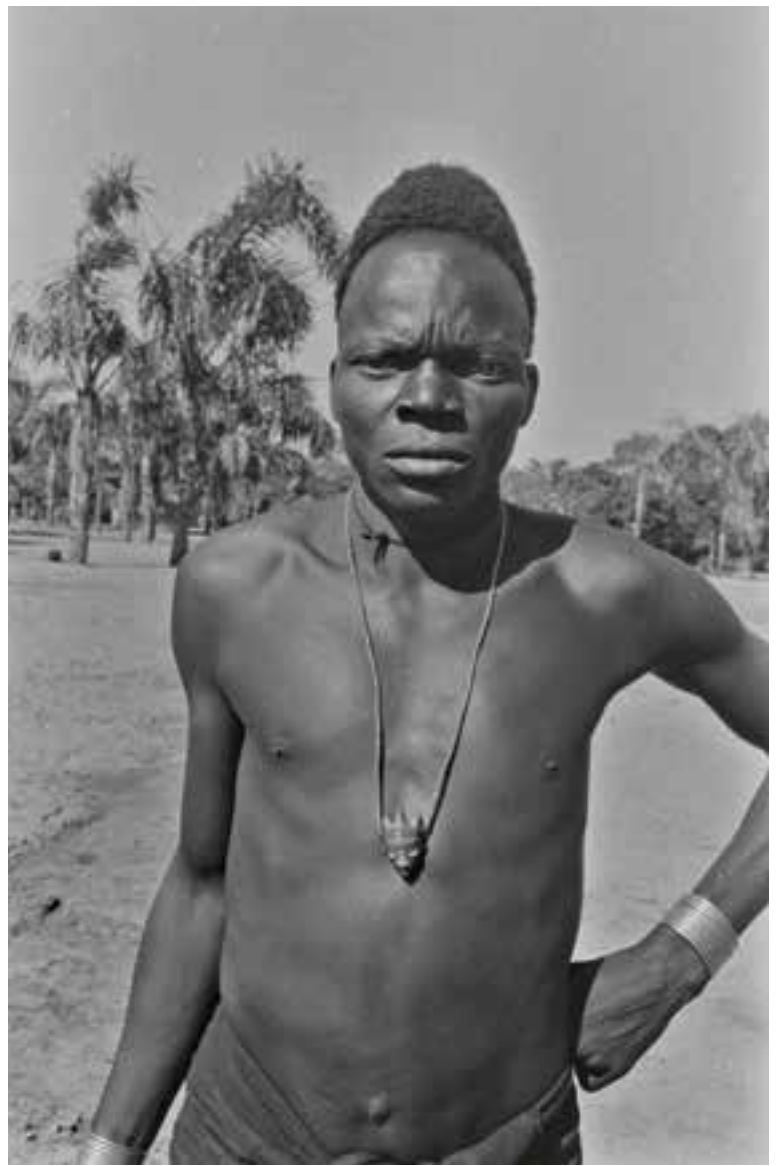


Fig. 282



Fig. 283



Fig. 284



Fig. 285



Fig. 286



Fig. 287

Fig. 279
Artist of the Pende region
Portrait figure of the Belgian colonial officer Maximilien Balot
1931, wood with metal repair clamp, 62.5 cm
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2015.3
Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund
Acquired by Herbert F. Weiss

Fig. 280
Unknown photographer
Personnel card of Maximilien Norbert Balot
1930, Brussels, Archives générales du Royaume 2 (dépôt Cuvelier), Service du Personnel d'Afrique, Série Colonie, K2615, n°15988, p. 1.

Fig. 281
Hans Himmelheber
According to Hans Himmelheber, this miniature mask is a portrait
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 191-5

Fig. 282
Hans Himmelheber
Pende man with miniature mask as pendant
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 191-16

Fig. 283
Artist of the Pende region
Ikhoko pendant in the form of a mask
First half of the twentieth century, ivory, 5.9 × 2.7 × 2.1 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 850
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 284
Artist of the Pende region
Ikhoko pendant in the form of a mask
First half of the twentieth century, aluminum, 4.9 × 2.5 × 1.7 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 872
Gift of Elsy Leuzinger

Fig. 285
Artist of the Pende region
Ikhoko pendant in the form of a mask
Before 1939, lead, 5.8 × 3 × 2.2 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.478
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 286
Artist of the Pende region
Ikhoko pendant in the form of a mask
Before 1939, bone, 5.7 × 2.9 × 2.2 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.479
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 287
Artist of the Pende region
Ikhoko pendant in the form of a mask
First half of the twentieth century, ivory, 5.6 × 3.5 × 1.9 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 867
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

ART AS EXPRESSION OF RESISTANCE: PENDE POWER FIGURES AND PENDANTS — In the 1920s the Congo population's dissatisfaction with the colonial state grew and manifested in open revolts like those of the Pende. The resistance to the Belgian colonial power was also expressed in art. This is especially clear in the wooden Pende figure that is a portrait of the Belgian colonial official by the name of Maximilien Balot [fig. 279]. His side part, high forehead, and uniform have been faithfully reproduced [fig. 280]. In 1931 Balot was involved in a conflict between the Pende chief Matemo a Kelenge and the cruel territorial agent Edouard Burnotte and was killed as a result.¹ Among the Pende, sculptures were rarely designed naturalistically—and if so, they were intended to elicit awe and fear. Thus, in the figure Balot is depicted as a *ngunza* (killer) with wide-open eyes—considered dangerous—and an angry expression. The sculpture is a power object to capture the spirit of the Belgian aggressor in a guardian figure and use it for the benefit of the community [see essay Oberhofer]. Balot's murder marked the beginning of the Pende revolt, which was directed against the colonial power's reprisals; it lasted only a few months before being brutally crushed by the Belgian army in 1931.

After the Pende rebellion, chains with pendants in the form of small faces became widespread until the country's independence. Cherished for their beauty, they were simultaneously a symbol of the newly fortified Pende identity and of solidarity in the face of the colonial rulers.² Himmelheber photographed two men with such pendants and was able to purchase an array of miniature masks. According to him, the pendants were also used to heal diseases.³ In one case he suspected that the face might be a portrait of the man wearing the necklace [fig. 281]. Nevertheless, these faces were not true portraits, which the Pende associated with witchcraft. For this reason, the carvers avoided any close resemblance to living persons. Instead, the pendants represented various types of Pende masks, which could be identified by their different "hairstyles" [fig. 282]. The majority of the miniature masks were made from ivory or hippopotamus bones, in addition to which there were also examples made of wood or imported materials like aluminum or lead [figs. 283–286]. Sometimes the faces have been completely worn away because their owners rubbed them with sand for years in order to prevent the ivory from turning yellow and to attain a brilliant white—a sign of appreciation for these small carvings [fig. 287]. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 See Weiss/Woodward/Strother 2016.

2 Strother 2008, p. 52.

3 Himmelheber, diary, Djingila, May 25, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

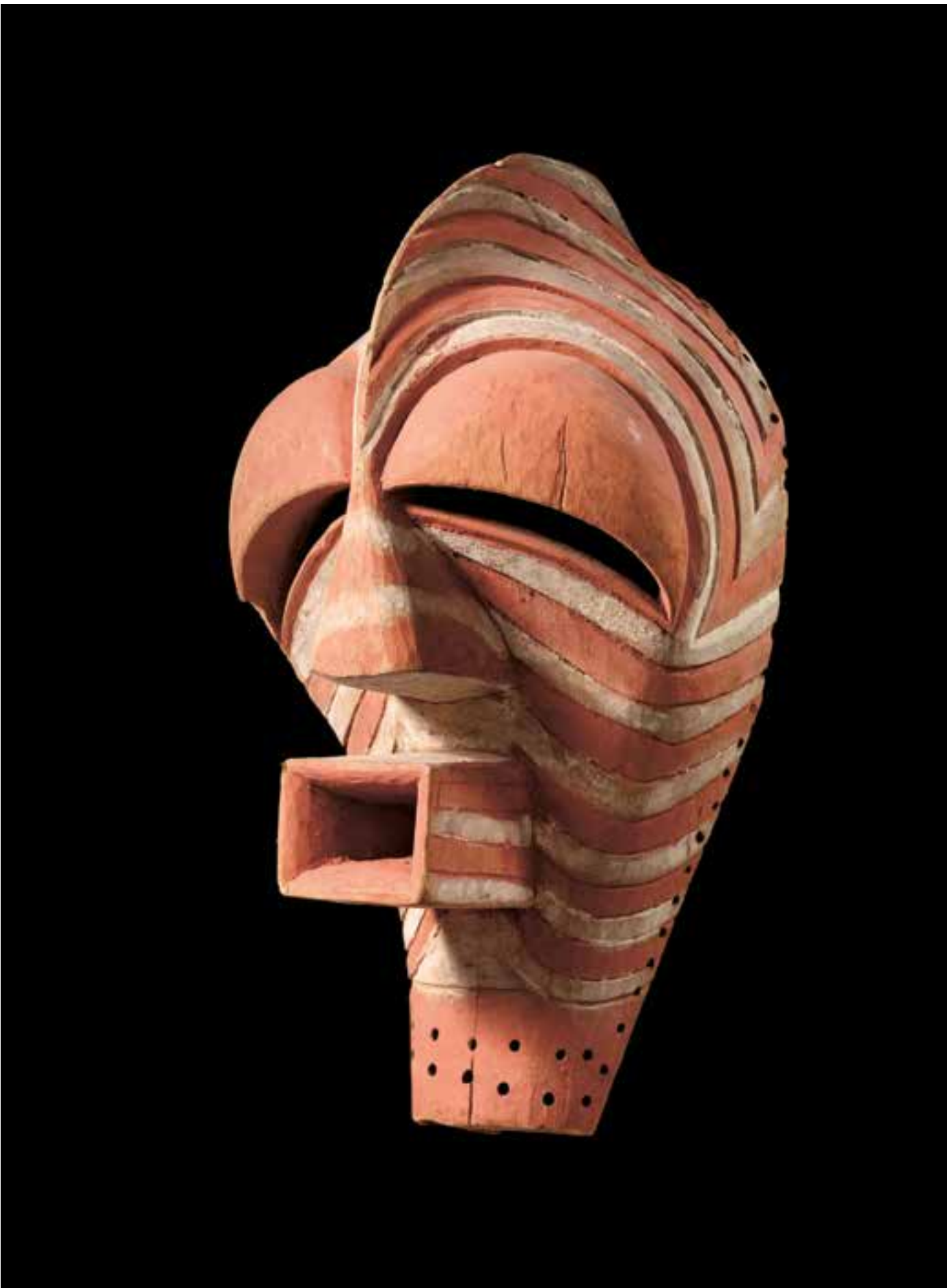


Fig. 288



Fig. 289.1

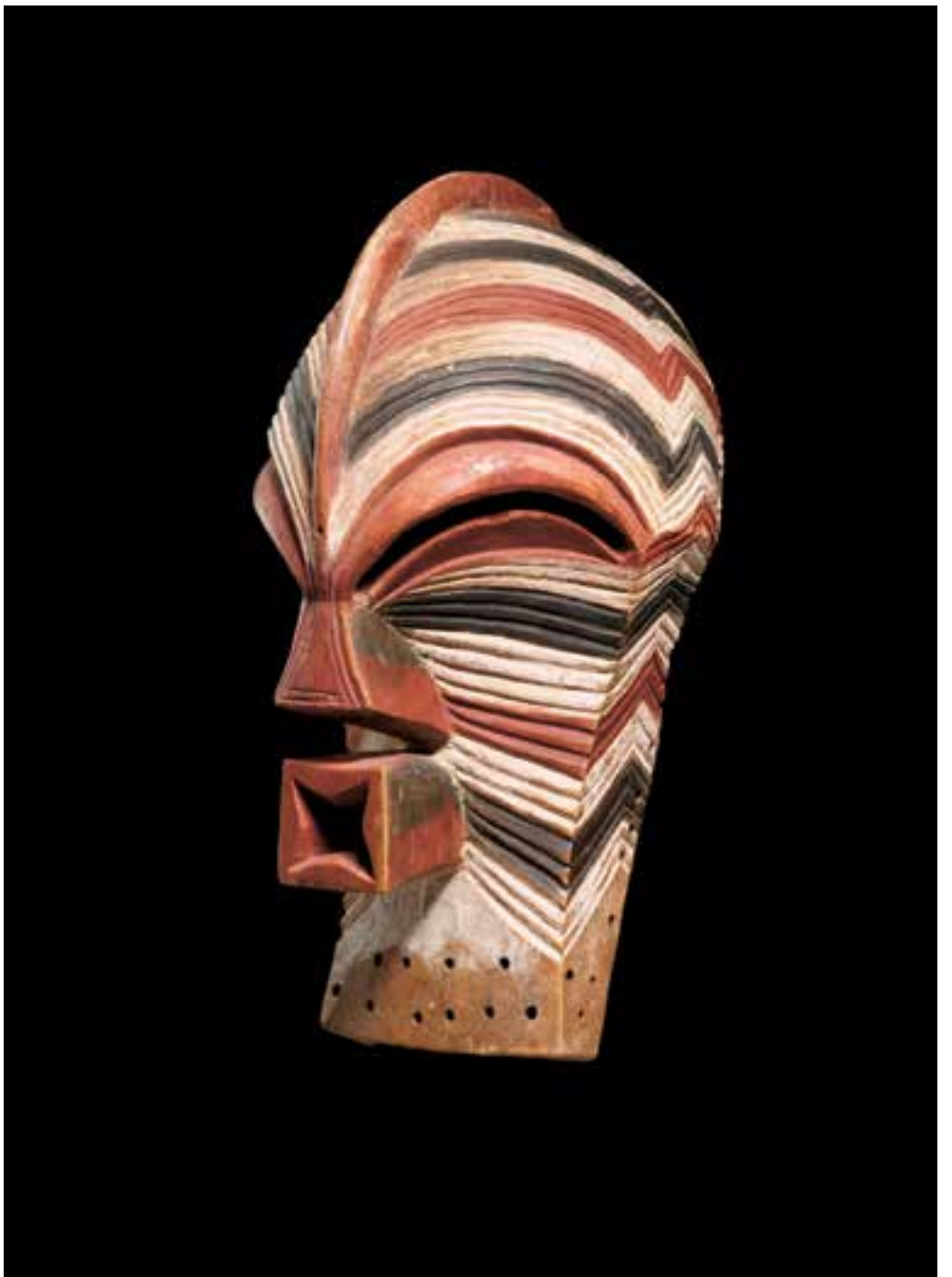


Fig. 289.2





Fig. 291



Fig. 292



Fig. 293

Fig. 288
Artist of the Songye region
Kifwebe mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments,
45.5 × 22.5 × 20.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 25
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 289
Artist of the Songye region
Kifwebe mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments,
43 × 22 × 21 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 24
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 290
Artist of the Songye region
Kifwebe mask
Nineteenth/early twentieth century
wood, pigments, 57 × 27.5 × 32 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 302
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 291
Artist of the Songye region
Kalengula mask
Before 1939, wood, paint, raffia fibers, fur,
feathers, leather, 166.5 × 40 × 24 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9507
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 292
Artist of the Songye region
Kilume mask
Before 1939, wood, raffia, beans, feathers,
leather, pigments, 135 × 25 × 50 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9506
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 293
Artist of Kabashilange, Songye region
Figure with Janus head
Before 1939, wood, fur, raffia, reptile skin,
73 × 27 × 29 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9514
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

FEARED MASKS, CUBISTIC ICONS: KIFWEBE FROM THE SONGYE REGION — The histories of the *kifwebe* masks in the Congo and the West could not be more different: as emissaries of the local elite, the *kifwebe* masked figures of the *bwadi bwa kifwebe* male society in the territory of the Songye were responsible for political and social control over the community in the early twentieth century. Even during the colonial period, the masks remained influential. For this reason, the Belgian colonial government had the masks banned and confiscated in the 1920s.

At the same time, artists and art collectors in the geographic north declared these abstractly carved masks painted with red, white, and black lines icons of Cubism [figs. 288–290]. In the Songye region, the masks' visual codes and their significance constituted the core of the secret knowledge that the boys learned during their initiation. This knowledge was connected to cosmology, animals, and mythical heroes.

While in their place of origin the masks were stored in secret places and could only be accessed by a select few, today the objects are presented as highlights in museum vitrines, brightly lit and visible to everyone. Between these poles of hidden and forbidden, secret and sought-after, Hans Himmelheber went in search of such masks around the administrative center of Kabinda. His search proved extremely difficult, as he notes in his diary:

“But in every village the same answer: the père of Kongolo had taken the masks away or burned them. Until I arrive at the big chief's village of Sangua, where I am eagerly shown a mask kept in a ruin in the bush, then another—and very pretty figures, too. Finally. The masks are actually very beautiful, precisely the style for which I have been hunting for so long [...] and which was recently shown to me in the mission. [...] Just twenty of these very highly paid masks make the long journey worthwhile.”¹

Hans Himmelheber, who always had an eye for unusual items, also purchased artworks that did not conform to the Western *kifwebe* canon. These pieces may not have yielded high profits, but they continue to demonstrate the full spectrum of artistic production in the region. For example, he not only acquired the wooden face masks that were sought after in the West, but also the associated mask costumes [fig. 292]. Among his most unusual finds is a two-headed figure whose face is carved in the style of the *kifwebe* masks [fig. 293]. Himmelheber gives us the following information about the figure: he purchased it in the village Kabashilange, where it was standing in an inconspicuous square. Due to its two faces, it could see everywhere from this position. Corroded by woodworms, the base of the figure had been repaired by its former owners.² — Nanina Guyer

1 Himmelheber, diary, April 24, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).

2 Index card III 9524, (archive of the Museum der Kulturen Basel); Himmelheber, diary, May 7, 1939 (archive of the Museum Rietberg).



Fig. 294



Fig. 295

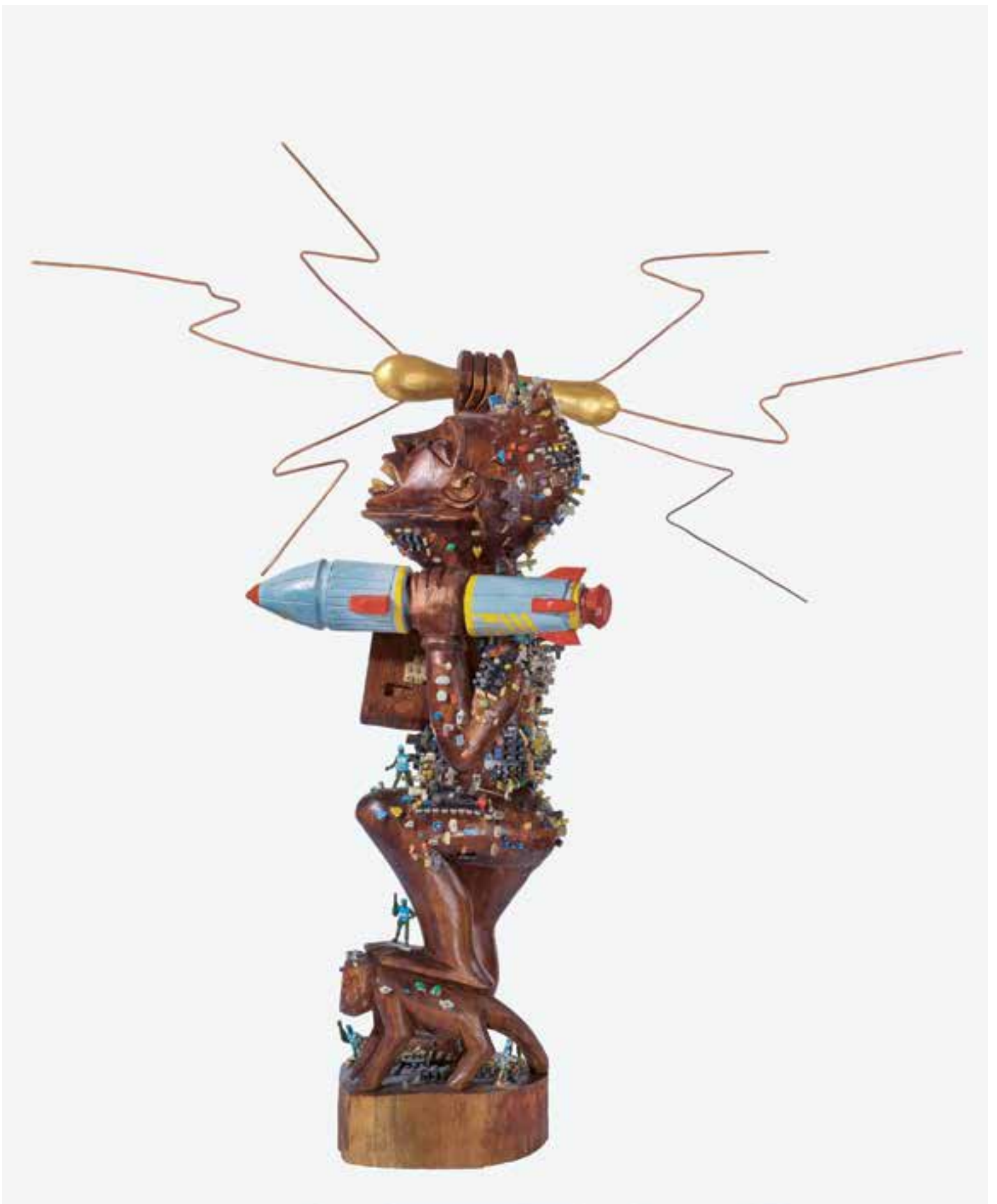


Fig. 296



Fig. 297

Fig. 294
Artist from the Kingdom of Kongo
Mangaaka power figure
Nineteenth century, wood, iron, metal,
plate glass, ceramic, plant fibers, textiles,
and pigments, 115 × 45 × 37.5 cm
Horstmann Collection, Zug

Fig. 295
Artist from the Kingdom of Kongo
Mangaaka power figure
Nineteenth century, wood, iron, metal,
plate glass, ceramic, plant fibers, textiles,
and pigments, 110 cm
Private Collection, Zug

Fig. 296
Hilaire Balu Kuyangiko
Nkisi numérique
2017, various media, 109 × 50 × 50 cm
Nuno Crisostomo Collection,
The Bujas-Crisostomo Family Collection

Fig. 297
Artist from the Kongo region
Mpungu figure with Chinese locks
Before 1991, wood, skin, pigments, plant
fibers, nut, metal, cowries, textiles,
38.5 × 22 cm
RMCA Tervuren, EO.1991.21.5
Acquired by A. Mieke Van Damme

(IM)BALANCE OF POWERS: MANGAACA FIGURES THEN AND NOW — Transcending cultural barriers, the majestic power figures (*mangaaka*) from the Kingdom of Kongo that are charged with metal and other substances continue to evoke mixed feelings today [figs. 294/295]. Indeed, the aesthetic of accumulation is intended to inspire awe and to astonish.¹ First, a carver would create the voluminous sculpture from a piece of wood. Much more important, however, was the ritual specialist (*nganga*), who would insert plant, animal, or mineral substances (*bilongo*) into the abdomen or head of the figure. Nails and iron blades activated the powers with which a *mangaaka* could administer justice, seal agreements, settle conflicts, and restore morality in a community. Beyond our conceptual separation of subject and object, power figures possessed social agency in the sense of Alfred Gell² because they were attributed a positive and occasionally negative effect on other people.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the colonial powers' pressure on local political structures constantly increased.³ On the Loango coast the Kingdom of Kongo lost its authority and ultimately collapsed. In these uncertain times *mangaaka* power figures acquired particular importance. With their help, the chiefs attempted to maintain control of trade and politics—in competition with the Europeans. Trade agreements or oaths were sealed with a nail and those who did not keep their side of the bargain were punished. New power figures emerged as a reaction to the regime implemented by the Europeans and were a means of resistance against colonization. This was a thorn in the side of the colonial government, which destroyed these powerful protectors in order to dominate the economy and politics. The Christian missionaries likewise branded these charged objects as the work of the devil and had them burnt.

However, the practices of activating power figures did not disappear completely. Today they may seem much less conspicuous and more incidental or be charged with symbols of modernity, such as Chinese locks [fig. 297]. Even contemporary artists like Hilaire Balu Kuyangiko have applied themselves to the subject. In his hybrid sculpture *Nkisi numérique*, the Kinshasa-based artist reappropriates the historical carving technique and imagery while simultaneously criticizing the idolization of capitalism and consumption in modern society [fig. 296]. Painted with Chinese characters, the rocket in the colors of the Congolese flag alludes to China's economic and trade offensive on the continent and African dependence on Chinese investment. The assemblage of electronic waste is all the more horrifying when one is aware that the inhumane conditions in mines of minerals in Congo supplies the rest of the world with coltan, the foundation on which digitization is built. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 See MacGaffey 1993.

2 See Gell 1998.

3 LaGamma 2008, 2015.

THE LORD IS DEAD, LONG LIFE TO THE LORD

Sinzo Aanza



Fig. 298



Fig. 299

Fig. 298
Sinzo Aanza
Le Royaume des Cieux
2017, different materials
Sinzo Aanza and Galerie Imane Farès,
Paris

Fig. 299
Hans Himmelheber
The power figure is carried over
Songye region, April 28, 1939,
b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-20

Fig. 300
Sinzo Aanza
Untitled
2018, different materials
Sinzo Aanza and Galerie Imane Farès,
Paris

Fig. 301
Sinzo Aanza
Sans titre 7
2018, photograph, 80 × 137 cm
Sinzo Aanza and Galerie Imane Farès,
Paris

Fig. 302
Sinzo Aanza
Sans titre 8
2018, photograph, 80 × 137 cm
Sinzo Aanza and Galerie Imane Farès,
Paris

Hans Himmelheber's photographs bear witness to the waning subjection to traditional power structures, whose cosmogony and materiality of discourse summoned different figures offering power and protection relative to the powers held by others, all gravitating around the tutelary figure of a chief. Thereafter, subjection to a new world began, the one that colonization had brought into being and stabilized with its institutions after the great adventures of the explorers, navigators, and conquerors. I was especially drawn to the image of this man carrying a large power figure—large power figures being supposed to concentrate more power or have the ability to ward it off—to sell to the art dealer [fig. 299]. His motives were certainly, as so often during the period, the need to pay taxes or simply to meet the new demands of life in the so-called *groupements extra-coutumiers*, groups outside traditional jurisdictions where people aligned with the colonial project, in which they had served, still served or hoped to serve as porters, soldiers, workmen, collection clerks, etc., lived. For these people, the encounter with the West had just produced the equivalent of an economic Great Depression. Almost overnight, the items that stood for wealth in the imaginary of their societies had come to be perceived as junk. The photograph speaks to the magnitude of the upheavals produced by a colonial process that sought to reorganize spiritual existence—substituting for the invisible, to which the large power figure on the shoulders of the man offered a form of access—a poetic and political consensus supposed to contain spirituality, education and enlistment in the project of colonial exploitation. The Pentateuch, the nucleus of Christianity, is made up of an origin story, Genesis, followed by divine and human legends that conclude upon the law, the necessity of hierarchy, or, better put, of obedience to the new established order. It is, therefore, for the pursuit of power, the most accommodating form of the legal state, which explains the global reach of this story that still undergirds most state-controlled organizations today.

As an art dealer, Himmelheber inevitably found himself on the outside of events. His photographs were taken in the same way that Joseph Conrad's famous novella *Heart of Darkness* was written, offering an overview of a situation whose sole interest lay in the story that would be drawn from it. However, this space was in the process of transformation. It would continue after these stories drawn from it; indeed, it would feed on them for its transformation. After the "heart of darkness," this space would become the "empire of silence" in the eyes of the colonial administration. Its artistic productions, like its commercial activity in the nascent urban, so-called detribalized areas, would follow the trajectory of what we can see in Hans Himmelheber's photographs, that is to say, a market would emerge without order or any real law and defined by nervous instability and anxiety.

This operation followed the stories the West told itself about the rest of the world, with the great adventures of commercial maritime voyages and worldwide exploration. Such stories would contribute to the colonial labor of indoctrination, relaying to the very places they described new imaginaries and a new way of being in the world, the new identity of peoples the world over being bound from then on to the commercial needs of the largest economic powers.



Fig. 300

THE ROADS ARE SERPENTS

They bite like serpents
They hiss, they suffocate, they snap, they swallow,
They defecate, they vomit
And you are no longer the same
Their story is one of a snakeskin being sloughed
The first to grab you is a path
It puts a stitch in your side, you quell its breath
It's windy
A little dusty wind, but dense and swirling
Triumphing over the receding forest

Men here have become the gods they slew

A python swallows you up as soon as the path releases you
A highway of beaten earth
Carrying trucks and human bodies
Loaded with logs
Bags of cinders and mineral sludge
Vegetables that wither under a harsh sun
Livestock dead and living

Heavy-footed shadows trudge ahead
Under a storm of mediatized spittle
A trail of rags and bent forms

They say they knocked their attainment of humanity out of commission
They refused to work
What man refuses to work choosing instead to slaughter the good souls that beg him to work for his own good?
What man says no, when he is told, work, my good friend?
What man says no when he is told, from now on, you're no longer a child?
When he is told, you're no longer an animal?
Work!
For your own good!
For mine too, but above all for yours!
Put your heart in it, exploit the emanations of your newly attained humanity
Work for yourself!

They killed with machete blows, arrows, and pestles
They were felled by cannon and submerged in a pagan death
Then they came back to life
Having no name, no face, they emerged from the mud in a mishmash of decay

Children
Indolent
Inert
Dying
Dead
Anecdotal women
Displaying an atrophied breast
And dusty as the wind
And flat ... like the wings of officious flies
And empty ... like the look they cast on suckling indolence

They too have taken their neighbors' babies by the knees and
smashed their skulls against the sides of their impatience
Anger is an incomplete story
It is out of impatience they heckled humanity the world over
The humanity of dust
The humanity of water
The humanity of hills
The humanity of forests
The humanity of the firmament
It is out of impatience they threatened with their frail finger
And out of impatience they abandoned their bodies in this *scavenging* dust

There are
Children
Women, men as well
Indolent
Inert
Dying
Dead

The shadows debauch the meaning of the journey
And people gather for the victim
At the hangman's feet
In the epic of his glory
The hangman is the nation builder
And his life and his death, the only echo of common history

It was the hangman who built the roads
Then said, come, you must live on the roads
You must feed the roads and feed on roads

Without the roads, railroads, and ships,
We are nothing but a pile of mud waiting to dry up

Come, parasites, wandering in the night of time and consciousness
Today your animal life comes to an end,
No more existential quietude
Let's open up this land to the world!

The python vomits you out on a muddy road that defies the fever of a low sky
And a somersaulting village

The sky draws near like it was damnation
It tosses and turns, twists in pain, groans, and slobbers
The sky cries out and sweats
The sky furrows the road and fields and bellies

And men are digging along the road
They have stripped the gods
Stuck an obscene finger in all their holes
Suffocating the sacred fire of their guts





They are naked
Head held high
Arms determined
Genitals erect
They search the land
They search with their treacherous gaze
They search with their heads leashed to an immature hope
They search with their sacrilegious arms
They search with their eager genitalia

The sky has come so low
The sky coughs so hard
The sky spits out burst pieces of its tubercular clouds
It is the dirty blue of political promises
The dirty blue of the new economic order
The dirty blue of the right to stipulate, to command, to extract, to rectify, to tame ...
The dirty blue of the infinitely big and the infinitely trivial
The dirty blue of the promised land and the rediscovered country
The dirty blue of the water that pools with seed thrown on the ground
The dirty blue of the gospel according to the missionaries

Blue of the flood, of indoctrination, of tax collection
Blue of the pious idea of homeland and clothes hiked up to rape the gods

Here, God is man's thirst
The hunger of men
The insatiable appetite of men
Here, God is a dead end

Here the shadows feed on each other
With corn fufu and palm wine

Kera loves Ndabi the way one loves a boy
She dresses up for him each morning
Each morning, he gazes at her in silence, but with ardent eyes
Each morning, she gives thanks to the God of eyes, for all eyes that can speak such volumes
Each morning, Ndabi draws palm wine and takes it to Kera's father
In the hope of seeing her again so beautiful, so beautiful for him
The village listens to Ndabi gazing
The entire village can read in his palm wine the torture of a shy passion
Kera loves Ndabi the way one loves a shy boy
The moons pass and still Ndabi says nothing
The village grows impatient and Ndabi says nothing
The village tells Kera to make the first move: "smile at him more often, more openly, for longer ...
Tell him to lower into his mouth the jubilation of his eyes ...
Tell him to raise up the words from his palm wine ...
Tell him flowers are born of flowers and of the embrace of bees ...
That even mountains said to be lonely hold hands in the valley ... Tell him ..."
Kera loves Ndabi the way one loves a boy
This boy, her mother tells her, who speaks with his eyes and palm wine, is a gift from God
Mothers speak even better than palm wine
It is they who judge the beauty of the flame and fan it with their breath
Men are the last to know
For the paperwork and more palm wine
The village flocks to the feast that breaks Ndabi's silence, the sole fervor of his eyes, the forenoon
excuse of palm wine ...

Men say yes after women do
Ndabi smiles with his lips that say nothing and his ardent eyes
Kera loves him the way one loves a shy boy
Night falls with song, dancing, laughter, drunkenness ... and soldiers' boots!
The boots fire on the brawny men
The boots burn the thatched huts
The boots build cages, confine the women and Kera there
The boots tie up the others with the goats
The boots say they're all set, the perimeter is secure ...
Kera prays for Ndabi, for the ardent flame in his eyes, for their honeymoon

She pleads with the God of ardent eyes, weddings and palm wine
that he may choose as he likes the children's names
The children she will bear Ndabi
She prays the village may sing, dance, and smile on the birth of children
The children she will bear Ndabi
The rugged boots yank her from the cage, after her maid of honor and Ndabi's mother
Kera is adorned for Ndabi's eyes
The rugged boots cut off her necklaces with a knife and put the blade to her throat
Kera is heartsick
She knows she shouldn't cry, but she is so heartsick
Kera cries on the blade that slides under her chin
She weeps
Not for herself ...
But for all the pain she causes Ndabi
For her mother who howls like a storm, her face hid by trembling hands
For her father whose grief is tied up with the goats
Kera can see her blood mingle with her tears in the gleam of the blade
Kera can see Ndabi close his eyes
She can hear him moan
Her heart swells with love and anguish
Kera loves Ndabi the way one loves a shy boy
To hear him moan hurts her more than the blade
Kera closes her eyes
The rugged boots lift her from the ground
Undress her
Turn her around
Flip her over
Cut her in pieces
Mix her together with her maid of honor
Mix her together with Ndabi's mother
Rub her with chili pepper
Salt her
Season her some more
And some more
Douse her with oil
With water
With sweet peppers
With leeks ...
With more chili pepper
With more salt ...
Carry her to the fire made for her by the village
For Ndabi and for the children to whom the God of ardent eyes and palm wine, boots and victories
will give a name in some putrefied memory of his divinity of ardent eyes and palm wine, boots and
victories ...
Kera loves Ndabi the way one loves a boy

Here the shadows are scattered turds in the bush
After the passage of the boots

I don't know if we love
Like the wave and the cliff
Or the air and the bird
I don't know if our gazes
Struck in unison
The innocence of our hearts
If the zeal of your uncovered hair
can wash clean the conventions around us
If the game of our misguided laughter
Frightens the birds in the trees

We are so mad, so alone
So lost, so far away ...

You don't know if we love like blood and wine
If our arms are wings
Barricades or bridges
You don't know if the sound of the wind
Is a distant metaphor
Perhaps we'll live again
We'll set the moon to dance in our hands
We'll be alive
We'll seal up the sky in our glances
And the four winds in our sighs
We'll be the hurricane's upheaval
and I'll make love to you in a reversal of our cries of terror
And juddering of our bodies fallen
in the blood, dust, and bullets ...

Here ...
Love stories
have no beginning

The mirrors of life are eyes that do not see you
And the roads are serpents



Fig. 303



Fig. 304



Fig. 305



Fig. 306



Fig. 307



Fig. 308



Fig. 309



Fig. 310



Fig. 311

Fig. 303
Artist of the Bekalebue-Songye region
Male figure
Before 1939, wood, glass beads, and plant fibers, 92.4 × 19.7 × 24.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 13
Permanent loan from Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 304
Artist of the Songye region
Large power figure *nkishi*
Before 1938, wood, metal, plant and animal substances, fur, horn, 80 cm
Private collection
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 305
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, 52 × 16 × 13 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.440
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer/
Susanne Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 306
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers, 19 × 5 × 6 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 2
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 307
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, leather, 42 × 12 × 12 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 6
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 308
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, glass, 18 cm
Horstmann Collection, Zug
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 309
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi* with raised arm
Before 1939, wood, 24 × 6.5 × 6.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 3
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 310
Artist of the Songye region
Female power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, textile, and metal alloy, 54 × 15 × 16 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.112
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 311
Artist of the Congo region
Power figure for the art market
1920s/1930s, wood, plate glass, 75.2 × 25 × 20 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 725
Han Coray Collection

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE WORLDS: SONGYE POWER FIGURES

— Already Hans Himmelheber differentiated between the Songye's small power figures made for personal use and the impressive, large sculptures used by communities. When it was necessary to produce a power figure (sing. *nkishi*, pl. *mankishi*), first a chief or an elder would commission a carver with the wooden corpus.¹ Then a ritual expert (*nganga*) would apply substances (*bishimba*) of plant, animal, or mineral materials to the outside and inside of the figure. His words and sacrifices would then activate the powers (*kikudi*) of the spirits of the deceased, which could ward off diseases, infertility, or other evil dangers associated with witchcraft. The Songye believed that the *kikudi* were located in a person's abdomen or head—which is where the potent substances are applied to the figures. *Mankishi* were vessels for these supernatural powers that were bound in time and space. They are the expression of the complementarity between the living and the dead, between the visible and the invisible or rather the outside and the inside.

Due to their size and accumulation of materials, the community figures elicited a combination of awe and fear. A Bekalebue sculpture described by Himmelheber as an ancestral figure [fig. 303] exudes exceptional calm and harmony as a result of its dignified face and unusual gesture of suppliant palms. The large figures were given their own names and bore insignia of wisdom and power, such as a beard, headdress, glass necklace, or raffia skirt. In contrast, materials like snakeskin, leopard teeth, or antelope horns [fig. 304] were intended to act as a deterrent and be reminiscent of characteristics associated with these wild animals, such as strength or speed. Metal arrows and staffs were associated with the culture heroes of the hunter and blacksmith, but also symbolized the lightning that a warlock or a witch could use against enemies. In the colonial period the importance of the *mankishi* grew as they seemed to guarantee continuity and cohesion in an age of economic and social insecurity and power imbalance.²

Both the large and the small power figures of the Songye are characterized by a V-shaped face, half-closed eyes, and a triangular nose that merges into the distinctive arches of the eyebrows [figs. 305–309]. The torso—with the hands often at the sides of the abdomen—is composed of angular shapes and volumes whose Cubistic appearance was very popular among European collectors. Few *mankishi* survive in their original condition with all their substances. In these two examples [figs. 312–315], only an X-ray tomography reveals the invisible load, such as a metal arrow or the veins inside the head and the abdomen. Far more commonly, the sculptures were “uncharged” [fig. 310]—by the original owners prior to sale or by later owners—so that they would correspond to the aesthetics of the Western art market. The artist of this sculpture that was carved in the Kongo style [fig. 311] went one step further, creating a smooth and dark surface—entirely in line with the classic taste of collectors at the time—and reducing the “charge” to a small mirror. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 See Hersak 2013.

2 Hersak 2010, p. 41.

Fig. 312
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, copper, iron, glass beads, textile, plant fibers, encrusted patina, bone, snake, and horn, 43 × 26 × 26 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2016.155
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Figs. 313/314
Pictures of the inside of the two Songye power figures
2018, X-ray tomography
Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen

Fig. 315
Artist of the Songye region
Power figure *nkishi*
Before 1939, wood, textile fibers, leather, plant fibers, snake, copper alloy, patina, horn, and plant seeds, 33.5 × 12 × 14 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 21
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber



Fig. 312.1



Fig. 312.3



Fig. 312.2

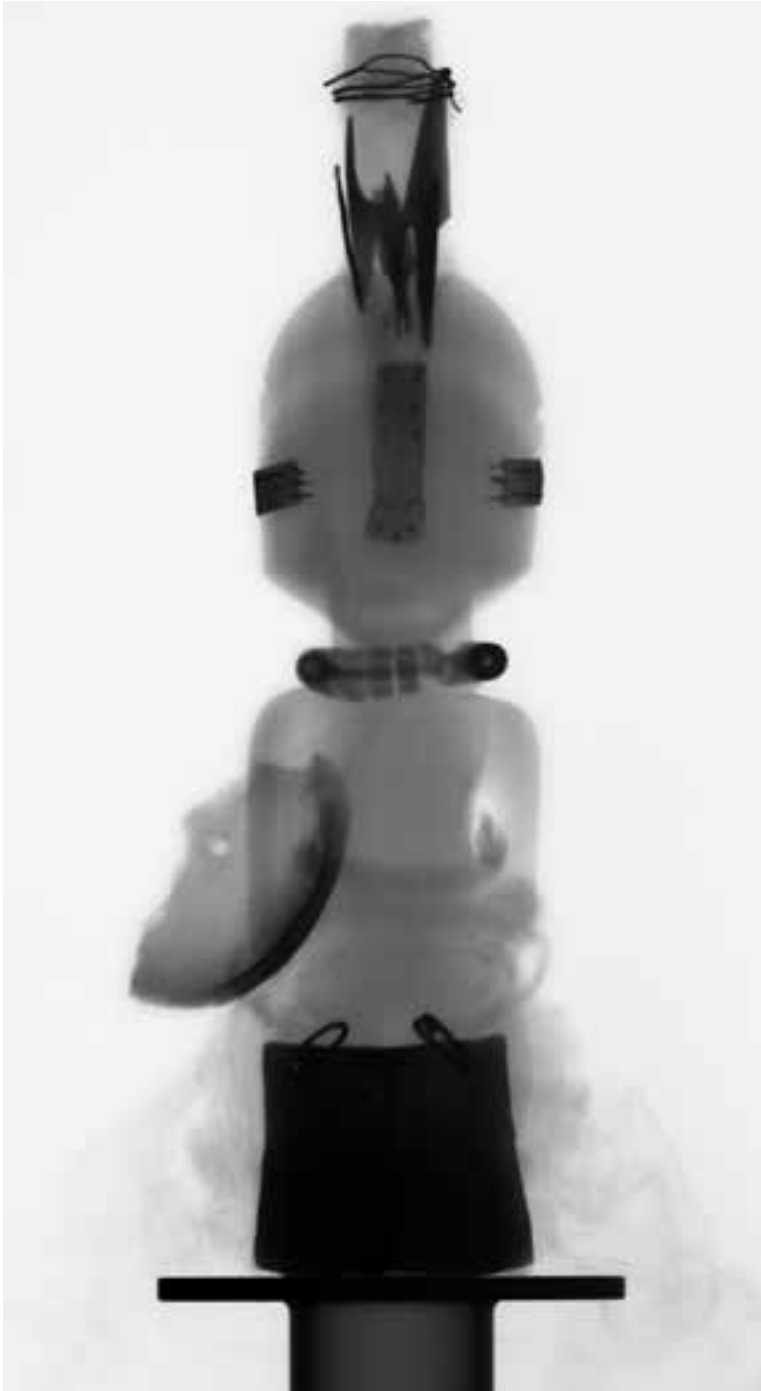


Fig. 313.1

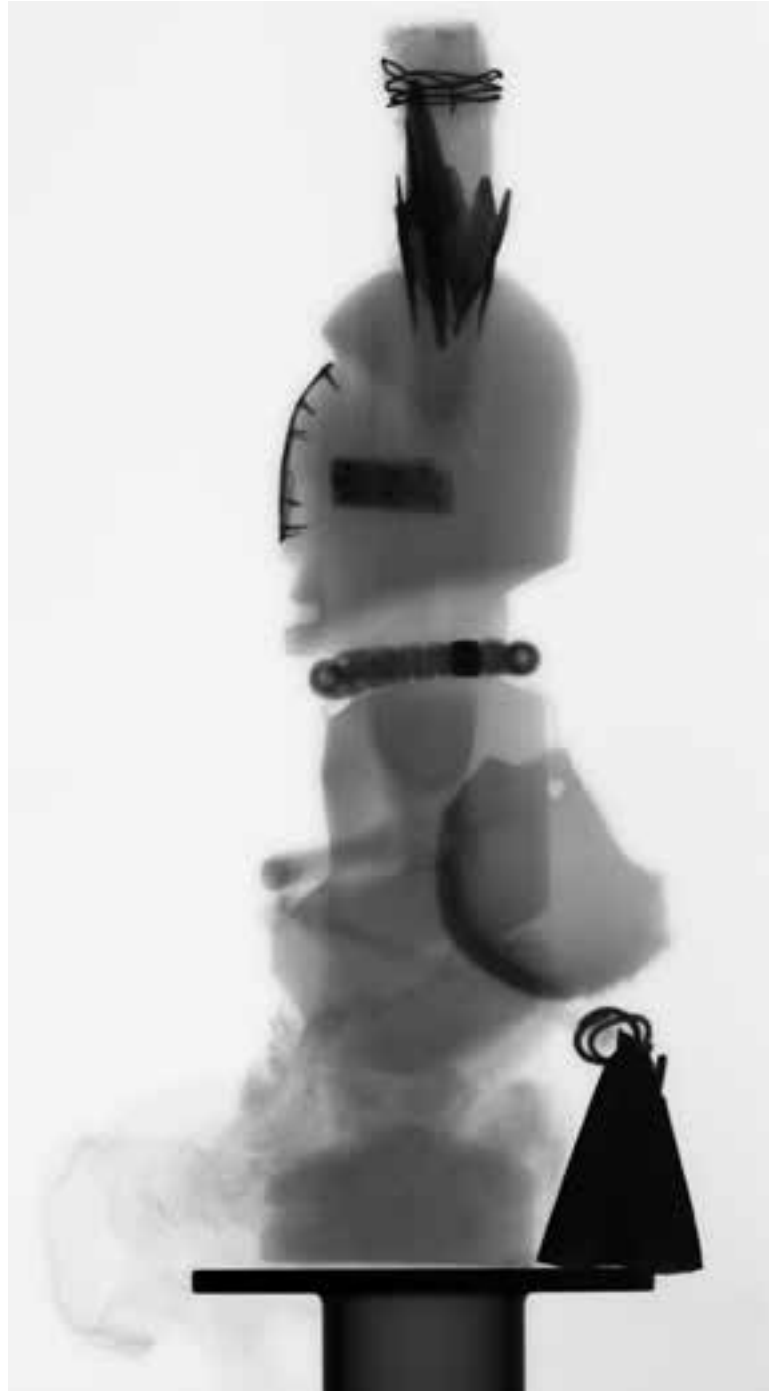


Fig. 313.2



Fig. 314.1



Fig. 314.2



KASALA: THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE OF DREAMS OR THE FIRST HUMAN, BENDE'S ERROR

Sammy Baloji

with texts by Fiston Mwanza Mujila

“When men die, they go down in history. When statues die, they go down in art. This botany of death is what we call culture.

An object is dead when the living gaze that was cast on it has disappeared, and when we will have disappeared, our objects will go where we send those of the N—: to the museum.”

Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet
Excerpts from the film *Statues Also Die*.
1953, film *Révue Présence Africaine*
Tadé Cinéma Production

KASALA 78

the masquerade
or the rancid concerto
of the carnivores
of the carrion feeders
of the cutthroats
of the first rain
avid for blood and sperm
goes on forever

KASALA 22

dreams nipped in the bud?

KASALA 28

the masquerade
of the carnivores
blows up in our face
the masquerade
of the traffickers
incites financial collapse
in the sickly spiral
of this broken beautiful word

KASALA 11

before memory begins to play
its tricks on us
shall we spike the djudju juice
with some liquor
or name off the entire genealogy
gunned down?

KASALA 12

the diggers of Katekelayi
cut down in broad daylight
for having committed a single crime
mining the precious stone
in their own country
drift in the streets of Grand Kasai

KASALA 8

not even twenty suns suffice
the night continues its frantic farandole

KASALA 33

the Congo River is filled to the brim
with corpses and other seeming suicides

KASALA 81

should Bende, the first Human, have to stomach
the whole mess?
if he'd known what was to follow from his scheming
would he have had the nerve to take Mvidi Mukulu, the Elder
Spirit's measure?

KASALA 29

Patrice Emery Lumumba
Rossy Mukendi Tshimanga
Floribert Chebeya
Fidèle Bazana
Thérèse Kapangala
the list of so-called suicides
is as long as the Mississippi

KASALA 44

the night
still rings with the laughter
of the children of Katekelayi
their breath
their heaving chests
their seared voices
in a cerebral cacophony
blending with the uproar
of others who perished during the full moon

KASALA 15

because of one man: Bende
the universe went off the rails

KASALA 85

the mass graves of Maluku
what a lovely story!
holes stuffed with meat
an ancient stench

KASALA 64

Central Africa is a slaughterhouse

KASALA 86

in the mines of Shinkolobwe
the kids, with their wasted faces
bellies bloated from disease
dig, measles imprinted on their bodies
they stink of excrement and gasoline
their dirty, yellow, loose teeth
rip the carpet, scrape the floor
without fearing a collapse

KASALA 73

we had the sun in our mouths

KASALA 25

and Bende's curse sticks to our skin

KASALA 68

what was Bende thinking
when clumsily pulling the strings
that Mvidi would resume creation?
a second begetting
to satisfy the creature's swollen ego
a farce that dare not speak its name

KASALA 51

take this as a warning
by catching epilepsy
from these sclerotic nights
forsaken by the good God
weaned from mother's milk
affected by scurvy
infested with mosquitos
and other cockroaches
we've become a nomadic people
headless, spineless
scattered in the bush
party animals in Hong Kong
boozers in Moscow
club dancers in Malaga
night watchmen in Prague
errand boys in Casablanca
carwash guys in Brazza

KASALA 1

the trains still carry
kids and ore
in the backcountry of Katanga

KASALA 38

it all began in Nsanga-a-Lubangu
departure of my Kaku and his family
followed by other migrations
then, return to Katanga for the mines
then exodus in great haste
the skeleton balled up in pain

KASALA 67

the false copies
not unlike the cutthroats of the full moon
can think of nothing but a good pogrom
without that, and the masquerade that drips from it
they succumb to nervousness
smash everything that comes to hand

KASALA 4

the carnivores in Beni never lose their hard-on
they perform with passion
an excremental orgy

KASALA 63

Central Africa's favorite spot
its mass graves
those it never tires of digging
at this rate, it may well squash all its kiddies
half of them already can barely stay on their feet

KASALA 56

in whose cabinet of curiosities
do my Kaku's amulets gather dust?

KASALA 42

since we are there
Lumumba's teeth

KASALA 53

I, Mukalenga Mwanza
Mwanza Mujila Tshimankinda
Mwanza Nkongolo
Mwanza wa ba Tshibamba
Mwanza wa Mwanza
will part the ocean
for whoever brings me
arms and legs trussed
one of these dinner-jacketed spies

KASALA 14

who's got the goods
on Kalambayi's offspring?
who knows in what podunk town squat Mukendi's issue?
Kanjinga wa Mukendi
Mulumba wa Mukendi
Ntumba wa Mukendi
Kongolo wa Mukendi

KASALA 2

and to think that even death
no longer speeds one's return to Mwene-Ditu

KASALA 3

now this nourishing land
is no longer what she was
in the time of Tshimbalanga and Mujinga
Kabwanga and Mukengeshayi Alphonse
Mulanga Judith and Mbombo Antoinette
the land of Baloji Kabambi
is but a shadow of herself
a barren sepulcher
she is spitting blood
her belly barks with diamonds
the brambles thicken
the trees grow stunted
the rivers are gumming up
worse, the waters of Lake Munkamba
despite being our only lifeline
can no longer manage
to remove the stain
they augur trouble ahead
the waters of the lake

KASALA 52

in desperation
we fling open our mouths
our pleadings to Mvidi Mukulu
lose their bite in the sky
we implore Mvidi Mukulu
to stop driving us to suicide in our sleep
we implore Mvidi Mukulu
to stop punishing us with diarrhea
we implore Mvidi Mukulu
to stop unleashing
famine and her sisters-in-arms: nausea, madness, sleeping
sickness, amnesia, schistosomiasis, typhoid, measles
Mvidi, stop reducing us to beggary
Mvidi, stop condemning us to exile
to vicarious wandering
to pointless transhumance
to death by asphyxiation
Mvidi, stop abandoning us
in the very middle of the unwinding
without food or pets
at the mercy of the cutthroats of the full moon
Mvidi Mukulu, we implore Mvidi Mukulu
to delay the lightning
to delay tuberculosis
to delay the heat wave
to delay the flood
to issue a permanent injunction against malaria

KASALA 45

here we come
and here we are, slobbering
having reached the chapter of despair
Pithecanthropi
the wretched of the earth
pot-bellied
rags on our backs
bodies wasted by
primordial exile
slumped over, bodies transmuted
from one region to another
as dictated by hunger
the mines
wars of liberation
and as always
scurvy

KASALA 71

Who's responsible?
us or Mvidi?
us or the Celestial Animals?
us or Bende?
we were the first
to usher in the devil-may-care dance
we were the blacksmiths
of our own malediction
the assiduous artisans
of defection
now we are left to pick up the pieces
of a collective heresy
and incidentally an unneeded one
first, we called Mvidi
every name in the book
then we stopped praying
boycotting at the same time the kutshipulula rite
we weren't exactly heading down a good path
we had scorned the Elders
on the same impulse
we hammered down
what Kaku, our great-grandfathers, had built up
by the sweat of their brow
as if that was not enough
we lost all control
we danced stark naked
we pounded the pavement
we uttered sarcasm, miasma, invective
we flaunted ill-gotten opulence
in the midst of uncontrolled chaos
on every corner
stunned by bottles of djudju juice
and potatoes of the same ilk
we abandoned the homeland
to its own pathetic fate
exile in Saint Louis
itinerancy in Moscow
exodus to Baltimore
banishment to Prague
just like Mansema, thirty years before

KASALA 40

while we wait for Mvidi
 to feel like redeeming us
 to suspend the lightning and the fire
 to slow down the fury of the Bakishi
 what remains for us is to try and force Mvidi's hand
 to supplicate Mvidi
 to implore Mvidi
 to extricate us
 from this hell
 what remains is to haggle with the Lesser Spirits
 those who have kept company with Mvidi
 from a time before the Stone Age

KASALA 31

the years have pulverized memory
 they've turned it into laughable dust
 who remembers Mujinga wa Tshimankinda?
 Tshisungu Mutamba
 or even Lwamba François
 son of the late lamented Lwambo and Ntumba Bernadette
 Lwamba the giant
 Lwamba the caterpillar-eater
 Lwamba, with hands hardened by the pickaxe
 Lwamba, lighter on his feet than a gazelle
 Lwamba, burlier than a rhinoceros at the watering hole
 Lwambo, he of the hoarse voice
 Lwamba, the first to leave Mbuji-Mayi
 ("goat-water" or "water-goat")
 climbing onto the first locomotive
 in search of an umpteenth chore
 in the slag heaps of Katanga
 at the acme of his eighteen years
 Lwamba who roamed throughout the Colony
 Lwamba who stayed two months in Stanleyville
 Lwamba who called the shots in Banningville
 Lwamba and his endless trips to Thysville
 Lwamba the pilgrim
 Lwamba the explorer
 Lwamba the mapper of the backcountry
 Lwamba and his restless feet that never got a cramp
 Lwamba who sent the whole world packing
 Lwamba who pushed the logic to its very end
 Lwamba who pilloried the holy rollers, gigolos and their
 nephews
 Lwamba who danced the rumba in the bistros of Leopoldville
 Lwambo who toiled for the first whites in the country
 Lwamba, valet for the Italians
 Lwamba, driver for the Belgians
 Lwamba, gardener for the Portuguese
 Lwambo and his Greek friends
 Lwambo who whispered secrets in the ears of the Americans
 Lwamba who knew the colonial prison
 and the splendid jails of the Second Republic
 Lwamba, yes, still him

Lwamba and his dynasty
 Lwamba, three times shambuyi
 first pregnancy:
 Lwamba and his wife give birth to two girls
 second pregnancy:
 Lwamba and his wife
 give birth to a girl and a boy
 third pregnancy:
 Lwamba and his wife
 give birth to a girl and a boy
 Lwamba, the male with 67 grandchildren
 Lwamba, the man who lived into his one hundred and
 twenty-second year
 Lwamba the patriarch
 Lwamba and his bluffing
 Lwamba and his head-scratching gossip
 Lwamba, who read and wrote in the language of the Europeans
 supreme euphoria when Lwamba got his first bike
 Lwamba, still him, posing with his first car



Fig. 316

Fig. 316
Hans Himmelheber
Figure on the bow of a dugout
Songye region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 188-25

Fig. 317
Sammy Baloji
**Mine à ciel ouvert noyée de Banfora.
Lieu d'extraction artisanale**
2010, ink, paper
Sammy Baloji

Fig. 318
Hans Himmelheber
Congo river at Léopoldville (Kinshasa)
Kinshasa, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 160-5



Fig. 317

KASALA 36

who remembers
 Mulowayi wa Kalala François
 The uncle of many nicknames
 the Ancestor
 the Golden Voice
 the Chief
 the Warrior
 solitude, when you lead us by the nose
 in the time of Mulowayi wa Kalala
 a descendant of the Tshisumpa line
 exile was but a dim lure
 the carats accumulated
 day followed night
 and night winked out before the sun
 we possessed a homeland
 where we sought our way
 without pissing our pants

KASALA 10

Mumbu
 Dilenge
 Mululu
 Kapolowayi
 Muabi
 Tree-Spirits
 once invoked by Tshimbalanga
 the second youngest of my uncles
 give us the strength to subdue the sun

KASALA 79

Bende's nerves cracked
 and here we are floundering in the mud

KASALA 65

the isolate
 Kongolo Kaa Mukanda who thought he was pulling the rug
 out from under Mvidi Mukulu's feet
 came to at the bottom of a ravine
 metamorphosed into a snake, among reptiles
 a pathetic destiny
 for one who once was a Great Lord

KASALA 83

were it not for Bende's embezzlements
 we might still be in High Heaven
 cozier than ever

KASALA 74

the tragedy of Kongolo Kaa Mukanda is to have been
 from his apparition neither Man, nor Thing, nor Animal
 is that reason enough to envy other creatures
 to lobby until hoarse for an artificial beauty?
 what happens next, we well know

KASALA 17

country of surfeit and excess: diamonds, oil, forests, river,
 copper, mass graves

KASALA 87

let's leave the creature
 to his homely ruminations

KASALA 88

don't think we'll rush for the exits
 go wake up Kabambi Baloji Mutambayi Mwena Shabanza,
 Mukua Mulumba too,
 just because Bende shot himself in the neck
 or went on a bender for the umpteenth time
 in the same damn week

KASALA 89

the city has the feel of a public flophouse
 kids high on diamba and other hallucinogens
 skid through the streets, fast and loose
 cardboard boxes do duty as mattresses
 the kids get carried away, wear the same plague-stricken faces
 as their cousins digging in the mines of Shinkolobwe

KASALA 90

biso nionso tosa bikelemu ya Nzambe
 he who makes a big show of disbelief has but to craft his own
 world
 with its whores, its rivers, its pampas, its filth, its pimps, its
 mass graves, its midlife crises, its latrines, its shit show and
 all the rest

KASALA 92

a poor bedfellow?
 Bende gulps down his lutuku moonshine
 without feeling the slightest buzz
 The zealot burps and struts about in the crowd
 he forgets he's just a puppet
 a shit, nothing more

KASALA 93

we won't visit the King of the Animals
 under penalty of peopling his pantry

KASALA 95

you could give Bende centuries to repent
 the result wouldn't change
 give or take a few utterances
 the same legendary shenanigans and the birth of brats

KASALA 69

every fabrication is a work of consolation
 not excluding the creation of Man
 overcome by pity, Mvidi created the Spirits (hermaphrodites),
 the Animals, Men and Things
 what happens next we well know
 a bloodbath

KASALA 91

mass graves still have a bright future
the jesters doze with their Kalashnikovs under the pillow

KASALA 106

it would be too good to be true
if their too subtle scheming ended in defenestration
a leech, can you picture it eating pizza?
even in your dreams!
it's like mistaking the ocean for the Kalahari

KASALA 5

one struggles to unhear
the stinging cries of the Katekelayi diggers

KASALA 76

Mulunda wanyi
your children are still digging mass graves
lash us with the flood or stomach sickness
they've been digging for twenty years

KASALA 39

Ntete
Tshiambe
Mukulumphe
Ancestors of the dawn of dawns
if you showed yourselves to us
we might get out of the Zairean wood

KASALA 82

the longest cemetery stretches
between Lubumbashi and Mbuji-Mayi
thousands of bodies crammed along the tracks
a corridor of ethnic cleansing
in every station, the trains stopped
to unload the corpses
and if you're looking for the graves
(if still visible to the naked eye)
of Kabeya Jean, Mujinga Marie or even Kaniki Alphonse
take the train from Mwene-Ditu or Katanga

KASALA 54

the Bakishi watch over me
rejoice in my offhandedness
almost lose hope
uncork the epilepsy and syphilis
come to their senses at the last second

KASALA 49

winter is fast approaching
and my Kaku is missing

KASALA 58

in his rocking chair
Kaku, my great-grandfather
looks even older
as ancient as the river
as old as the Lubumbashi-Mwene-Ditu railroad

KASALA 59

Kaku can no longer move his legs
only his jaws work
he repeats forgotten names
one after the other

KASALA 60

Mvidi Mukulu wa Mukulumphe
Mvidi Mukulu wa Bende
Mvidi Mukulu wa Tshiana Tshikulu
Mvidi Mukulu wa Tshilele
Mvidi Mukulu wa Tshiambe
your creature that I am
has a toad spinning in his head
credit his deep dives in the djudju juice.

KASALA 84

the Bakishi are still upset
about my body pitted with smallpox
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 41

the genealogy of Mwanza Nkongolo
is unused to a scarcity of masks
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 61

the kids gasp for breath in a copper mine
they look like zombies
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 94

ba meli, ba tondi, ba buaki ngunda
it's Aunt Konde who should kick herself
the creatures cut the cord
is Bende to blame?



Fig. 318

KASALA 18

Kaku and me, we lie about
 drink nothing the entire evening
 not a sip of beer, no djudju juice, not even Chibuku
 the masks, the masks
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 46

Kaku comments on the events
 gets riled up
 even if age keeps him from brawling
 he curses the cutthroats down to the sixth generation
 gives in to collective reproach
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 34

every time he gets a cavity
 Kaku brings up Lumumba's teeth
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 55

the diggers of Katekelayi await...
 a resurrection, their own
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 57

the cutthroats of the full moon are busy
 gulp down the last chalice of sperm
 before rushing out for fresh meat
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 47

from Nsanga-a-Lubangu
 we trot behind a fictional country
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 70

mua Ntumba mourns her twins,
 Mbuyi and Kabanga, shouting themselves hoarse in the cells
 of the ANR
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 26

Mwanza wa Mwanza
 is waiting for his Kaku's bracelets
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 100

from wanting democracy too much
 we end up with a country that pisses blood

KASALA 98

kids barely weaned from their mothers' milk
 toil in the hole
 they stink of shit
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 96

on top of the trains bound for Mbuji Mayi
 the kids are rolling with laughter
 once past the slag heap, will they track down some ancestor
 or invoke Mvidi to Kaku, to the Spirit of their
 Great-Grandmothers
 to release them from the curse
 once and for all?

KASALA 101

kids, bellies full of roundworms
 dig by hand
 in the quarries of Fungurumu
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 97

the masks that cross the ocean
 are valued at less than trinkets
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 99

the kids continue to go down the mine
 they cry out to the God of Foremother Tshiame
 to spare them from a collapse
 from yet more measles
 or the sleeping sickness

KASALA 107

the child miners
 have a beaut of a hangover
 they all shave their heads
 in imitation of army recruits
 sport second-hand sneaks
 to cut a fine figure in the mines of Dimbelenge
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 108

even with a gun to our heads
 we won't go to Prague, Moscow or Kingakati
 but to Tshikapa
 to perform the Tshishimbi dance
 to make offerings of "nzolo" to the ancestors

KASALA 106

in this country where the intelligence services are run better
 than hospitals, whorehouses, and nursery schools
 the kids who go down the hole
 still foster dreams
 to find enough stones to launch themselves out of the mud

KASALA 102

the kids, suffering, what's more, from smallpox
 or is it a lingering trace of tuberculosis?

KASALA 23

without Mvidi Mukulu wa Mukulumpe
 we'd still be mired in shit
 body of grimy mornings
 mouth filled with grass

KASALA 7

they won't defenestrate themselves as quick as all that
no offense to the false copies

KASALA 32

am I so much to be pitied
to be pushed to suicide in the river?
just me or my whole line
Kaku's, that is, my great-grandfather?

KASALA 77

and if we traded my Kaku's teeth
for Lumumba's?

KASALA 37

I won't line up
for a bowl of bloodstained soup
if I sell out my genealogy
let Mvidi Mukulu wa Mwanza strike me with venereal disease
a heart attack
and let the Bakishi unstep my erection
for the next two hundred years and forty rainy seasons

KASALA 9

you may impound my hand
if it means the sun
and also the moon
will rise in my mouth
this afternoon
no offense to Bende

KASALA 16

I refuse to sit down
with the cutthroats
of the first rain
they reek of fresh blood

KASALA 19

I'd pick exile
over the cabal
no offense to Bende

KASALA 20

I refuse with my belly
I refuse with my balls
I refuse with my protozoan mug
choose madness over
dishonoring my Kaku
no offense to Bende

KASALA 43

I die, my belly cut open
oh death!, the good death, what is it?
you get inured to the machete
the cutthroats, the cutthroats
they have a yen for the pubic mound

KASALA 30

theater of the absurd?
the cutthroats of the full moon
speak of Peace and Love for one's neighbor
they listen to Brahms and Mozart
but still despair over the lack of new victims

KASALA 35

everlasting nostalgia for Tshimbalanga
the second youngest of my uncles
he left to get his share of diamonds
in the mines of Dimbelenge
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 13

we dispersed
according to the railway's whims
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 96

what are these jokes about a pimp past his prime
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 6

insane prices
masks sold at auction
the crowd presses in
snaps them up without batting an eye
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 21

a great country was ours
vast, green, lush, gigantic
stretching from Kinshasa to Katanga
from Luebo to Gbadolite
is Bende to blame?

KASALA 72

Kongolo Kaa Mukanda wonders:
does Mvidi Mukulu regret
having deposed me
extorted forever my insignia of a Great Lord
and dumped me like a criminal on Earth?

KASALA 48

years after the carnage
the Katekelayi diggers ranted
in the nameless tongue of the dead

KASALA 86

what we do best
 mass graves
 shall we blame it on Bende?
 has anyone actually seen him digging for us?
 is it Bende who rapes the Kivu women and girls?
 is it the black hand of Bende at work in the Kamuina Nsapu massacre?
 is it Bende meddling in the merry carnage of the Bundu dia Kongo followers?
 the bodies in the river, still Bende?

KASALA 27

the assegais, bracelets, masks, statuettes, drums, rugs, spears, and other ornaments of Mwanza
 wa Mwanza still loiter in the museums
 is Bende to blame?

KASALA 24

names are a roving museum
 when I whistle my kasala
 I cease to be alone
 I am with my mother and father
 my aunts and Uncle Tshimbalanga, the Congo River and the Celestial Animals, the railroads
 and mountains, the sun and the rain, Munkamba Lake and the Lubilanji River, my Kaku always at
 my side, my Kaku and his rocking chair, my Kaku and his long beard, my bespectacled Kaku

KASALA 62

this wild night
 the urge to do something foolish rises in my chest
 I'll go dance the rumba and the tshikuna-fou
 until I crush my spine
 my Kaku would truly deserve that
 an exhilarating thwocking of the hips in honor of mukishi

KASALA 50

I summon 347 horses
 I summon the earthquake
 I summon the solar eclipse
 I summon the flood
 I summon the stars
 I summon 560 luxury rides
 I summon 345 rhinoceroses
 I summon 67 tigers
 I summon the Mississippi, I summon the Maningoza, I summon the Maroni, I summon the
 Brahmaputra, I summon the Okavango and the Jordan and the Niger and the Saloum and the
 Essequibo and the Euphrates and the Mackenzie and the Rio Grande and the Kamchatka and
 the Yangtze and the Santa Cruz and the Suriname and the Amu Darya and the Ganges and the
 Congo and the Indus and the Charente and the Dnieper and the Dordogne and the Irrawaddy
 and the Guadalquivir and the Meuse and the Volga and the Mokau and the Sepik and the Tiber
 and the Yser and the Lena and Lake Tanganyika and the Orinoco and the Mekong and Lake
 Tshangalele and the Danube, and the Amazon and the Rhine and the Limmatt and the Nile and
 the Limpopo and the Zambezi
 to celebrate a Woman
 my mother, Ma'Nanga

Translated by J. Bret Maney

Glossary

KASALA: Praise song or poem for oneself, a relative, a dignitary, or even a fictional character.

MVIDI MUKULU: Literally meaning Elder Spirit, or Supreme Spirit, a reference to God. A title often combined with other terms in order to underline one of God's characteristics. In this way, many names arise, such as Mvidi Mukulu wa Tshiame, Mvidi Mukulu wa Tshiana Tshikulu, Mvidi Mukulu wa Tshimpanga...

NSANGA-A-LUBANGU: The mythical place from which the Luba people dispersed. They emigrated to the Kasai region and established themselves in Katanga. Also considered as the place of origin of the Luba people of Katanga and Kasai.

BAKISHI, in the singular **MUKISHI:** The spirits or manes of the departed. Deceased relatives acquire this title and remain reference points for the living.

BENDE: A highly polysemous word. 1. It is used to denote belonging when it is not used as a proper noun. For example, "Mbujji wa bende," someone else's goat. 2. It is a name of God since Bende holds a privileged place in the divine lineage and Maweja Nangila, God, is also invoked with the names of illustrious persons. 3. The word designates the ancestor of all Human Beings. 4. It applies to the human ancestor brought into creation in the form of the twin, or couple, formed by one man and one woman. 5. In genealogies, Bende is also identified as one of the founders of the clan or bakole. 6. Bende appears in legends as the equal or double of God. Bende orchestrates the world with Maweja Nangila but also contradicts his authority (Van Caeneghem, *La Notion de Dieu chez les BaLuba du Kasai*, 1956).

KONGOLO KAA MUKANDA: "The Law-giver" or "The Spiral of the Law." Brother of the rain, a being who is half-man, half-animal, he reproached Maweja Nangila due to his imperfect physiognomy. He went further by trying to trick Maweja Nangila, which led to his "defenestration" from the High Heavens (Fourche and Morlighem 2002).

PERFORMANCE AND INITIATION



Fig. 319

PHOTO ESSAY: THE ROLE OF MASKS IN THE EASTERN PENDE *MUKANDA*

Z. S. Strother,
Nzomba Dugo Kakema

In memory of Chief Kombo-Kiboto (Mukanzo Mbelenge) (d. 1987) and Mukishi Loange (d. 1996), who sent the authors to *mukanda* to learn about Pende art and culture (*ima jia Apende*).

In 1939, while searching for sculpture on the southern savanna of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Hans Himmelheber stumbled upon *mukanda* camps among Yaka, Chokwe, and eastern Pende peoples. The *mukanda* is or was many things, including a men's fraternity, a puberty initiation, and, a woods-and-crafts camp. The *mukanda* turns boys into men and in the past, the protracted initiation created tight bonds of solidarity within a generation so that its members developed a lifetime *esprit de corps*, aiding one another in conflicts but also in social tasks, such as building houses or laying new fields. As an institution, the *mukanda* probably began in central Angola but spread north in the seventeenth century into what is today the DRC. It survived during the colonial occupation as a rite of passage, although it sometimes faced fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic Church by clerics who regarded it as "immoral." In particular, they disapproved of the songs used for sex-education and of what they called "stealing," i.e., confiscating domestic animals to feed the boys during their seclusion. Despite the criticism, the *mukanda* continued to expand. For example, during the 1930s, Lunda enclaves adopted it from Chokwe. Perhaps holding onto the *mukanda* was a form of resistance during the colonial period. It is striking that many communities only dropped the initiation after independence in 1960. The regime of Mobutu Sese Seko (1971–1997) left it to chiefs to decide about the value of the *mukanda* as long as the initiation did not encroach on the school calendar. It seems that the *mukanda* was disrupted in Angola following protracted unrest and civil war; however, waves of refugees introduced it or reinforced its importance in Zambia.

The *mukanda* is an institution central to the transmission of social values; however, what this essay will show is that it is structured from beginning to end through the use of masks and it is the charisma of the masks that helps it survive. The institution remains strong among the eastern Pende and the text is based on exhaustive documentation by Z. S. Strother of two different initiations in 1987 and 1988 (funded by Fulbright Predoctoral Grants issued by the US Information Agency). Participating in a government-sponsored exchange program allowed Strother to secure the necessary research clearance (including the right to take photographs) in order to prepare an art history dissertation. It was one thing to work among the central Pende in Bandundu Province, but quite another to study the arts of the eastern Pende

who lived in the Western Kasai in a highly regulated “mining zone.” In the late 1980s, during the repressive regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, there was a window when research was tolerated—although closely monitored—on topics of cultural “authenticity.” That window closed in the 1990s and Strother was unable to make a follow-up visit until 2007. Fresh interviews were conducted by Nzomba Dugo Kakema in 2018/19, which bring the research up to date.

Although an academic treatise will follow one day, this photo essay is an opportunity to share with readers the emotional intensity of *mukanda*. With the addition of a little context, they will be able to see the little smile playing on the face of the blacksmith as he works, the boys cringing in fear at what they are asked to do, the tenderness of a mother showing love to her son in a stolen moment, the precision and discipline of initiates marching to the beat, and a man laughing to hear a young man belt out a sassy song in public. It is not a matter of going through the motions or checking rituals off of a master list. The *mukanda* is absorbing and elicits the entire gamut of emotions from joy to loss to fear to pride of accomplishment. Nzomba Dugo Kakema wrote that his interviewees felt nostalgia in recalling the *mukanda*, and we did, too, in reliving it.

According to the conventions of photo essays, the text is written for the most part in the historical present unless it is important to underscore a break or adaptation of practice. (For more on the photographs, see the “Photo Research Note” at the end of the essay.)

[Fig. 319] Sponsoring a *mukanda* was one of the prerogatives most jealously guarded by paramount chiefs. Himmelheber photographed one of the long houses built to house the initiates (*tundanda*), which he estimated to be twenty meters long. Men initiated in the 1930s recalled how boys would sleep together in rooms organized according to their home villages. Judging from the number of doors visible, the house illustrated probably sheltered boys from eight to nine villages. Some estimate that by the end, eighty to two hundred young men might be brought together. The *mukanda* now exists more as a rite of passage than as a fraternity, a social institution providing men with assistance throughout their lives. Furthermore, the initiation, which once lasted for many months, has been abridged to accommodate the school vacation period. Its length now ranges from six to ten weeks.

Ideally, initiations should be launched by the boys themselves. The stated goal of *mukanda* is to turn spoiled children, boys who have never been spanked, into a community of men. In the village, the experience is made to sound as disagreeable as possible. There are bogus claims that the initiates shiver from cold because they have no fire at night, that they sleep without shelter, that they eat raw food, etc. On the other hand, it is true that every small infringement of discipline will be punished by the blow of a whip. Therefore, it is an important point that the boys themselves ask for *mukanda* because it means that they are old enough and brave enough to face their childhood terrors in order to gain the status of adulthood.

[Fig. 320] A couple of boys go to the chief’s house and begin to sing the infectious tune: “Fathers, why are you silent? Let *ngolo* arrive.” *Ngolo* is the symbol of the initiation. The word itself

Fig. 320
Artist of the central Pende region
Ngolo mask with horns
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers, pigments,
67 × 29 × 36 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 19
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber



Fig. 320

signifies “strength” and “health” and is used as the name for any generic horned mask with white protruding eyes. If enough boys join the call, the chief will be obliged to respond. A given community will hold an initiation approximately every ten to twelve years, but the camps are staggered around the region. In 1987, there were at least twenty-something camps active among the eastern Pende. In 1988, there were another couple of dozen. In 1989, there were more. It takes five to six years for an entire generation to be initiated.

[Fig. 321] When the community agrees, the first thing that the chief must do is commission a series of masks. Chief Kende Kakele (Katshivi Koji) hired blacksmith Ngoma Kandaku Mbuya, who worked around the clock for six days to carve three masks so that the process could get started. Behind, the chief keeps a watchful eye on his progress. There is a chicken dinner in the pot to encourage him in his work.

[Fig. 322] On the tenth day, the first major rite of *mukanda* began. The nine boys cannot believe their eyes; the smallest cringes in fear. They see four masqueraders raising a cloud of dust, leaping and pirouetting. Boys who have run from masks all their lives are told to their horror that they must “touch the mask,” i.e., run over and pull off the headpiece from one of the masqueraders, who is guarded by three others, all of them well-built young men much bigger than the boys who are, on average, twelve years old. And they all carry whips!

[Fig. 323] The chief points, “Go! Go! Grab that one!” But they huddle together, paralyzed.

[Fig. 324] Finally, Luya (who is fourteen years old) runs out and tries to pull off the headpiece from the target (who wears an overskirt of shiny green leaves). His courage inspires the other boys, who race out to help. However, Luya is just not big enough. One of the other masqueraders charges forward, whip raised to give him a terrific blow across the back, hard enough to raise a welt. Luya’s father (Sh’a Lamba) can’t stand it any longer. He races to his son’s rescue and it is he who actually pulls off the headpiece while another father wrestles with the bodyguards.

It is strictly forbidden for the fathers to intervene, but they often do so because the young men running the camp can become overly enthusiastic about their new role in administering discipline. In fact, the fathers break the rules all the time and it is one of the means by which adolescents bond with their fathers. When things grow calmer, the boys who were more timid are obliged to pull a leaf from the costume of the target mask and to receive a symbolic blow on the back. In the end, the experience is designed to increase the boys’ self-confidence because each of them has wrestled with his worst fear and emerged triumphant. As in martial arts training, the boys learn that they are tougher than they realized.

Boys will continue to join the camp up until the end. No matter when they arrive, each individual will have to undergo a personal ritual of “touching the mask” (what Westerners would call “unmasking”) when he must pull off the headpiece or a piece of the costume off a masquerader and receive a small blow in punishment. Once a boy has done this, he must not leave the camp until he graduates. The parallel is made between the secrets of *mukanda* and the secrets of childbirth as men historically were not allowed to be present at a delivery.

Fig. 321
Z. S. Strother
Sculptor Ngoma Kandaku Mbuya carves a mask with such speed and assurance that his adze has blurred out of sight.
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 6, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 322
Z. S. Strother
“Touch the mask!” The opening ritual of the boys’ initiation.
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 11, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 323
Z. S. Strother
“Go! Grab the one in the middle!”
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 11, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 324
Z. S. Strother
A father runs to the aid of his son.
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 11, 1987
Z. S. Strother



Fig. 322



Fig. 323



Fig. 324



Fig. 321



Fig. 325



Fig. 326



Fig. 327

Fig. 325
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Panya ngombe mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, and plant
fibers, approx. 35 × 67 × 26 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 23
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 326
Z. S. Strother
**Thengu ya lukumbi is named after the
roan antelope which is notorious for
goring hunters who think that they have
killed it (this example was commis-
sioned from Ngoma Kandaku Mbuya for
the mukanda of Chief Mukunzu.)**
Ndjindji, August 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 327
Z. S. Strother
**Once the tundanda master the dances,
some will be allowed to don masks and
to take them into the villages.**
Mukanda of Chief Kime (Mayimbi a
Mulenda), August 1988
Z. S. Strother

The penalty for “touching the mask” used to be circumcision, an operation that was painful for adolescents. In 1939, Himmelheber photographed the last generation to be universally circumcised in the camps. Increasingly, the Belgian colonial state required that the operation take place in birthing centers for reasons of health and safety. As a result, some felt that the *mukanda* had lost its *raison d’être* with the suppression of the central ritual marking the transformation of a boy into a man able to marry and father children. The Kwilu Pende abandoned the *mukanda* in the 1930s and the central Pende in the 1950s. On the other hand, the eastern Pende believed that the *mukanda* was a multi-faceted institution too valuable to lose. Instead, they made the unmasking, which had always preceded the circumcision, the central transformative ritual.

The one mask that dropped out of the eastern Pende *mukanda* repertoire was *panya ngombe* [fig. 325]. This unique helmet mask once appeared in the villages in the interim period after the boys had been circumcised and before they were healed. It was a tense period because infections occasionally cost a boy his life. The appearance of *panya ngombe* distracted people but also expressed their anxieties. According to one witness, the masquerader was restrained by a cord and would whirl and cut it at the climax of its performance after which it searched for a chicken or goat to kill before it could retire. Himmelheber collected one of these masks, which is extremely rare today, although it still appears carved in relief on the lintel of the door of chiefs who enjoy the honor of being authorized to host a *mukanda*.

[Fig. 326] The symbol of the initiation, of its pleasures as well as its terrors, is the mask and the whip. During the initiation, masks erupt from the bush to run through the village, carrying switches made from branches. Their main targets are mothers of initiates and adolescents. However, there are many rules that ensure a raucous atmosphere reminiscent of “tag,” where the would-be victims taunt the masqueraders before they dash to safety, screaming with laughter. Because the masqueraders carry rattles, it is difficult for them to take anyone unaware.

One of the horned masks that Himmelheber collected [figs. 101/320] is extraordinary for being carved with the face deliberately off-kilter from the upright horns. What the sculptor was mimicking is the way that dancers of *ngolo* will often tilt their faces to the side to make their audience smile at their curiosity. Since no one can run with their head on the side, adopting the pose is a strategy to put the viewer at ease and to keep him or her within range of the whip until the performer suddenly snaps back into character for the chase. In this case, because the dancer does not actually need to tilt his head, he will be able to pursue his targets without a moment’s hesitation.

[Fig. 327] The forms of the masks can be quite varied as long as they play with the idea of the initiates as creatures of the savanna. Some of the horns metamorphose into knives or swords. In the village of Kime, they reserved the more fanciful shapes for the younger boys who were not allowed to strike anyone.

[Fig. 328] The *mukanda* masks are also described as police (*pulushi*) and their main function is to make sure that most people keep a distance from the camp and the initiates. After not being seen for over three weeks, the initiates are brought into the town under masked guard to demonstrate the dances that they’ve

learned. In the past, the celebration called *mimba* marked a major transition because it reassured the mothers that their sons had survived circumcision. Even today, there is concern that the boys are vulnerable during this period; they are supposed to avoid all eye contact and no one is supposed to touch them—with one exception.

A woman past menopause greets the initiates on behalf of their mothers, rubbing red cosmetic powder on them, which is prepared from a bark powder mixed with water. Today, *miseke* identifies someone in a liminal, ritual state because it is rare and expensive but it is first and foremost a beauty product, a superb skin conditioner that gives the skin a coppery glow.

Kavula and Kibi, the first two boys in the line, are spotted like leopards to acknowledge their status as sons of the chief. The mask with protruding white-rimmed eyes intimidates people from approaching too closely. It is named *Mabeu* (“He who looks every which way”) and the dancer makes a point of jerking his head to stare in different directions. The crocheted style of western Pende *mukanda* masks (*minganji*) is becoming popular because the dancers can breathe more easily and therefore run faster.

[Fig. 329] The initiates (*tundanda*) are careful to obey the rules and to keep their eyes lowered. The day is poignant for mothers. They are relieved to see their sons performing and in good health. However, it drives home to them that they are moving into a new phase of life. Although a festive occasion, the mothers dress in rags to show psychic solidarity with the suffering of their sons. The photo shows a mother sneaking a bonbon into her son’s mouth. Although forbidden, the counselors turn a blind eye. Her son quickly swallows without acknowledging her in any way. Meanwhile, Kashala (in a new dress) dances alongside her nephew Kibi to show her love and support.

[Fig. 330] During *mimba*, the initiates (*tundanda*) display their mastery of the signature *mukanda* dances. For *sh’a khulu*, they should be able to gyrate their hips so that the cords of their tutus fly straight out (level with the hips). The crowd encourages them, chanting “*kosa!*” (Get it up!), a ribald *double entendre* for a puberty ritual. The argument for circumcision is that it will ensure the fertility and potency of the initiates.

[Fig. 331] There is an infectious joy about *mimba* with the masks dancing on the rooftops and the women enjoying the music. In Kende village, food and millet beer was offered to over 300 guests.

[Fig. 332] During the initiation, the boys eat better than they ever have in their lives thanks to heavy taxes exacted on the community for meat. As a result, they grow before everyone’s eyes and put on muscle mass thanks to the strenuous physical training. Although enjoyable, the hours of stamping and twisting of shoulders and hips also strengthen the boys’ stamina and breathing. During an exit poll conducted by one of the authors, the boys were asked what they liked most about *mukanda*. Fifty percent said the eating and fifty percent the dancing.

In order to help pay for the initiation, the initiates (*tundanda*) are requisitioned for community chores, e.g., gathering firewood. Today, coppery red *miseke* is reserved for festivals. Most days, the initiates and their guardians rub their bodies with red ocher clay (*khundzu*). The layer of clay helps protect them from mosquitoes

Fig. 328
Z. S. Strother
The *tundanda* welcomed to the village for *mimba*.
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 26, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 329
Z. S. Strother
A mother sneaks a bonbon into her son’s mouth—*mimba* celebration.
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 26, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 330
Z. S. Strother
Get it up! The *sh’a khulu* dance—*mimba* celebration.
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 26, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 331
Z. S. Strother
***Mimba* is a day of joy.**
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, July 26, 1987
Z. S. Strother



Fig. 328



Fig. 329



Fig. 330

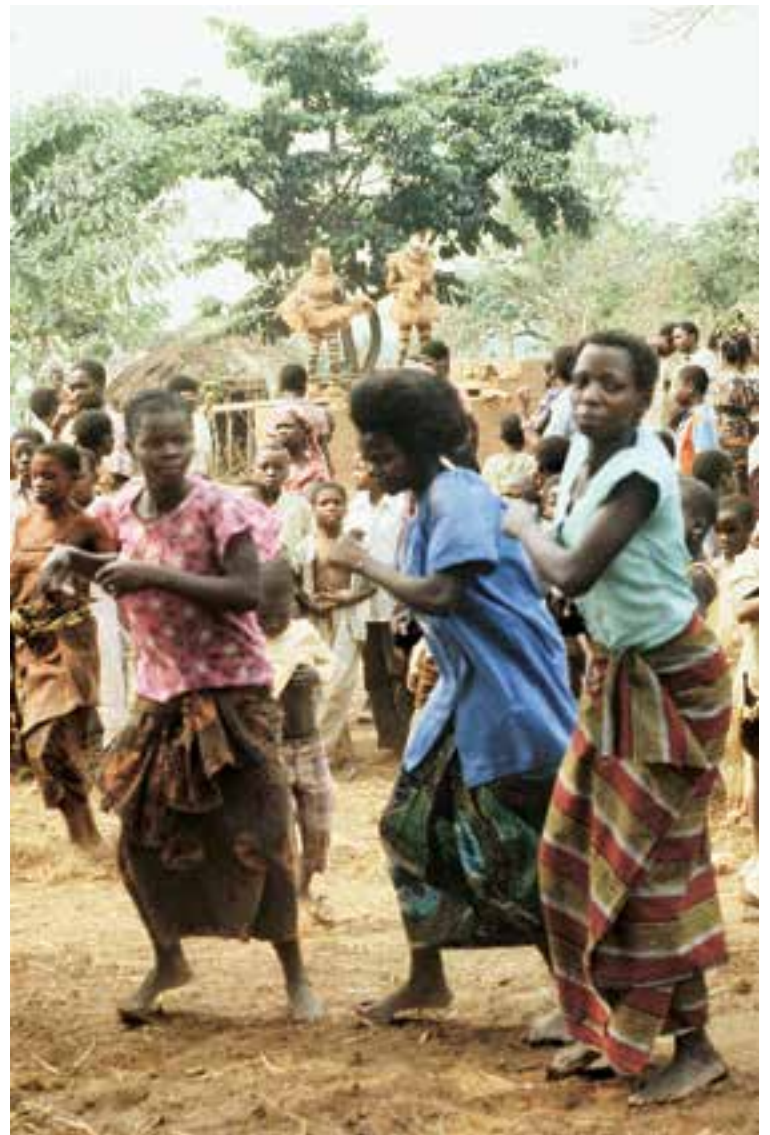


Fig. 331



Fig. 332



Fig. 333



Fig. 334

Fig. 332
Z. S. Strother
Tundanda carry firewood into the village.
Mukanda of Chief Kime
(Mayimbi a Mulenda), August, 1988
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 333
Z. S. Strother
Tundanda in circle sing *mitodio* (*mukanda songs*) and dance.
Mukanda of Chief Kime
(Mayimbi a Mulenda), August, 1988
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 334
Z. S. Strother
Toto sneaks a peek.
Mukanda of Chief Kime (Mayimbi a Mulenda), September 7, 1988
Z. S. Strother

in the bush and from the scratches they get from going barefoot. Moreover, *khundzu* is dark red in color, reminiscent of blood. For this reason, it is a constant reminder that the initiates should have fortitude (*unzui*) in the face of adversity. At Kime, the initiates dug themselves a pit from which to mine *khundzu*. Each day they ground it up in a mortar to apply to themselves.

[Fig. 333] Rather than do calisthenics to improve their strength and stamina, the boys spend at least seventy-five minutes both morning and evening singing and dancing in a circle. In call and response, the boy in the center will shout a cheer and begin a song, which the others follow. Guardians behind make sure that they match steps. The photo shows a rare occasion at Kime when the boys brought their singing into the community. Usually, they sing on a dance floor (*kilombo*) close to the village so that everyone can hear them although few have access to the camp itself.

[Fig. 334] Toto (seven years old) was the youngest in a camp of twenty-six boys, in which the average age was fourteen. His father forced him to go because a chief must have a son in the camp. Initially, it was hard for him to sing some of the ribald songs because he was embarrassed that his mother might recognize his voice. And yet, within a few weeks, he began taking pleasure in shouting out the naughty words at the top of his lungs. He was developing audacity (*umbunzudi*). Nonetheless, he and the other young boys would seek out their mothers when allowed to visit the village disguised for various rituals, hoping that she would guess who they were. A mother may be simultaneously smiling and teary-eyed after such encounters. While it reassures her to see her son healthy and mischievous, she cannot help feeling a little sad that she cannot talk to him. The experience of proximity and separation drives home the reality that her son has moved beyond her domain into the realm of men.

After *mimba*, when the initiates show off their mastery of the dances for the *mukanda* masks, they begin to practice the technically more difficult dances for the village masks (*mbuya jia kifutshi*), the most important of Pende masks, those that bring the living and the dead together in celebration. Knowing what is to come, sculptors circulate in the region offering masks for sale and chiefs also begin to place commissions for masks missing from their collections.

Himmelheber was fortunate to arrive in Pende country during this period and acquired a number of pristine, beautifully colored, ready-to-dance village masks, such as *kindjinga* [fig. 341]; *kambanda* [fig. 343]; and *kiwoyo* [fig. 350]. The chiefs were probably willing to sell them to help defray the heavy costs of the comingout ceremonies and figured that they had time to replace them at a more nominal cost.

[Fig. 335] The ritual of “touching the mask” introduced the boys to the *mukanda* masks. During one of the closing rituals, the initiates (*tundanda*) will be reconciled with the village masks. At Kende, the *tundanda* are told to lie down so that they cannot see what is happening. One of the guardians brushes some medicine on the back of the initiate. *Kipoko* (the chief of the village masks) [fig. 351] steps on the back to strengthen the spine and to release sperm from the sack believed to be located at the base of spine. Then he taps the boy with a flywhisk. His assistant brushes some kaolinite on the initiate’s legs.

Once everyone has been blessed, the ritual closes with a test of the boys' virility. The initiates are lined up and (one by one) they grab the ears of *kipoko*, the chief of the village masks, and eat a bite of food from the shelf on the bottom of the mask (or sometimes from the tip of his nose). Once the boy has eaten, he must turn and dash through a gauntlet of whips. If he can do so without incident, he is judged capable of intercourse. However, sometimes a boy will vomit from anxiety. If so, he will be pushed aside and required to repeat the ritual at another camp before he can graduate.

Later that afternoon, the initiates showed off for the community their mastery of some of the dances of the village masks (*mbuya jia kifutshi*) as a group. (The whip-toting *mukanda* masks are banned from this joyous event.) Three of the oldest and most accomplished initiates appeared in full costume to perform to great acclaim. The village masks must dance to close a *mukanda* but some chiefs prefer to wait for some months to give the community time to rest and gather their resources for a three- to five-day extravaganza. This strategy can backfire as the months pass because the *tundanda* are not considered fully initiated until they eat from the mask *kipoko*.

[Fig. 336] The initiates are told that the *mukanda* cannot end until they hunt and kill an elephant. Near the end, the camp, by now grown to its maximum size, is marched into the forest, where they met the "elephant": an umbrella tree (*musengedi*). They learn that "killing the elephant" really involves felling this tree and keeping fires burning around the clock in secret to dry the trunk so that it will resonate as a talking drum. The boys also collect leaves from the tree, which will be incorporated into a medicine to ensure their potency.

Kidinda, the boy on the right, ran off to *mukanda* when he heard songs mocking the uninitiated. His father proposed paying a fine to withdraw him, arguing that he needed Kidinda to babysit his other children. Everyone knew that the real reason was that they were Malembists (a charismatic Protestant denomination) opposed to the initiation. The chief probably would have agreed but the camp counselors threatened to go on strike and the boy himself adamantly refused, telling his father: 1) you're responsible for babysitting; 2) you were able to have children because you were initiated yourself; and 3) that's your church, not mine! The matter went to trial, but without the boy's assent, nothing could be done. Although not a natural dancer, Kidinda worked hard to master the songs and dances. At the comingout ceremony, he surpassed himself and received a huge ovation from the crowd.

[Fig. 337] Eleven days later, when the "elephant" was ready, the non-initiates were locked up in their houses. As many as forty men with sticks joined the initiates to play the dry tree trunk as a drum throughout the night, carousing and singing war songs,

Before the men began, the camp counselors gathered the masquerading costumes and headpieces and had the initiates sweep up all the straw surrounding the camp to throw onto the roof of their house. At this point, in 1987, there was quite a dispute. The young men running the camp wanted to follow the rules and to throw all the masks on the fire. The fathers felt that the masks could be hidden in a burlap bag and sold on the sly to help defray the costs of the camp.

Fig. 335
Z. S. Strother
Kipoko mask at Kibetelo ritual during Chief Kende's boys' initiation into the mukanda.
Ndjindji, August 9, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 336
Z. S. Strother
Hunting the elephant
Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele
Ndjindji, August 11, 1987
Z. S. Strother



Fig. 335



Fig. 336

Once the singing was finished, the organizers collected some chunks of dry wood to serve as replicas for the masks and disguised them by putting them in burlap bags. They had chosen a moonless night for the ceremony and when the drill sergeant set the “elephant” and house ablaze, the size of the conflagration was impressive. One could feel the heat on one’s face. And when they threw the bags into the blaze, the dry wood hissed and popped as it exploded into a shower of sparks.

Why go to *mukanda* in 2018? Whereas the Catholic Church vehemently opposed the *mukanda* for much of the twentieth century, many of their representatives accepted it in the 2000s, sometimes even organizing graduation parties. On the other hand, Congolese charismatic churches (*églises de réveil*) take a hard line and will excommunicate parents who allow their sons to go. Many young men also oppose the *mukanda*, not seeing its value in the contemporary economy. The boys who continue to call for *mukanda* do so to avoid being teased. They do not want to have to run from the *mukanda* masks and some would like to be allowed to dance the village masks. Boys must also be initiated in order to be eligible to become the chief of a lineage or the chief of a village. It is striking that, despite growing resistance, some of the camps are far larger than they were in the late 1980s. Kende, who had around twenty boys in 1987, had sixty in 2000 and forty-six in 2011. Even during a period of uncertainty in the region, in 2018 documented camps ranged from thirteen to thirty-two boys. One turnaround from the 1980s was that it was chiefs and fathers who were responsible for launching most of the camps rather than the boys themselves.

Why go to *mukanda*? Ironically, only two people out of the dozens interviewed over the years have cited what the boys in fact spend most of their time doing: singing. In 1987 and 1988, I recorded eighty-five to 120 different songs for each of two camps. Some were teasing (“Whoever stays in the village is a child!”); many teach morals through the escapades of birds and animals; some were outrageously bawdy; and the most memorable were historical songs with haunting melodies. For example,

*Ngenze a Panda udi kale ku mbongo ya Loange,
Muna Munzadi wamakana ha pambu ya Khoyi,
Ita ngayisha mu Mbinda. Tsumienu ngenji, jiyile Makumbi
a Lubunda,
Wasala kungima.
Mbimbi tsuayidile kilako, Makumbi a Panda azuele milonga,
mbimbi tuaitshikina.
Kisanga kia Muna Mumbanda!*

In the voice of a messenger of Chief Kisanga:

Ngenze a Panda has already gone downriver,
The Child of Munzadi stopped at the crossroads at Khoyi,
I left the war on the savanna called Mbinda, [at the border].
Send someone, let him go get Mukumbi a Lubunda,
Who stayed behind.
We were agreed on what Makumbi a Panda said, what he said
was what we wanted to do.
Kisanga, Child of Mumbanda!

Sometimes in wishing to justify the *mukanda*, foreigners describe it as a “school.” However, the situation is far more complex than this analogy allows. Yes, the boys learned to sing the song as they concentrated on their dance steps. Nonetheless, on examination, it turned out that the words were as opaque to them as they were to the authors of this essay. Nor did anyone attempt to explain the song to the initiates. Instead, the boys were turned into unconscious tape recorders for the community’s use.

While the boys learn nothing about the history recorded in the songs, it is the people listening at leisure in the village who may ask someone knowledgeable: who or what was “Ngenze a Panda”? What war are we talking about? It is at this point, divorced from the stress of initiation, that the motivated will learn that, at one time, men of Kisanga agreed to go to war with the people of Kombo-Kiboto. However, at the last moment, the three lieutenants scattered and did not follow through on the plan worked out by Makumbi a Lubunda with the result that the chief himself was killed.

While referring to an actual conflict (probably in the late nineteenth century), the song carries a moral: Make a plan and stick together, or you will lose. In everyday life, the song is launched during trials for one witness to remind another: we agreed; follow through or we will lose.

Most often, the *mukanda* is valued because of the transformation that it achieves. In the 1980s, many said that the *raison d’être* of *mukanda* was to make the boy *kutema*, aware, resourceful, on his toes, resilient, hard-working, independent, and able to earn his own living. In 2018, Nzomba found through extensive interviews that the parents believed “that the uninitiated are not awake [*éveillés*]: they do not have the courage to express themselves or to initiate projects, they have no stamina, no courage or audacity. Certain families find that these qualities can only be cultivated in the field. And that these qualities will help the boy to defend himself and his family [...] because the initiate will not recoil from a situation when he swears an oath in the name of his generation.” Many parents share the point of view that the boys who are not yet initiated are “timid, unformed, lazy, dull, preferring to stick close to their mothers and sisters. They avoid groups of boys and are unable to speak up for themselves in a crowd.”

The *mukanda* masks first appear to children in nightmares but then they will woo them, tease them, plead for them [fig. 338], and the boys will finally have the opportunity to lay hands on them, an action that is identical linguistically to “taking ownership” of them. According to Chief Malombo Kalongela, the *mukanda* is important because it brings together young men from different families and teaches them to live together as they share and negotiate certain intense experiences. Confronting the masks is central to that process.



Fig. 337



Fig. 338



Fig. 339

Fig. 337
Z. S. Strother

In theory, everything is destroyed at the end of *mukanda*—a sentinel watches over the fire and makes sure that no one is able to pluck anything out before it burns to ash.

Mukanda of Chief Kende Kakele, Ndjindji, August 23, 1987
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 338
Z. S. Strother

The masks still attract children to *mukanda*—some children play with a ram's mask from a previous *mukanda*, which was hidden away to sell when the opportunity arises; in the past, it would have been burned at the end of the initiation.

Nyanga, January 6, 2007,
digital photograph
Z. S. Strother

Fig. 339
Marvin Goertz

The sculptor Mashini Gitshiola shows pictures of himself to a crowd.

Nyoka-Munene, January 2007,
digital photograph
Marvin Goertz

Z. S. Strother — The photographs in this essay were conceived as documentation for future publications and slide lectures. I used a Nikon F3. Several photographers had recommended using Kodachrome slide film because it was sensitive to reds and greens and would complement the red soil and lush foliage of tropical Africa. Most of the photos in this particular essay were taken with Kodachrome; however, I ended up throwing away quite a few rolls because Kodachrome was a slow film and masquerades or other strenuous physical activity are usually scheduled late in the day when it is cooler. Ektachrome was faster, essential on overcast days, but tinted blue.

There were no photo processing laboratories for color film in the country. At the time, Nzomba Dugo Kakema was working as an itinerant portrait photographer and he had to send his black-and-white film roll by roll to Kinshasa to be developed and printed. From reviewing his prints and negatives, I could see that the labs would “push” their chemicals to save money. If one’s order arrived when the chemicals were weak, then the quality of the negative and associated prints would be thin. It was clear that all my film would need to be sent out of the country to be developed.

An unexpected trip home at the end of one year allowed me to see my photos for the first time and confirmed that, as predicted, black-and-white negative film was far more tolerant of being stored for months in tropical conditions before and after exposure. For most of my work, I relied on black-and-white. I carried back pre-paid mailers addressed to laboratories in Europe or the USA and would wait long months until I met someone leaving the country to ask him or her to mail them for me from abroad.

In the late 1980s, every adult was required by the Mobutu regime to affix a photograph to his or her identity card. There was great hunger for portrait photographs and people were accustomed to long delays between the taking of the photos and the delivery of black-and-white prints for the reasons outlined above. They preferred their own portraits to be full figure and carefully posed. Most people were pleased to be photographed and rarely refused. The same was true in 2007 during a follow-up visit. Occasionally, an individual might hesitate because she was dressed in ritual or work clothes and feared (as one woman worded it) that “people in America will think that I am poor.” However, they accepted when I promised to explain the circumstances. (The pirating of my photos on the internet sometimes proves a problem in my keeping this promise.) Occasionally, a young chief would wonder if a certain object or site should be photographed but his elders always agreed, asking “What harm could it do?” It was never an issue with the *mukanda*. The chiefs and elders had given their permission. The discipline and emotional intensity during rituals was such that both initiates and organizers seldom seemed aware of my presence as they were concentrating on anticipating what would come next and doing what was expected of them.

Because of the difficulties in conducting research in a restricted zone, I am embarrassed by how long it has taken to present the publications sought-after by my hosts. In 2007, I carried

back as many copies as I could and found field associates nostalgic to see pictures of themselves from their youth and eager to show young people why Pende art and culture (*ima jia Apende*) should be valued [fig. 339]. Nzomba and I look forward to distributing copies of the present catalogue for their delectation.



Fig.340



Fig. 341



Fig. 342

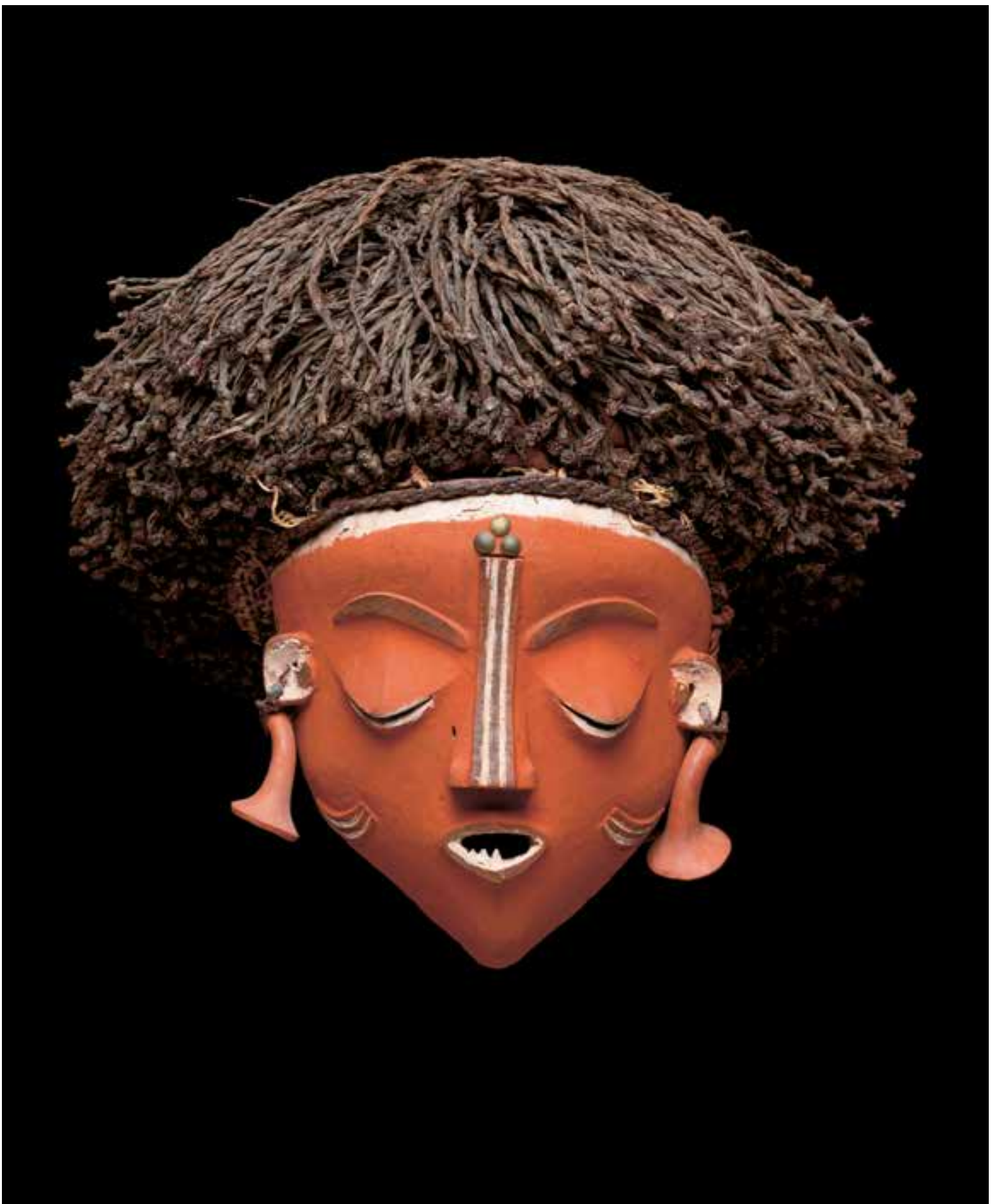


Fig. 343



Fig. 344



Fig. 345



Fig. 346



Fig. 347



Fig. 348



Fig. 349



Fig. 350.1



Fig. 351



Fig. 350.2

Fig. 340
Hans Himmelheber
The long building of the circumcision camp can be seen behind the mask
Pende region, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 190-27

Fig. 341
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Kinjinga/munyangi mask with feathers
Before 1939, wood, pigments, feathers, cowries and textiles, 69 × 42 × 62 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 30
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 342
Hans Himmelheber
Masked performance on stilts
Pende region, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich,
FHH 192-4 to FHH 192-6

Fig. 343
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Kambanda mask with woman's face
Before 1939, wood, pigments, plant fibers, and brass nails, 32 × 35 × 30 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 21a
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 344
Artist of the central Pende region
Male mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, and plant fibers, 40 × 26 × 24 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 20
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 345
Artist of the Kwilu-Pende region
Gitenga mask
Before 1939, rattan, raffia, feathers, 94 × 64 × 12 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 9178
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 346
Hans Himmelheber
Big, white eyes were equated with unbound anger
Pende region, May 24, 1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 190-29

Fig. 347
Hans Himmelheber
Performance of a mbuya mask with leaves and raffia costume
Pende region, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich,
FHH 192-12 to FHH 192-14

Fig. 348
Artist of the central Pende region
Male mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, and plant fibers, 31 × 23 × 17 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2016.152
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 349
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Kiwoyo horizontal mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, and plant fibers, 64 × 18 × 22 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 18
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 350
Artist of the central Pende region
Horizontal mask in the style of giwoyo
Before 1939, wood, pigments and plant fibers, 53.5 × 22 × 37 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 17
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 351
Artist of the eastern Pende region
Kipoko helmet mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, 28.5 × 30 × 35 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2016.151
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

PENDE INITIATION MASKS: ART THAT MAKES MEN OUT OF BOYS — Hans Himmelheber's visit to the Congo in 1938/39 happened to coincide with the initiation ceremony (*mukanda*) in the Pende region, which only takes place once every ten years. The young boys would live in the bush, away from their mothers and separated from the civilized world of the villages, where they would learn dances, songs, or craft skills while also acquiring the secret knowledge that was the preserve of the men [see essay Strother]. At the end of their communal experiences, the boys were prepared for their role as men in society. Various types of masks accompanied the boys during this long period of trials and dangers.¹ Hans Himmelheber visited the camp where the circumcisions were carried out and photographed the dances of these masked figures [figs. 340/342]. As the masks were considered worthless after use, he was able to purchase whole series of these bright red initiation masks.

It is possible to differentiate between female, male, and hypermasculine Pende masks.² The feminine is idealized as peaceful, self-controlled, and social. Hot energy, creativity, and strong emotions are seen as male—extending to uncontrolled rage and aggression in the case of the hypermasculine. These characteristics are also identifiable in the masks. The female mask shown here has a flat forehead, round eyebrows, and most importantly the expression with lowered lids known as *zanze*, which was considered particularly beautiful and seductive [fig. 343]. In contrast, the male mask conveys an aggressive impression [fig. 344]: the face is angular and chiseled, the eyes look out vigilantly from under their lids, and the lip is pursed as if the mask—according to the Pende's interpretation—was about to start yelling.

A mask of which one had to be much more wary is the *gitenga* mask in the form of a disk [fig. 345]. The round, open eyes were described as “dangerous.” Armed with a whip like all initiation masks, the *gitenga* mask had not only social responsibilities but also police duties, and was able to punish the initiands and villagers if they breached the rules. The *pumbu* mask of the eastern Pende was reserved for especially powerful chiefs and its wide-open eyes made it exceptionally terrifying [fig. 346].

Photographs show that many Pende masks, such as this male mask [fig. 348], were worn horizontally—contrary to our viewing habits. This also applies to *kiwoyo* or *giwoyo* masks [figs. 349/350]. Often mistaken for a beard by Western observers, the latter in fact depict a body laid out horizontally as for burial. This type of mask was naturally associated with the realm of the dead.

Among the most important village masks by the eastern Pende were the chiefs' *kipoko* helmet masks [fig. 351]. *Kipoko* danced at important community rituals like the appointment of a new village chief and represented the connection to the world of the dead. Furthermore, the *kipoko* also played an important role in the circumcision camps. At the end of the initiation, the boys had to grab something to eat from the edge of this imposing mask—the ultimate test—in order to be accepted in society as full-fledged men. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 Strother 1988.

2 See Strother 2008, pp. 23–28.



Fig. 352



Fig. 353



Fig. 354.1

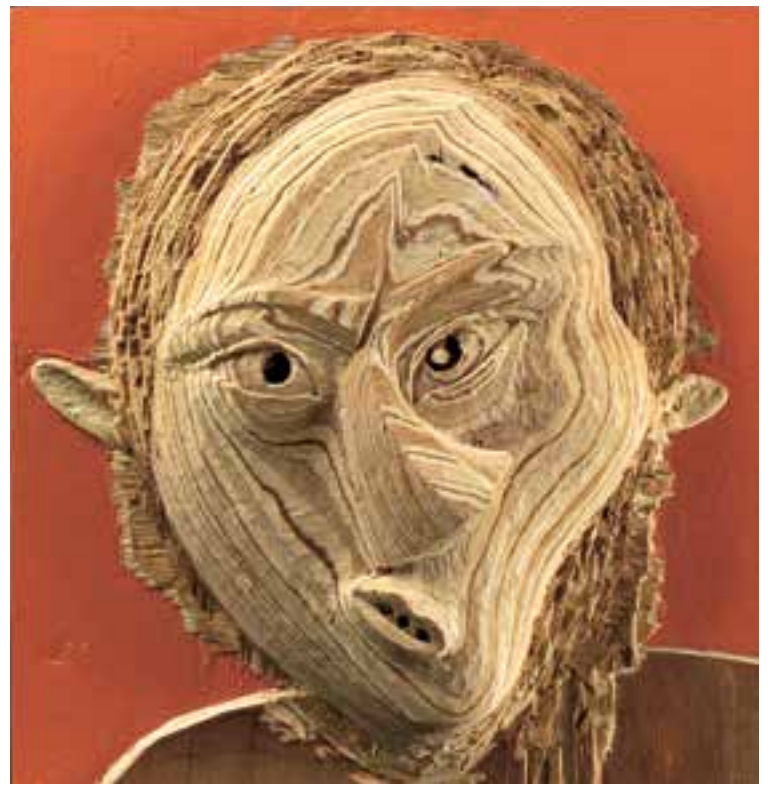


Fig. 355.1



Fig. 354.2



Fig. 355.2

Fig. 352
Artist of the central Pende region
Mbangu mask
Before 1939, wood, textile and plant
fibers, pigments, 31 × 21 × 13 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 25
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 353
Steve Bandoma
Papotage
from the series *Opium*
2016, acrylic, ink, and collage on paper,
180 × 120 cm
Gallery MAGNIN-A, Paris

Fig. 354
Aimé Mpane
La Demoiselle Picasso-Minso
2018, acrylic and mixed media on wood,
31 × 32 × 7 cm
Nomad Gallery, Brussels,
Aimé Mpane Collection

Fig. 355
Aimé Mpane
La Demoiselle Picasso-Mputu
2017, acrylic and mixed media on wood,
31 × 32 × 7 cm
Nomad Gallery, Brussels,
Aimé Mpane Collection

LIGHT AND DARK SIDES: THE PENDE MASK MBANGU IN CONTEMPORARY ART — One of the most famous yet most unusual masks is the so-called *mbangu* mask by the central Pende. This is one of the very rare masks in African art that has an asymmetric design [fig. 352]. This initiation mask's potency lies in its strong black-and-white contrast. *Mbangu* was associated with disease, misfortune, and physical shortcomings, which were ascribed to witchcraft.¹ The mouth, nose, and eye on the dark, "sick" side are distorted. In contrast, the white side bears typical features of a male Pende mask, like the distinctive forehead and pronounced cheekbones—symbols of strength and health. *Mbangu* was "bewitched" but was also searching for the source of its curse. With its simultaneously harmonious and asymmetrical design, *mbangu* symbolized illness and cure, suffering and hope.

Both Congolese artists Steve Bandoma and Aimé Mpane reference this unusual mask type in their artworks. In his painting *Papotage* ("chitchat") from the series *Opium*, Steve Bandoma questions the missionary work from the fifteenth century to the present day [fig. 353]. With this title and the subject of the *mbangu* mask, he is criticizing the Church's two-faced behavior and promise of salvation. Instead of exchange and syncretism, the missionaries often demanded the rejection of traditional religious practices. This was sadly accompanied by the destruction of old masks and figures, which Hans Himmelheber also documented on his travels.

In his series *Demoiselles* the artist Aimé Mpane created two-faced portraits that can be seen on the recto and verso of the supporting material [figs. 354/355]. Drawing on Pende masks among other things, three-dimensional faces emerge from several layers of plywood. While the carved faces on the one side are reminiscent of the topographies and reliefs of a landscape, the strong colors and abstract forms on the other side allude to Cubism. With the title Aimé Mpane makes direct reference to Picasso's iconic picture *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* from 1907, which was modeled on African masks. Mpane is paying tribute to Picasso, but he is also criticizing the avant-garde's appropriation of African art. Being able to see through the masks from both sides raises the question of what is the front and the back, what is public and private. — Michaela Oberhofer

1 Strother 2008, pp. 27f.



Fig. 356



Fig. 357



Fig. 358



Fig. 359



Fig. 360





Fig. 362



Fig. 363



Fig. 364



Fig. 365





Fig. 367



Fig. 368



Fig. 369



Fig. 370



Fig. 371

Fig. 356
Hans Himmelheber
Performance of the *hemba* mask
Kiala, June 24, 1938, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich,
FHH 157-38 to FHH 157-41

Fig. 357
Artist of the Suku region
Mask with bird crest
Circa 1900, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 70 × 35 × 48 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, RAC 506
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

Fig. 358
Artist of the Suku region
Helmet mask with antelope
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 57 × 45 × 47 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 2
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 359
Artist of the Suku region
Helmet mask
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 49 × 35 × 41 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 1
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 360
Artist of the Suku region
Helmet mask
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers, pigments,
approx. 40 × 50 × 50 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 4
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 361
Katomi from Kapuna
Mask *kambaandzya* as protection
Before 1938, Kingulu, plant fibers,
pigments, 28 × 60 × 46 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.430
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 362
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with cone crest
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, approx. 80 × 60 × 50 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.429
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 363
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with five-pronged crest
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, approx. 54 × 51 × 32 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.428
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 364
Mukelenge Yamfu from Moanauta
***Ndeemba* mask**
Before 1938, wood, raffia textile,
feathers, white, black, and blue
pigments, 50 × 50 × 49 cm
Museum der Kulturen Basel, III 1337
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 365
Artist of the Yaka region
***Kisokolo* mask with horns**
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 36 × 60 × 50 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 26
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 366
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with lovemaking couple
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 67 × 41 × 35 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 28
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 367
Hans Himmelheber
***Mbala* mask with bicycle**
Yaka region, 1938, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 168-12

Fig. 368
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with lovemaking couple
Early twentieth century, wood, woven
bast, plant fibers, 100 × 30 × 30 cm
Private Collection Lausanne
John Torres Jr.

Fig. 369
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with animal crest
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 90 × 56 × 44 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 29
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 370
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with birds pecking out the eyes
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 60 × 50 × 20 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2018.7
Gift of Martin Himmelheber
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 371
Artist of the Yaka region
Mask with two figures
Before 1938, wood, plant fibers,
pigments, 77 × 44 × 43 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 27
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

A SNAPSHOT OF ARTISTIC PRACTICES AROUND 1938: THE YAKA'S *MUKANDA* MASKS — Right at the beginning of his travels, Hans Himmelheber came across the dances performed east of Kinshasa in connection with the Yaka's *mukanda* circumcision camp. In these camps boys spent a year undergoing their initiation to become full-fledged men. They learned craft skills and practiced dancing and singing. The artist *kalaueni* produced three to eleven masks for each camp; with the exception of the leader, they would then always perform in pairs. They were danced by the newly initiated with a privileged status. Himmelheber was able not only to document these dances in numerous photographs but also to purchase mask ensembles. These comprised very distinct masks, ranging from faceless ones worked entirely from raffia [fig. 361] to ones with carved wooden faces and simple headdresses like antennal extensions [figs. 362/363] or feathers [fig. 364] to horned masks [fig. 365]. As a costume, the masked figures wore dancing shirts made of woven cord [fig. 32]. At the dances the plainer masks performed first [fig. 59]. The largest and most attractive mask, the *mbala*, made its appearance at the end of the performance and was the leader's mask. *Mbala* were the public's clear favorites and were intended to astound the viewers with surprising scenes that were reenacted with mario-nettes on the head section. The artists were inspired by sex, humor, and current events. For example, Himmelheber purchased masks that show a couple lovemaking [fig. 366/368]. Modern subjects were also popular and Himmelheber photographed a mask bearing a cyclist [fig. 367]. Humor played a big part in the selection of subjects for *mbala* masks. Parodies of colonial officials were popular, such as an *agent sanitaire* on his motorbike, a nurse at the microscope, or another doctor's assistant examining a woman on a gynecological chair [fig. 371].¹ One genuine discovery is the mask with birds carved on the sides of the face section that are pecking out the mask's eyes [fig. 370]. Before now this subject had not been described for the Yaka, but it testifies to the artists' inventiveness. Yaka artists created new masks for every *mukanda* camp; in this respect, the mask ensembles acquired by Himmelheber constitute a snapshot of artistic practices in 1938. — Nanina Guyer

1 Himmelheber 1939a, p. 11.



Fig. 372



Fig. 373.1



Fig. 373.2



Fig. 374



Fig. 375



Fig. 376



Fig. 377



Fig. 378



Fig. 379



Fig. 372
Artist of the Chokwe region
Female *pwo* mask
Before 1939, wood, pigments, plant fibers,
iron, copper alloy, 34 × 19 × 21 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2019.423
Purchased with funds from the Rietberg-
Kreis
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 373
Hans Himmelheber
***Pwo* masked figure**
Northern Suku region (?),
1938/39, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich,
FHH 173-15, FHH 173-35

Fig. 374
Artist of the Chokwe region
Mask with wig
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers,
29 × 24 × 12 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, HH 16
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 375
Hans Himmelheber
Crouching *pwo* masked figure
Northern Suku region (?),
1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 172-7

Fig. 376
Hans Himmelheber
**Two *chihongo* guardian masks at the
entrance to the *mukanda* camp**
Northern Suku region (?),
1938/39, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich, FHH 174-2

Fig. 377
Artist of the Chokwe region
***Chihongo* mask**
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers,
resin, pigments, 55 × 42 × 33 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 5
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

Fig. 378
Hans Himmelheber
***Chihongo* guardian mask**
Lele region, January 6,
1939, b/w negative
Museum Rietberg Zürich
FHH 178-36

Fig. 379
Hans Himmelheber
Dance of the *chihongo* guardian mask
Lele region, January 6, 1939, b/w negatives
Museum Rietberg Zürich,
FHH 179-13 to FHH 179-20

Fig. 380
Artist of the Chokwe region
***Chihongo* mask**
Before 1939, wood, plant fibers, resin,
feathers, pigments, 58 × 58 × 34 cm
Museum Rietberg Zürich, EFA 29
Gift of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer
Acquired by Hans Himmelheber

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: CHOKWE MASKS — With coloni-
zation the Chokwe's tradition of eternalizing wealthy men as
wooden figures, in the style of the cultural hero Chibinda Ilunga,
died out [see fig. 7]. Instead the artists concentrated on producing
masks. We know of two different types of mask: dance masks
whose facial sections are carved naturalistically from wood, and
the guardian masks from the *mukanda* camps that are shaped
from resin.

During his travels Hans Himmelheber regularly came across
these various masked figures of the Chokwe, photographed their
performances, purchased masks, and interviewed their creators.
He also noted down their names: Maliboka from Kambaganungu,
Allone from Sakuhindika, Mamukepe.¹ In these interviews
Himmelheber makes a significant discovery for the history of art.
Embodying the ideal woman with their graceful facial features,
tattoos, and hairstyle, the *pwo* dance masks are actually a kind of
semi-portrait because their proportions are modeled on a real
woman's face [figs. 372/373/375]. An artist told Himmelheber
how he tricked the woman into giving him these measurements
without realizing what he was doing. According to the artist, he
went up to a pretty girl and said: "Oh, your face is much longer
than mine." She would then protest, they would compare their
faces with a stick, and *voilà*—he had his first measurement. This
was followed by the distance between the eyes, between the nose
and the mouth, etc. "Once I have done a portrait of my wife, my
fiancée, and my girlfriend in this way," said one of the artists in-
terviewed by Himmelheber, "then I can use another man's wife as
my model. I just ask her husband to provide me with her measure-
ments."²

Pwo, the ideal woman, is danced by a man. To do so he wears
a woven, full-body dress and artificial breasts. On one occasion
Himmelheber even saw a dancer who had chastely concealed his
wooden breasts "à la mode de la mission" with a little chiffon scarf
[fig. 373].³ Such dance masks can also depict men, in which case
they generally have more angular carvings. Himmelheber pur-
chased one of these onto which, curiously enough, a carefully
worked female wig has been attached [fig. 374].

The second type of mask by the Chokwe, *chihongo*, was pro-
duced in the *mukanda* camps from a blackened resin compound
and plant fibers. A woven head basket adorned with stork feathers
sits on the modeled face [fig. 380]. They were the guardian masks
of the *mukanda* camps. With their towering face masks, the
masked figures made an impression even from a distance [fig.
376]. One of their tasks was to scare off the women with their
terrifying appearance, because the freshly circumcised boys were
not allowed to see any women. For the performance these masks'
feather hairstyle was adorned with a scarf [fig. 378]. In the village
of King Pero, Himmelheber witnessed the performance of a *chi-
hongo* mask and captured the tremendous vitality of its dance in
stunning photographs [fig. 379]. After the performance, he was
able to purchase the mask. Despite its now faded colors and miss-
ing costume, this mask still gives an impression of its original
impact [fig. 377]. — Nanina Guyer

1 Himmelheber 1939b.

2 Himmelheber 1960, pp. 340–341.

3 Fischer and Mayer-Himmelheber 1993, p. 150.



Fig. 381



Fig. 382

Fig. 381
Nelson Makengo
Sans-titre
From *Théâtre Urbain*
2017, photograph, 40 × 150 cm
Nelson Makengo

Fig. 382
Nelson Makengo
Sans-titre
From *Théâtre Urbain*
2017, photograph, 60 × 120 cm
Nelson Makengo

“MANY ARTISTS MAKE AN ACERB CRITIQUE OF WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS THE UNINTERRUPTED COLONIZATION OF THEIR COUNTRY BY CAPITALIST AND GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS.”

A conversation on the Contemporary Art Scene of the Democratic Republic of Congo
Sandrine Colard, Nanina Guyer

Sandrine Colard is an art historian, writer, and curator based in New York and Brussels. A specialist in modern and contemporary African arts (PhD Columbia University), Colard is a professor at Rutgers University-Newark and has been appointed artistic director of the 6th Lubumbashi Biennale 2019, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Her writings include contributions to exhibition catalogues such as *Sammy Baloji: Hunting and Collecting* (2016) and *The Expanded Subject: New Perspectives in Photographic Portraiture from Africa* (2016). In addition to the Biennale, she is also curating *The Way She Looks: A History of Female Gazes in African Photography* in collaboration with the Artur Walther Collection (Ryerson Image Center, Toronto, 2019). Colard is currently working on her book about the history of photography in the DRC.

NANINA GUYER The contemporary art scene in the Congo and its diaspora is thriving. What makes it unique and what are the core themes that today’s artists are working on?

SANDRINE COLARD The vastness of the country makes it difficult to speak about “one” scene, but the cities of Kinshasa, the capital, and Lubumbashi, the second most important city in the southeast Katanga province, have produced and attracted the largest number of internationally recognized contemporary artists. Historically, both cities became the seats of the two national and formal art schools founded in the 1940s and the 1950s under Belgian colonialism, and they retain the position of art poles to the present day. However, the young generations of Congolese artists often position themselves independently or against the “academicism” of these schools, and they came of age after the

period of state-sponsored art put in place during the 1970s by President Mobutu. Therefore, these artists' practices are often supported and nourished by the incredible energy of artist-based initiatives and collectives, such as Picha and Centre Waza in Lubumbashi, or KinArt Studio and Eza Possible in Kinshasa. Simultaneously exhibition spaces, intellectual hubs, art organizations, and sponsors, these spaces have become central to the dynamism of the Congolese artistic ecosystem, and ensure networks of collaboration and support that have contributed to the growth of the national scene. This necessity for artistic self-reliance parallels the resilience of the larger Congolese society, for which political and economic instability and episodes of violence are part of everyday life. Naturally, these preoccupations lie at the heart of many contemporary artists' practices.

The drastic transformation of a city like Kinshasa, the harshness of its urban environment and of its infrastructures, are recurrent themes, as is the transcendence of these difficulties. The posthumous retrospective of the utopian *maquettes* by Bodys Isek Kingelez at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 2018 has probably provided the most well-known example of this, but younger artists like Mega Mingiedi also create quasi frescoes of futurist versions of Congolese cities. The photographer and video artist Nelson Makengo has made a trademark of using superhero toys and figurines that he films as *kinois* prevailing over their circumstances [fig. 381/382], or again, the performance artists of KinAct and their annual festival intervene directly on the streets of the megalopolis. All address the urban "chaos" but ultimately sublimate and re-enchant it. The photographs of the late Kiripi Katembo are beautiful examples of this, turning Kinshasa's flooded potholes into poetic mirrors of the city.

The long tradition of so-called "popular" Congolese painting, often charged with a social, moral, and political critique, is pursued by the famous painter Chéri Samba. But younger painters also experiment with different approaches, creating portraits of a less figurative nature. Often composite collages, the subjects of painters such as Steve Bandoma, Hilaire Balu Kuyangiko, or Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga evoke fragmented subjectivities of twenty-first-century Congolese.

Many more topics occupy Congolese artists, but the question of mobility and migration is certainly an important one, too. In recent years, Jean Katambayi has produced a magnificent series of drawings entitled *Visafrolampes* (2018), which is the result of his reflections on the numerous impediments to travel for Africans [figs. 383/384].

N.G. The archival turn, or the appropriation of archival material as a major artistic practice has profoundly influenced the work of artists worldwide. How has this trend affected Congolese artists?

S.C. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo as in the rest of the world's contemporary art scene, the turn to the twenty-first-century has seen the rise of the so-called "archival turn." Here, it also coincided with the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of the country's independence from Belgium in 1960, as well as with the publication of a few best-sellers about the country's history, for instance, Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*. Therefore, the first decade of the 2000s saw a "rediscovery" of the colonial era and its massive photographic archives, both in Bel-

Fig. 383
Jean Katambayi
Visafrolampes
2019, installation view
*Multiple Transmissions:
Art in the Afropolitan Age*,
WIELS

Fig. 384
Jean Katambayi
Visafrolampes
2018, ten drawings, different pens on
paper, A3 (29.7 × 42.3 cm, unframed)
Trampoline Gallery, Antwerp



Fig. 383

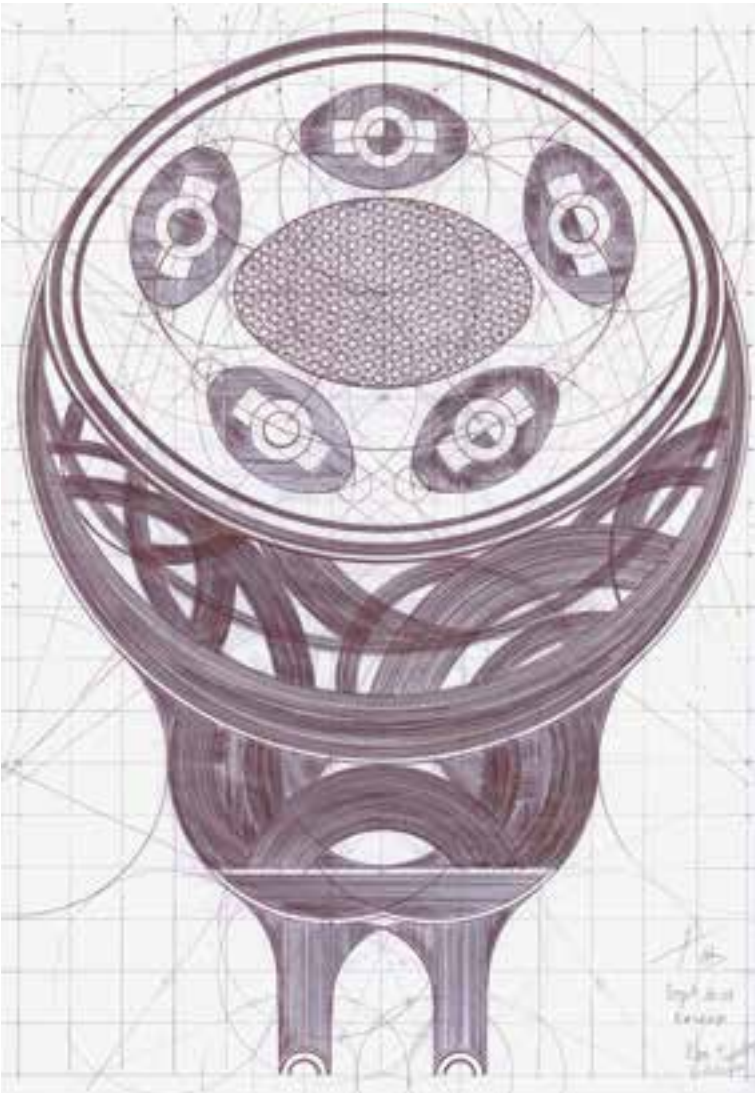


Fig. 384.1

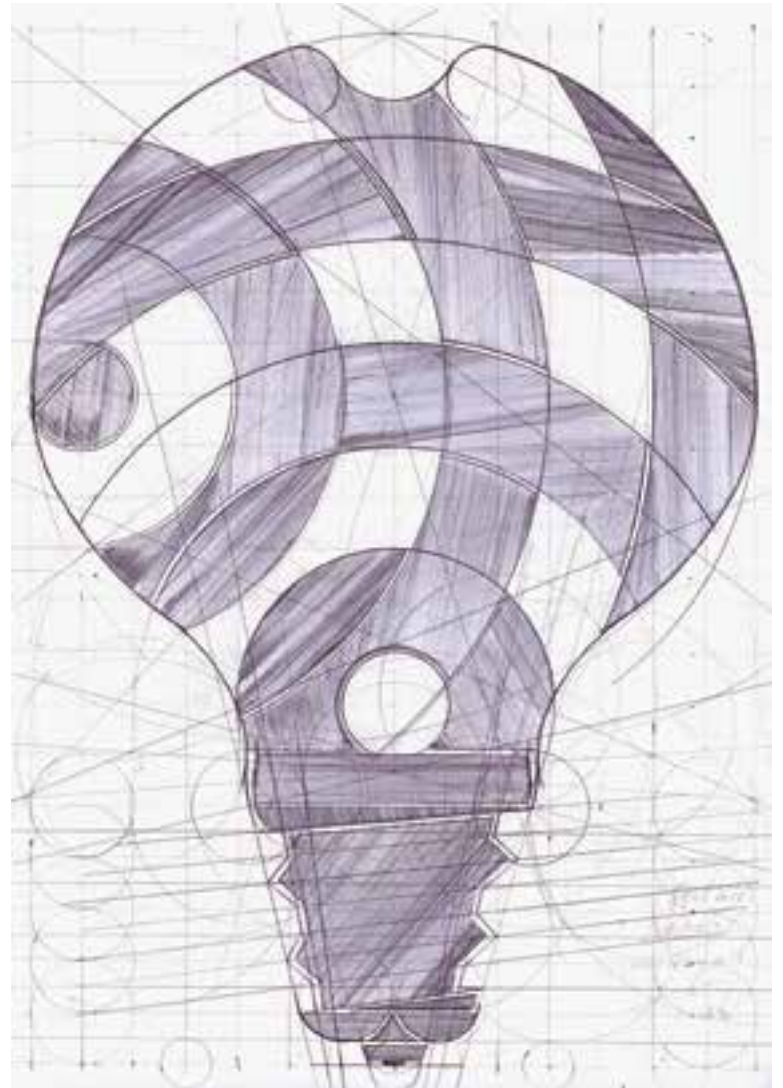


Fig. 384.2



Fig. 385



Fig. 386



Fig. 387

Fig. 385
Sammy Baloji
Untitled #18
2006, archival photograph on
satin matte paper, 60 × 160 cm
Galerie Imane Farès, Paris

Fig. 386
Sammy Baloji
Untitled #12
2006, archival photograph on
satin matte paper, 60 × 181 cm
Galerie Imane Farès, Paris

Fig. 387
Sammy Baloji
Untitled #19
2006, archival photograph
on satin matte paper, 60 × 160 cm
Galerie Imane Farès, Paris

gium and in the DRC. Different efforts at digitization made large numbers of pictures that had not been circulating for a long time more readily available. This was particularly palpable in Lubumbashi, which is a city that still visibly bears the traces of its colonial past. The preserved colonial architecture and the imposing slag-heap and chimney of the former *Union Minière du Haut Katanga* company still dominate the cityscape. The company produced its own important photographic archive, which was rescued and digitized by the local Institut Français. This is how an artist like Sammy Baloji was able to discover these images and create his first series of collages, *Mémoire* (2006/07), which launched his career. That work digitally juxtaposed contemporary views of the run-down mining setting onto which the artist pasted cutouts of vintage photographs, which showed figures from the colonial period, particularly (forced) laborers [figs. 385–387]. As the series' title indicates, the work is about retrieving the memory of the city and its inhabitants and commemorating the labor carried out by the ancestors, which is often forgotten to the profit of the industrial know-how brought by the Europeans. In the Congo, the archival turn was about reappropriating a history that was largely forgotten, and connecting it to the country's present situation. The younger generations and artists born after independence do not really know that history and are seldom educated on the subject.

In 2017, I led an artists' workshop about the history of colonial photography, parallel to the last edition of the Lubumbashi Biennale curated by Toma Muteba Luntumbue. The great interest and will to further work on those archives among young Congolese artists was evident. Following the workshop, for instance, Nelson Makengo produced a video, *E'ville*, which incorporates some of the photographs that we discussed.

Interestingly, European museums of ethnography or natural sciences own large collections of colonial artifacts and photographs, and there is a growing tendency to invite Congolese artists to reflect upon them. In a sense, then, the "archival turn" has put Africans and Europeans in dialogue around the colonial history. Long before its renovation, Sammy Baloji and the Congolese writer Patrick Mudekerezwa were invited by the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren (Belgium) in 2008 to mine and reinterpret their collections in order to create new artworks from an African point of view. This resulted in the *Congo Far West* exhibition and book (2011). Similarly, for the exhibition *Congo as Fiction*, the artist David Shongo is using Museum Rietberg's collection of photographs by the ethnographer Hans Himmelheber. While these residencies have had the great merit of sharing collections and perspectives, some scholars such as Lotte Arndt have also warned against putting the weight of these institutions' "decolonial" task in dealing with their past exclusively on the shoulders of African artists.¹

N.G. Artists like Sinzo Aanza, Sammy Baloji, Michèle Magemba, and David Shongo make use of a variety of archival material such as objects, sound recordings, photographs, films, and texts. Especially the use of colonial photographs is a recurring theme in the works of these artists, and is striking.

S.C. The dominance of colonial photographs is explained by the very large production that was created by the Belgian admin-

1 Arndt 2013.

istration, but also by their easier circulation through digital platforms and the internet. Many of the official archives from the colonial period are not held in the DRC, but in Belgium. Even if photographs, because of their reproducibility, have remained present in the Congo, the institutions that hold them are not always easily accessible, or their collections are just not listed. But when they do not have direct access to collections, artists source their material on the internet. A good example is the series of diptychs by the Lubumbashi photographer Georges Senga, *Une Vie après la mort* (2012) [fig. 388]. That work consists in imagining what Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Congo and martyr of independence, would have become had he not been assassinated in 1961. Several portraits of a present-day Lumumba admirer and lookalike are coupled with archival images and portraits, newspaper clippings, etc., and all of them have been retrieved from the web. In the same way, the Kinshasa-born, Belgium-based artist Freddy Mutombo also works on colonial photographs that he has recuperated online. This says a lot about the democratization of resources that the internet has brought about for African artists, and also about the unequal access and continued effort still necessary for the sharing of collections.

N.G. Perhaps connected to this and as a follow-up question: can you elaborate on the ways that artists have engaged with colonialism and called for a decolonization of minds?

S.C. I have rarely heard Congolese artists use the term “decolonization.” This does not mean that it is not an issue of interest to them, but in my opinion, it translates differently than in the European and American diasporas, where the notion has recently regained a powerful attraction after its initial coining by Walter Dignolo. A precursor of the decolonizing awareness in the DRC is the resonant “authenticity” (*authenticité*) campaign promoted by President Mobutu starting in the 1970s. Because he believed that post-independence Congolese still suffered from mental and cultural colonialism—they were *mundele ndombe*, that is, white people with black skin—Mobutu implemented “decolonial” cultural policies *avant la lettre* that pervaded all aspects of society. The way people dressed was modified: dresses and suits were abandoned in favor of *pagnes* and *abacost* (short for “à bas le costume,” that is, “down with the costume.”) Christian names were officially changed to indigenous ones. Artistically, this campaign largely favored and sponsored classical or “traditional” African arts and motifs. Today, artists in the Congo regard that authenticity campaign with ambivalence, for the mold that it imposed on artistic practices and for the political propaganda tool that it became in the hands of Mobutu. Also, today’s Congolese artists are so conversant with the global contemporary art scene that questions of authenticity seem to be of little concern. However, the necessity for African self-pride is a preoccupation that remains, for instance, in the photographs of Alain Nsenga [fig. 389]. In a series entitled *Métamorphoses*, the artist has documented the imposing billboards that advertise skin-bleaching products in the streets of the city of Lubumbashi. Because a lighter complexion is often regarded as more beautiful than dark skin tones, these cosmetics enjoy great popularity and testify to the pervasiveness of Western beauty standards in Africa. Nsenga denounces this aesthetic colonialism that he counteracts by creating portraits of

Fig. 388
Georges Senga
Une Vie après la mort
2012, photographs, different formats
Georges Senga



Fig. 388.1



Fig. 388.2



Fig. 388.3



Fig. 388.4



Fig. 389.1



Fig. 389.2



Fig. 389.3

black women with their natural hair, in dramatic lighting, as a sort of localized Black is Beautiful movement launched in the USA by the African-American photographer Kwame Brathwaite.

More generally, many artists make an acerbic critique of what they perceive as the uninterrupted colonization of their country by capitalist and geopolitical interests. The way that the industrial and financial world sucks out the natural resources of the DRC to the detriment of the local population constitutes the backdrop or overt subject of many Congolese art practices. Visual arts but also literary works address that situation frontally, such as the unambiguously titled novel *Congo Inc.* by Jean Bofane. In the same way, Sinzo Aanza is a writer and an artist for whom global capital's stranglehold on Congolese national sovereignty is a recurrent question. For instance, in his installation, photographic series, and video *Pertinences Citoyennes* (2018), [figs. 301/302] Aanza deconstructs what he calls the "institutional national fiction" that is the Congo. As a creation of the 1884/85 Berlin Conference and a continuous financial playground for the international community, the country and its politicians are reduced to puppets of what the artist calls the "feudality of the capital." In Katanga, Sammy Baloji has worked on similar issues by documenting the economy of soil extractions and the consequences for local people and artisanal miners, for instance, in his series *Kolwezi* (2011).

N.G. Many artists participating in the exhibition *Congo as Fiction* connect the past with the present and the future in their works. As the curator of the Biennale of Lubumbashi, you have chosen the leitmotif *Future Genealogies—Tales from the Equatorial Line* [figs. 390/391]. To me, the themes utopia, fiction, and the quest for a new geographical centering of art history resonate here.

S.C. The decentering of art history that started in the 1980s with groundbreaking exhibitions like *Magiciens de la Terre* is undergoing a new acceleration. At the institutional level, a geographical shift back to the African continent is undeniable. Museums such as Zeitz Mocca, or le Musée des Civilisations in Dakar, and art fairs like 1:54 that takes place in Marrakech, in addition to its London and New York editions, are some of the examples that testify to that continental grounding. In the West, the call for decolonizing art institutions have started to make collections that are much more inclusive of non-Western arts. The recent donation by the famous contemporary African art collector Jean Pigozzi to MoMA is striking, as the museum has long represented a fortress of Euro-American modernism and contemporary art. In that context, the existence of African biennales like the one in Lubumbashi play an important role, as it participates in the creation of an African discourse around African art. For the coming year alone, three biennales are planned in the DRC: *Lubumbashi*, but also *Young Congo* in Kinshasa, and the second edition of *Yango*, founded by the late Kiripi Katembo.

What interested me about the oxymoron in the title of the biennale *Future Genealogies* was to express the impossibility of thinking about the present and the future of the arts separately from their past history. As you rightly point out, many Congolese artists conflate various time periods in their work, as the Congo is a place where different layers of time coexist. The country still lives in the aftermath of colonialism, but the Congolese are simul-

taneously at the forefront of future technologies and development due to the presence of a multitude of companies sourcing necessary raw materials. For instance, *On-Trade-Off*, is an ongoing artistic project led in collaboration between Congolese and Belgian artists. It raises awareness about environmental and economic implications of the extraction and processing of lithium, the main raw material needed for the global production of green energy, and for the construction of Tesla cars. One of the pieces created for that project is *Tesla Crash, A Speculation* (in progress), by Jean Katambayi, Sammy Baloji, and Daddy Tshikaya. It is a handmade, 1:1 model of the Tesla Model \times in recycled copper wires, based on the model that children often make in the Congo [fig. 392]. Another good example of this layering of time is the works by the painter Eddy Kamuanga Illunga, who mixes tall, elongated figures with Congo cosmogony and electric circuits.

N.G. What is your vision of the Congo's art scene in 2050?

S.C. Other cities are contributing more and more to the contemporary art scene, and I expect a multiplication of Congolese art poles. Kisangani has long been another center of art production, particularly with the Studios Kabako of Faustin Linyekula. Lately, also the city of Goma's burgeoning art scene has attracted lots of attention. Women still represent a minority of the practitioners, but this is rapidly changing. In a few years, young female artists like Michèle Magera, Géraldine Tobé, Pamela Tulizo, Gorette Lubondo, and Hadassa Ngamba, just to name a few, have risen.

My wish is for a well-rooted Congolese art ecology to bloom, one that can critically sustain and accompany the formidable artists who thrive there. Only with local art critics and institutions, curators, patrons, and audiences can the Congolese art scene continue to grow.

Fig. 390
Pierre-Philippe Duchatelet
Généalogies Futures
Lubumbashi Biennale VI
October 24 – November 24, 2019
Poster French/English

Fig. 391
Pierre-Philippe Duchatelet
Mazazi Ya Baadaye
Lubumbashi Biennale VI
October 24 – November 24, 2019
Poster Swahili/French

Fig. 392
Sammy Baloji, Jean Katambayi Mukendi,
and Daddy Tshikaya
Tesla Crash, a Speculation
2019, Mixed media, 60 \times 50 \times 50 cm,
view of the installation
Galerie Imane Farès, Paris

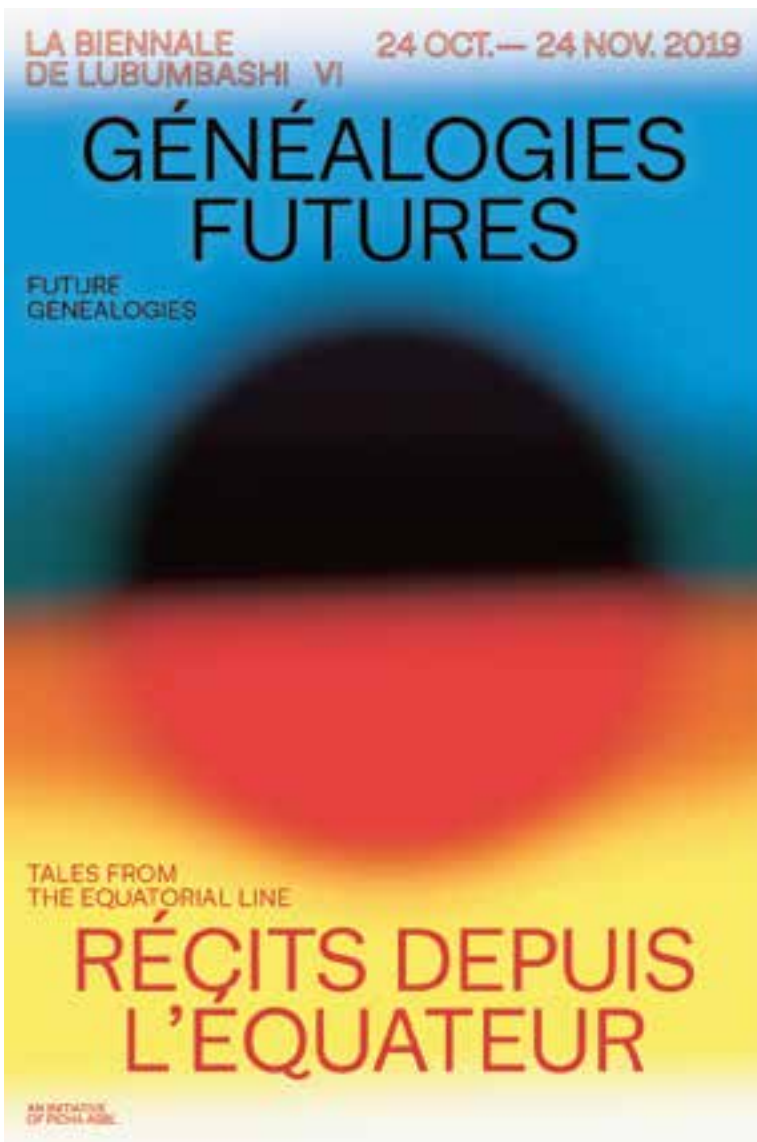


Fig. 390

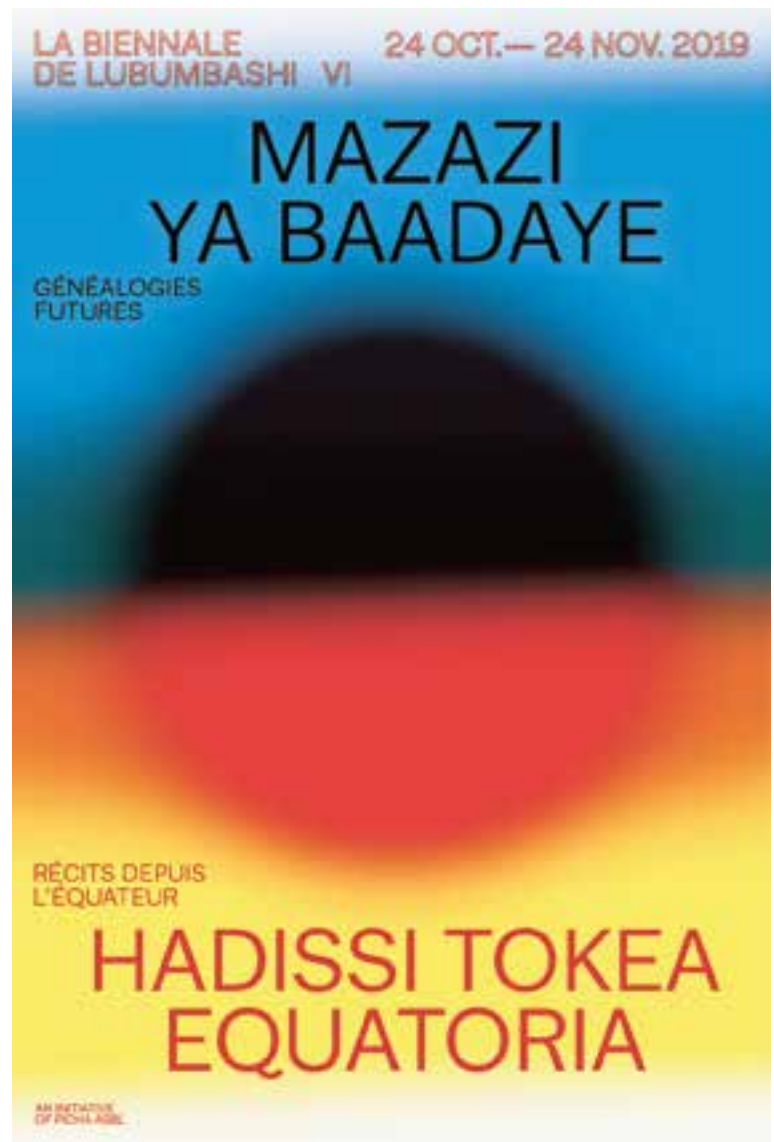


Fig. 391



Fig. 392

APPENDIX

AUTHORS

LAURA FALLETTA is a graduate student of art history in a global context and of Portuguese language and literature at the University of Zürich. Her interests lie in the field of cultural transfer within a global understanding of art history, focusing on the lusophone world and a gender-sensitive reappraisal of the art historiography. She is currently completing a curatorial internship at the Museum Rietberg in Zürich.

CHRISTRAUD M. GEARY is an independent scholar and Teel Senior Curator Emerita of African and Oceanic Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. A cultural anthropologist, she conducted research on history and arts of the Cameroon Grassfields, a highland region in the western part of the country. She also focused on early colonial photography in Cameroon and other parts of the African continent, and in the 1980s joined a cohort of scholars who began pioneering research on the history of photography and Africa, including the work of African practitioners. From 1990 to 2003, before joining the MFA Boston, she was curator of the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Geary has organized photographic exhibitions and published catalogues, books, and numerous essays.

NANINA GUYER is curator for photography at the Museum Rietberg in Zürich. Her special interests include the global history of photography and its local forms of expression. She earned her PhD with a thesis on historical photographs from Sierra Leone and Liberia. Currently she is working on the history of photography in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1930s, with special emphasis on the photographs of Hans Himmelheber. Additionally, she is preparing an exhibition on early African photographers.

NZOMBA DUGO KAKEMA is a photographer based in Tshikapa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

DAVID MANNES is a scientist in the research group for Neutron Imaging and Applied Materials at the Paul Scherrer Institut (PSI) in Villigen. He assists domestic and international researchers in their experiments with neutron imaging and both advises and supervises clients from the industry. His main interest is in the nondestructive analysis of art historical objects using imaging techniques.

MICHAELA OBERHOFER is curator for Africa and Oceania and head of Collection Services at the Museum Rietberg. Her exhibitions (e.g., *Dada Africa*, *Bead Art*) highlight the entangled history of creative production in Africa as well as the reception of non-Western art in Europe. Together with Professor Gesine Krüger (University of Zürich) she has headed the research project Hans Himmelheber since 2018. At the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin and at GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig, she carried out studies and realized exhibitions on the history of acquisitions and collectors. A further focus of her work is on cooperations with museums in Africa.

CONSTANTINE PETRIDIS is chair of the department of the Arts of Africa and the Americas and curator of African Art at the Art Institute of Chicago. His recent book *Luluwa: Central African Art Between Heaven and Earth* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2018) derives from his doctoral dissertation on the same subject for Ghent University in his native Belgium.

JENS STENGER is a physicist and has been working in the field of art research for fifteen years. His research into the materials and production techniques used in works of art took him from the Harvard Art Museum to the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at Yale University and then to the Swiss Institute for Art Research. His main interest is in matters of art history at the intersection of materiality and imaging techniques.

Z.S. STROTHER is Riggio Professor of African Art at Columbia University, New York. She is the author of *Inventing Masks: Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende* and *Humor and Violence: Seeing Europeans in Central African Art*.

ARTISTS

SINZO AANZA (*1990) lives and works in Kinshasa. In his poetic texts, the writer questions the political conditions under colonial rule as far as the present power relations in the DR Congo. In his installations, he addresses the ruthless exploitation of his country's mineral resources, the representation of national identity, as well as the construed postcolonial image of the Congo. Most recently he displayed his work at the group exhibition *Kinshasa Chroniques Urbaines* in Sète (France) and is to appear at the Biennale in Lubumbashi (2019). Together with Sammy Baloji, he took part in an artist-in-residence programme for the exhibition *Congo as Fiction* at the Museum Rietberg. In the process, Sinzo Aanza concerned himself with the photographs of the art anthropologist Hans Himmelheber, focussing on the far-reaching changes brought about by the realignment of space and power at the hands of the colonial regime.

SAMMY BALOJI (*1978) lives and works in Brussels and Lubumbashi. He ranks among the most renowned Congolese artists. Baloji has not only taken part in notable art biennales (Dakar 2016, Venice 2015, Lyon 2015), *documenta* 2017, and various photo festivals (Bamako 2007, 2015), his works are also held by museums in Lyon, Paris, Tervuren, Ulm, Washington, Virginia, and as far as Luanda (Angola) and Ouidah (Benin). His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions; he has also served as curator (*Congo Art Works* 2016, *Congo Stars* 2019) and is one of the co-founders of the Biennale in Lubumbashi. In 2008 he received the Prince Claus Award.

In his photographs, videos, and installations, Baloji is concerned with historical archives and enquires into the impact of Belgian colonial rule on Congolese society to this day. The multimedia installation he created for *Congo as Fiction* focuses on the reinterpretation of traditional Luba remembrance practices to which the Graz-based writer Fiston Mwanza Mujila has added the vocal background.

HILAIRE BALU KUYANGIKO (*1992) is a painter and sculptor. He lives and works in his native city of Kinshasa. His sculptures are based on *mangaaka* power figures and are invested with modern symbols of consumption and globalization. His works have been shown in exhibitions in Austria, France, and Germany, as well as in his home country.

STEVE BANDOMA (*1981) born in Kinshasa, now lives and works in South Africa. After his art degree in Kinshasa he moved to South Africa, where he developed the painting style comprising *objets trouvés*, fashion magazines, and watercolors for which he has become famous. In his pictures, collages, and installations he addresses politics, religion, history, and many other aspects of postcolonial Africa. Bandoma, who was awarded the American ArtBuzz prize in 2009, has exhibited his work in solo and group shows in Europe, the Congo, and South Africa.

FIONA BOBO (*1992) lives and works in Zürich. In her degree thesis *BWANIA* at the Department of Art & Media of the Zürich University of the Arts, she dealt with her Congolese roots. This has resulted in a multimedia installation that addresses the issue of identity and sets Western visual culture against that of the Congo. She uses photographs to illustrate the significance of fashion and designer clothes in modern Congolese society.

MICHÈLE MAGEMA (*1977) is a Congolese-French video, performance, and photography artist. She was born in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. She emigrated to Paris, France in 1984, where she currently resides. Michèle Magema has participated in exhibitions such as *Africa Remix* and *Global Feminism* (Brooklyn Museum), and her work can be found in museums and collections worldwide. She locates her work within an intermediate zone, a sort of a mental space or a frontier that she created, which she situates between the Global South and the Global North. The exploration of her feminine identity displaced through time, memory, and history reflects the image of a woman with a new identity that is totally detached from exoticism. A key focus for her is articulating a permanent exchange between individual stories, collective memory, and history. Michèle Magema walks the line between the limits of personal experience and the wider outlook shared by collective anxieties.

AIMÉ MPANE (*1968) is an internationally successful artist who lives and works in Brussels and Kinshasa. In addition to his paintings, Mpane creates sculptures and portraits out of wood, in which he links the colonial history of the Congo to the reception of African art in the avant-garde, among other things.

FISTON MWANZA MUJILA (*1981) was born in Lubumbashi and lives in Graz as a French-speaking writer. He writes poetry, plays, and prose and teaches African literature at the university. His award-winning novel *Tram 83* was published in 2014. The plot is set in "Tram 83," a nightclub and vibrant center in a run-down fictional Congolese city and the starting point for the story of two very different friends who meet up there.

CHÉRI SAMBA (*1956) is one of the most famous contemporary artists from Africa. Numerous solo and group exhibitions have been dedicated to the painter, whose works can be found in art collections worldwide. In his humorous and ironic pictures that often feature a self-portrait, Samba takes a critical approach to Congolese and Western society and questions the collection practices of European museums in Africa.

YVES SAMBU (*1980) lives and works in Kinshasa. He has presented his photography in solo exhibitions (Brussels, Graz, Fribourg) and also participated in group shows in Berlin, Brussels, Dortmund, and Paris. Since 2007, he has been a member of the artist collective SADI (*Solidarité des Artistes pour le Développement Intégral*). In his work, the visual artist deals with urban phenomena such as the *sapeurs* and Kimbanguism. For the *Congo as Fiction* exhibition, Sambu selected motifs from his series *Vanité Apparente* in which he addresses the ostentatious display of elegance and vanity. Remarkably, the pictures also bear surprising reference to Hans Himmelheber's photographs shot roughly eighty years ago.

DAVID SHONGO (*1994) lives and works in Lubumbashi. In his work the young composer and artist questions the colonial images that persist in modern-day Congo to this day. He combines music, film, and colonial photography to create works that deal with the psychological repercussions of the colonial era, the social and economic effects of technological change, the impact of coltan mining on the country, and the reinvention of imagery. In a joint residency programme for the 2019 Lubumbashi Biennale and the *Congo as Fiction* exhibition in Zürich, Shongo has created a piece in which he reinterprets Hans Himmelheber's historical photographs with the aid of blackout poetry, thus catapulting the images into the present.

MONSENGO SHULA (*1959) lives and works in Kinshasa. Like many popular artists, he is inspired by everyday life and politics in the capital and is interested above all in social inequality. Monsengo Shula's paintings differ from those by other masters of popular art due to their unique choice of color, which lends his images a mythical character and transports the viewer to unworldly spheres. He has participated in various group exhibitions, most recently exhibiting in *Beauté Congo—1926–2015—Congo Kitoko* at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain as well as in *Congo Stars* in Tübingen and Graz.

PATHY TSHINDELE KAPINGA (*1976) lives and works in Kinshasa. The trained sculptor was a founding member of the artist collective Eza Possible in 2003. His work can be located between contemporary art and popular painting. In his pictures that capture revolts, language, life, streets, and light, he links his personal story to the history of the Congo.

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IMPRINT

This book was published on the
occasion of the exhibition *Congo as
Fiction—Art Worlds between Past and
Present* at the Museum Rietberg Zürich
from November 22, 2019 to
March 15, 2020.

Edited by Nanina Guyer and Michaela
Oberhofer, Museum Rietberg

Catalogue assistance: Laura Falletta,
Daniela Müller

Translations:
From German: Lisa Rosenblatt, Maria
Slater
From French: Bridget Mason

Copy editing: Charlotte Eckler, Lisa
Rosenblatt

Proofreading: Colette Forder

Project manager publishing house:
Muriel Blanco, Chris Reding

Design: Hi – Megi Zumstein &
Claudio Barandun

Lithography, printing and binding:
DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg GmbH,
Thuringia

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work *Under the Landscape* (2015) by
Michèle Magema

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gablerstrasse 15
8002 Zurich
Switzerland
www.rietberg.ch

Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess
Niederdorfstrasse 54
8001 Zurich
Switzerland
www.scheidegger-spiess.ch

Scheidegger & Spiess is being supported
by the Federal Office of Culture with a
general subsidy for the years 2016–2020.

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ISBN 978-3-85881-835-5

German edition:
ISBN 978-3-85881-643-6

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The Democratic Republic of the Congo is world famous today for its vibrant art scene. Its multifaceted, creative, and current art production is unlike any other on the African continent. But the country already brought forth striking masks, sculptures, and pieces of design in times past. Published to coincide with the exhibition at Museum Rietberg, *Congo as Fiction* presents objects, photographs, and documents—some never published before—from the archive of German art ethnologist Hans Himmelheber, who traveled the Congo in 1938/39. The artworks and images bear witness to the extraordinary creative force of the period. *Congo as Fiction* avoids a biased Eurocentric view by having contemporary Congolese artists engage directly with Hans Himmelheber's archive. Their critical contributions address the effects of colonialization, global trade, and the art market on the country, and combine the past and present of the Congolese art world in an entirely new way.

