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Mediating Past, Present and Future of D.R.Congo's Historical Narratives on Art in a Global South Dialogue

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Mediating Past, Present and Future of D.R.Congo's Historical Narratives on Art in a Global South Dialogue

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A Global South Dialogue on African Art and Historical Narratives from D.R. Congo

**Guest Editors: Emi Koide,
Ruth Sacks, and Matthias De Groof**

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Cover: Yannis Majestikos's performance at a workshop organised by Ayrson Heráclito at the Académie des Beaux Arts of Kinshasa in 2016. Photo by Ayrson Heráclito.

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The *ARTL@S BULLETIN* is a peer-reviewed, transdisciplinary journal devoted to spatial and transnational questions in the history of the visual arts.

The *Artl@s Bulletin*'s ambition is twofold: 1. a focus on the "transnational" as constituted by exchange between the local and the global or between the national and the international; 2. an openness to innovation in research methods, particularly the quantitative possibilities offered by digital mapping and data visualization.

We publish two to three thematic issues every year. If you would like to contribute to the journal with an article or propose a theme for a future issue, please contact the editors Catherine Dossin (cdossin@purdue.edu) and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (beatrice.joyeux-prunel@ens.fr). We welcome suggestions, ideas, and submissions from scholars worldwide and at every stage in their career.

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Mediating Past, Present and Future of D.R. Congo's Historical Narratives on Art in a Global South Dialogue

This special volume aims to bring to readers some of the main themes, discussions, research topics, dialogues and exchanges that were central to the symposium “Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th/ 21st Century Art – Dialogues with Global South Experiences”. This took place at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa from the 18th to the 21st of January 2016. Following this, a smaller event, “Dialogues and itineraries of the south from Kinshasa: Art, History and Education”, took place on October 28th, 2016 at Biblioteca Mario de Andrade in São Paulo (Brazil), as a way of continuing dialogues started in Kinshasa with some of the participants and establishing new interlocutions in Brazil. The project was conceived as a cross-disciplinary collaboration between different institutions: Kinshasa (Académie des Beaux Arts, Democratic Republic of the Congo), Johannesburg (Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa), São Paulo (Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brazil) and Antwerp (Antwerp University, Belgium).¹ The idea was to promote South-South exchange and dialogue as well as strategize ways of decentralizing narratives from the Northern hegemonic frame.

The Kinshasa workshop addressed the interstices between history and art (especially from and about the Congo), with a focus on creative methodologies

and shared issues around the teaching of art in the Global South. The event revolved around two main axes: (i) the relationships between historical narratives and artworks, alongside (ii) South-South dialogues in arts education. Most of the articles in this volume deal with questions around history and art in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R. Congo) and local concerns and debates are presented through different points of view.

The event featured a key note lecture by Andre Yoka Lye (INA, Kinshasa), a round table discussion on art education led by Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa (NIAAD, Kampala), Kamabayi Buatshia (UPN, Kinshasa) and Bamba Ndombassi (ABA, Kinshasa), and a round table on institutions and museums with Joseph Ibongo, Felix Mangwangu (INMC, Kinshasa), Bambi Ceuppens (MRAC, Tervuren), Nadine Siegert (Iwalewahaus, Bayreuth) and Patrick Mudekereza (Centre d'art Waza, Lubumbashi). Across the four days, small focus groups met to present on the following themes: Education and Pedagogy from the South; Imaging Violence; Exhibiting Histories; The Art Institution and Decolonization; Comparative Methodologies; and Artwork as History. The last day was dedicated to each group reporting back to the symposium, allowing for a collective discussion. As a result of a diverse group of people coming

¹ The core of the event was the South-South dialogue, but many participants who reside in Europe were important to rethink ways of dealing with the Southern diaspora in the North as a South-North relationship. With this in mind, Antwerp

University was integrated into the project for promoting decolonial thinking and being committed to support South-South projects.

together, different points of view based in various localities and perspectives comprise this volume².



Figure 1. Symposium “Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th / 21st Century Art – Dialogues with Global South Experiences” at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (D.R.C.) – Photos credit: Académie des Beaux Arts’ students.

Whereas the first three days were held on the grounds of the Académie des Beaux Arts (ABA), the last took place at the Museum for Contemporary Art and Multimedia (MACM) at Échangeur de Limete. ABA, the host institution, has a significant history. It started as a colonial art school and underwent some changes after independence. During the Mobutu regime, it became an important artistic and educational institution on the African continent. Currently, it can be a place of conflict between two generations with differing ideas about artistic practices. The event took place in a time of transition of direction of the institution. The organization of the workshop in ABA was overseen by the director at that time, Patrick Missassi, who made every effort to ensure the success of the event. Recently, a director from the “new generation” has taken his place. Henri Kalama, who was also significant for the symposium, has undertaken certain changes. Both former and present directors are part of this volume and are members of its editorial committee. MACM is a museum, which is located at the Tower of Échangeur de Limité, a monument conceived by Mobutu as symbol of authenticity and modernity. It is part of the Institut des Musées Nationaux du

Congo (IMNC) and has become a space for multiple exhibitions. Both venues were extremely significant and important for the workshops.

Prior to the main symposium, artist-educators Ayrson Heráclito (BR), Natasha Christopher (ZA) and Donna Kukama (ZA) conducted workshops with local students at ABA. The outcome of these sessions was displayed in the Institut Français de Kinshasa’s Halle de la Gombe gallery space. In addition, ABA took symposium participants on a preliminary tour of significant historical and cultural spaces in Kinshasa. ABA generously hosted a closing party and displays of Congolese culture were organized by both ABA and MACM.



Figure 2. Symposium “Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th / 21st Century Art – Dialogues with Global South Experiences” at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (D.R.C.) – Photos credit: Académie des Beaux Arts’ students.

Although the main focus was to establish and rethink possibilities of South-South dialogue, the event also set up contradictions which served to fuel debate. It provided an occasion to rethink various pre-conceived notions of practice in the Global South. As a geopolitical term, “South” refers to all countries that were formerly known as “Third World”. The concept of South used here is further related to the Third World alternative cooperation policies in the 1950’s and 1960’s, as oppositional to colonialism and related to African struggles for independence as seen in conferences in Bandung (1955) and Belgrade (1961). These saw nonaligned countries in Africa, Asia, Central and South

² Further information about the conference and its participants can be found here: <https://dialoguesdusud.wordpress.com/>

America, Middle East and Eastern Europe coming together. Beyond politics and economics, cultural exchanges also took place. The concepts of South and Global South also name practices and knowledge that are not recognized and escape hegemonic framework.

During the workshop, one of the main points of contention concerned the funding and logistics of dependency that the cultural arena is beset with. Alongside our main host, ABA, part of budget and organization was further generously funded by many local sponsors and partners: Association Attitude, Musée d'art contemporain et multimédia de l'Échangeur, Artlab, Atelier Alfred Liyolo, Espace Amenagé, Terre d'Artiste, Black Motion Photography, Imprimerie Ledygraphe, Ben Design Créative. As an international event, involving D.R. Congo, South Africa, Brazil and Belgium, many other organizations were also sponsors-partners: Goethe Institut Kinshasa, Goethe Institut São Paulo, Pro Helvetia Johannesburg, Institut Français Kinshasa, Wallonie Bruxelles and Ville de Bruxelles. In general, with regard to the cultural domain and political economy of arts funding, Southern countries struggle on different levels to have local funding or sponsors. A significant sector does not have state funding for the arts, which leads artists and cultural actors to depend on Northern international organizations and corporate sponsorship.

Since the Global Art turn³ in the 1980's, Northern international institutions have been dealing with the absence of Southern artists in mainstream exhibitions. As postcolonial and decolonial studies have become an obligatory part of curatorial studies, many institutions and central international exhibitions⁴ of art systematically include Southern artists. What contradictions arise when peripheral cultural practices and Southern artists become part of the mainstream system with funding based in the North? How are artistic practices, local institutions

and artists impacted by it and how do they react? How do some funding institutions deal with stereotypical, exotic and identity-based art? These are some of the many contradictions and controversies addressed during the workshop (even if they are not discussed in great depth in this volume). Northern international organizations who assisted in funding the event were well aware of these issues and sought to work through ways of counteracting hegemonic practices.

How to rethink relationships between art, history and education from a Southern perspective? How are we to consider the possibilities of decolonizing art history in the South? In the end, who has the final say on how the story is told? Which narratives are more visible than others? Which are the challenges and projects for decolonizing art and art education? It is in the wake of this debate that considerations about the stereotypes that still surround so-called "African art" and its history come into play. Euro-American fictions around the ideas of "tradition", "authenticity" and "identity" bring us one of the main discussions that pervade some of the articles that follow.



Figure 3. Symposium "Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th / 21st Century Art - Dialogues with Global South Experiences" at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (D.R.C.) - Photos credit: Académie des Beaux Arts' students.

³ At the end of 1980's, with the influence of postcolonial studies and the emergency of multiculturalism, considerations and curatorial practices in contemporary art international systems started to look at the insufficiencies of exhibitions and art history that were limited to Western artistic production. Frequently, most bibliographies see the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) in Paris to be a landmark in this debate. This point of view neglects all the international exhibitions that were not Northern based that had taken place.

⁴ Since the end of 1980s, we have seen many important international exhibitions including Southern artists, for example: *Documenta Kassel XI* (2002) which had a non-European director for the first time, the Nigerian Okwui Enwezor. He was also the curator of the *56th Venice Biennale* (2015) which included more than 15 African artists. This trend has been followed by numerous other exhibitions and institutions.



Figure 4. Symposium “Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th / 21st Century Art – Dialogues with Global South Experiences” at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (D.R.C.) – Photos credit: Académie des Beaux Arts’ students.

In the piece "Les nouveaux défis du métier d'artiste en République Démocratique du Congo", André Yoka Lye presents a series of challenges in the field of art concerning historical, epistemological and institutional questions concerning teaching, support and international cooperation in the DRC. It briefly outlines a history of the artistic production of the Congolese visual and performing arts, drawing attention to models of conflict set up by the colonizer and experimental ones that seek new horizons. In "Le paradigme 'Art Africain' - de l'origine à sa physionomie actuelle", Henri Kalama discusses the origins and historical trajectory of the concept "African art". Based on the problematics outlined in V.Y. Mudimbe's idea of the "invention of Africa", the author reflects on the colonial and neocolonial legacy that is embedded not only in the designation of an "other" art, often read as "savage", but also in artistic practices and institutional and curatorial methodologies that unfold in the African continent. Kalama discusses the appropriation of the aesthetics of the African objects by Western Modernism and the creation of a nativist modernism at different moments of history in the African continent, including Senghor's politics of Negritude and Mobutu's "recourse in authenticity".

Further, Kalama describes aspects of the contemporary art produced on the continent in terms of the neocolonial impositions that surround the Northern-dominated arts and market system. An artistic contribution, concerning Mobutu's

project is presented by Ruth Sacks' "Retour à l'authenticité in the city: a photo essay", which brings us particular places, buildings, and public artworks undertaken by Mobutu in Kinshasa where the tension between a desired modern international architecture and "traditional" Congolese forms created an aesthetic of national modernism. Nowadays these images allude to visions of modernist utopias of a new African state.

Dialogues between visual productions, iconography and history are explored by way of historical figures in the DRC: notably Patrice Lumumba, the prime minister who was assassinated shortly after independence, as well as Laurent Désiré Kabila, the assassinated president who ousted Mobutu from power. In "Lumumba's Iconography: The Interstice between Art and History", Matthias De Groof explores the different and contradictory figurations of Lumumba in popular paintings, graffiti, cinema and music and the manner in which they are interwoven with history and the promise of decolonization. Addressing popular paintings and their relationship to oral history in "Histoire picturale de Laurent Désiré Kabila (1997-2001)", Donatien Dibwe Dia Mwembu examines images produced in different contexts. These are read as a testimony or reconstitution of the historical past in the popular imagination and describe events from when Kabila came to power up until his death, as well as the war conflicts that took place in DRC at this moment.

Referring to another context, that of post-war Angolan artistic production and the absence of works dealing with the memory of war in this country, Nadine Siegert's "Aesthetic Autopsy – collective memory and trauma in contemporary art from Angola" analyzes some artworks from the 1990s that rather than representing the traumatic experience of the war, engaged with memory in an active and engaged way, creating an empathic relation of collective experience, operating between the interstices of remembering and forgetting, presence and absence.

Concerning contemporary developments and biennialization in locations outside the main

Western art circuit, Daniella Géo's "The Lubumbashi Biennial: Towards New Protagonists" deals with significant reflections on the recent experience of the co-curatorial, communal and horizontal organization of the 4th Lubumbashi Biennial, which took place in 2016. Géo reports on the importance of exploring alternative ways of making and organizing art exhibitions, the ability to adapt from fleeting realities (the central theme of this edition of the biennial) and also of a certain anthropophagic, or cannibalistic, inspiration. In the latter, Géo employs a legacy associated with Brazilian modernism in order to highlight how the Lubumbashi exhibition reworked references from other African biennials, rather than looking to mainstream ones in the Global North. Drawing in the Brazilian context and eschewing the canonized narrative of Brazilian modernism, "Au-delà des rivalités provinciales: poétiques visuelles tropicalistes et autres projets d'art étendu depuis de perspectives du Nord est brésilien" by Ayrson Heráclito and Tiago Sant'Ana presents part of the research done during the 3rd Biennial of Bahia. The article is concerned with the visual production on the margins of Tropicalism from 1960 to 1970. Working from a proposed concept of "PEBA" (Bahia-Pernambuco, both States in Brazilian North-east region), a term that usually has a pejorative connotation, referring to that which is poorly finished and precarious, the authors use it to define an extended alternative and poetic artistic practice.

This volume includes two reports from the focus groups that took place at the conference. Matthias De Groof reports on conversations of the group "Cadrer le temps et l'histoire", around the relationship between art and history, in the areas of production, distribution and diffusion of the arts, especially in the South. Emi Koide reports on the group "Artwork as history", which discussed issues related to the writing of art history, especially in the Congolese context. Within this, issues concerning the importance of records and archives, as well as the centrality of the body as mediator between

object and performance, as well as between material and immaterial, comes to the fore. In all groups, despite the diversity of its participants, a generational conflict between the Congolese artists was evident, as previously mentioned. However, both generations were open to enriching exchanges, so that it was possible to conduct dialogues from variegated positions and accept dissent as a necessary part of open debate.



Figure 5. Symposium "Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th / 21st Century Art – Dialogues with Global South Experiences" at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (D.R.C.) – Photos credit: Académie des Beaux Arts' students.

Dealing with different times (past, present and future) was a constant in the symposium. A brief account of Cedrick Nzolo's educational work and design, "Think natural, une nécessité qui ne se cache plus" brings the current development work of contemporary fabrics in raffia, redrawing a material considered "traditional" in contemporary ways. During the event, an important theme was looking at arts education from a decolonial perspective. Representatives of the Another Roadmap African cluster were present with Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa (UG) and David Andrew (SA). The Another Roadmap for Art Education⁵ is an international network that appeared as a critical answer to the *Road Map for Arts Education*⁶ (2006) presented by UNESCO and considers this document in relation to neglected local realities, varied experiences, methodologies and practices in art. In

⁵ For further information please consult: <http://colivre.net/another-roadmap>

⁶ The document with the directives of Road Maps for Art Education can be found here:

http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/multimedia/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_RoadMap_en.pdf

her conference speech, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa drew on her experience in Nnaggenda International Academy of Art & Design (Kampala) to examine the necessity of reviewing curriculum and methods accordingly to local knowledge and practices, recognizing local language and artistic forms.



Figure 6. Symposium “Mediating Past, Present and Future: Historical Narratives and 20th / 21st Century Art – Dialogues with Global South Experiences” at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (D.R.C.) – Photos credit: Académie des Beaux Arts’ students.

In October 2016, the follow-up event in São Paulo⁷ coincided with the 32nd São Paulo Biennale and a parallel meeting of the Another Roadmap for Art Education group. David Andrew, who participated in these events, connects discussions from Kinshasa to his reflections during the meeting in São Paulo, alongside South African questions and challenges in “Notes from Johannesburg – Dialogues and itineraries of the South from Kinshasa: Art, History and Education”. At that time (2015-2016), important student protests were taking place in South Africa and in Brazil, with occupations of schools and universities. While these had different motivations and histories in their respective contexts they shared a common goal to protest against certain commodification and dismantling of the education system led by neoliberal government policies. He raises questions about how to decolonize the curriculum, pedagogies and practices in art education,

⁷ This event was organized by Casa das Áfricas (Núcleo Amanar), Inter-graduate Program in Aesthetics and Art History of São Paulo University and sponsored by Goethe-Institut São Paulo. Some of the participants from the Kinshasa conference who took part in this event were: David Andrew (SA), Henri Kalama (DRC), Ayrson

observing that the centrality of students’ experience in occupations and protests, in which learning and teaching becomes dialogical and based on horizontal logics, may lead to establishing an active and participatory form of pedagogy that academic experience has often dismissed.

This volume represents only a partial overview of events in Kinshasa and its offshoot in São Paulo. This was a dense and complex project which operated on many different levels, from different places and languages, times and backgrounds, all of whom shared common challenges. It was crucial that a conference concerned with issues of Congolese art and history took place in D.R. Congo and not elsewhere. The events also provided the occasion to relate Congolese issues in art, education and art history to other Southern perspectives from South Africa, Brazil, Uganda and Cameroon, as well as to foster new dialogues and exchanges. We would like to end by acknowledging the limitations of text in the face of the spontaneous discussions and vibrant atmosphere of being in Kinshasa at the cusp of many changes and challenges. Through this volume, we hope that further dialogues will continue.

The guest editors would like to thank the many sponsors and partner institutions that made the event in Kinshasa possible. Most especially, we are grateful to the host institution, ABA, under the directorship of Patrick Missassi at the time. It was a challenging and critical forum, which required an enormous amount of logistical work and care.

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Heráclito (BR), Daniella Géó (BR) and Emi Koide (BR). Other local participants were: Denise Dias Barros, Alecssandra Matias de Oliveira, Claudia Mattos Avolese, Eliane Dias de Castro and Marcelo Rezende.

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Patrick Missassi is an artist, interior designer and educator. He was director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa from 2012-16 and has held several positions in this institution since 2000. In 2014, he received a managerial excellence award from the DRC university and higher education institution.

Henri Kalama is an artist and professor who is currently the director of Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa, DR Congo. He holds a master's degree (2007) and a PhD (2011) in Fine Arts from the China Academy of Arts, Hangzhou. He was also the founder of Kalama – les ateliers réunis – a platform showcasing Congolese artists.

David Andrew studied at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, (BA Fine Arts) and the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (H Dip Ed (PG); PhD). He is an artist and lectures in Fine Arts and Arts Education courses. He is currently Head of Division of Visual Arts at the Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg.