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**Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and the
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Partner to Exhibit Balot Sculpture in Lusanga**
Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot Will Appear at the
White Cube in Lusanga, in Tandem with CATPC's Exhibition at the 2024 Venice Biennale



Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer, Maximilien Balot, circa 1931, Unknown artist (Pende, Democratic Republic of the Congo), wood (possibly *Alstonia Boonei*) with metal repair staples. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund, 2015.3. Photo by Travis Fullerton © 2015 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Richmond, VA — The [Virginia Museum of Fine Arts \(VMFA\)](https://www.virginiamuseumoffinearts.org/) announced the temporary loan of the sculpture *Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot* (circa 1931) for an exhibition organized by the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) collective. The CATPC will display the sculpture at the White Cube museum in Lusanga, Democratic Republic of the Congo, from April 20 to November 24, 2024. This will be the first time that [*Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot*](#) has returned to its country of origin in more than 50 years.

“The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is delighted to partner with CATPC for this important exhibition,” said VMFA’s Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. “The sculpture’s appearance in Lusanga will be profoundly meaningful to the people

in that region. The loan of a wooden sculpture from an American museum’s collection to a museum in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is also of historic significance, and we hope it will inspire a new era of collaboration and partnerships between museums on both continents.”

Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot has been part of VMFA’s permanent collection since the museum lawfully purchased it in 2015, and the sculpture’s provenance is well documented. Dutch artist and Human Activities artistic director Renzo Martens and CATPC artists Ced’art Tamasala and Matthieu Kasiamu first approached VMFA about the loan of the Balot sculpture to the White Cube museum in 2020. Since that time VMFA, CATPC and the White Cube museum have worked together on the complex logistics involved in bringing the sculpture to Lusanga and ensuring its safe return to VMFA in November 2024.

[CATPC](#) hopes that exhibiting the sculpture at the White Cube museum, located on a former palm oil plantation in Lusanga (formerly known as Leverage), will underscore their efforts for the region’s spiritual, ethical and economic recovery.

Both a portrait and a power object, *Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot* represents the Belgian colonial officer Maximilien Balot who was killed during a revolt by the Kwilu Pende people against forced labor on plantations in 1931. The sculpture’s display in Lusanga is timed to coincide with an exhibition of new works by CATPC artists at the Dutch National Pavilion in Venice. CATPC, in collaboration with artist Renzo Martens and curator Hicham Khalidi, will represent the Netherlands at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, and the Balot sculpture will be projected as a livestream from the White Cube into the Dutch Pavilion as a key component of this exhibition. The [Dutch entry](#) was commissioned by the [Mondriaan Fund](#), which also provides Human Activities with a budget for the loan.

The two simultaneous exhibitions demonstrate the artists’ ongoing commitment to return the colonial-era plantation back into a sacred forest. CATPC believes that the display of *Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot* on the plantation will strengthen their cause.

“Exhibiting the ancestral sculpture of Balot in Lusanga will enable the community to reconnect — physically and historically — with this symbolic object and demonstrate our shared value of humanity,” said Ced’art Tamasala, a CATPC artist whose work will be on display in Venice.

“It’s great that the Virginia Museum is committed to really engage with the meaning of the sculpture and with the value it represents for the people from where it originates,” said Eelco van der Lingen, director of the Mondriaan Fund. “I am delighted the loan is agreed on for CATPC, and I trust that this narrative will be given a proper podium at La Biennale di Venezia in the presentation by CATPC, Renzo Martens and Hicham Khalidi.”

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Mondriaan Fund

Please visit www.dutch-pavilion.com for more information about the Mondriaan Fund, the exhibition during the La Biennale di Venezia 2024 and CATPC, Renzo Martens and curator Hicham Khalidi.

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Editor's Notes

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA)

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, and French Impressionist, Postimpressionist, British sporting and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing I after a transformative expansion, previously the largest in its history. A new expansion, the McGlothlin Wing II, is planned to open in 2028. Comprising more than 170,000 square feet, it will be the largest expansion in the museum's history and will make VMFA the fifth largest art museum in the United States.

CATPC

Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) is a collective and community from Lusanga (DRC). Lusanga is the site of Anglo-Dutch company Unilever's very first plantation. Today, the lands and ecosystems surrounding Lusanga — once rich rainforests — are depleted soils no longer capable of sustaining the communities that live from them. In 2017, CATPC with Renzo Martens opened the White Cube, a museum, in Lusanga. They also built a school, conference hall, kitchen and a gathering place for the community. It is here that the CATPC members create the artworks that they have exhibited in leading museums and institutions internationally. With the proceeds from their art, they have already bought back 200 hectares of former plantation lands and are currently transforming them into biodiverse agro-forests. For CATPC, the time has come for plantation workers to reclaim the land and the profits extracted from plantations and invested in museums, as theirs. CATPC includes the artists Djonga Bismar, Alphonse Bukumba, Irène Kanga, Muyaka Kapasa, Matthieu Kasiama, Jean Kawata, Huguette Kilembi, Mbuku Kimpala, Athanas Kindendi, Anti Leba, Charles Leba, Philomène Lembusa, Richard Leta, Jérémie Mabiala, Plamedi Makongote, Blaise Mandefu, Daniel Manenga, Mira Meya, Emery Muhamba, Tantine Mukundu, Olele Mulela, Daniel Muvunzi, Alvers Tamasala and Ced'art Tamasala. CATPC is presided by René Ngongo.

Maximilien Balot

The 1931 rape of Kafutshi, a Pende woman, was one of the sparks for the Kwilu Pende peoples' revolt against brutal forced labor on the Unilever plantation in Lusanga. During the struggle, Maximilien Balot, a newly arrived Belgian colonial administrator, failed to heed warnings to avoid the area and was decapitated and dismembered. *Chief's or Diviner's Figure Representing the Belgian Colonial Officer Maximilien Balot* was created as a power object, made to harness the colonial officer's spirit, in service of the Pende people. The sculpture's provenance has been verified. Dr. Herbert Weiss, an American scholar of Congolese Political History, first encountered the sculpture while conducting field research in Gungu in the Kwilu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1972. In the following year, he legally purchased it and, in 2015, sold the sculpture to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond, Virginia.

Renzo Martens and Hicham Khalidi

The Mondriaan Fund has invited Dutch artist Renzo Martens and Dutch-Moroccan curator Hicham Khalidi, to work and think together on a proposal for the Biennale Arte's 2024 Dutch pavilion. This opportunity was premised, in part,

on Martens' long and sustained work with CATPC from its inception. Martens and Khalidi have sought to find a way in which CATPC can represent itself at the Dutch pavilion in Venice. For Martens, one of the reasons it is important that they take center stage, is that communities like CATPC have provided the profits on which many Western museums and cultural institutions have been built in the first place. Martens: "It is time we listen and learn from their art." In parallel, CATPC has come to the conclusion that the moment has arrived for them to part ways from their earlier ways of working. After long deliberation, members of the collective, along with Martens and Khalidi, have decided that CATPC's project for self-determination cannot be realized without autonomy from Martens' original vision. Martens has therefore elected to act in service of the collective, while Khalidi proposes to mediate this transformation. Together, they hope to support CATPC's aim to articulate a forceful critique of the art world's often unwitting participation in the plantation regime that has devastated — and continues to devastate — the indigenous peoples and communities of the Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond. Martens and Khalidi aim to help accommodate CATPC's concepts and approaches toward the sacred within art and agroforestry to inaugurate a new era of the post-plantation. Above all, they hope to advance CATPC's struggle to recuperate its cultural past, to claim its place in current debates, about the capacity of western art institutions to be sites of accountability, repair or healing, and to restore its sacred lands so as to live and thrive as a community.

Mondriaan Fund

The Mondriaan Fund, the public incentive fund for visual arts and cultural heritage, is responsible for the Dutch entry at the International Art Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia. The presentation is funded from the international budget the Mondriaan Fund receives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.