



Renzo Martens, *Episode 3: Enjoy Poverty*, 2008, video, colour, sound, 90min, stills. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles

Previous spread: Launch of the Institute for Human Activities' 'Critical Curriculum' at an undisclosed location in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2014, video still. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles



Gentrification After Institutional Critique: On Renzo Martens's Institute for Human Activities

— T.J. Demos

The Institute for Human Activities (IHA), founded and directed by Dutch artist Renzo Martens, represents an ambitious five-year project based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that is as ethically provocative as it is conceptually complex.¹ Neither a purely local initiative nor one made solely for international audiences, the IHA attempts a critical and creative interface between, on the one hand, its platform for artistic production in sub-Saharan Africa and, on the other, Western art markets and cultural institutions. While clearly an 'institution of critique', the project differs from past models in Western contemporary art, most significantly in not being based in the developed cultural centres of the global North.² The IHA should also be distinguished from the examples of cultural institution-building in the African context, with groups like Huit Facettes (Senegal)

also shares certain of these goals — such as promoting community organisation and stimulating local artistic creativity — it also represents a conceptually experimental project coming from outside the region (although Martens has spent much time in the DRC, he is based in Brussels) and aiming to invent a new transnational artistic model of economic and social re-engineering: one that aims to reverse the flow of capital so that art's cycle of production, critical intervention and profitable consumption directly benefits the South.

In this sense, the IHA both develops and appears distinct from the critically mimetic strategy of Martens's past experiment in the DRC: *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008). This film documents the self-implicating performance of Martens in his investigation of the image economy of commercial photojournalism operating in the conflict zones of Congolese refugee camps, materially deprived plantations and inadequately equipped medical clinics. Shifting variously into the role of the concerned artist, humanitarian photographer and colonial explorer, Martens dramatised the exploitation of poverty by otherwise well-intentioned but nonetheless commercial image-makers (himself included). The film painfully shows the structural barriers confronting the Congolese underclass, particularly those who are stuck performing precarious plantation labour and villagers displaced and brutalised by warfare and deprivation, which prevent them from benefitting economically from the commodified images of their own misery.

T.J. Demos untangles the provocations, contradictions and apparent good intentions of Renzo Martens's 'gentrification programme' in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

and Le Groupe Amos (DRC) working to develop workshop-based collectives and events programming in order to revitalise traditional craft production or advance models of African modernism, strengthen grass-roots communities, overcome regional social stratification and build local cultural networks.³ While the IHA

- 1 Inaugurated in 2012 during the 7th Berlin Biennale, and overcoming many initial logistical challenges, the IHA will likely continue beyond 2017 owing to a stalled beginning and complications with its initial sponsored site.
- 2 See Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 1, September 2005, pp. 278–83.
- 3 See Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes', in Blake Stimson and Greg Sholette (ed.), *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 223–52; Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012, especially pp. 96–99; and Clémentine Deliss, 'Brothers in Arms: Laboratoire AGIT'art and Tenq in Dakar in the 1990s', *Afterall*, issue 36, Summer 2014, pp. 4–19.

For poverty is their most economically valuable 'natural resource', according to Martens. This is explained as the artist is shown mentoring a ragtag group of village photographers in taking pictures — the highly prized images of the international media — of 'raped women' and 'starving children', instead of their usual fare of birthday parties and weddings, for which they earn a pittance.⁴ Unfortunately, the institutional cards of the media industry are stacked against such crass opportunism, even though in the film Western photojournalists are shown effectively to practice the same thing. For this reason, *Enjoy Poverty* remains alternately eye-opening and intolerable: it exchanges the transformative and redemptive potential of artistic intervention for the critical exposure of insurmountable challenges brought on by a neocolonial system of institutional and racial inequality, and it cruelly offers no source of hope to concerned viewers.

While the film insists that art, like photojournalism and humanitarianism, is ultimately a brutal form of capitalist realism, a commercially self-generative enterprise like any other,⁵ the IHA appears to abandon that cynicism, making new efforts at positive impact. Of course, this new approach will not be convincing to all. One particular obstacle is that the IHA advertises itself — ever controversially — as a 'gentrification programme'. The IHA intends to creatively appropriate that term, its objective being to deploy the gentrification process in order to attract resources to the DRC, in the same way that impoverished urban areas are apparently revitalised by the creative industry. If this proposal appears unlikely, if not obscene, it's because such terminology and ideas have been heavily criticised and largely discredited in recent years.⁶ By identifying with a practice deemed politically

offensive by many on the cultural left, and installing it in the unlikely setting of a rural Congolese plantation town, Martens hopes to retool it for progressive purposes, essentially mobilising its controversial aspect as an avant-garde shock tactic. Martens's strategy here — in a departure from *Enjoy Poverty* — operates in a productive way: taking up institutions and economic relations that normally privilege the elite few and redirecting their benefits (including the funding generated from European cultural initiatives⁷) toward the disenfranchised many. In other words, the IHA seeks to reverse-engineer the neoliberal project on a micro level. This, at least, is the business model; what remains to be seen is whether it will operate as intended in the long run (Martens hopes that the system will be self-financing within the next year⁸).

The IHA also targets artistic and cultural institutions, in particular Tate Modern for its sponsorship by Unilever, the Anglo-Dutch multinational consumer goods company now co-headquartered in London and Rotterdam. It is not by coincidence that the IHA initially founded its settlement in Boteka, in north-west Congo, on a former Unilever plantation. After the IHA was violently chased away by the land's current owner, the Canadian company Feronia, the project resettled in an undisclosed location near Kinshasa, at another former Unilever site. In 1911, William Lever — who was later renamed Lord Leverhulme in honour of his wife, Elizabeth Hulme — established a number of plantations in the Congo, then under Belgian colonial rule, in order to produce palm oil for European markets and build the corporation that would ultimately become Unilever (following a merger with Dutch company Margarine Unie in 1930).⁹ The colony was established through a



Renzo Martens and the Institute for Human Activities, *The New Settlement*, 2015, video, colour, sound, still. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles

veritable genocide during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and subjugated as the personal possession of King Leopold II, with its peoples commandeered into servicing his lucrative rubber industry.¹⁰ Lever's plantations exploited the virtual slave labour of locals, including the Pende people. Around the same time, Lever created Port Sunlight near Liverpool, a model company town for his British workforce, which included the Lady Lever Art Gallery at its centre — the use of art in this case amounting to what Martens calls 'a tiny exception to the status quo, to be seen and savoured by few, but not really changing the rule of production' for the many, such as those in Congo's field of operations.¹¹ As an added intrigue, Martens observes that the Pende were also amongst the African sculptors who inspired the early twentieth-century 'primitivist' avant-garde, Picasso and Matisse among them, who appropriated (or rather exploited) African tribal styles in order to reinvigorate Western models of creative transgression, endowing them with an aura of savagery and uncivilised virility. Like many other former tribal groups,

the descendants of the Pende commonly work today for global extraction industries, running palm-oil and cocoa plantations; their impoverishment remains in place in a neocolonial regime of multi-generational servitude that is nearly impossible to escape, and that has historically served art markets and capitalist industry alike.¹²

It is precisely this vicious cycle of multinational corporate extractivism, global neoliberalism, African pauperisation and Congolese social devastation that Martens's IHA project is intent on disrupting. In settling at a former Unilever site, the IHA has sponsored an artistic workshop and invited locals from the Congolese Plantation Workers Art League — which the IHA helped set up, and which is run by René Ngongo, the former director of Greenpeace Congo — to participate in a different sort of production, one leading toward the making of artistic self-portraits. The process benefits from the coaching of prominent artists from Kinshasa such as Botalatala, a former palm-oil plantation worker who was able to escape from the system through his artistic practice. Botalatala and Ngongo were also speakers

4 For an extended analysis of this film, see T.J. Demos, 'The Haunting: Renzo Martens's *Enjoy Poverty*', *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013, pp.97–123.

5 As Martens said recently, 'However critical it is of labour conditions in Congo, in the end it only improved labour conditions in Berlin's Mitte and in New York's Lower East Side. Because that's where people see it, talk about it, write pieces about it — whether for or against doesn't really matter.' Quoted in Stuart Jeffries, 'Renzo Martens — the artist who wants to gentrify the jungle', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/16/renzo-martens-gentrify-the-jungle-congo-chocolate-art> (last accessed on 10 June 2015).

6 Critics generally point out how gentrification generates wealth for developers while entailing the eviction of working-class and poor people. See Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', *October*, no.31, Winter 1984, pp.91–111.

7 Among the non-profit European funders of the IHA are the Berlin Biennale, the Mondrian Fund, the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds and the Prince Claus Fund.

8 Email from the artist, 17 June 2015.

9 See Jules Marchal, *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo* (2001, trans. Martin Thom), London: Verso, 2008. Also, for comparison, see Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*, London: Icon, 2010.

10 See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1999.

11 Email from the artist, 14 June 2014. See also 'Institute for Human Activities: Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos', *Camera Austria International*, no.120, 2012, pp.45–52.

12 For more information, see <http://www.palmwatchafrica.org> (last accessed on 10 June 2015).

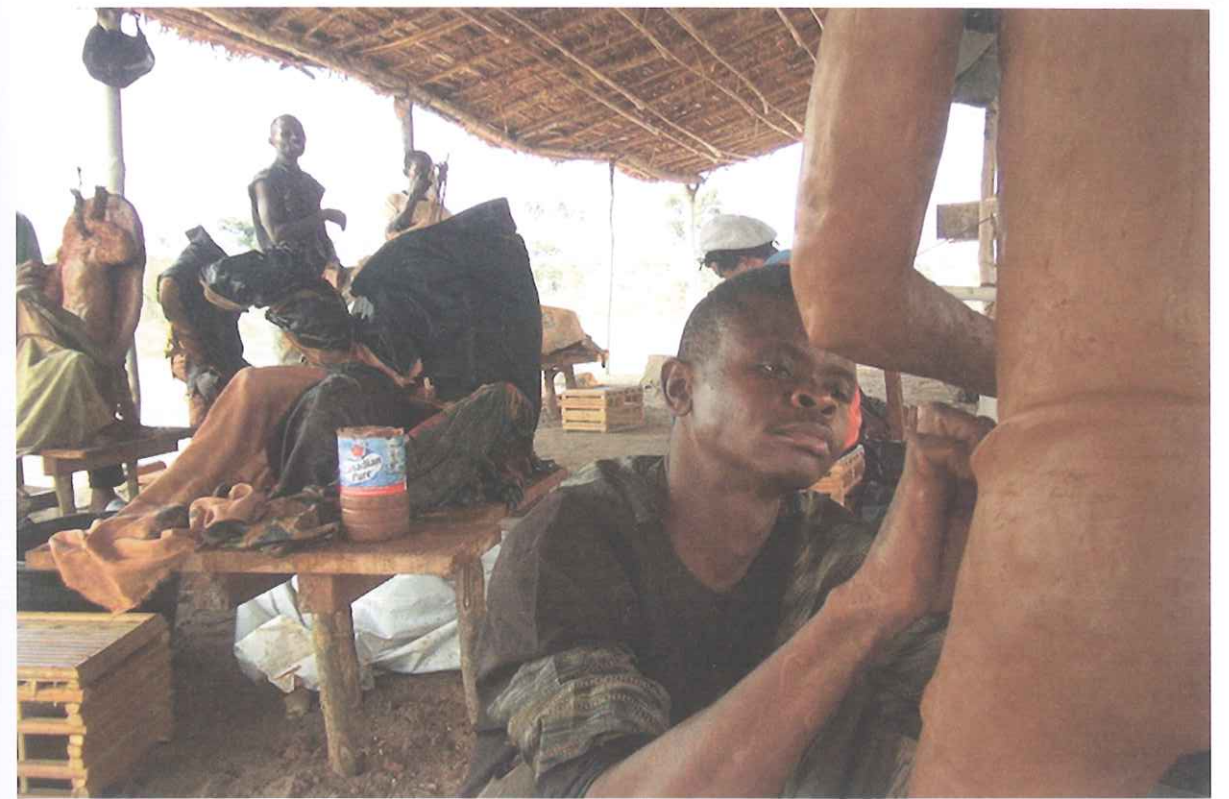


at the IHA's Opening Seminar that took place in June of 2012 in Boteka, which brought together a mix of Congolese and international speakers (myself included) to discuss the directions, challenges and potential risks of the IHA initiative over a two-day public workshop.¹³ The conference formed part of a developing and currently ongoing 'Critical Curriculum', an introductory arts course for plantation workers, including artistic training, talks and presentations, run by the IHA in conjunction with the Congolese Plantation Workers Art League, from which artworks are generated that can be sold on the international art market.

Blending the creative directions of the IHA and the artistic energies of plantation workers such as Mathieu Kasiana, Mubuku Kipala, Dionga Bismar and Jérémie Mabiala, the first edition of IHA works comprises expressionist-styled self-portrait busts rendered in chocolate to be sold in square, white IHA-designed boxes. Initially sculpted in the clay of the Congo River, these portraits are then, with the agreement of the original artist-labourers,

transformed into chocolate reproductions by the IHA through a process of 3D printing, which reconstructs the original authors' pieces in Europe, remaking them in the very material of their everyday plantation labour (objects that would otherwise be too fragile and expensive to ship from the DRC). Some of this chocolate, by an agreement of corporate sponsorship — one that is key to the IHA's institutional *détournement* — has been provided by Callebaut, the Belgian chocolatier that obtains its cocoa from West Africa (including from the plantation that is owned by the Groupe Blattner Elwyn, whose owner was memorably featured in *Enjoy Poverty* buying black-and-white photographic prints of his impoverished workers rendered with a classic documentary aura). The collaborative chocolate sculptures are sold in the European and North American art markets, with sales facilitated by the IHA and proceeds returned directly to the original producers, helping them to live beyond the basic subsistence provided by their plantation labour — the gentrification process

René Ngongo and Renzo Martens in conversation with Richard Florida at the Institute for Human Activities, 2012, video still. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles



Emery Muhamba working on *Self Portrait* (2014) at the Institute for Human Activities, video still. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles

completed. It is these objects that were shown recently at Artes Mundi in Cardiff in 2014, and at KOW Gallery in Berlin and Galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam in 2015, in shows authored by Martens and the IHA. Indeed, the Amsterdam presentation, 'A New Settlement', was attributed to 'Renzo Martens and the Institute for Human Activities',

While Enjoy Poverty insists that art, like photojournalism and humanitarianism, is ultimately a brutal form of capitalist realism, the IHA appears to abandon that cynicism.

while individual inclusions were credited to the Congolese artists, an arrangement encoding the very terms of IHA's institutionalisation of gentrification and its division of labour.

What of the unsettling anthropophagic aspect of the chocolate heads, the implication that upon purchasing the sculptures

consumers can eat not only African chocolate but also devour the labour and even the very being of their makers? According to Martens, this is nothing new: the West has been feeding on Africa and Africans for centuries, not only relying on commodities for which the sourcing and cultivation of raw materials (cocoa, rubber, coltan, diamonds) pay pitiful salaries — Congolese palm-oil plantation workers earn approximately US\$1 a day — but also consuming liberal expressions of compassion and guilt in the form of addictive media images.¹⁴ Through this mimetic and interventionist cycle, then, the IHA's artistic production is directly embedded in the materiality, institutions and sites of the extraction industry. And here is where Martens's operation finds its key element. According to his analysis of the conventional operating procedures of global contemporary art,¹⁵ an artist from the West (e.g. Richard Mosse, Francis Alÿs or Mark Boulos — figures to whom Martens himself often points) typically develops a critical art project in a non-Western developing country, attempting to bring

13 See the IHA website at <http://www.humanactivities.org/conferences/> (last accessed on 17 July 2015). In my presentation 'Toward a New Institutional Critique', I explored the problematic notion, then quite trendy in the art world, of 'immaterial labour', particularly misplaced, I argued, when considered in relation to precarious plantation labour practices in the DRC. I also called on the IHA to develop African participation at all levels of its organisation so as to avoid the dangers of perpetuating new forms of colonial relations in its implementation. The IHA is currently preparing a publication that will include this and other texts from the seminar.

14 S. Jeffries, 'Renzo Martens — the artist who wants to gentrify the jungle', *op. cit.*

15 This view correlates with recent observations made by artists such as Hito Steyerl and Andrea Fraser. See H. Steyerl, 'Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Postdemocracy', *e-flux journal*, no. 21, December 2010, available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/> (last accessed on 14 July 2015); and Andrea Fraser, 'L'1% C'est Moi', *Texte zur Kunst*, August 2011, pp.114–27, and 'There's No Place Like Home', *The Whitney Biennial 2012* (exh. cat.), New York: Whitney Museum of America Art, 2012, pp.28–33.

A Gap in Criticality

Critique on global inequality improves labor conditions in New York, Berlin and Venice

Unilever plantation workers sponsor critical art production in Tate Modern

Last instalment of Unilever Series: Tino Sehgal's meditation on immaterial labor.

Palm oil for Unilever's Blue Band



Salaries in 2012: 20 USD / month

Plantation workers cannot live off plantation work. Can they live off critical engagement with plantation work?

A digital HD file of the sculpture is sent from Congo

upload

Cocoa and palm oil plantation in the Congo

A NEW SETTLEMENT IN THE CONGO

Undisclosed location, 2014, on former Unilever plantation

Jérémie Mbalela Massamba making a self-portrait

First Settlement: Boteka

Destroyed by Canadian company Ferona in 2013

In a setting designed by Liam Gillick

Inaugural meeting of Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs des Plantations Congolaises



Avoid Criticality & Emotions

Self-portraits uploaded through satellite

Satellite receives and sends file to Amsterdam

download

Moral Problem

Self-portraits by Djunga Bismar and Manenga Kibwila

Financial Solution

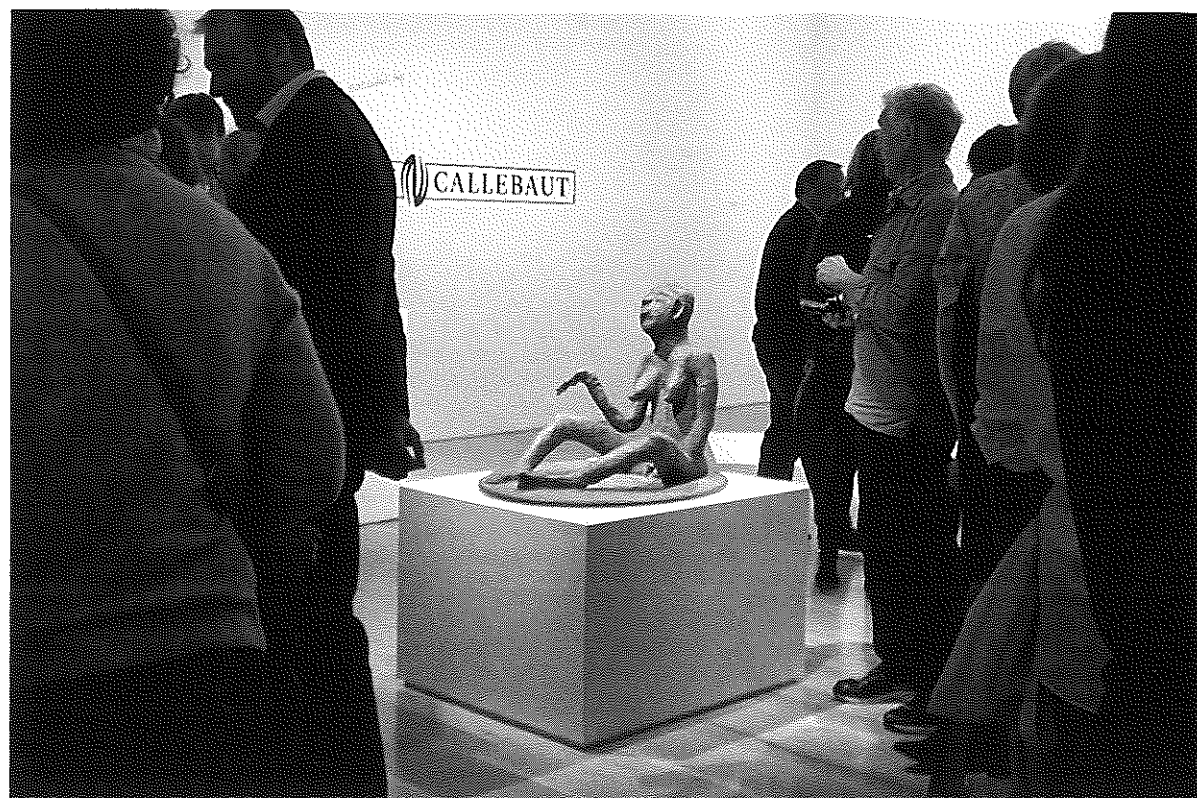
Income is raised for plantation workers and CATPC

AMSTERDAM COCOA WAREHOUSE

Chocolate sculptures are casted here

Raise in income per gram: 7000%

Institute for Human Activities infographic, designed by Metahaven, 2015. Courtesy the artists; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles



forms of representation and participation to the underprivileged, socially repressed and economically excluded; yet the final product of that work is generally exhibited, circulated, discussed and sold in the art markets, gallery institutions and magazines of the developed countries of the North. Martens's IHA challenges this logic in two ways: it reverses this flow, which otherwise drives and exemplifies the inequalities of global neoliberalism, and it unifies the origin of artistic production and intervention with the destination of profit.¹⁶

The elements of this intervention can be seen in IHA's developing activities, including its exhibition programme in collaboration with the Van Abbemuseum, whereby the IHA presents works from the Eindhoven-based collection in the DRC — for example, pieces by Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham.¹⁷ (Tino Sehgal allegedly declined the invitation, explaining to

Martens he only works for 'affluent people'.¹⁸) In other words, museum-quality works by well-established and supported artists — Nauman has been a featured artist in Tate Modern's Unilever Series — are being presented in the Congo, thereby returning (however briefly) the cultural gains of colonial and now neoliberal industry to the former and current location of resource extraction and plantation labour. As Martens points out, Unilever pays plantation workers a mere US\$240 annually while sponsoring one of the world's most visible contemporary art series: 'Look at where the surplus money that Unilever spends on subsidising these art exhibits comes from', he explains. 'It comes from people working on the plantations.'¹⁹ So why not let them share in the benefits? In addition to such exhibitions, the IHA conference programme aims to foster dialogue with the existing practices of a further range of Congolese

Mubuku Kipala, *Self Portrait without Clothes*, 2014. Installation view, 'Artes Mundi: Renzo Martens and the Institute of Human Activities', National Museum Cardiff, 2014. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles



Jérémy Mabiala and Djonga Bismar, *The Art Collector*, 2015, chocolate, 120 × 62 × 65 cm. Courtesy the artists; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles

intellectuals, writers and scientists — among them Lubumbashi- and Brussels-based photographer Sammy Baloji, Kinshasa-based dancer and choreographer Faustin Linyekula, Lubumbashi-based artist and author Patrick Mudekerezwa and Kinshasan musician Bebson de la Rue — in an effort to generate critical discourse in the IHA's local context.

Speaking as a participant in the IHA's Opening Seminar, I discovered that, far from some kind of neocolonial carnival

or bad-faith, cynical artistic game — which is sometimes how Martens's provocative project is (mis)understood — the programme represented a serious discussion featuring Congolese intellectuals, activists and artists (including Botatatala, Ngongo and the professor Jérôme-Emilien Mumbanza mwa Bawele) and their European counterparts (including Marcus Steinweg and Nina Möntmann, in person, and Eyal Weizman and Richard Florida, by satellite connection).²⁰ In the course of

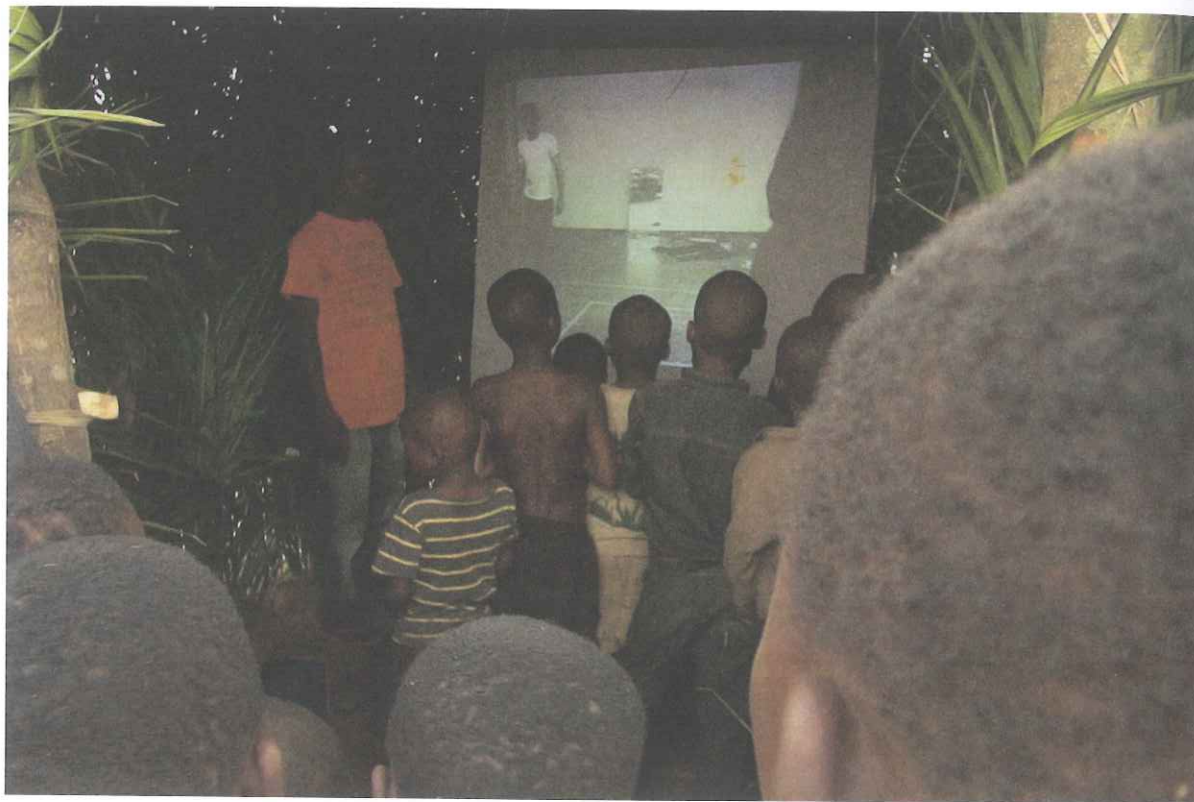
16 This is clearly articulated by Martens in 'Institute for Human Activities: Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos', *op. cit.*

17 In this regard, Martens's project participates in the recent energy around exhibiting European collections in zones of conflict outside Europe, such as Khaled Hourani's 2011 'Picasso in Palestine' project, also supported by the Van Abbemuseum, which brought *Buste de Femme* (1943) to Ramallah — the first time a European work of this order has been seen publicly in the West Bank. See Sandy Tolán, 'Picasso comes to Palestine', *Al Jazeera* [website], 16 July 2011, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/07/2011715131351407810.html> (last accessed on 10 June 2015).

18 Email from the artist, 19 June 2015.

19 Daisy Carrington, 'The secret artists colony that wants to change the world with chocolate heads', *CNN* [website], 6 March 2015, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/05/africa/drc-artist-hipster-paradise-in-the-heart-of-africa> (last accessed on 10 June 2015).

20 Florida was an exceptional case as the sole advocate of creative-class neoliberalism. The IHA aims to divert such capitalist interests toward other ends by proposing to apply certain of Florida's principles to redistribute the economy in the specific, rural circumstances of the DRC. Part of the plan appears to be to test his Pollyannaish rhetoric, including his so-called 'three Ts' for cultivating urban regeneration: Talent (a highly talented/educated/skilled population), Tolerance (a diverse community) and Technology (the technological infrastructure necessary to fuel an entrepreneurial culture). For a critique of Florida's position, see Martha Rosler, 'Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism, Part I', *e-flux journal*, no.21, December 2010, available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-i/>, and 'Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism, Part II', *e-flux journal*, no.23, March 2011, available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-ii/> (both last accessed on 13 July 2015).



its proceedings, the seminar addressed the challenges of promoting contemporary art in rural Congo; confronted the difficult-to-overcome, institutionalised socio-economic inequalities that exist within that context (contra Florida); and considered the potential dangers of repeating colonial hierarchies between privileged Westerners and disenfranchised African subjects when it comes to such institution-building.²¹ Of course, were it to fall into such a familiar rut, then clearly the IHA would be a failure.

While the project is still in its early days, its achievements are already impressive, even if it has yet to fulfill its ultimate ambition: to progressively reshuffle the cards of art's symbolic, cultural and economic capital. As Martens claims, 'We can sell these [chocolate sculptures] for £40 a piece, they cost maybe £2 or £3 – so £37 profit.'²² Currently the IHA markets these artworks through galleries; it hopes eventually to sell its products through department stores, where the price per pound of chocolate, worth approximately US\$0.25 to plantation workers, might soar when transformed into an art object. 'People in Congo export a lot. They export cocoa,

for instance, but cocoa doesn't speak. If you add emotions, all of a sudden it does speak, and as soon as it starts speaking, it's worth a lot more money', explains Martens. 'You add feelings and emotions to chocolate and you get a 7,000 per cent surplus.'²³ (A recent diagram by Metahaven, commissioned by the IHA, maps out this circulation in a helpful flow chart.)

Yet, in the end, it's not quite so simple. (Is it ever?) The IHA adds into the ingredients of its products its own cultural capital, generating artistic publicity via press releases and coverage in both the mainstream media and art publications, including *The Guardian*, CNN and *e-flux* announcements (and even here, in this *Afterall* essay). The IHA exploits this publicity for its own self-reproduction, establishing visibility and credibility through association with internationally recognised writers and public intellectuals, as well as through organising exhibitions and public events, and drawing on the marketable buzz of Martens's own reputation. The IHA mixes that cultural capital into the production of chocolate sculptures, at the same time cultivating further publicity – and most importantly,

Installation view, 'Bruce Nauman Video Show I', Institute for Human Activities, undisclosed location in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2014. Courtesy the artist; KOW, Berlin; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; and The Box, Los Angeles

funding – for its own activities, to the benefit of all its worker-collaborators. While the contract is meant to be advantageous to both sides, Martens's conceptual direction clearly distinguishes itself from Congolese sculptural work – the labour of grand ideas differentiated from manual craft.

Here, too, there is an aspect of critical mimicry: Martens's own masterminding of the IHA project places him in the role of the exceptional (white, European, male) subject, overseeing his (poor, black, African) workers as beneficent facilitator of their own liberation, thereby re-enacting in part the very unequal hierarchy and traditional identities of the plantation system. It's not surprising that his project's slipperiness – wherein mimicry risks sliding into repetition – engenders confusion between his intentions and the complex ironies of his performance. This situation occurs when Martens is cast as a 'missionary' of 'state imperialism', an apologist for old-fashioned gentrification and a pretender who speaks for 'the entirety of exploited peoples of the Congo', yet articulated without any awareness of the satirical elements or representational criticality of Martens's artistic form of political theatre.²⁴ In fact, such a situation speaks to a central tension within the IHA – namely between its over-identification with destructive ideologies (gentrification, neocolonialism, etc.) and its plans to improve the local situation. These contradictory aspects cannot easily be separated: just as it would be inaccurate to read the project as a straightforwardly 'humanitarian' endeavour, it seems inadequate to write it off on the basis of its obscene over-identifications. The IHA's artistic achievement, perhaps, lies in forcing these tendencies to coexist.

If the IHA does indeed repeat a colonial relationship, it would seem that it could be overcome only if the exchange generated by the IHA were a two-way street. This would entail surpassing its current division of conceptual and manual labour and relinquishing the fixation on Martens's own character, perhaps in the formation of a post-Martens IHA

(as has long been the plan). At the same time, the double-bind logic of the project hints at the long-term unlikelihood of such a resolution: after all, it remains both a gentrification programme and a modelling of institutional critique (even if it reinvents both of these terms). Until transformation transcends critique, however, it seems impossible to create an arrangement where both sides work to the benefit of an equal distribution – of agency as much as reward, conceptual invention as much as manual production – giving way to the creation of a positive, postcolonial form of life, even at the microcosmic scale of the IHA. The IHA has made progress, most of all in revealing how acute forms of global economic disparity are reproduced in certain critical art practices and in the arrangements of institutional sponsorship, reproducing hierarchies between populations that remain locked in trans-generational colonial-style servitude and others that enjoy the exploitative benefits that derive from that situation. Its work, however, is far from done.

21 See <http://www.humanactivities.org> (last accessed on 10 June 2015).

22 S. Jeffries, 'Renzo Martens – the artist who wants to gentrify the jungle', *op. cit.*

23 D. Carrington, 'The secret artists colony that wants to change the world with chocolate heads', *op. cit.*

24 See, for instance, Vivian Zihler, 'Renzo Martens and the Institute for Human Activities' "A New Settlement", *Art Agenda* [online magazine], 27 May 2015, available at <http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/renzo-martens-and-the-institute-for-human-activities-a-new-settlement/>; and Nora Kovacs, 'Discussing the Matter of Critique with Renzo Martens at KW Institute for Contemporary Art', *Berlin Art Link* [online magazine], 26 May 2015, available at <http://www.berlinartlink.com/2015/05/26/review-discussing-the-matter-of-critique-with-renzo-martens-at-kw-institute-for-contemporary-art/> (both last accessed on 24 June 2015).