

# Extra City

centrum  
voor  
hedendaagse  
kunst

Extra City, Centrum voor hedendaagse kunst, Antwerp, Belgium.

## Letter to Leopold

*Letter to Leopold* is a project bringing together some ten participants in a reflection on Belgium's history, its global dimension in modernity, and its present day legacy and implications for Europe and European policies. Leopold refers to Leopold II, King of Belgium until 1909, owner of the 'private' colony 'Congo Free State' which was later handed over to the state of Belgium and which gained independence as the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1960. Not least through Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* a steady trope of the colonial imaginary, larger public consciousness of the realities in colonial Congo, the relationships it has shaped and the shadows it continues to cast only began to awaken as recently as in 1998, with the appearance of a historical study by Adam Hochschild entitled *King Leopold's Ghost*, and subsequent studies and documentary films by various authors that followed.

In the exhibition *Letter to Leopold* this historical heritage is reflected through aesthetic strategies in an investigation of the structuring of the political imaginary. What relationships are embedded in pictures and narratives by which history is mediated? And what possible relationships do they foreclose or empower? The format of the 'letter' raises the question of the personal speaking position. It reflects the way in which the initial address induces and establishes a relationship, and asks about the possibilities to 'speak to' the past. ■

Curator

Anselm Franke

Exhibition architecture

Andreas Müller & Jesko Fezer

Jochen Becker

metroZones Brussels Capital:  
From/To Europe #5

*From/To Europe*, a research and exhibition project in progress, maintains that its two central fields of examination – the reciprocal relationship between Europe and its colonies since 1884 and the contemporary situation of "cities of the world," which are effectively determined by migration – are interlinked. Usually, colonial history and migration politics are discussed separately.

The reciprocal, yet unequal relationship between the North and its colonies was further consolidated during World War II when the "Third World" served as a battlefield as well as an important source for material and humans. The colonial theorist Frantz Fanon (Martinique/Algeria), as well as most of the heads of state of the later decolonized nations, served in the French army under General Charles de Gaulle, and was directly involved in Europe's liberation from the Nazis. The 8th of May 1945 not only marks the end of World War II but also the temporary suppression of the national liberalization movement in occupied Algeria, which became the cradle of the anticolonial war against France some ten years later.

"During the war we saw those who had been our colonizers the day before naked. We fought at their side, suffered the same hunger and thirst, wept over the same sorrows. It was clear: there was no material difference between us. But the French made friends more readily with German enemy soldiers than with us, their black comrades. That embittered us. These experiences changed many things." – Senegalese film director and war veteran Ousmane Sembène in a lecture held in Tübingen, 19 September 1995

How does Europe constitute itself through colonialism and migration? How have the contours of development and reciprocal relationships been defined up until the present day? And how will a future Europe emerge from the "cities of the world"? These are the points of reference from which the project's research emanates.

Artistic Contributions

**Sonja Hohenbild (Berlin):** The Long Shadow of the Colonial Update, or The Reinvention of Leopold II (2008) Photographs

The monument that throws the shadow was established by "Ostende à son Génie Protecteur Léopold II" in 1931. It is part of the reinvention of King Leopold II as "Bâtisseur" (master builder) of the Belgian nation. As if one wanted to ban the resistant ghost of the Congolese president Patrice Lumumba, murdered not least by the Belgian state, through an ossified historiography, which stretches itself like a net

over Belgium, together with Leopold II tunnels, boulevards, plazas and tram stops.

**Francesco Jodice (Milan):** The Morocco Affair (2004), DVD, 22 min.

*The Morocco Affair* consists of a series of 82 portraits of houses in Morocco. The project took place in the suburbs of Oujda, thirty kilometres from Africa's Mediterranean coast, near the Algerian border. Infrared technology was used to film at night from 17 to 23 March 2004, a week after the terrorist attacks on train stations in Madrid.

Most of the houses are owned by MREs (Marocains Résidents à l'Étranger), most of whom are from Belgium, Germany, Holland, France and Spain. They are usually vacation homes, built by their owners with the help of income earned from working in various European countries to which they have emigrated. (Francesco Jodice)

**Valérie Jouve (Paris):** Grand Littoral (2003), DVD, 20 min.

With: Raphaëlle Paupert Borne, Salah, Michèle Berson, Jo Abad, Rabah and Islam, Marie Ducaté, Abderaman Diakité, Triscia Mendy, Flavie Pinatel, Marie Mendy, Jo Thirion, Westley and Lester Mendy, Alain and Emma Huet

*Grand Littoral* is the name of a suburb of Marseille and a local shopping centre. ... The shopping centre covers a universe of contradictory nature at its entrances. I wanted to cross this territory. ... The viewers never enter the shopping centre: they remain on the periphery, on the level of the no-man's-land that surrounds it. ... It is populated by the people who live around here, a place for strolling and roaming. ... For me, the hill is a heterotopy, while the supermarket doesn't fit in that concept. I had turned back into the supermarket and immersed myself in its function, I could not understand it as an element of the territory. ... I am not studying the social side of the suburb but its territorial quality. ... There is a dark tension in the film. I am always afraid that a plan will become too legible. I try to create images with a maximum number of abstract elements in order to hide their primary meaning. (Extract of a conversation between Valérie Jouve and Fabien Danesi.)

**Fahrettin Orenli (Amsterdam/Istanbul):** Somebody in the European Community (2001), DVD, 4 min.

In the European Community an individual knows scientifically that the moment a lit match falls and touches the magic circle, it catches fire. In the circle the scorpion will sting itself. (Fahrettin Orenli)

**Dierk Schmidt (Berlin):** The Division of the Earth - Tableaux on the Legal Synopses of the Berlin Africa Conference (2005–08)

At the Berlin Africa Conference in 1884–85, the twelve European conference participants, the Ottoman Empire and the US granted the Belgian King Leopold II rule over the Congo Basin, which became the paradigmatic example of a supposedly "modern" colony. Among the goals of this conference was also the relegitimation and redefinition of colonialism. However, the real reason for the conference was the European resolution for preventive conflict avoidance among the states present. The so-called "Berlin borders" were established, which still apply to the majority of the national borders within the African continent today. This conference, largely a business conference, can be considered a precursor of the renowned Economic Summits held in recent years. (Excerpt from a text accompanying *The Division of the Earth*)

Although the press did publish illustrations of these events, it is until today all but impossible to adequately picture the details of this historical process of colonization. Dierk Schmidt's critical concept of historical painting assesses and conveys politico-historical potentials and present-day implications pertaining to international law. The series handles different pictorial semiotics that have their source in the traditions of diagrammatic-statistical and cartographic representation, on the one hand, and modernist (abstract) painting on the other. Alongside the conflictual encounter of artistic and legal forms of language, the work also articulates a basic irreconcilability. For this approach is not about resolving but above all about representing an historical problem of nonrepresentability. ■

Peggy Buth

Untitled (image cycle from  
Desire in Representation)  
Photographs

*Desire in Representation*, an artist's book in two parts, is the result of a comprehensive documentation and research project which began at the Royal Museum for Central Africa founded in Tervuren (near Brussels) in 1907. It combines documentary photo material of the museal representation of central Africa and its colonisation with a narrative created by quotations of travelogues and adventure stories, archival images and historic documents from the colonial days of Belgium and Germany. The publication focuses on the colonisers' desires, expectations and aspirations and the way in which these find expression in their self-portrayals and in images of the "other". The first part of the book, *Travelling through the Musée Royale*, shows room views, individual exhibits and details of various displays chosen from this fund of documentation. Buth's photographs foreground areas of transition and reconstruction, the gaps and correctional traces which reveal the layers of time and the palimpsest of past exhibition concepts. The second part *O, my Kalulu!* traces the story of an African boy who appears in the travelogues of Henry Morton Stanley as well as a fictional

character in his novella, *My Kalulu, Prince, King and Slave* (1873). Buth contrasts excerpts from this novella with passages from Stanley's travelogues, linking them with book illustrations, portrait photographs and written sources. Myths of masculinity and homoerotic desires are thus elevated into leitmotifs in Buth's new narration. An appendix lists the sources used and provides further references through additional information and image material. It supplements both parts of the book by providing background information, additional photographs and film stills from the museum documentation, variations of archive images, internet photos etc. It not only forges links between both books, but also highlights a further aspect of *Desire in Representation*. ■

Christine Meisner

The Present  
Videos, Drawings, Narration  
Warsaw, Brussels, Kinshasa,  
Kisangani

*The Present* shows the result of a two year research from German artist Christine Meisner out of her travels beginning with her residency at the Centre of Contemporary Art in Warsaw and continued in Belgium and Democratic Republic of Congo. The developed videos, drawings and a narration considering the historical relation between Congo and Europe since the beginning of the Belgian Colonisation of Congo. The different works are approaching to that history and its remembrance, thereby those places are focused the most, where individual experiences, collective imaginary and political constellation cross each other. *The Present* records some aspects of this commemoration of a date continuing past. Countless interviews and meetings with people in Warsaw, Brussels, Antwerp, Kinshasa and Kisangani telling about their history, forms the basis of the work. The project started by questioning the consideration of the Belgian King Leopold II, who wanted to know "whether or not there is probably anything to go for in Africa" in 1875, and reaches until the current eight year ongoing "Peacekeeping Mission" of the United Nation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During those over hundred years there hardly was a moment for the Congolese population, which was not influenced by colonial paternalism, exploitation, dictatorship or war. The colonialism is continuing to have an effect on the present. Two different collectives of remembrances are confronted with each other, the Congolese-African and the Belgian-European commemoration, each with another perspective on the history. In her research, Meisner traced the question how important it is for the people involved to deal with their history and to question responsibility, which still lasts today. The answers are detaching the virtual from the event. Moments of individual memories remain without linearity. But still there is the awareness of an unfinished history, which has to be faced in the future.

The artist related the project with a discussion on the author Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, better known as Joseph Conrad. The writer traveled to Poland, the country of his birth, again in 1890 to take leave of his relatives. Conrad signed a three-year contract in Brussels in order to work as a captain of a steamer on the Congo river. Like most Europeans of these days, he had considered taking part in the noble and "civilizing" mission of King Leopold II. But as Conrad had observed later in the African country was the greed and unprecedented brutality of white colonial traders and officials, which had put his belief of the moral structure of order in question. Eight years later he has written down his memories of these experiences in his famous novel *Heart of Darkness*. Meanwhile in Europe already a general clarification wave about the atrocities of the Belgian King in Congo was on the move. In his book Joseph Conrad has exposed cruel machinations of colonization used to exploit the country and it has been interpreted in many different ways during the last hundred years. Its title stands constantly as an expression for Congo and its political events. Last-mentioned 2005 in the German media by the question, whether or not German armed forces should be sent for the EUFOR mission into the *Heart of Darkness*. *The Present* follows geographically Conrads journey to question the myth and its historical reception in relation to the present political situation of DR-Congo.

Conrads traces made the work starting in Warsaw where Meisner developed the structure of this project. First records emerged from talks with several Congolese individuals who left their home country for Warsaw. The research was continued in Brussels, where Conrad signed his contract with the 'Societe Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut Congo' at Rue Brederode. The Royal Museum for Central Africa, which was financed from King Leopold II with his proceeds out of his private colony of Congo, gives an insight into the beginning of the Belgian colonial history. The records from Brussels confronting the omnipresent architecture, which represents the colonial ventures with a reality where Congolese and Belgians living next door to each other. Statements of several involved persons in Brussels attesting an unfinished history. Today's Kinshasa and Kisangani in the interior have been once the destination of Joseph Conrads travel to Congo where he met at the first time those colonial officials, whose inhuman attitude he describes so vividly in his novel. In Kisangani, then Stanleyville, the meeting between Marlow and the legendary Kurtz took place in the book. In those two cities most interesting for the project was the question, how much dealing with the colonial and post-colonial history has a relevance for the inhabitants who just experienced a civil war and are struggling on all day survival. The videos, drawings and narration out of this travels talking about the presence of past, the traces of a history which is continuously present under the surface as long as all have been able to agree on it.

\*Christine Meisner, German artist living in Berlin. Focus on drawings, video and texts about colonial and post-colonial matters in Africa, the Americas

and the Diaspora related to these changes. Meisner is interested in the ongoing impacts of cultural processes released by occupation, appropriation, incorporation or destruction. Thereby she investigates the different forms of memory between writing of history and personal truths. Her projects are the results of long research and travel in cooperation with international museums and institutions from the countries mentioned. *The Present*, exhibited first Nov/Dec 2007 in a solo show at the Centre of Contemporary Art Warsaw is part of the Collection Museion Bolzano. A catalogue about *The Present* is published by CCA Warsaw, ISBN: 978-83-61156-08-6 ■

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## Ulrike Ottinger

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### Diamond Dance. A Musical Thriller Screenplay, photographs, postcards

Legendary filmmaker Ulrike Ottinger, known for her early feminist, ethnographic as well as fiction work, presents excerpts from the screenplay and research material from her unrealized film *Diamond Dance*.

"World-wide links existed long before the world globalization was common currency. Of course journeys in King Solomon's days took years or even decades, but different cultures did meet, and goods, knowledge, technology and religious, philosophical or artistic ideas were exchanged and transferred.

Diamonds from India glittered even on King Solomon's throne, and migrated through the centuries from there. They were stolen, given away, sold, carried off as booty and found their way back on to priceless works of art. They decorated goblets and Saracen swords, Thora shrines and gospel books, they adorned altars and icon frames and garments, belonged to emperors, satraps, pirates or merchants, beautiful women, robbers and dictators."

(Text about the screenplay)

"Diamonds' migrations through the epochs and all their changing scenes of war, danger, triumph, concealment and annihilation, form a parallel with the itinerant people in my screenplay. I have been researching, collecting and taking photographs for this screenplay since the early eighties in the diamond centres of the world, in New York, Hong Kong, Bombay or Antwerp. I visited the diamond districts in these cities, with their diamond exchanges, shops and diamond clubs.

Pelicanstraat is for Antwerp what 47th Street, or formerly Canal Street, is for New York. A glance at the architecture of these places tells you a great deal. 47th Street has Art Deco buildings that use diamonds in their décor for façades, interiors or even elevators. It also has a building that looks as though it has been brought

here from the Herengracht, Canal Street has a piece of Cubist architecture from Prague, and there is a tiled Portuguese house, a "Casa de Azulechos", in Bombay. They tell us about where the architects came from, and their desire to resurrect the old within the new, about the exciting story of people who have been linked world-wide for a long time, their migrations and their cultures, carried with them like heavy cases.

What do we take with us of our old culture when we have to go to a new country? What becomes more important, what is forgotten, what is diluted or strengthened, what is new in the old or old in the new?"

– Ulrike Ottinger ■

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## Stefan Pente, Ines Schaber

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### Untitled Series, Part One and Two

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#### Part 1: Invited by Stefan Pente und Ines Schaber: Karen Peters

Invitation Letter

8 Photographs by Karen Peters: Site of Former Palace Hotel, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2007)

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#### Part 2: An approach to adress something that one would have never dared to say anything about; except through symbolic practices

Video (approx. 14 min.)

Photographs by Aby Warburg from the book Photographs at the Frontier:

Aby Warburg in America 1895-1896 (1998)

Voice: William Wheeler

In Autumn 2007, at a studio visit of an artist friend, Stefan Pente and Ines Schaber happened on a series of contact sheets by the photographer Karen Peters. They are told that Peters had been visiting and documenting several historical sites in New Mexico, USA in the last years. Researching the history of the State photographically, Peters was now off again, and had left the sheets behind. Eight of them, showing the site of the former Palace Hotel in Santa Fe, caught Pente's and Schaber's attention. As one of the first hotels of the town, it had burned down in the 1930's. Before though, and responsible for its gain of high visibility, it was the place where Aby Warburg, art historian from Germany and creator of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, met Cleo Jurino, priest of the Chipeo Nanutsch, who made a drawing for Warburg explaining him the serpent dance. Speculating about Peters' motivations to photograph the site in Santa Fe and about the readability of the images as such, Pente and Schaber decide to get in contact with her.

They had known the famous story of Warburgs' encounter with Jurino for some time and been in correspondence with his lecture Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America. This lecture was held on April 21, 1923 in the sanatorium Bellevue

in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland, where Warburg was hospitalized, being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. For Pente and Schaber, the lecture and the accompanying slide show poses questions about the translation of experiences. In their solo- and collaborative work, they investigate in how far a site of experience is important as a signifier as soon as that experience is communicated to others. They explore the question how the making of images of those sites corresponds to the need and desire to collect souvenirs – souvenirs of events that are reportable, of events whose materiality has escaped and might only exist in the invention of narrative. In his own words, Warburg was not able to talk about the experiences with the serpent dance in his healthy time. He could only speak about it in a place of dis-placement (ver-rückt sein).

The works were only possible through the generous support, inspiration and friendship by: Stefan Warburg, Cleo Jurino, the unnamed and unidentified children, woman and man on the photographs taken by Aby Warburg, Alena Williams, Avery Gordon, Celine Condorelli, Christoph Hefti, Cristina Gómez Barrio, Dagmar Gabler, Deborah Root, Disco-teca Flaming Star, Elizabeth Felicella, Hans Bryssinck, Mathias Heyden, Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Kobe Matthys, Sandra Bartoli, smoking mirror, Susan Stewart, Thomas Locher, William Wheeler, Wolfgang Mayer. ■

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## Gert Robijns

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### helder, licht bewolkt, betrokken, bewolkt, zwaar

Paint on 8 columns, text on window. ■

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## Florian Schneider

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### Blank Space Two channel video-installation with sound

"When I grow up I shall go there." The nine year old Konrad Korzeniowski points his finger on what the grown up Joseph Conrad later calls "the blankest of all blank spaces". He was looking at the map of Africa and chose his destination with "absolute assurance and amazing audacity" as he recalls himself.

"To open to civilization the only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness which hangs over entire peoples..." With these words King Leopold II welcomed the participants of the "Geographical Conference" that took place in September 1876 at the Royal Palace in Brussels. Nine years later "the blankest of all blank spaces" has been named the "Congo Free State". For the next 23 years it was the private property of Leopold.

Blank spaces are not blank at all. They have been blanked out in order to be appropriated. It is a negative act of imagination that eradicates anything that is there in order to be able to properly own it. The blank space is the canvas on which imagination projects: an allegedly empty signifier which may stimulate the phantasies of nine-year old Konrad.

But in fact has been emptied out of meaning. Leopold and his handyman in the Congo, well-armed explorer H.M. Stanley managed to make treaties with nearly 500 "native chiefs" in which they signed over their land to the "king of the belgians" for almost nothing, like a few clothes and a couple of bottles of gin. With the help of an Oxford scholar Leopold promoted the right of private companies to act as if they were sovereign countries. ■

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## Stefan Schneider

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### L'Afrique fantôme. Sound-installation

In spring 2007 we did a guided tour through the empty building of the former Postsorteercen-ter at Gare du Midi train station in the center of Brussels. When we looked outside through the big windows of the building, we had a panoramic view overlooking the modern city of Brussels. An aerial view which invited the eye to wander and to speculate. How many letters per day entered and left this place? For how many years? What parts of the world have letters been sent from or to? And when we follow them they bring us to foreign continents and unknown territories. The fascination of the imagination of the unknown.

Like blank spaces on a map of Africa which looked "particularly inviting" also to Joseph Conrad as he wrote his novel *Heart of Darkness* and made him want to go "there." In *Heart of Darkness* and in his *Congo Diary* Conrad used words to describe the blank space. It turned into a deadly labyrinth. A place where everybody got lost.

The isolated eye that belongs to the voyeur and voyagueur. The French language suggests two meanings for the word representation: 1. depiction; 2. imagination.

*Imago mundi*: More than any other continent, Africa seems to have been a place for fantasy and imagination since Europeans and Africans encountered each other there. On early maps of Africa cartographers filled unknown spaces with fantastic plants, animals and mountains. The portuguese cartographer Jorge Reinel called the hypothetical source of the Nile River *Mountains of the Moon* (1520). The traumatic *Map of Lopo Homem/Miller Atlas* (1519) depicted Africa cut in two halves with blood running from the wounded territory.

*A letter from T*: "I have read the book in which K. had mentioned a postcard from Accra. I have never been to Accra before in my life but after I had read the story about the postcard I had to get there and had to see the place with my own eyes. I had to reassure myself if the place would exist in reality or if it was just a projection. Accra. Accra. Accra. When you repeat the the name over and over again it becomes a sound. Not music. A sound."

The title *L'Afrique fantôme* goes back to French surrealist and ethnologist Michel Leiris, who travelled Africa for many years. In his failed search for truly, authentically African possession rituals, he started to develop his own rituals instead. To conjure phantoms of otherness he started writing letters and poems as a European way to experience spirit possession.

*A letter from S. (Cameroon, 1898)*: "We have collected unknown flowers, measured foreign animals and studied the music and the languages of the native people with scientific precision and honesty. More than ever I am concerned that our work has more to do with us than with the things we find here." ■

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## Susan Schuppli

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### Claim-Staking Three channel video-installation with sound

*Claim-staking* is a prospector's term that refers to the activity of mapping out terrain by means of a series of markers which lay "claim" to the land for the purposes of ownership and resource extraction. To stake a claim is to perform an act of sovereignty over the land. A claim is also a discursive statement that "stakes" out a position by a speaker. To make a claim is to perform a speech act over which the question of its truth remains open.

This project is about the territorial nature of the claim as a mechanism for asserting authorship over land and speech.

I've long been intrigued by three small cities located in southwestern Ontario, Canada named Brussels, London, and Paris. Berlin is also in the vicinity but was renamed during WWII. European colonists settled each of these locations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As rather modest cities and towns, their eventual naming after grand European capitals invokes the central dynamics of the colonial project. Not only did their act of naming claim the land as an extension of the imperial project's global reach, conjuring memories of homeland on behalf of settler and immigrant populations, but it also functioned to erase aboriginal presence given that these locations were already named by the indigenous peoples that lived there. Renaming thus affirmed the right of European occupation while simultaneously rendering invisible native populations, which in turn abrogated their legal

claims to the land.

Using the format of a video triptych, the project brings into juxtaposition three historical modalities that refer to processes of *claim-staking*. The central video depicts contemporary images shot in the Canadian cities of Brussels, London, and Paris and functions as a space of conjunctive expression for the various temporalities and politics at stake in the project. The two videos that bookend the installation are based upon the autobiographical writings of Susanna Moodie, a British immigrant who wrote about her life as a colonial roughtier in the Canadian bush in 1852, and Pierre Vallières, an FLQ revolutionary (Front de libération du Québec) who wrote about his experiences as a French-speaking minority or *White Nigger in America* while in prison in 1966. The rather benign image-flows of the central video are consequently rerouted by the "unsettling" narratives of colonization that subtend the installation.

*Left monitor: Roughing it in the Bush*, written by Susanna Moodie, a British immigrant to Canada in 1852. "Remington" typewriter manufactured by the company that was originally known for its production of the Remington rifle.

*Centre monitor*: Various videos shot in Brussels, London, and Paris, Ontario, Canada

*Right monitor: White Niggers in America*, written by Pierre Vallières, an FLQ revolutionary (Front de libération du Québec) while in prison in 1966. Portable typewriter model is an "Empire Aristocrat" manufactured in Britain. ■

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## Nico Dockx Yves Vanpevenaeg

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### Blackface Photograph, text

BLACKFACE is the work of Yves Vanpevenaeg, it was created within the installation *Sétats Detinu* (United States) for the Richard Foncke Gallery, Gent. Yves Vanpevenaeg questions existing conventions and behavioural patterns in his work and by doing so designs new methods of communication. It is a continuity, a stream of consciousness which always presents itself in new ways. Nico Dockx found the work to be very appropriate within the context of the Brussels Biennial and invited Yves Vanpevenaeg to take his place at the exhibition. This action is very closely related to the artistic practice of Nico Dockx who by doing so takes a position with reference to the conception 'colonialism'.

In this framework the concept of BLA KFACE arose, a work by Nico Dockx and Yves Vanpevenaeg in which Nico Dockx created the typography to enforce the universal message of the original photograph. 'BLACKFACE' turns into 'BLANKFACE'. De beholder is confronted with colonial, racist and social problems in contemporary society and its history. A specific reality is torn open into a general abstraction. ■