

**SVEN AUGUSTIJNEN*****SPECTRES*****08.05 – 31.07.2011**

As part of Kunstenfestivaldesarts

To open Kunstenfestivaldesarts, WIELS presents Belgian artist Sven Augustijnen's new project around his feature film *Spectres* (104 min). Augustijnen has gained national and international recognition for his films describing the cultural specificity of familiar places, such as the Royal Park or the Mont des Arts neighbourhood, both in Brussels. Renowned as a subtle chronicler of the city, Augustijnen here establishes a link between its current vocation as administrative capital of Europe and its colonial past. This documentary film essay recalls one of the darkest chapters in the decolonisation of the Belgian Congo: the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, Congo's first democratically elected prime minister.

Augustijnen's research into the remnants of the colonial past has so far resulted in *Cher Pourquoi Pas?* (A Prior, 2007) – published within the framework of dOCUMENTA 12 in Kassel and describing the mystery around the death of Tshombe from the point of view of journalist Pierre Davister, who was involved in the affair – and the exhibition *Les Demoiselles de Bruxelles* (Jan Mot, 2009) – a photo series featuring black African prostitutes who ply their trade around the entrances to old colonial institutions.

In *Spectres* the main thread of the story is constructed in the form of a voyage, a typical Augustijnen technique. The main character is Jacques Brassinne de La Buissière, a former high-ranking civil servant and protagonist in the political and humanitarian 'thriller' that unfurled after the hasty decolonisation decision, the transfer of power and the subsequent conflicts, up to and including the imprisonment and execution of Patrice Lumumba on 17 January 1961. He acts simultaneously as guide, commentator and symbolic figure, and we follow him through many crucial historical sites and symbolical moments. In the course of these peregrinations, questions arise about the hidden motivations behind the historic events of a still largely unresolved past, issues that continue to haunt past and present. These events have shaped a relationship fraught with difficulties between Congo and its old colonial power, recently expressed during a parliamentary committee of inquiry into the responsibility for the assassination and on the occasion of the commemorations marking the transfer of power, as well as in the intentions of Lumumba's immediate family to bring proceedings against those involved where they are still alive.

Following a career as a high-ranking civil servant, Jacques Brassinne wrote a doctoral dissertation on the sequence of events that led to this tragedy and was called to give evidence by the parliamentary committee of inquiry. Due to his position at the time and his thorough research into the historical circumstances and true facts, he is so to speak a privileged 'protagonist-narrator' who embodies the confusion of all persons concerned by these traumatic and dramatic events, linked to the questions of 'responsibility' and 'guilt'.

Through this 'travelogue' Brassinne advances the arguments he has developed over thirty years and addressed during meetings and commemorations with the last survivors, all of them witnesses or family members of the main protagonists. The 'construction' of the story is brought into question and the process of the film becomes a means of exorcising the spirits that emerge between the folds of the stories and their rectifications.

In addition to the film, the exhibition presents different objects from Brassinne's personal records: photos from various trips during the 1960s and 1980s to 'real' places of execution, historical objects and audio clips. A substantial book comprising reference documents, photos and explanatory texts accompanies the exhibition. Two debates and a lecture complete the investigation during the exhibition.

Sven Augustijnen has received the Evens Prize for Visual Arts 2011. The Awards Ceremony and the screening of *Spectres* will take place at Pompidou Center, in Paris, on 17 October 2011. [www.evensfoundation.be](http://www.evensfoundation.be)

Sven Augustijnen (1970, Mechelen) lives and works in Brussels, which has served as the focal point of his artistic career. His films, photographs and writings on various places and their history are generally concerned with a fiction as legitimation or a reality as construction of tradition and history. In his work he examines the various types of interaction and relations at play within the notion of 'authority', as dictated by the economy or other less visible forces. He unmasks them in his visual essays, manipulating words and facts (always jumbling up the media).

His works have been exhibited and screened among other places at Gallery Jan Mot (2001, 2002, 2007, 2008), Tate Modern, London (2009); Kunsthalle, Basle (2009); Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2009); Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2008); Museion, Bolzano (2008); documenta Magazines, Documenta 12, Kassel, (2007); CAC Vilnius (2006); Extra City, Antwerp (2005); Manifesta 4, San Sebastián (2004); Argos Brussels (2004); International Film Festival, Rotterdam (2003); Shanghai Art Museum (2009); Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels (2001); L'Effet Larsen, OK Linz & Casino Luxemburg (2001/2002).