



Flanders
State of the Art



La Biennale di Venezia

**59. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte**

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Commissioning body: Jan Jambon, Minister-president of the Government of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Culture, Digitalization and Facility Management

Opening of the Pavilion 21 April 2022, 12.30 hrs

Press view days: 19 April 2022 - 22 April 2022

Exhibition dates: 23 April 2022 - 27 November 2022

Opening hours: 23 April to 25 September, 11 am - 7 pm / 27 September to 27 November, 10 am - 6 pm

Location: The Belgian Pavilion, Giardini di Venezia, Venice

Website: www.belgianpavilion.be

Alÿs presents *The Nature of the Game*, an exhibition featuring a selection of films and a series of paintings. Almost all of the films are new productions.

Since 1999, during his many travels, Alÿs' camera has captured children playing in public spaces. For the Belgian Pavilion, Alÿs presents films made in Afghanistan, Belgium, Canada, DR Congo, Hong Kong, Mexico and Switzerland; each film is the result of an invitation and of where the 'chances' of life have taken him. For Alÿs, filming children in the public arena is a way to make contact with a place and get a preliminary understanding of its socio-cultural codes: the first moment of a project is always documentary and based on observation.

Playing is something natural, something that we discover and learn instinctively in our childhood. Like eating and sleeping, playing is an essential human need. Children's play is to be understood as a creative relationship with the world in which they are living, revealing a socio-political dimension. However, as social interaction becomes more and more virtual, Alÿs is keen to capture these games before they disappear. Whilst some of the games are related to tradition and to a particular territory, several are also universal. Many of the games are the same as those depicted in a 17th century painting *Children's Games* by Breughel, a picture which Alÿs has acknowledged left a big impression when he first saw it as a child. This painting has also been linked to an anonymous Flemish poem published in Antwerp by Jan van Doesborch from 1530, in which mankind as a whole is compared to children who are entirely absorbed in their foolish games and concerns.

The idea of children's games, and their sometimes apparent lack of rules and boundaries is a notion which has fascinated Alÿs, also when considered in parallel to a situation of conflict. Whilst Alÿs has spoken of the struggle within himself to represent that which is unrepresentable, for him, the absurdity of the artistic operation can introduce a measure of meaning in a situation that has stopped making any sense. Likewise, the games of the children, which continue whatever the circumstances, create a

framework and a structure (even when it is fleeting and makes sense only to themselves) which is universal.

Observing, investigating and documenting human behaviour in urban life is a constant in Alj's work. His films record (in an ethnographical way) both the power of cultural tradition and the relaxed, free and autonomous attitudes of children, even in the most conflicted of situations. The children's games play an important role in these explorations and have gained a more central position in his practice: Alj's uses his camera as a way to try to understand the culture and the patterns by which people live, to find the patterns and the structure even in the places and people where it seems most far away.

As Alj's has stated, *"I think that we, as adults, should be faithful to the children we were"*.

Hilde Teerlinck: *"Children's Games show us that when children play, they are really into the game. They neutralise the outside world, even in the most conflictive of situations. They have the capacity to be creative, to adapt and to introduce meaning into society and a world that sometimes has stopped making sense"*.

The exhibition will be presented in WIELS Belgium during the Spring 2023.

A special thanks to Galerie Peter Kilchmann, to Jan Mot and to David Zwirner.

Hilde Teerlinck

Hilde Teerlinck (Belgium, 1966) lives and works in Barcelona. She is the CEO – General Director for the Han Nefkens Foundation, which supports young video artists worldwide through production grants. All projects are realised in close collaboration with international museums and art centres.

Hilde Teerlinck was the director of FRAC Nord-Pas-de-Calais in Dunkirk, CRAC Alsace in Altkirch and the Center d'art contemporain in Perpignan, and Artistic Coordinator of the Pavilion Mies van der Rohe in Barcelona. She has also curated numerous international exhibitions and biennials, including the 2015 Lyon Biennale (contribution from Palais de Tokyo), the 2015 Beaufort Triennale (Belgian coast) and the 2018 and 2021 Kortrijk Triennial.

Francis Alj's

Francis Alj's (Belgium, 1959) lives and works in Mexico City. Trained as an architect, Alj's practice embraces multiple medias, from painting and drawing to video and animation. His works address ethnological and geopolitical concerns through the observation of and engagement with everyday life. His *Children's Games* series (1999- ongoing) is a recollection of scenes of children at play around the world. A dozen new games filmed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Belgium, Canada and Hong Kong will be featured at the 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. Alj's has exhibited in renowned museums worldwide.

About the selection

Curator Hilde Teerlinck and artist Francis Alj's have been selected to represent Belgium in 2022 at the Biennale di Venezia. The selection procedure was held in two phases. In a first phase, the jury invited six curators to present an exhibition project for the Belgian Pavilion in Venice. In a second phase and after the presentation of each project, the jury made the final decision on June 12, 2020.

The selection was organized by Department Culture, Youth and Media of the Government of Flanders. The jury was composed of experts of the arts sector and consisted of Devrim Bayar (only first phase), Frank Benijts, Hicham Khalidi, Zeynep Kubat, Jozefien Van Beek, Sofie Van de Velde and Els Wuyts (only first phase) with Dirk De Wit as chairman and Stan Van Pelt as secretary.

Project manager

Alessandra Biscaro

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