

Press preview  
08.06.2023  
11:00  
14:00  
+ on request

Public opening  
11.06.2023  
11:00-17:00

Exhibition  
11.06-20.08.2023  
wed-sun: 10:00-17:00

Location  
Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens  
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Tickets  
€ 12 / € 8 / € 0

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## Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

### *Fruits of Labour*

11.06-20.08.23



Lala Meredith-Vula, 20th July 2018, Gotovuša, Kosova no.2,  
from the series "Haystacks" (1989-ongoing)  
Courtesy of the artist

What forms of labour emerge when artists explore landscapes today?

*Fruits of Labour* posits that any depiction of a landscape is primarily a depiction of labour. Since both 'land' and 'labour' are politically and culturally heavily loaded subjects, an artwork that captures this tension tests the possibilities of representation itself. Representation has both a political and an aesthetic meaning – the representation of landscapes is subject to both.

Ever since the 15th century, landscape painting has been a dominant genre within visual art. Originating from the Dutch landschap, 'landscape' is not a substitute for the term 'nature'. It designates both a type of terrain that has been shaped by human intervention and an image that unfolds from the viewer's vantage point. The tradition of landscape painting is thus not only the depiction of an (artificial) idyll but also a genre that is crucial to consider what labour is – how it simultaneously shapes people and land.

In the immediate vicinity of MDD, around the turn of the 19th century, several artists migrated from the city to Latem to capture the social and artistic promise offered by the countryside and, more specifically, peasant life. Why this obsession with 'land', though? For the painters who settled in Sint-Martens-Latem, the notion of landscape stood in opposition to that of the city, as an antidote to the chaos of urban life and the sprawl of technological developments. For these painters, this landscape had a religious (or at least moral) component: the land – and, by extension, the farmer

– symbolised "authenticity": the honesty of hard work and the perspective of a simpler life. The different groups of artists who depicted the Leye region produced images that seem almost Arcadian: they are a sublimation of the portrayal of farmers and the land that they cultivate. Since the land is never fixed, neutral, or *natural*, neither is its depiction.

*Fruits of Labour* examines the forms of labour that are embedded in works by contemporary artists who consider landscapes in a time when the traditional idea of 'landscape' has come under increasing ecological pressure, to the extent that human-induced changes are becoming irreversible.

Laurens Otto  
curator *Fruits of Labour*

"When I think of 'landscape', the most iconic image from art history that comes to mind is probably the haystack. It is a constantly recurring element in the work of French impressionists in the 19th century and even appears in work by Hubert Malfait and Constant Permeke, among others, until just before WWI that these artists painted in the region around Sint-Martens-Latem. But what does such a haystack stand for? The exhibition *Fruits of Labour* shows that when artists look at a landscape, they mainly see labour. Labour is deeply embedded in the landscape, which is not *natural* but artificial."

To highlight three works from the exhibition:

**Artists:**

Simon Boudvin, Andrea Büttner,  
Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de  
Plantation Congolaise,  
Timo Demollin, Jean-Luc Godard,  
Dionisis Kavallieratos, Ives Maes,  
Lala Meredith-Vula, Jamilah Sabur,  
Allan Sekula, Marie Voignier

**Works from the collection of  
Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens and made of:**

Gustave De Smet, Hubert Malfait,  
Constant Permeke, Albert Servaes,  
Gustave Van de Woestyne

**Thanks to:**

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Vidi Square

Lala Meredith-Vula, *20th July 2018*,  
*Gotovuša, Kosova no.2*, from the series  
"Haystacks" (1989-ongoing)

Lala Meredith-Vula (1966, Sarajevo) moved from what was then Yugoslavia to England at a young age. Immediately after graduating from Goldsmiths University in London, she returned to the Balkans in 1988 to photograph the landscape.

For almost 35 years, Meredith-Vula has been working on this series, which contains the most diverse shapes of haystacks. The artist sees these stacks, which you would rather place in the 19th century but are still being made, as sculptural elements that farmers unconsciously put together.

This exhibition contains seven of these photos, in which some haystacks, photographed from the front, acquire almost human characteristics.

Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de  
Plantation Congolaise, *Résistant déporté et  
incarcéré (Kimbangu)*, cotton thread, palm  
nut/cocoa bag, 2022

CATPC – "Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise" (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League) in full – is a cooperative of plantation workers based in Lusanga, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Founded in 2014, the cooperative is best known for their sculptures in river clay that are reproduced in products from the plantation: palm fat, cocoa, and sugar.

CATPC uses the proceeds of their art to secure hundreds of acres of former plantation land and established worker-owned, ecological and inclusive food gardens: the Post Plantation.

This work represents the spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu (1889-1951). The work is not just a "performance" by artists Mbuku Kimpala, Ced'art Tamasala and Jérémie Mabiala of the CATPC collective, but above all an object that uses the codes of contemporary art to improve material conditions on a former palm oil plantation.

Andrea Büttner, *Kunstgeschichte des  
Bückens*, 160 analogue 35 mm slides, 2021

The work of Andrea Büttner (1972, Stuttgart) focuses on diverse themes as poverty, shame, labour, craft, religion and how they stand in ambivalent relationship between aesthetics and ethics.

The work *Kunstgeschichte des Bückens* (An art history of stooping) is a continuous slideshow that juxtaposes images of a variety of art-historical depictions of what is usually considered manual labour: collecting, harvesting, adjusting, processing, washing, and caring for children.

The images include iconic works, including from Paul Gauguin, Hans Holbein, Jean-François Millet, but Büttner also goes back to the Middle Ages and even further back with artefacts from ancient Egypt.

Lala Meredith-Vula, *20th July 2018, Gotovuša, Kosova no.2*, from the series "Haystacks" (1989-ongoing) Courtesy of the artist



Installation view: Andrea Büttner - *Triebe*, Galery Tschudi, Zuoz, 2021. Image: Ralph Feiner. Courtesy of the artist, Galery Tschudi, Zuoz and Hollybush Gardens, Londen



Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (Mbuku Kimpala, Ced'art Tamasala, Jérémie Mabila), *Résistant déporté et incarcéré (Kimbangu)*, 2022. Image: Afrikpic. Courtesy of the artist and KOW, Berlijn



### Kunstenaars

**Simon Boudvin** (1979, Le Mans) studied at the École des Beaux-arts de Paris in the studio of Giuseppe Penone and at the École d'architecture de Paris-Malaquais. After teaching in various art and architecture schools, he joined the École nationale supérieure de Paysage in Versailles in 2018.

Every piece has developed from the exploration of a territory. One of the particularities of Boudvin's work is his consideration of the ground.

**Andrea Büttner** (1972, Stuttgart) lives and works in Berlin. She is a professor of art in the contemporary context at Kunsthochschule Kassel, and has received a PhD from the Royal College of Art, London. Her research-based works focus on wide-ranging themes such as poverty, shame, work, craft, religion, the ascription of value, vulnerability, community, botany, philosophy, and art, which she examines in terms of the ambivalent tension between aesthetics and ethics.

**CATPC – “Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise”** (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League) in full – is a cooperative of plantation workers based in Lusanga, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Founded in 2014, the cooperative is best known for their sculptures in river clay that are reproduced in products from the plantation: palm fat, cocoa, and sugar. CATPC has used the proceeds of their art to secure hundreds of acres of former plantation land for future generations. In the middle of that land, they built a museum, the White Cube Lusanga, and established worker-owned, ecological and inclusive food gardens: the Post Plantation. Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise, Renzo Martens, and curator Hicham Khalidi will provide the Dutch entry for the Venice Biennale 2024.

**Timo Demollin's** objects, installations and interventions are oriented toward the critical potential of accounting for the position of artists, workers and the public in the economy and society. This practice is largely informed by the impact of neoliberalism on industry, infrastructure, and the public sector.

Timo Demollin is currently artist in residence at Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam.

**Jean-Luc Godard (1930-2022)** was a French-Swiss film director, producer, screenwriter, and film critic. Following his work as a critic for Cahiers du cinéma in the 1950s, he rose to prominence as a pioneer of the French Nouvelle Vague film movement of the 1960s.

His most famous films include *À bout de souffle* (1960), *Le Mépris* (1963), and *Pierrot le Fou* (1965). From 1988 to 1998, he focused on the multipart television documentary *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which offered his iconoclastic views on the first hundred years of motion-picture history.

**Dionisis Kavallieratos' (1979, Athens)** practice includes large and small-scale clay, wood and mixed media sculptures, and pencil and charcoal drawings.

His most recent work is the movie *The Chivalrous Quest*, “an over-simplified satire about the greed for power and the stupidity of mankind – which moves humanity throughout its history and will never change for the better.”

**Ives Maes** (Hasselt, 1976) works and lives in Antwerp. Working mainly with installations and photography, he has developed several long-term projects that revolve around the concepts of temporary architecture, nomadism, ruination, and ephemerality. He is currently affiliated with KASK School of Arts and the HOGENT Arts Research Fund as a post-doctoral artistic researcher. In 2018, he presented his solo exhibition *Sunville* in Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens. His most recent research project, *Forbidden Fruits Create Many Jams*, connects the principle of the camera obscura pavilion to a perception of paradise.

**Lala Meredith-Vula** (1966, Sarajevo) is an artist and professor of art and photography at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. Born to an Albanian father and English mother, she moved to England at an early age, returning to the Balkans after graduating from Goldsmiths University in 1988. Lala Meredith-Vula represented Albania in the 48th Venice Biennale (1999) and participated in documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel (2017).

Meredith-Vula is currently working on a book of her *Haystacks series*, edited by Monika Szewczyk and with assistance from an award granted by the Graham Foundation, Chicago.

**Jamilah Sabur** (1987, St. Andrew Parish, Jamaica) lives and works in Brussels. Metaphysics, geology, and memory are recurrent themes in her work. Making critical contributions to the discursive spaces of labour and economies of movement, Sabur engages imagination on a planetary scale to recalibrate our understanding of place, time and history.

**Allan Sekula** (1951-2013) was an American photographer, writer, filmmaker, theorist and critic. From 1985 until his death, he taught at the California Institute of the Arts. His works focused on the theory and history of photography, studies of family life in the grip of the military-industrial complex, and in *Fish Story*, on explorations of the global maritime economy.

**Marie Voignier** (1974, Ris-Orangis, France) lives in Paris. Her video work explores the intertwinement of imaginary and factual elements in reality itself.