# VIELS WIELS WIELS WIE

# **PARTNERS**

Commissioned by Jan Jambon, Minister-President of the Government of Flanders and Flemish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Culture, ICT and Facility Management

Special thanks to the members of the "Exhibition Circle Francis Alÿs"

With the generous support of Proximus Art Collection, GBL, Fondation Willame Stichting, KU Leuven, Vidi-Square AV Solutions

In collaboration with Peter Kilchmann, Jan Mot, David Zwirner galleries, and visit.brussels

## **EVENTS**

Late openings with guided tours (NL/FR) and screenings of documentaries about Francis Alÿs Every 1st Wednesday of the month, 11:00-21:00

Lecture: Michael T. Taussig (EN) 08.11.2023, 19:00

More events & information at **WIELS.ORG** 

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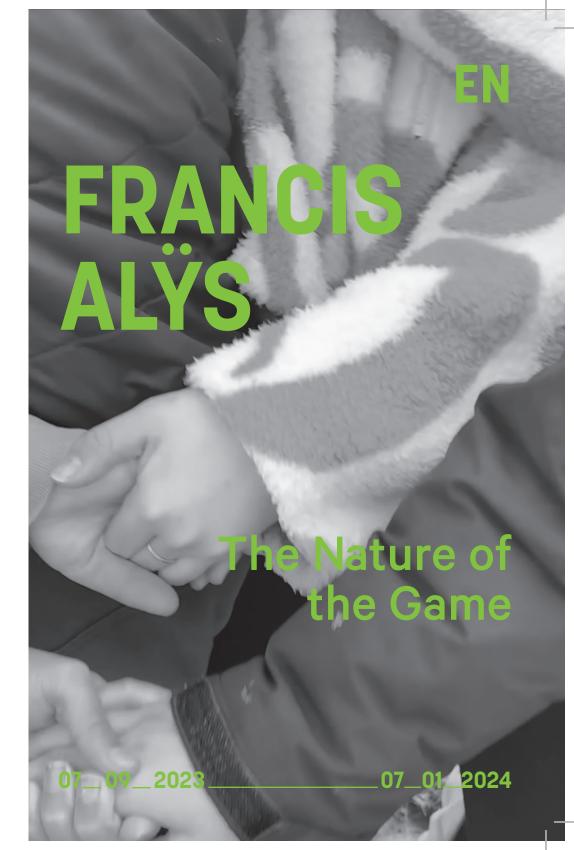






The Brussels Times

Francis Alÿs, Children's Game #35: Kluddermor (film still). Copenhagen, Denmark, 2022. In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux and Copenhagen Contemporary. © Francis Alÿs, Courtesy Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Jan Mot and David Zwirner Gallery.



Since the late 1980s, Francis Alÿs has been capturing seemingly futile or senseless human behaviour in films, drawings and paintings. In a similar way, he has been observing children playing in public places during his many travels in his second homeland Mexico and around the world. A practice he began systematically in 1999, in order to develop and complete his ever-growing *Children's Games* series, which now includes around forty films.

Children's games have become central to his work. They record cultural traditions and myths as well as spontaneous and casual acts by children on the streets, in conflict zones and in the sometimes chaotic world of urban technology and our industrialised society. They enable him to understand the cultures and patterns of people's lives better, even in places where play seems the most unlikely.

At the 2022 Venice Biennale, Alÿs presented a large selection of children's games in the Belgian pavilion. Here at WIELS, he is now complementing this – 12 years after his memorable retrospective – with four recently finished games (including from Ukraine). Images of children filmed during the pandemic in Hong Kong are projected side-by-side with images from turbulent countries

such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Morocco, Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador as well as from affluent societies such as Belgium, Switzerland and Denmark.

"Whereas adults are more likely to use speech to process experiences, children play to assimilate the realities they encounter. Their games mimic, mock or defy the rules of the adult society that surrounds them. The act of playing can also help them to cope with traumatic experiences such as those of war by creating a simulacrum of the real and turning the dramatic circumstances around them into a more fictional, ludic world. But the magical thing about a child's game is that it holds no secrets, "it's all there is". We as adults should be faithful to the children we were; remember and trust that moment, the most precious one of our existence."

FRANCIS ALŸS

In addition to these film projections, Alÿs has created a space for a large collection of his signature small-format paintings that all were made during the same trips as the films. Taking in the paintings occurs in a very different register, where Alÿs' observations are accompanied by a hushed melancholic dream experience or in a slipping away

from reality in magical realism. The cinema experience of *The Silence of Ani* (2015) involves a different form of perception to this. This film installation follows children playing hide-and-seek in the ruins of an abandoned Armenian town in Turkey. Whilst decoy whistles imitate bird sounds, a musical composition is built up and the children create the illusion of the city coming back to life.

Alÿs often speaks of how his work involves an inner struggle to depict what cannot be depicted. The apparent absurdity and purposelessness of child's play, and its similarities to the artistic creation process, allow him to bring back some coherence and meaning to a situation seemingly without any logical sense. In a similar way, children's games, which carry on regardless of circumstances, create a framework and structure (even if fleeting and meaningful only to themselves), which is universal.

Curators Dirk Snauwaert & Hilde Teerlinck

### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Francis Alÿs (Belgium, 1959) lives and works in Mexico City. Alÿs trained as an architect. In his practice, he uses a variety of media, ranging from painting and drawing to video and animation. His work addresses ethnological and geopolitical themes by observing daily life during his walks and travels. His series Children's Games (1999-ongoing) is a collection of scenes of children playing in various countries around the world. A selection of new films, made in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Belgium, Canada, Iraq and Hong Kong were shown at the 59th Venice Biennale, and the most recent ones here at WIELS. His work has been exhibited in renowned museums around the world.

Watch all children's games on the artist's website



