

SculptureCenter is pleased to announce the first exhibition of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League or CATPC) in the United States.

Creating sculptures with cacao as a primary material, the artists that comprise the CATPC are plantation workers who harvest raw material for international companies. In the Congo, as elsewhere, plantation workers are grossly underpaid for their contribution to global industry, whether to the \$100 billion chocolate industry or to the production of palm oil, broadly used in common household products. The Congolese plantation laborers cannot actually afford to live off of the wages they receive for their work and survive without basic amenities such as clean water and electricity. By using material sourced from cacao plantations worldwide instead to make artworks, the members of CATPC can occupy another place in the global value chain, one normally reserved for middle class artists.

Many of the sculptures created by CATPC members are future, present, and ancestral self-representations, and take up symbolic figures such as the art collector. First molded from clay, then 3D printed and cast in chocolate, the sculptures are made in collaborative settings and the materials used refer back to and overwrite the exploitative economics of global trade. So far plantation labor has funded the art world; here art funds the emergence of a new type of *post-plantation*. The CATPC reinvests profits from sales of these artworks in self-owned agricultural production throughout Congo, provoking questions about the division between those who should work on plantations and those who are allowed to reflect on this.

Unprecedented wealth (financial and cultural) has been extracted directly from plantations worldwide and redeployed in the production and acquisition of art in major global cities, resulting in local gentrification and the reaffirmation of class disparities. One striking example may be the Unilever Series at Tate Modern, funded by a corporation that has a large stake in the Congo. How can we assess the conditions and motivations around the consumption of critically engaged art when it is funded by plantation economies? What is the value of art that is not only about a site of conflict as a subject, but actually originates from that place? Can we extract wealth from the art system and repatriate it to the plantations where it originates? Can art turn the plantations into inclusive and ecological test sites?

In collaboration with their sister organization the Institute for Human Activities (IHA), founded by Dutch artist Renzo Martens and active in Congo since 2012, CATPC is currently building the Lusanga International Research Center for Art and Economic Inequality (LIRCAEI) on a former Unilever plantation in a remote rainforest, which aims to put the quintessential white cube to service

as a vector for social and environmental change. Its location is of crucial importance: the research center is constructed in Lusanga, formerly Leverville, where the Lever Brothers (later the Unilever company) founded their first palm oil plantation in 1911. It is here, at heart of the plantation system, at the crossroads of ecological and economic urgencies, where the research center will establish a program to redefine the mandate of art.

This exhibition will include existing and new sculptures and drawings produced by members of the CATPC, as well as materials about the larger activities and context of the IHA in the Congo. A series of public programs on topics raised by the exhibition will be announced at a later date.

The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) is an expanding art collective co-founded in 2014 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Plantation workers Djonga Bismar, Matthieu Kilapi Kasiama, Cedrick Tamasala, Mbuku Kimpala, Mananga Kibuila, Jérémie Mabiala, Emery Mohamba, and Thomas Leba, ecologist René Ngongo, and the Kinshasa-based artists Michel Ekeba, Eléonore Hellio, and Mega Mingiedi are its leading personalities.

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