

Project Francis Alijs for the Belgium Pavilion in Venice

For the 59th Venice Biennale, the Belgian Pavilion (Flemish Community) has invited artist Francis Alijs and curator Hilde Teerlinck to develop an exhibition project.

A young boy runs and falls on the ground while his leg slides over the earth of the street and the tip of his foot touches an imaginary ball, and he scores a goal! Action comparable to the likes of Messi! You can feel the joy on the dry and dusty streets. But even if the ball isn't there, he is there. A place in Mosul in the middle of the war, young boys play Haram Football going head-to-head against the ban on playing football imposed by the Islamic State. Imagination and force make the game happen and convince even the viewer, and we are absorbed in the game as much as the boys are. That's where the project for Venice started.



Making of *Haram Football* © All rights reserved

FRANCIS ALÿS

Dates: Preview 20-23 April 2022

Exhibition: 23 April – 27 November 2022

Curator: Hilde Teerlinck

*59th Venice Biennale 2022
Belgian Pavilion*



The Belgian Pavilion

The Belgian Pavilion was the first foreign pavilion built on the Giardini. Architect Léon Sneyers designed the building for its 1907 construction in an art nouveau style with the influence of Josef Hoffmann and Viennese architecture. The pavilion was expanded by A. de Bosschère between 1929 and 1930 with rooms added on both sides of the main exhibition space. De Bosschère also converted the flat roof from a pitch. Later, the pavilion was twice restored: in 1948 by Virgilio Vallot, who also made its façade concave with rosette motifs, and in 1997 by Georges Baines, who converted the space into a white cube gallery.



Belgian Pavilion © All rights reserved

The Venice Biennale

The Venice Biennale is an international art biennial exhibition held in Venice. Often described as “the Olympics of the art world”, participation in the Biennale is a prestigious event for contemporary artists. The festival has become a constellation of shows: a central exhibition curated by that year’s artistic director, national pavilions hosted by individual nations, and independent exhibitions throughout Venice. The Biennale parent organisation also hosts regular festivals in other arts: architecture, dance, film, music, and theatre. Outside of the central, international exhibition, individual nations produce their own shows, known as pavilions, as their national representation. Nations that own their pavilion buildings, such as the 30 housed on the Giardini, are responsible for their own upkeep and construction costs. Nations without dedicated buildings create pavilions in venues throughout the city. In 2022 the 59th edition of the Venice Biennale will be held.



Venice Biennale © Haupt & Binder, Universes in Universe

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Since 1999, during his many travels over the world, Alijs' camera has captured children playing in the street. It started coincidentally with the video Children's Game #1: *Caracoles*, showing a young boy kicking a bottle up a steep street, only to let it roll back to him and then kicking it up again.

Observing, investigating and collecting human behaviour in urban life is a constant in his work. The children's games played an important role in these explorations and gained a more central position in his practice. This is not to say that it is now a nucleus from which works arise. Hence, we decided to devote the pavilion to Alijs' research on children's games. Besides, the exceptional time we are living in, the



post-coronavirus period, seems to ask for a hopeful and positive project.

Playing is something natural, something that we discover and learn in our childhood instinctively. Like eating and sleeping, playing is an essential human need. It's necessary to take time, spend time and lose time in playing. Psychiatrist Stuart Brown compares play to oxygen. Alijs' films are full of oxygen. They record (in an ethnographical way) both the power of cultural tradition and the relaxed, free and autonomous attitudes of children, even in the most conflictive of situations. Children's play is to be understood a creative relationship with the world in which they are living, revealing a socio-political dimension. Besides children make important economic and cultural contributions to society and may be significant generators of social change. Alijs uses his camera as a way to try to understand the culture and the patterns by which people live.

For the Belgian Pavilion, Alijs will present a selection of new films and a series of paintings. Almost all of the films will be new productions. The pivotal work is the recently edited film *Haram Football* (Forbidden Football). Indirectly, it takes on a very actual position since the recent political changes in Afghanistan. In addition to *Haram Football*, other games will be filmed in Hong Kong, Congo, Belgium, Mexico and most probably Venice itself. Most of them are still in production.

As anthropologist David Macdougall wrote, "Taken together, these films reveal some wider truths: that many children's games are specific to girls or boys, that most are competitive but also cooperative, and that children are adept at making do with little, adapting a wide range

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The films will be installed in a way where image and sound dialogue will give the viewer the feeling that they are standing in the middle of a playground, vibrating with life.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication. We decided to go for a facsimile edition of Alijs' notebooks, something overall very visual. It becomes a journey through Alijs' notes and drawings on the children's games. Anthropologist Michael T. Taussig, for whom fieldwork notebooks are an indispensable tool, argues that a notebook develops a life of its own, a life which is often fed by what hasn't been written down.

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Children's Game # 21 : Hand Stack
2019 Irak



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Children's Game #No. 26 : Kisolo'
2021, Democratic Republic of Congo



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Children's Game # 20 : Leapfrog
2018 Irak



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*Children's Game # 19 : Haram Football,
2019 Irak*



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Children's Game # : Ruby
2021 Democratic Republic of Congo



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Children's Game # 23 : Step on a Crack
2020 Hong Kong



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—
2020 Tlayacapan
oil on canvas, 15 x 21 cm



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—
2019 Mexico
oil on canvas, 13 x 18 cm



*Project Francis Alijs for
the Belgium Pavilion in Venice*

—
2017 Mosul
oil on canvas, 13 x 18 cm



*Project Francis Alijs for
the Belgium Pavilion in Venice*

—
2010 Bamiyan, Afghan
oil on canvas, 13 x 18 cm



Francis Alijs

Born in Antwerp, Belgium (1959)
Lives and works in Mexico City

Trained as an architect and urbanist, Francis Alijs moved to Mexico in 1986 to work with local NGOs. In 1990 he entered the field of visual arts. His practice embraces multiple medias, from painting and drawing to video. Although his studio is based in Mexico City, he has done numerous projects in collaboration with local communities around the world, from South America to North Africa and Middle East over the last 20 years. For example, in Peru he produced an event where 500 volunteers moved a sand dune just a few centimeters (*When Faith Moves Mountains*, Lima, 2002).

Since 2016 he has been engaged in a series of new projects in Iraq, such as *Hopscotch*, 2016, produced in collaboration with the Yazidi Refugee Camp of Sharya, Duhok, Iraq, or "Color Matching", 2016 filmed while being embedded with a Peshmerga Battalion during the siege of Mosul. The feature film *Sandlines* was filmed in 2018-9 in collaboration with the children of a small mountain village of the Nineveh province near Mosul.

Francis Alijs has had solo exhibitions in museums worldwide such as the Rockbund Art Museum, RAM- Shanghai, China, 2018; Ikon Gallery-Birmingham 2018; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto 2017; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de la Habana, Havana 2016; Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico 2015; DOCUMENTA (13)- Kassel and Kabul, Afghanistan; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo 2013; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)- New York 2011; Tate Modern- London 2010; Bass Museum of Art-Miami 2009, Dia Art Foundation -New York 2007, Hammer Museum-Los Angeles 2007, The Israel Museum- Jerusalem 2005, Museu d'Art Contemporani-Barcelona 2005, Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sof.a-Madrid 2003, Museo de Arte Moderno-Mexico City 1997, etc... He was awarded the Blue Orange prize in 2004, Vincent Award in 2008, BACA-laureate prize in 2010, EYE Art & Film Prize, EYE Filmmuseum, Amsterdam in 2018.

Hilde Teerlinck

Born in Brugge, Belgium
Lives and works in Barcelona

Hilde Teerlinck began her career as the artistic director of the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion where she invited artists such as Jeff Wall, Panamarenko, Thomas Ruff, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster to create site-specific works for this landmark building.

After a short stay in Perpignan where she ran a local art centre, she went on to become the director of the Centre Rhenian d'Art Contemporain (CRAC) of Alsace in Altkirch in 2002. Later, Teerlinck was the director of the Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain Nord-Pas de Calais (FRAC NPDC) in Dunkirk (2006-2014). She constructed the FRAC's emblematic new building (AP2) with the architects Lacaton & Vassal. Under her direction, the collection was shown worldwide with exhibitions in Europe and Asia.

In 2015, along with Lorenzo Benedetti, Phillip Van Den Bossche, and Patrick Ronse, she co-curated *Beyond Borders*, the fifth Beaufort Triennial. She also worked as a curator at large for the Extra-Muros projects and the *Modules* programme of the Palais de Tokyo, and curated their participation in the Biennale of Lyon.

In 2016, she organised a retrospective exhibition of the work of the Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi for Le Magasin in Grenoble. She was one of the curators of Superflex' twentieth anniversary show, at the Charlottenborg Art Museum.

Teerlinck is also, and has been for several years, a board member of the SMAK Gent, Mondriaan Fonds, Amsterdam, Openluchtmuseum Middelheim, Antwerpen and Koning Boudewijnstichting, Brussels, amongst others. She intensively collaborates with different art schools and studio programmes.

Since, she has been the CEO and artistic director of the Han Nefkens Foundation in Barcelona. The Han Nefkens Foundation supports emerging and mid-career video artists by financing production and providing them with an international platform. An extensive worldwide network of museums, art institutions and biennales enables the Foundation to present the new videos productions to a diverse and global audience.

Partnership

- WIELS, Brussels (B)
- Research Team: KU Leuven (B)
- Young Curators Program: KASK, Gent and BIJ, Brussels (B)
- Vidisquare, Zandhoven (B)
- DCV Publishers, Berlin (B)

- Gallery Jan Mot y, Brussel (B)
- Gallery Peter Kilchman, Zürich (CH)
- Gallery David Zwirner, New York (US)