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**Francis Alÿs: The Nature of the Game  
Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale**



Francis Alÿs, *Children's Game #29, Nzango, Tabacongo, DR Congo* (still),  
2021. 5:41 minutes. In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux and Felix  
Blume.

For the 59th International Venice Biennale, the Belgian Pavilion (Flanders) has invited curator Hilde Teerlinck and artist Francis Alÿs to develop an exhibition project. Alÿs will present *The Nature of the Game*, an exhibition featuring a selection of paintings. Almost all of the films will be new productions.

Since 1999, during his many travels, Alÿs's camera has captured children playing in public spaces. For the Belgian Pavilion, Alÿs will present films made in Afghanistan, Belgium, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Hong Kong, Mexico and Switzerland; each the "chances" of life have taken him. For Alÿs, 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 linked to a Flemish poem by an anonymous writer 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 con 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 Alÿs's work. His power of cultural tradition and the relaxed, free and autonomous attitudes of children, even in the most con

an important role in these explorations and have gained a more central position in his practice: Alÿs uses his camera as a way to try to understand the culture and the patterns by which people live, to structure even in the places and people where it seems most far away. As Alÿs has stated, “I think that we, as adults, should be faithful to the children we were”.

The exhibition will be presented in WIELS (Brussels, Belgium) during the Spring 2023.