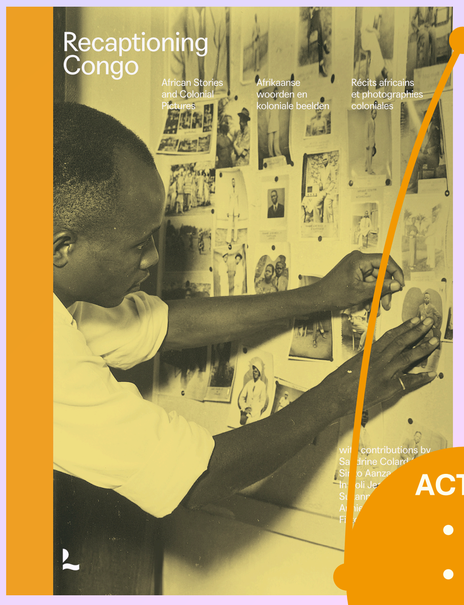


1. RECAPTIONING CONGO

New perspectives on the photographic history of colonial Congo

The exhibition and publication by Dr. Sandrine Colard in 2022 meant a critical reassessment of the descriptions and imagery in the FOMU collection that rooted in colonial contexts. Several interventions were made to address structural power asymmetries in the registred titles and descriptions, alongside extra attention that was paid to create an as safe as possible discourse space for (Belgo-)Congolese visitors and communities.

ACTION POINTS

- Words in captions were crossed out when undignified language was used in metadata.
- Special care was taken before entering the room with sensitive images of Congo Atrocities.
- Guides were trained to be prepared for emotionally charged encounters.
- Perspectives of Congolese and West-African photographers were the main focus.



Unknown photographer,
The two ~~mulatte~~ girls: Mariette and Lucy, s.a.
Collection FOMU Antwerp, 2020/7/13/30 ©

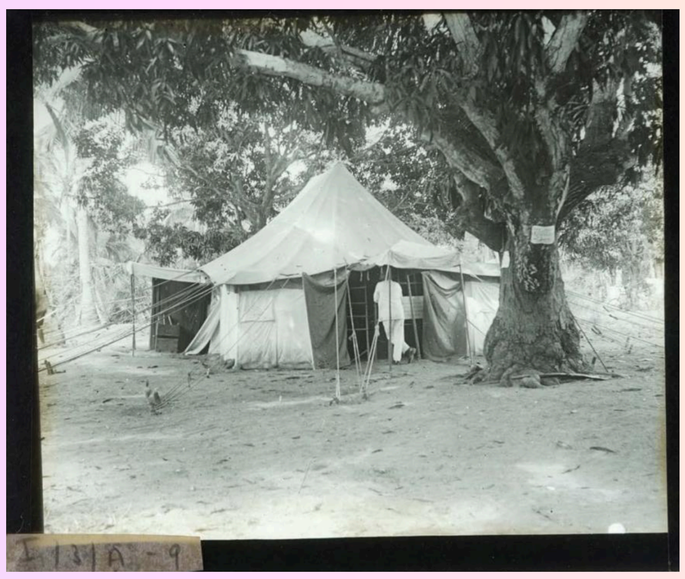
ACTION POINTS

- Reflection groups addressed the inherent colonial gaze and provided feedback on all exhibition texts and the image selection.
- Interventions in the original captions of lending collections.
- Research and include the names of Congolese individuals.
- Trigger warnings were added in introductory texts, thematic texts, …
- Scenography:
  - Missing perspectives are highlighted by integrating empty frames in the scenography along with guiding questions.
  - A reflection space is built after the section on the colonial gaze to encourage dialogue and critical thinking.

2. EARLY GAZE

Belgian Photography in the 19th Century

The exhibition illustrates that from the very start, photography was not a neutral registration of reality but a powerful instrument that helped shape the story of the ruling class. Because of the deep intertwining of the 19th century and coloniality, curatorial decisions are driven by the tension between the need to confront painful or undignified visual narratives and the risk of reinscribing harm through their display.



Unknown photographer, *Campement*,
Collection FOMU Antwerp, 2020/7/2/3 ©
Situated around 1917 in a military campaign of the Public Force in WWI. Probably a field hospital in the region of Dodoma or Kilosa in Tanzania.

Radical care in FOMU

*The exhibition of '**Recaptioning Congo**' in 2022 marks the start of a self-reflective assessment trajectory of FOMU.*
*'**Early Gaze**' will open in October 2025 and the first research phase of '**Insight**' is planned for 2026. Multi-vocality and participation are key focuses of the photomuseum's policy, but it often remains a difficult question on how to implement concrete, lasting actions.*



Unknown photographer
Group portrait of Congolese at the 1885 World's Fair, Antwerp. From left to right: Nzala, Luamba, Zumba, Tchinkela, Mongo, Kasuku, Masala, Siouka, Fernando Tati, Nzimbi, Lubendo, Mabote.
1885. Albumen print, 17.2 x 23.6 cm

3. INSIGHT

Research into participatory collection processes

In 2026, FOMU will conduct a participatory research to interrogate and change FOMU's institutional asymmetries. Through co-creation with communities (mainly Congolese), we venture to create a thesaurus for historic colonial photo collections with words that are used and carried by the community itself, rather than simply replacing what museum workers deem 'outdated' or 'sensitive'. Another focal point of the research will be the visual language within colonial imagery. As a museum of photography, we want to address and pinpoint risk levels of sensitive images, and, more importantly, establish a greater access to dignified portraits and stories that matter to the heritage communities to which a photograph belongs. It comes down to this basic question: ***What does this image mean to you?***

[Dutch title: Beeldinzicht]

ACTION POINTS

- Focus groups with communities and decolonial experts around colonial photographs and their metadata.
- Deliverables:
  - List of terms used by communities to describe their heritage
  - List of visual criteria within imagery
  - Risk assessment of sensitive photographs
  - Assessment of various case studies
- Empowering colonial collections that are unsafe to publish as is because of their sensitive context, their demeaning imagery and language by transcending their sorrowful impact. Other, positive and even joyful stories can exist by adding other voices and views.
- Long-term goal: adjust collection management systems technically to the needs of sensitive collections. This would be the second phase of the *Insight*-project, with technical partners.

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