



High School Program



Educator Resource Guide

White Cube

DIRECTOR: Renzo Martens
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Netherlands/Belgium
RUNNING TIME: 79 min.
LANGUAGE: Lingala, French and English

Website & Trailer

This film offers students an eye-opening, thought-provoking exploration into questions surrounding colonization, global wealth and poverty, exploitation of Black labour, and one way these inequalities could be addressed today—through art. Dutch artist and filmmaker Renzo Martens believes in the art world, however corrupt it might be. Remember: the major European art centres built themselves out of stolen cultural objects and financial gifts from extractive corporations. Martens wonders if it's possible to reverse the flow of profits and endeavours to create an art project model that empowers Congolese artists and workers rather than exploits them. The project isn't without challenges, but as the film unfolds and Congolese artists like sculptor Matthieu Kasiama share their experiences about the project, we see it succeed beyond anyone's expectations.

Primary Curriculum Interest

Social Justice 12, Human Geography 12, Social Studies 9 + 10, 20th Century World History 12, Explorations in Social Studies 11, Studio Arts 3D 11+12

Other Curriculum Interests

Langue et culture de la francophonie 11+ 12, Études du cinéma et de la littérature francophones 11 +12, Media 10, Media Arts 11, 12, Film + Television 12

Read more about these curriculums at

curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum

Content consideration for teachers

At 45:44 and again at 53:51, one artist makes a large sculpture representing the sexual assault by men against Congolese women, past and present

If you have any questions about this film and its content, please contact VIFF at education@viff.org.

About VIFF

VIFF is the leading presenter of international cinema in Western Canada. Operating both the annual Vancouver International Film Festival and the VIFF Centre, VIFF brings hundreds of films from dozens of countries to British Columbia screens every year.



Why are film festivals important?

- Film festivals such as VIFF generally include screenings, talks, and events that serve as a catalyst for a diverse community to discover, discuss and share the creativity and craft of storytelling on screen.
- For filmmakers, showcasing their film at an international festival such as VIFF allows them to build an audience, meet other filmmakers and even win awards to help fund future films.
- It is in VIFF's mandate to encourage understanding of the world's cultures through the art of cinema.



Before Viewing

What comes to mind when students hear the word 'plantation'? Are they a thing of the past?

What goods or resources do we use today that are made overseas in developing countries?

Define these terms: Global North/South, colonialism, post-colonialism, exploitation, globalization, gentrification.

After Viewing

- What are the major themes and ideas this film explores?
- What social and political issues are presented in the film? What sources of information does the filmmaker consult? Who is interviewed for context?
- The past shapes the present: how has colonialism shaped people, places, land, and industries, creating the present-day circumstances we see investigated in this documentary?
- What aspects or scenes of the documentary stood out to you? What scenes stayed with you? What surprised you?
- Addressing global social and economic inequalities is an enormous challenge; some solutions work well, and others don't. This film shows how this project unfolded, including its challenges, flaws and setbacks. Were there parts of the project you felt could have been done differently? Where there areas where it fell short? What parts of the project do you feel were most successful?
- During the film, filmmaker Renzo Martens says he has been "benefiting from poverty and inequality all his life" and he speaks of "museums being indebted to plantation workers". What did he mean, and do you see any similarity to these statements here in Vancouver or in your own life?
- How is Martens self-critical of his role in global exploitation and poverty? How did this self-reflection lead to this White Cube project in Congo?
- Art offers us ways to speak and express creatively, but for the filmmaker and the Congolese artists in this project it is also a vehicle to do much more. What are some examples? (Denouncing corruption and inequality, the violence and exploitation of the plantation system, empowering workers, and also bringing profits to the community in order to build a post-plantation that invigorates the community while also repairing and rehabilitating the local ecosystem)
- This film raises many questions including how African art is acquired and shown in Western museums. Compare the

perspectives of the museum and conservation staff, and Matthieu Kasiama's perspectives on the divination object in the Met's collection. What does touching the object mean for Matthieu and for museum staff?

- How does this film and project offer a shift in both the place and role of African art and artists and the ways they are represented in Western museums and art markets?
- Have you heard of the word gentrification? What does it mean in the West, and what do you think of Renzo Martens' questions "Is there a way for working people to benefit from art rather than be the victim of it? Is there any way for gentrification to be reversed?" How could these questions play out in the White Cube project, or here in Vancouver?

Activity: African Stories Beyond the Screen

With Black Lives Matter having gained attention in recent years, ask students to now critically explore African representation in news, media and film. What ideas or stereotypes about African countries and people have they most often learned about? How have African artworks (and many non-European artworks) often been displayed in Western museums in different ways than Western artworks? How does this film address those images and show a different story? Have students research empowering organizations, news stories, or even films that offer alternative perspectives on African countries and experiences. Research news and media coverage about the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise in Congo and in overseas exhibitions. What do students think of any media interviews and reviews of this film they find?



Director Profile

Renzo Martens studied Political Science at the University of Nijmegen and art at the Royal Academy of Ghent and the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. In 2010, Martens was an artist-in-residence at the ISCP program in New York.

Martens is currently working on a PhD in the School of Arts in Ghent. Martens has given lectures on art, economy, and representation at University College London, London School of Economics, Yale University, Städelschule Frankfurt, HEAD Genève, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid.