

Julien Vermeulen

Luc Peire's *Mwinda Mingi* (1955): a Belgian abstract painting on the Congo

First submission: 25 January 2012

Acceptance: 15 June 2012

As a young artist Luc Peire (1916-1994) was influenced by expressionism, but by 1955, when he painted *Mwinda Mingi*, his work had become predominantly abstract. The Lingala-title suggests this shift may have taken place during his journey in the Congo and critics have often claimed that the painter's perception of African village life had a decisive impact on his new style. This assumption however requires a profound analysis taking into account the broader context of Belgian colonial art, Peire's contacts with modernist artists, the circumstances of his isolated life as a painter-in-residence, the gradual development of his abstract idiom and the ambivalent reception of his new work among expatriates and Belgian critics. The *catalogue raisonné* of his oeuvre mentions 1398 oil paintings, sixty of which have been inspired by Africa.

Luc Peire's *Mwinda Mingi* (1955) in die konteks van Belgiese koloniale kuns

As 'n jong kunstenaar is Luc Peire (1916-1994) beïnvloed deur die ekspressionisme, maar teen 1955, toe hy *Mwinda Mingi* geskilder het, het sy werk al oorwegend abstrak geword. Die Lingala-titel van die werk suggereer dat hierdie verskuiwing kon plaasgevind het tydens sy reis in die Kongo en kritici het dikwels aangevoer dat die skilder se persepsie van die plattelandse lewe in Afrika 'n afdoende impak op sy nuwe styl gehad het. Hierdie aanname verg egter grondige ondersoek wat die breër konteks van Belgiese koloniale kuns, Peire se kontak met modernistiese kunstenaars, die omstandighede van sy geïsoleerde lewe as 'n inwonende skilder, die geleidelike ontwikkeling van sy abstrakte idioom en die dubbelsinnige ontvangs van sy nuwe werk onder uitgewekenes en Belgiese kritici, in ag neem. Die *catalogue raisonné* van sy oeuvre noem 1398 skilderye, waarvan sestig deur Afrika geïnspireer is.

Dr J Vermeulen, KATHO Kortrijk (Assosiatie KU Leuven), Belgium & Research Fellow, Dept of History of Art, University of the Free State, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300; E-mail: Julien.Vermeulen@katho.be



Acta Academica Supplementum

2012 (1): 156-188

ISSN 0587-2405

© UV/UFS

<<http://www.ufs.ac.za/ActaAcademica>>

SUN MODIA
BLOEMFONTEIN

Belgian colonial art can be considered a collection of paintings and drawings, sculptures and monuments, posters and decorations produced between 1880 and 1960 and related to the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.¹ These works of art are diverse in concept and quality: they range from simple notebook sketches made by early travellers to impressive statues of colonial heroes. A great number of Africa-related images formed part of colonial propaganda, commercial publicity and missionary initiatives. In the first half of the twentieth century a range of easily recognisable stereotypes became part of the Belgian colonial rhetoric and have been embedded in the collective memory of the nation ever since. The visual power and strength of these icons functioned as schemata inviting the Belgian audience at large to project the predominant ideas of the era in those emblematic clichés.

Obviously, Belgian colonial art was not made by Africans, nor was it intended for an African public. The artists did not apply African aesthetic standards or methods and, in many instances, the works were not even created in Africa. It can be mentioned that only the theme of those paintings is Africa-oriented: painters endeavoured to give their Western audience an impression of African fauna and flora, of Congolese village scenes and people, of ethnographic objects and endemic themes. These works of art were embedded in a cultural discourse in which the ideals of colonialism and civilisation prevailed. Some artists were colonial civil servants themselves, others were commissioned by enterprises, received government grants or worked for propaganda institutions.²

A first and striking tendency in Belgian colonial art was the grandeur of official sculptures and public monuments that were erected in the early years of the Belgian colonial era. In Belgium, the World Expositions in Antwerp (1885, 1894, 1930), Ghent (1913) and Brussels (1897, 1935, 1958) increasingly promoted the colony in all its aspects. Belgium's imperial ambitions were embodied in impressive colonial pavilions hosting huge wall paintings, baroque statues and

- 1 We express our gratitude to the Stichting/Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke and Belfius Bank, Brussels, owner of the painting *Mwinda mingi*, and to Marc Peire and Suzanne Human for their stimulating comments and detailed proofreading.
- 2 Inforcongo, Centre d'Information et de Documentation, Comité de Propaganda Scolaire Coloniale and a great many others.

live performances of African village life. These works reflected an unfamiliar world to be shown to the Belgian public. The painting *Panorama of the Congo* designed by Paul Matthieu, Alfred Bastien and five assistants caught the attention of visitors to the 1913 exposition in Ghent: the work was 115 metres long and 14 metres high and displayed the benefits of the Belgian presence in Africa. The artists had obtained a government grant to visit the Congo in July 1911; both the concept and the preliminary designs of this work had to be submitted to the Ministry of Colonies for approval. The painting proved to be a huge success and was used again at the 1935 World Exposition in Brussels. In 1958 there were plans to exhibit the work again but as the canvas was damaged, the organisers of the Exposition commissioned the Flemish expressionist Floris Jaspers (1889-1965) to decorate the Congo Hall. The size of Jaspers' *Synthèse du Congo belge* baffled all visitors: the impressive wall painting was 30 metres wide and 11 metres high. Although the 1958 Exhibition in Brussels heralded modern times promoting technology, progress and the aesthetics of functionalism, the sculptor Arthur Dupagne (1895-1961) also opted for the monumental style of heroic statues. A massive work such as the naked *Couple bantou* (1958, 4.50 metres high) (cf Figure 1) showed Africans as symbols of physical strength and primeval power. His emphasis on the powerful posture and the muscular texture of the semi-naked people may have been inspired by Greek models, but the size was clearly dictated by the underlying aspirations of colonialism. The enormous dimensions of those works reflected what the Congo was and had to be for Belgium. The colony was eighty times larger than the mother country, a slogan which inspired and supported the entire colonial project until 1960. This monumental style was also characterised by the impressive exposition halls, facades of official buildings, meeting rooms in enterprises, lobbies in banks, seaside promenades and bourgeois salons.



Figure 1: Arthur Dupagne, *Le couple bantou* [Bantu couple] (1958). Plaster, 4,5 m high. Brussels World's Fair 1958

A second and, at first sight, totally opposite trend was the veneration by some painters of Africans as noble savages living in harmony with nature and enjoying the benefits of the pre-industrial

era. The Belgian *africanistes* who were fascinated by an idealised life in a lost paradise, found inspiration and support in the oeuvre of French philosophers and artists such as J J Rousseau, Gauguin, Puvis de Chavannes and Matisse who wanted to turn their backs on a society ruled by technology and commerce. The admiration of the wild and the primeval was expressed in different ways. Some romantic paintings were nostalgic and sentimental in concept and portrayed nature as an exotic, idyllic setting for a happy pastoral life. Others were inspired by a vitalistic spirit and embodied their appreciation of the primitive, the sensual and the instinctive in semi-naked warriors, dancers and mysterious magicians. Those works, admiring the “natives” for their authentic lifestyle, rapidly disseminated stereotyped images of Africa, corroborated the values of Eurocentrism and consolidated the metaphors coined by cultural evolutionism. Needless to add that this approach often led to a cult of pseudo-traditionalism and *indigénisme* based on preconceived notions and self-fulfilling prophecies.

The painter Auguste Mambour (1896-1968), for example, wanted to portray the African as “a simple being, instinctive, not spoilt by civilization”, as formulated by a critic in 1921 (Guisset 2003: 204). A similar approach characterised the work of his contemporary Pierre de Vaucleroy (1892-1980). In 1918 this artist wrote a letter to a friend explaining that he mainly painted trees and naked women: “I have found an old garden where my model can pose amidst the shrubs. This would be magnificent if our disagreeable climate wouldn’t make this sort of work almost always impossible.”³ This remarkable extract reveals something peculiar about De Vaucleroy’s artistic programme: he had already painted (white) nudes in a pseudo-wilderness before he ever visited Africa.

In July 1926, de Vaucleroy visited the Congo. After spending two months in the region of Léopoldville (Kinshasa), he visited the Kasai region where he spent five months painting village life, market scenes, fishermen, children, women on their way to a waterhole, and so on. The same motivation which made him paint Belgian models in gardens, now led him to portray the Luba people in what he called

3 “J’ai trouvé un vieux jardin sauvage où je puis poser mon modèle en plein air, dans les feuillages. Ce serait merveilleux si notre pénible climat ne s’opposait presque constamment à ce genre de travail” (De Rycke 2003: 219).

“la nature vierge”: a number of his paintings also showed semi-naked women in lush primeval settings (cf Figure 2). From this point of view it could be argued that De Vacleroy's Africa was a pretext to idealise sensuality and to abandon the restraint of Western civilisation.



Figure 2: Pierre de Vacleroy, *Le chemin à la source* [The path to the waterhole] [s a]. Oil on canvas, 115,5 x 81 cm.
Signed bottom right. Private collection

This prejudiced approach seems to echo the work of some Orientalist painters of whom Edward Said (1978: 145) testified: “Women are usually the creatures of a male-power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing”. Other postcolonial critics made similar remarks and demystified the artist’s desire for an earthly Arcadia where naked women symbolised sexual freedom (Solomon-Godeau 1986: 315, Landau 2002: 12). The critic M Phillips (2006) even generalises that “the distinguishing feature of their work [Floris Jaspers, André Hallet, Arthur Dupagne] was an obsessive and overwhelming vision of African bodies”.

In addition to the cult of the colonial grandeur and the fantasies of exoticism, a whole range of clichés and stereotypes were used to evoke the African population and their way of life. Colonial values were also expressed in a number of artistic genres. From 1900, an array of posters and leaflets, postcards and flyers, lottery tickets and calendars were distributed in all niches of society and became collectors’ items for children and adults alike. The far-reaching impact of this graphic art cannot be overestimated: it popularised the colonial and evangelical discourse and brought these ideals beyond the walls of exhibition halls, churches and schools. In addition to the themes, the specific style of those graphics translated a set of concepts and beliefs. An early calendar entitled *Het beschavend Belgenland* [Belgium, a civilising nation] (Anonymous, Leuven, 1909) was one of those popular prints (Jacquemin 2002: 32) (cf Figure 3). The classicist and symmetrical composition of the image suggests a solid and self-confident vision on Belgium’s civilising mission. The upper half of the picture is dominated by a crucified Christ. On both sides of the cross two men personify the strength of the Belgian presence: the benevolent missionary on the left and the stalwart officer on the right join hands. The lower section illustrates that their joint efforts have liberated the Africans from the chains of slavery: three semi-naked blacks kneel down and bow simultaneously to Christ and to the institutionalised forms of civilisation symbolised by the priest and the soldier. The strength of the central scene (supported on both sides by pillars on a solid foundation) conveys the key message of the poster. The emblematic representation is explicitly decoded by the title *Het beschavend Belgenland*, inserted at the bottom, where it functions as a radiating halo around the profile of King Leopold II.

A clear example of how a representation allegorically mediated the patronising values and opinions.



Figure 3: Anon, *Sint-Albertus Patroenschap en Kring van Jonge Werklieden, Leuven*, 1909, [Kalender]. Lithography, 75 x 45 cm. *Het beschavend Belgenland* (Brussel: Goemaere, 1909)

In conclusion, some colonial artists attempted to capture stereotypical scenes they already had in mind before setting foot on African soil. In so doing they attempted to live up to the expectations of the Belgian audience by evoking narratives of mystery, exoticism, sensuality and primitivism. They often asked African models to pose (which in itself has been interpreted as an act of subjection) and to act out traditional, indigenous scenes. This form of staged authenticity was a repressive process of appropriation which led to a number of persistent motifs and recurrent themes. The production of these visual images underpinned the colonial structures of power: the artist often projected his/her world view on Africans who were remodelled in accordance with colonial concepts and genre expectations.

1. Luc Peire: painter in residence (29 May 1952-28 March 1953)

In the 1950s, the majority of Belgian artists who visited the Congo were “embedded reporters”: they usually obtained a grant from a Belgian ministry, were shown the highlights of the colonial regime, and invited to witness the impact of missionary efforts. In 1951, Albert Dasnoy (1901-1992) invited Luc Peire to apply for a grant which would allow him to organise a trip to Africa. Dasnoy was a painter and a critic who had visited the Congo on many occasions. From 1950 to 1972 he was the artistic advisor to the Belgian Administration of Fine Arts and president of the advisory committee of the National Ministry of Education and Culture.

1.1 Itinerary

Luc and Jenny Peire’s study tour took place between 29 May 1952 and 28 March 1953. Jenny Peire kept a diary in which she described various studios; some colonial newspapers interviewed the painter and reported on his exhibitions. Luc Peire was also invited to make some presentations for the Belgian members of cultural circles and those texts were later published in the Flemish colonial magazine *Band*. The titles of his paintings often offer clues to provinces and regions (Kasai, Katanga, Mayombe), towns (Matadi, Lubumbashi), villages (Lemba, Lukanda, Lukula, Luebo, Songololo), persons (Lukengo, king of the Bakuba) and tribes (Bakuba, Baluba, Deng[h]ese, Mangbetu). In

addition to those sources, the archives of the Luc Peire Foundation in Knokke contain no correspondence or photos with respect to this journey. Only two short amateur films have been preserved, mainly dealing with scenery, local dances and the scarification motifs of the Bakuba.

On their way to Africa the Peires first spent six weeks in the Canary Islands and on their return voyage they stayed over eight months on Tenerife where they met the art historian Eduardo Westerdahl (1902-1983) and the Italian architect Alberto Sartoris (1901-1991). On more than one occasion, Peire referred to his lengthy contacts with these modernist artists and claimed that those conversations had led to a real turning point in his aesthetic views (De Jong 1995: 134). In a letter to Jaak Fontier, dated 24 February 1984, he even stated that he was born an artist in 1952.

Luc and Jenny Peire left Tenerife on 18 May 1952 on the ss *Elisabethville* via Lobito (Angola) and arrived in Matadi on 29 May 1952. In June they stayed in a colonist's house in Lemba which had been abandoned by the owners and which was populated by "big ants, lovely salamanders, cockroaches and bats touring around in the living room at night,"⁴ as Jenny Peire wrote in her diary. Luc Peire immediately started working and even framed his paintings himself in preparation for local exhibitions. Jenny Peire's descriptions of the studios are not without importance since her husband turned "the studio" into the central theme of a dozen paintings: *Catalogue Raisonné* [hereafter CR] 426, 454, 455, 525, 542, 548, 552, 559, 560, 566, 574, 580. Easily recognisable motifs such as an easel, a canvas, a studio wall, an open door or a model are essential components of his works produced between 1951 and 1953.

His first confrontation with African people was later interpreted as crucial for his artistic evolution. Yet, we have to admit that Peire was not really enthusiastic about his visit to Africa. In an interview in the 1990s he explained how in Lemba:

I have seen all those blacks, I saw mankind as I couldn't distinguish the one from the other. [...] Then I have understood the importance not so much of the individual but of the human being. Mankind. I

4 "grote mieren, lieve salamanders, kakkerlakken en vlermuizen, die 's avonds in de grote brede kamer rondtoeren" (Peire-Verbruggen 2001: 53).

have also seen there that they had exactly the same spiritual worries as we have. [...] This living being asks himself questions not only about his existence, but also about the space he lives in.⁵

He clearly mentions that the presence of “all these blacks” actually impressed him: he could not pay attention to individual people as he perceived them as a depersonalised group. From a positive, metaphysical point of view he recognised that Africans have similar universal concerns and worries to those experienced by all people. Both impressions led to the insight that – for him as a painter – mankind in general, the “human being”, was more important than any particular individual. This was a starting point for him to reduce people to geometrical shapes in which individual traits and the human anatomy were systematically ignored. He gradually started simplifying his portraits to abstract phenomena such as lines, bars, circles and planes.

From early July until 22 August 1952 the Peires remained in Léopoldville (Kinshasa) where he could work in some of the classrooms and the kitchen of the *Athénée*, a secondary school. Meanwhile, from 5 to 11 July, he had an exposition in the Albert Hall in Kalina (Gombe) where he met the Belgian banker Maurits Naessens who was to have a drastic impact on his future career (Pauwels 2010: 5). The next five weeks were spent in the Kasai region, first in Lukanda where the artist could work in a large shed of a Belgian colonist, allowing him to produce large-size canvasses. In Dekese they spent a month in a *maison de passage* [traveller’s guesthouse] where the painter worked under difficult circumstances: “a spacious room with the barest necessities and the simplest things possible, but without any atmosphere”.⁶ In Mushenge he visited the Bakuba king Lukengo whom he painted twice. In the Flemish Congolese paper *De Week* he highly praised Bakuba sculptures characterised by their geometrical motifs, but he

5 “j’ai vu tous ces noirs, je voyais l’homme car je ne distinguais pas l’un de l’autre. [...] J’ai alors compris l’importance pour moi non pas de l’individu mais de l’être humain. L’homme. J’ai vu aussi là-bas qu’ils avaient exactement les mêmes préoccupations spirituelles que nous. [...] Cet être vivant se pose la question concernant non seulement son existence, mais aussi concernant l’espace dans lequel il vit” (Peire-Verbruggen 2001: 53).

6 “een ruime kamer met het meest noodzakelijke en allereenvoudigste, maar zonder de minste atmosfeer” (Peire-Verbruggen 2001: 53).

also regretted the European interference trying to make cheap copies of African art. He even expressed his fear that in a foreseeable future the Congolese might suggest that “they had their own art but that our presence here has killed it.”⁷

An exposition of his first series of Congo paintings was organised in the Salons du Cercle in Luluabourg (Kananga) from 8 to 12 October 1952 where he was invited to make a presentation. The Peires travelled to South Africa (25 August-25 November 1952), whereupon they visited the Katanga province where he worked in a studio described by his wife as follows: “as bare and impersonal as possible. In a *small yard* [...] a room [...] a stone floor [...] whitewashed walls.”⁸ In Elisabethville (Lubumbashi) the Chamber of Commerce organised an exhibition from 29 November to 7 December 1952. In Jadotville (Likasi) he exhibited his works from 23 until 28 December 1952; in Kamina an exposition was held in January 1953. The Peires then travelled back to Léopoldville where a retrospective of his Congo paintings was displayed (7-15 March 1953). He was invited to give a talk in which he formulated his views on his own work and on art in general: he strongly rejected the conventional opinion that art should be characterised by “resemblance [...] naturalistic reproduction [...] faithful imitation of reality.”⁹ Looking back on his trip, the painter told a reporter that the Congo had not disappointed him but that, in his opinion, he would not really fall in love with it. The journalist drew the tentative conclusion that the Congo apparently had not been a warm source of inspiration for the artist (L[amote] 1953). The Peires left Africa on 28 March 1953, bringing home some African masks, sculptures and a collection of paintings. Most works were painted on paper and ten works were oil on canvas (usually in sizes of approximately 50 x 60, 80 x 60, 80 x 100 cm).

7 “ze een kunst hadden en dat onze aanwezigheid hier ze gedood heeft” (L[amote] 1953).

8 “zo kaal en onpersoonlijk als het maar zijn kan. In een *buitenkoer* [...] een lokaal [...] stenen vloer [...] halfwitte muren” (Peire-Verbruggen 2001: 54).

9 “gelijkenis [...] naturalistische weergave [...] getrouwe nabootsing van de werkelijkheid” (Peire 1953: 59-60).

1.2 Inward journey

Within a period of ten months, in which he continually had to adapt to new circumstances and cope with basic accommodation, he made an impressive amount of drawings and sketches and finalised over twenty paintings. But the most important works still had to be painted. *Mwinda Mingi*, for instance, was only produced in 1955, two years after his return from the Congo. This proves that this dynamic period had a major influence on his development as an artist. This painting shows his gradual evolution from an expressionist style to a pronounced abstract profile. A number of critics have indicated the African inspiration as the main cause for this change. Back home, Luc Peire attempted to figure out why this change had taken place during and after his trip to the Congo. His explanation was quite ambivalent in terms of his relationship to Africa. In her diary, his wife had already characterised their period in the Kasai region as a time when they lived in isolation. Peire himself referred to this form of isolation as one of the reasons for his artistic change. In his view, no particular African experiences as such, but rather his psychological evolution, his “inward journey”, had had a profound influence on his aesthetic views and approaches. The fact that he had been cut off from European influences for nearly a year seemed important to him. In an interview he explained that “the Congo-figures [...] were only a shape which I adopted in my work because I saw it in front of me. I believe that I have never included a typically Congolese figure in my paintings, but only the rhythm, or the general shape of these figures.”¹⁰

Peire’s attitude regarding the rhetorical trope of “insubstantialization” (Spurr 1993) may be characterised as follows: the way colonised countries are described only as a backdrop for a European voyage of inward discovery, even with the explicit negation of a direct intercultural impact. Peire explicitly stated that his trip to the Congo and Tenerife was

10 “de Kongo-figuren [...] waren maar een vorm die ik in mijn werk heb opgenomen omdat ik hem voor mij had. Ik geloof daarbij niet dat ik ooit een typisch Kongolese figuur in mijn schilderijen gebracht heb, maar wel het ritme, of de algemene vorm van deze figuren” (Bekkers 1966: 1068).

the longest period that I had been separated from all areas of influence (that had formerly been of interest to me) and I was out of touch with other artistic centres. So for two years I was completely isolated from all artistic influences. What I tried to do was to put a world on canvas which was a hundred per cent myself and with which I could identify a hundred per cent. If I used the shapes by which I was surrounded, this was no longer for the individual shape itself, but as a shape within the whole of my painting – an abstract shape (Fontier 1973: 32 & 2005b: 92).

The art critic Roger Avermaete apparently agreed with the painter and made a similar remark: “If we hadn’t known that Peire had made a trip, it would have been unlikely we would have thought of the Congo.”¹¹ Other painters, critics and reporters expressed similar views. In *L’Essor du Congo* (10 March 1953) a journalist remarked that “neither the Congolese scenery, nor the tropical colours have influenced Luc Peire”, although he adds that the painter has been influenced by the African “rhythm”.¹² The journal *Band* went a step further, claiming that Africa had not even influenced the “rhythm” and the “character” of his works and that his paintings might as well have originated “on the North Pole” (Roos 1953: 63).

The atypical themes, but especially the new forms and the bizarre colours did not meet the expectations of the colonial public. Although the local press was always eager to welcome Belgian visitors, various reporters could not come to terms with Peire’s newly created work. *L’Avenir Colonial Belge* (6 March 1953) promised its readers an enriching visit to the exhibition, but warned them that “certain people will certainly not like Peire’s work.”¹³ In *L’Echo du Katanga* (31 August 1952) Jacques Leclere mentioned that Peire’s exposition in Luluabourg had the effect of a bomb but, apparently, this judgment should not be read as a compliment: “The paintings we have seen are strange and we estimate that only few compatriots will bring up the necessary efforts to understand them.”¹⁴ In February 1953, the journalist Pembene (undoubtedly a Bantu pseudonym for a Belgian collaborator from

11 “Moest men nu niet weten dat Peire op reis geweest is, zou men zelfs aan Kongo denken? Het valt te betwijfelen” (Avermaete 1953: 10).

12 “ni le paysage congolais, ni les couleurs tropicales n’ont influencé Luc Peire.”

13 “certains n’aimeront sûrement pas l’art de Luc Peire.”

14 “Les toiles que nous avons vues sont étranges sans doute et nous gageons que peu nombreux seront ceux de nos concitoyens qui feront l’effort nécessaire pour les comprendre.”

Jadotville) was impressed with the shocking originality of the works. In an understatement, however, he added: “When, frankly speaking, I admitted that I didn’t understand his latest compositions, his smiling wife told me: ‘You should not understand, you should just like it’”¹⁵. After Peire’s departure for Belgium, the board of the cultural journal *Band* still called him “a contested person” (Peire 1953a: 57). In the 1950s, the average Belgian expatriate apparently found it difficult to appreciate art that no longer inferred its meaning from the likeness to objects and the resemblance with persons. This representationalist approach, however, did not only assess the paintings in terms of their mimetic adequacy; the way they reflected the traditional modes of cultural perception and the dominant colonial ideology was also an essential factor in their evaluation.

2. *Mwinda mingi* (1955)

2.1 *Mwinda mingi*: much light

Mwinda mingi (cf Figure 4) was created in the painter’s studio in Knokke in 1955, two years after his visit to Africa. Strictly speaking, we must admit that this painting does not show any explicit references to Africa: not in terms of scene, theme or composition. Only the title suggests an African connection. In giving his work a Lingala title, Luc Peire clearly made a link with his Congolese experiences. In using this African expression he avoided the pejorative tone of colonial parlance often preferred by many of his predecessors and added an authentic touch to his work. However, he was not the only artist to use Congolese toponyms or other Bantu elements in the titles of his works. In the mid-fifties a number of French and Dutch publications and films were released under a Bantu title.

15 “Lorsque en toute franchise, j’avouais à l’artiste ne pas comprendre ses dernières compositions sa souriante épouse me disait: ‘Il ne faut pas comprendre, il faut aimer.’”

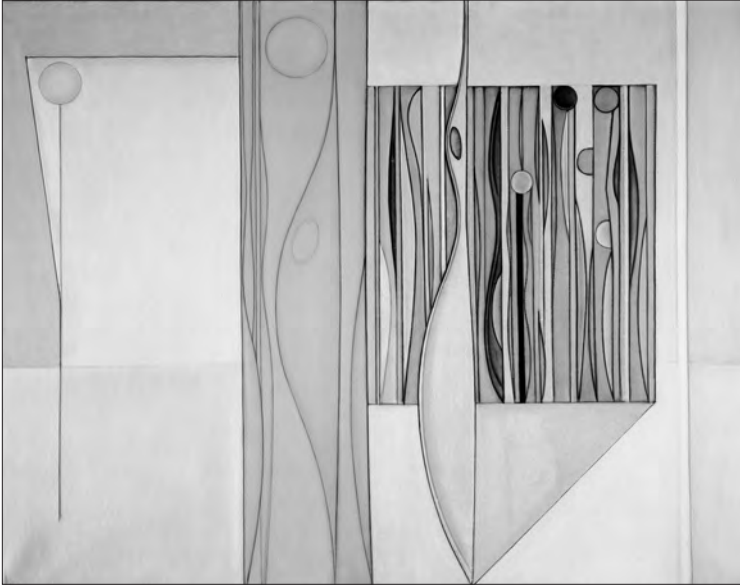


Figure 4: Luc Peire, *Mwinda mingi* [Much light] (1955). Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm. Signed and dated bottom left. Collection and photograph Dexia Bank, Brussels. *Catalogue raisonné* 626

Mwinda mingi, meaning “much light”, also emphasises an important aspect of the artist’s evolution in the sense that he no longer refers to persons, scenes or actions being represented. He distances himself from an anecdotal approach and explicitly stresses the dimensions of space and light that will fascinate him in the years to come. It is difficult to tell to what extent his insistence on light and the shades of yellow might be linked to the African background. The majority of his other Africa-related works were predominantly blue and in interviews he often explained his penchant for cold colours as a metaphysical preference: “the blues, the yellows are a lot more appropriate in the pursuit of space which I’m after.”¹⁶ In 1952 he painted *Matadi/Les porteuses* (CR 487, 1952, Matadi/Carrying women) in which he reduced three women to colourful silhouettes and *Femmes indigènes*

16 “les bleus, les jaunes sont beaucoup plus appropriés à la recherche d’espace que je poursuis” (Wuidar 1992: page nos?).

(CR 493, 1952, Native women) displaying a similar group in which both the women and the background are dark blue. Blue remains the dominant colour throughout most of his Congolese paintings, for instance in his *Denghese family* (CR 551, 1953) (cf Figure 5). On his return to Belgium his pronounced preference for light blue figures organised in a dark blue context remained a constant element. More than one hundred paintings made between 1952 and 1954 (CR 490 to CR 610 of the *catalogue raisonné*) constitute what is generally referred to as Peire's blue phase. The yellow tones which characterise *Mwind mingi* were first used in *La fine ligne* (CR 615, 1955, The fine line), *Jaune dans l'espace* (CR 621, 1955, Yellow in space) (cf Figure 6) and *Lumière dans l'espace* (CR 622, 1955, Light in space) (cf Figure 7), three works anticipating the colour tones of *Mwind mingi*.

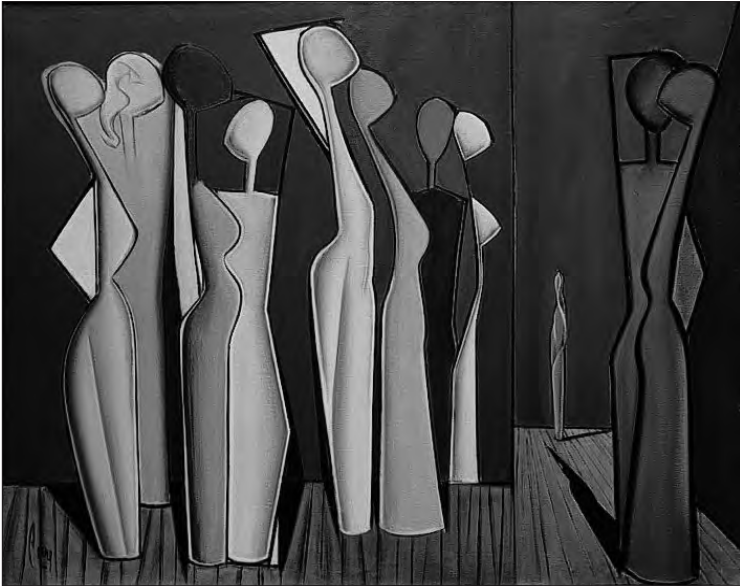


Figure 5: Luc Peire, *Familie Denghese* [Denghese family] (1953). Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. Signed bottom left. Collection and photograph Studio Luc Peire - Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke. *Catalogue raisonné* 551

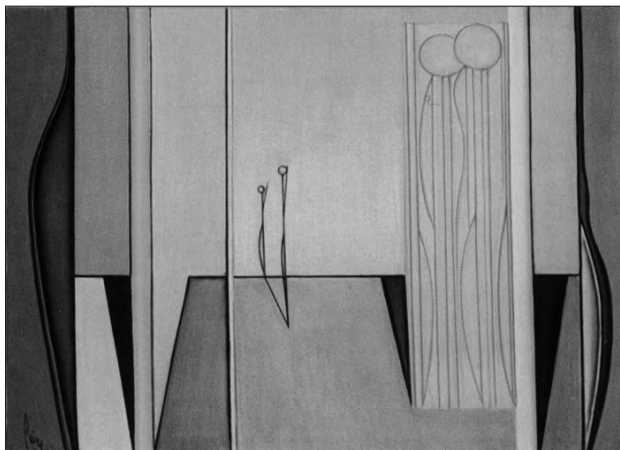


Figure 6: Luc Peire, *Jaune dans l'espace* [Yellow in space] (1955). Oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm. Signed and dated bottom left. Collection and photograph Studio Luc Peire - Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke. *Catalogue raisonné* 621

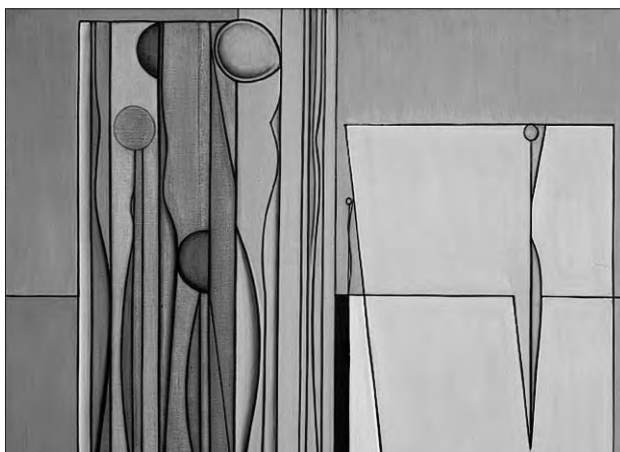


Figure 7: Luc Peire, *Lumière dans l'espace* [Light in space] (1955). Oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm. Signed and dated bottom left. Collection and photograph Studio Luc Peire - Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke. *Catalogue raisonné* 622

2.2 *Mwinda mingi*: a turning point

Viewers may be tempted to decode this composition in terms of its vague referential dimensions. If we position the painting in relation to Peire's previous works, we are able to describe how the painter gradually moved away from a figurative method. The critic Jaak Fontier attempted to discuss in detail Peire's gradual evolution from his initial approach to the pronounced abstract character of his later work explicitly inscribing the paintings in an African context. "The proud, statuesque figures of Congolese women became Peire's primary theme and the formal point of departure for a consistent stylistic and compositional development that was to culminate in an entirely non-objective conception of art" (Fontier 2005a: 16). Ultimately, Peire reduced human shapes to vertical lines, turned natural colours into imagined ones and reshaped the observed reality into an individual idiom. This process of translating African scenes into a rigid and abstract pattern without embellishments happened in only three years, a short period leading up to the creation of *Mwinda mingi* in 1955.

In terms of composition, lines, shapes and forms the link between the works produced in the Congo and those produced shortly after his trip is even more outspoken. The painting *Het model* (CR 542, 1953, *The model*) (*cf* Figure 8) shows a white, half-naked woman in front of a painter's easel. This central figure, placed in the middle of a studio, is portrayed without arms and is reduced to a kind of dummy or a puppet, a stylised model without any individual human traits. The African woman in the back, carrying a basket on her head, adds a touch of movement to the composition and links the work to the African environment. In bringing together disparate components he decontextualises the original Congolese setting. In later works the processes of condensation and displacement inscribe a stronger theme of ambiguity and alienation in his oeuvre.

La figura blanca (CR 552, painted in Tenerife in 1953) is a reiteration of the same theme: the easel has been reduced to some black lines, the white "model" now is a puppet-like and armless shape standing out from six similar dark blue silhouettes. The painter is indeed shifting completely from an objective style to an abstract code, from recognisable landscapes to suggested spaces. Another

step in the direction of *Mwinda mingi* is *La porte ouverte* (CR 593, 1954, The open door) (cf Figure 9) in which Peire still uses the “visual idiom derived from the female figure following his Congo trip and his artistically fruitful stay in Tenerife” (Fontier 2005b: 53). Seven standing silhouettes remind us of female figures (or their shadows): heads have been reduced to circles; a slight widening of the hips and breasts suggests female characteristics; two persons have been replaced by vertical wires, and the painter’s studio has been restyled to vertical lines and planes, three white lines suggesting an easel. The contours of the studio may be vague, but the boundaries of the various components are clearly defined.



Figure 8: Luc Peire, *Het model* [The Model] (1953). Oil on paper on board, 54,5 x 36 cm. Collection and photograph Studio Luc Peire - Foundation Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke. *Catalogue raisonné* 542

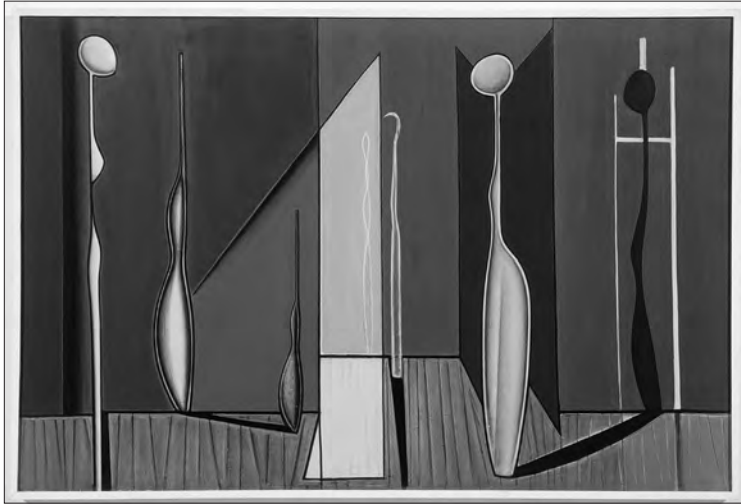


Figure 9: Luc Peire, *La porte ouverte* [The open door] (1954). Oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. Collection and photograph Studio Luc Peire - Foundation Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke. *Catalogue raisonné* 593

2.3 *Mwinda mingi*: a structure

The development of structuralism as a scientific paradigm in the early decades of the twentieth century may indirectly have influenced the advent of abstract art, although it is difficult to define the exact nature of this intricate process (Vermeulen 2006a: 177-92). From a structuralist point of view, however, Peire's *Mwinda mingi* can clearly be analysed in terms of a series of significant binary oppositions.

The first and most important dichotomy is the tension between the painting as a whole and the embedded rectangular shape at the top right. This small rectangle stands out of the background as it is a complex configuration of dark and pale grey curvaceous lines, interrupted by a number of circles spread over the upper half of this inclusion. This small composition sharply contrasts with the open, yellow and spacious atmosphere surrounding it. As indicated earlier, in the early 1950s Peire created a number of variations on the theme of a painter's studio. This incorporated rectangle can be decoded as a

painting on the wall of a studio. This “painting within the painting” shows a striking similarity with some smaller works, for example *Lubumbashi* (CR 617, yellow-grey composition of curvaceous lines) whose title clearly refers to the Congo, although it was also created in 1955. Another oil on canvas, *Songololo* (CR 625, 1955), shows the same patterns and the title echoes an African source of inspiration. One year later, in 1956, the same texture of closely linked silhouettes occurred again in *La grande foule* (CR 651, The huge crowd), a painting which was anticipated by the more realistic *La foule* (CR 600, 1954, The crowd). The abstract counterpart of 1956 was later realised as a huge wall carpet, now kept at the Foundation Jenny & Luc Peire in Knokke. At that stage, however, the vertical lines already dominated, a tendency illustrating that Peire's trip to Africa cannot be underestimated. Both the title and the concept of *La grande foule* may remind us of the painter's first impression when exposed to large groups of African people (Devolder 1992: 3).

From an aesthetic point of view, however, the interrelations between the incorporated artefact and the surrounding space need to be scrutinised. Structuralism has always stressed the importance of the tensions between subcomponents and overall structures. The interaction between part and whole, between inner structure and outer structure invites us to read this technique as an example of pictorial reflexivity, also coined in postmodernist terms as the painting's self-awareness or self-reflexivity (Bal 1990: 127ff). The concept of meta-painting has been introduced to analyse the role of paintings within paintings, the traditional *mise en abyme* which was a frequent topos in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings displaying collections of art, maps and statuettes often under the pretext of evoking studio scenes (Stoichita 1993). Peire's interest in this technique may have been motivated by his drive to explore the fictional space of his paintings: fascinated by light, space and structure, he wanted to discover the impact of various transformations and permutations. In view of this he did not only insert the canvas as an iconographic motif, but rather as a geometrical form similar to the easels, chairs and ladders he often included.

This notion brings us to two other structuring oppositions: the dynamic relations between the back and the front, as well as the juxtaposition of convex and concave lines. A striking detail of *Mwinda*

mingi is the yellow triangle in the bottom right. This shape connects the right bottom corner of the inserted painting with the bottom of an elegant silhouette which vertically runs across the entire configuration. In doing so, the painter reorganises the entire composition: the stand-alone silhouette reminds us of a stylised model and is echoed in the multitude of lines and shapes that characterise the embedded picture. Other concave and convex profiles bridge the gap between the overall painting and the included segment: on the left of the elegant figure a vertical dark yellow panel divides the canvas in two halves. This plane also contains a similar rounded profile which, in conjunction with a circle in the top left, suggests a vaguely represented human shape.

The extreme left of the picture shows a particular form of abstraction: the human body is reduced to an archetypal vertical line with a small circle on top of it. Situated in the context of the painter's evolution, *Mwinda mingi* can still be interpreted in terms of some underlying anthropomorphic shapes. The subtle forms, slightly rounded shapes and long curves remind us of the semi-figurative puppets, vases, stems and even of the recognisable human-like figures of his earlier Congo paintings. Some critics identified this cluster of motifs as "figure-derived elements" (Fontier 2005b: 54).

In later works, however, there are no figurative forms; all objective elements and human references have been exchanged for a series of lines, strips, planes, bars and patterns. The overall texture becomes more important than the ornamental embellishments, and the binary oppositions constitute a pattern in which open spaces have a specific rhythmic value. At that stage the process of abstraction leads to an oeuvre in which the vertical dimension gradually outweighs the horizontal element. Straight lines also systematically replace rounded or curvaceous profiles. From that moment on fine lines, narrow strips, geometrical bands and broader planes determine the vertical rhythm of his work. Peire identified this phase of his evolution as the essential part of his oeuvre since it formulated the core message of his work: "Man lives upright. To me verticality is life" (Fontier 2005b: 74).

Structuralism has revealed the semantic value of open spaces, blanks, silences and zero signs within a closed system. Linguists and anthropologists alike focused on the importance of unrepresented components in syntactic structures and social matrixes: in a closed

system the absence of a particular element can have an essential value. Abstract artists, too, were fascinated by the impact of empty spaces, perforated surfaces and open niches on the overall structure of their work. A number of sculptors experimented with binary oppositions such as solid/hollow, closed/open, inner/outer shape. Brancusi, and later Hepworth and Moore surprised their viewers with concave shapes, pierced forms, perforated volumes and suggestive cavities (Vanfleteren & Vermeulen 2000: 327ff). Luc Peire's affinity with the work of sculptors and architects later resulted in joint projects. In *Mwinda mingi* he already experimented with the effects of open circles, eye-like ellipses, empty spots, repetitive blanks and a variety of arch shapes. From this point of view, Peire's close friendship with the Catalan sculptor Josep Maria Subirachs should be mentioned. From 1954 to 1956 Subirachs stayed with the Peires in Belgium where he created the semi-abstract sculpture *La doña de Putifar* (1954, 80 x 235 x 60, reinforced concrete). In this stylised work, open cavities and empty spaces contribute to the transparent character of the overall structure (Peire-Verbruggen 2001: 43-4). In 1954, the sculpture was exhibited in Bruges (together with work by Peire, Victor Servranckx, Jan Burssens and Pol Mara) and in 1955 in the Middelheim Park in Antwerp. The sculpture was subsequently installed in Peire's garden in front of his studio where it still is. The close friendship between Peire and Subirachs (who would later become (in)famous for his contribution to *La Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona) also led to some aesthetic parallels characterising both oeuvres. Peire's *Mwinda mingi* has not only been conceived and created at the same time but its structure is also generated by a number of similar oppositions: open/closed, convex/concave, horizontal/vertical. At that point, it has become difficult to label Peire's painting as "Belgian" or "colonial". In most respects, the work has become part of the international movement of modern, non-figurative art.

Mwinda mingi is an important turning point in Peire's artistic career: the figurative and representative significance has diminished and the autonomous value of forms, lines and colours has increased. On the one hand, the work can still be read in the context of the painter's evolution: from this point of view a number of shapes can be interpreted as transformations of naturalistic motifs (canvas, easel, door, model). This interpretation identifies a number of traces that

lead to recognisable naturalistic entities. The painting as a whole can be considered a semi-abstract version of a painter's studio in which elements of his earlier works are taken up and modified in the direction of further abstraction.

2.4 An ambiguous reception

Belgian abstract art had a small beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is due to international contacts, expositions, magazines and art fairs that the new style was gradually introduced and disseminated in some art circles. Only a small section of the Belgian population, however, really came to terms with the groundbreaking changes that were heralded by non-figurative painting. Even half a century later, when Luc Peire turned to abstraction in the mid-fifties, the tide had not really turned.

When Peire had completed *Mwinda mingi*, it was first exhibited in Brussels in January 1956. In a letter, dated 10 February 1956, to Paul Fierens, who was in charge of the Royal Museum of Belgium, the painter referred to the Belgian Cobra painter Christian Dotremont of whom he said that he “liked very much the canvasses I exhibited and found my big yellow canvas very interesting.”¹⁷ In this letter Peire also mentioned that the original price for the painting at the exposition was 50,000 Belgian francs, but that he was prepared to sell it to the museum for 30,000 Belgian francs. Three months later, however, Peire received Fierens' reply explaining that the commission had not agreed on buying the painting.¹⁸ An explicit reason for turning down the work was not given, but an earlier letter by Maurits Naessens to Luc Peire (dated 28 February 1956) reveals that some influential contemporaries found Peire's abstract work “horrible” because of those “new, vicious, modernist procedures.”¹⁹

Others appreciated his evolution to abstract art and supported the artist in every respect. The colonial painter Claude Lyr congratulated Peire on this work, stating: “The painting has the flowering and

17 “aimait beaucoup les toiles que j'exposais et trouvait la grande toile jaune (Mwindi [sic] Mingi) fort intéressante.”

18 “J'ai le regret de vous faire connaître que la Commission a émis un avis défavorable à l'acquisition de ces peintures” (8 May 1956).

19 “nieuwe, verderfelijke, modernistische procedures”.

haunting character of Africa and perfectly defines your personality”²⁰ (Thornton 2003: 279). The Italian architect Alberto Sartoris expressed his admiration for “your magnificent canvas”²¹ Maurits Naessens, a Flemish banker and art collector, contributed to the painter’s success. From 1954 onwards, he invited Peire to exhibit his works in the Brussels headquarters of the Bank van Parijs en de Nederlanden, bought a number of paintings for the bank’s collection, organised exhibitions, and introduced him to clients and collectors in Belgium and abroad. In 1955, Naessens used three reproductions of Peire’s Congo-related paintings for the bank’s official New Year’s card. In 1958, Peire was artistic advisor of the section Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi at the World Exposition in Brussels where *Mwinda mingi* was also exhibited. After the exhibition Naessens asked Peire if he could have the painting in his office for three weeks “on probation”. Although he was immediately convinced of its quality, he postponed buying it because the painter wanted to change their original agreements. This unexpected reaction affected the friendship between the two men, but by the end of the summer of 1959 Naessens finally bought the work on behalf of the bank (Pauwels 2010: 5-9). In later correspondence the banker also expressed his appreciation for the painting *Mwinda mingi* and his later abstract works.²² In the 1960s, *Mwinda mingi* became one of Peire’s often-mentioned paintings and, as a result of its success, the painter achieved further recognition as one of Belgium’s leading abstract artists.

3. Conclusion

Most Belgian colonial painters approached Africa through a number of Western *Abstraktionen* and translated them in such a way that they could be appreciated by the European target culture. The underlying frames of reference could be ideological, religious, socio-economic and artistic: those sets of ideas and standards determined the way in which the various source cultures were reshaped, and this transformation also contributed to the construction of an imaginary Africa. The perceived

20 “Elle a l’éblouissement et le caractère lancinant de l’Afrique et définit au mieux votre personnalité.”

21 “votre magnifique toile”; letter dated 26 May 1958.

22 Letters dated 17 November 1960 and 3 January 1962.

reality often resulted in a number of biased images and stereotyped signs which functioned as vehicles transmitting the dominant values and prejudices of the colonial era. This process of appropriation could be either implicit when the embedded artist remodelled the observed reality unconsciously, or explicit when painters deliberately expressed colonial and missionary ideals. The majority of colonial paintings displayed a range of visual manipulations which translated the African source cultures to suit the “reigning orthodoxy” (Lefevere 1992: 15) of the intended audience.

The Belgian painter Luc Peire moved away from the conventional clichés which had been popularised by his predecessors. In the visual history of Belgian colonial art, his approach can be called innovative as he gradually introduced the strategies of abstract constructivism. But Peire’s “abstract turn” has not been triggered by one single cause as has often been claimed. Various elements – which may seem contradictory at first sight – shed light on this complex shift. His journey first took him to Tenerife where contacts with modernist artists and critics opened new perspectives. The subsequent 10-month study tour in the Congo was a period during which he felt isolated from European art centres: this isolation motivated him to experiment with various techniques in an attempt to discover his own voice. Although he was very reluctant in recognising the explicit impact of Africa on his work, the overall influence cannot be denied. His confrontation with Africa made him reflect on how he could portray “mankind” instead of focusing on individuals. He appreciated Bakuba art and attended a number of ritual ceremonies and dances. Moving from place to place he also had to work in different makeshift studios: the studio became an artistic theme in itself which was often combined with silhouettes of African women. Both the studios and the figures were gradually reduced to abstract patterns leading to non-referential compositions of diverse geometrical motifs and innovative combinations of colours. Between 1952 and 1955 he created sixty paintings and developed an individual abstract idiom. In this process the oil painting *Mwindamingi* may be identified as an important achievement and one of his first predominantly abstract compositions.

From a theoretical point of view the importance of this shift cannot be underestimated. Slightly generalising, we may state that his first African paintings still relied on the principle of similarity

as the expressionist style refracted a recognisable reality. His abstract paintings, however, reveal a fundamental metonymical approach as they rely on the basic concept of contiguity: the arbitrary character of the signs no longer refers to an extra-artistic reality. This technique echoes the principles of structuralism as the visual components derive their value and significance from their position within the closed structure of the painting itself.

Although Peire was certainly not one of the first abstract painters, the Belgian expatriates in the Congo and art critics at home were not immediately enthusiastic about the new turn in his oeuvre. Luc Peire, however, did not adapt his work to the audience's critical expectations and continued to work in an abstract mode. Influential connections, such as the banker and art collector Maurits Naessens, supported this innovative trend and introduced his work to a potential clientele. The artist's consistent drive to enhance and refine his newly created idiom ultimately met with a wider appreciation: the greater part of his oeuvre consists of abstract works which were sold worldwide.

Bibliography

ANONYMOUS

1950. *Congo-Nil. Guide du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi*. 7th ed. Brussels: Les Editions Van Assche.

1953. Une conférence de Luc Peire. *L'Avenir colonial belge*, Léopoldville: 27 février 1953.

1953. Quelques instants avec ... Luc Peire. *L'Avenir colonial belge*, Léopoldville: 6 mars 1953.

1953. Impressions africaines de Luc Peire. *L'Essor du Congo*, Elisabethville: 10 mars 1953.

2008. *Black is beautiful. Rubens tot Dumas*. Amsterdam-Zwolle: De Nieuwe Kerk-Waanders Uitgevers. [Catalogus tentoonstelling 26 juli-26 oktober 2008].

ARNOLDI M J

2003. Koloniale kunst: de Belgische beeldhouwers in Congo (1911-1960). Guisset (ed) 2003: 225-51.

ASHCROFT B, G GRIFFITHS & H TIFFIN

1989. *The empire writes back. Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London-New York: Routledge.

AUBRY F & W ADRIAENSENS

2002. *Philippe Wolfers. Beschaving en barbarij*. Brussels: Koning Boudewijnstichting.

AVERMAETE R

1953. *Luc Peire*. Antwerpen: De Sikkel.

BAL M

1990. *Verf en bederf. Lezen in Rembrandt*. Amsterdam: Prometheus.

BAL M (ed)

1999. *The practice of cultural analysis. Exposing interdisciplinary interpretation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

BARRY P

1995. *Beginning theory. An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press.

BEKKERS L

1966. Gesprek met Luc Peire. *Streven* 19(11-12): 1066-73.

BOMPUKU EYENGA-CORNELIS S

2003. Paul Mathieu, Alfred Bastien en 'Het panorama van Congo'. Guisset (ed) 2003: 157-69.

BONNEURE F (ed)

1966. *Retrospectieve tentoonstelling Luc Peire*. Brugge: Groeningemuseum. [Catalogus tentoonstelling Stedelijk Groeningemuseum Brugge 20 augustus-30 september 1966].

BROUDE N & M GARRARD (eds)

1986. *The expanded discourse: feminism and art history*. New York: Harper Collins.

BUYCK J F

2005. *Floris Jespers. Retrospectieve*. Oostende: PMMK-Pandora. [Catalogus tentoonstelling 17 december 2004-10 april 2005; Inleiding W van den Bussche].

- CEUPPENS B
2003. *Congo made in Flanders? Koloniale Vlaamse visies op 'blank' en 'zwart' in Belgisch Congo*. Gent: Academia Press.
- CONVENTS G
2003. *Afrika verbeeld. Film en (de-)kolonisatie van de geesten*. Brussel: Africalia-Epo.
- CORNELIS S (*et al*)
[s a]. *Belgische kunstenaars in de overzeese gebieden: 1884-1962*. Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika.
- CRABBÉ J
1952. Un peintre belge à Léopoldville. Luc Peire. *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, Léopoldville: 5/6 juillet 1952.
- DE JONG L (ed)
1995. *Luc Peire 1916-1994*. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen-Snoeck-Ducaju & zoon. [Catalogus Overzichtstentoonstelling 1995].
- DE RYCKE J-P
2003. Auguste Mambour, Pierre De Vacleroy, Fernand Allard L'Olivier. Drie Belgische schilders in Congo, drie blikken op Afrika. Guisset (ed) 2003: 203-23.
- DEVOLDER E
1992. Luc Peire (Interview). *Plus-Moins-Zéro* (Revue d'art contemporain), 24 October 1992: 3.
- FONTIER J
1973. In gesprek met Luc Peire. *De Vlaamse Gids* 57(3): 30-9.
1984. *Luc Peire*. Tiel: Lannoo.
- 2005a. Individuality and presence. Luc Peire and the art of the time. Peire & Soetaert (eds) 2005: 11-41.
- 2005b. The painting of Luc Peire. An analysis. Peire & Soetaert (eds) 2005: 43-77.
- GUISSET J
2003. Art Déco, modernisme en internationale tentoonstellingen. Guisset (ed) 2003: 171-202.
- GUISSET J (ed)
2003. *Congo en de Belgische kunst 1880-1960*. Doornik: La Renaissance du Livre.
- HALEN P & J RIESZ (eds)
1993. *Images de l'Afrique et du Congo/Zaire dans les lettres françaises de Belgique et alentour*. Bruxelles-Kinshasa: Textyles-éditions - Ed. Du Trottoir.
- HARRISON C, F FRASCINA & G PERRY
1993. *Primitivism, cubism, abstraction. The early twentieth century*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- JACQUEMIN J P (*et al*)
2002. *Notre Congo/Onze Kongo. De Belgische koloniale propaganda: elementen voor een kritische studie*. Brussel: CEC.
- JONCKHEERE K
1984. *De 'Kongo' van Floris Jaspers*. Antwerpen: Kunst & Kapitaal.
- L[AMOTE] J
1952. Luc Peire, waarachtig kunstschilder, in Kongo. *De Week*, Léopoldville: 20 juli 1952.

1953. Vlaamse kunstschilder vertelt. Luc Peire over inlandse kunst. Indrukken na een lange Kongolese reis. *De Week*, Léopoldville: maart 1953: 1, 2.
- LANDAU P S
2002. Empires of the visual: photography and colonial administration in Africa. Landau & Kaspin (eds) 2002: 141-71.
- LANDAU P S & D D KASPIN (eds)
2002. *Images and empires. Visuality in colonial and postcolonial Africa*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- LAOUREUX D
2010. *L'art abstrait en Belgique (1910-2010). La Collection Dexia/De abstracte kunst in België (1910-2010). De Dexia Collectie*. Brussel: Fonds Mercator/Mercatorfonds - Dexia.
- LECLERE J
1952. Luc Peire à Eville. *L'Echo du Katanga*, Elisabethville: 31 octobre 1952: 8-9.
- LEFEVERE A
1992. *Translation, rewriting, and the manipulation of literary fame*. London: Routledge.
- LOBBES T
2009. De artistieke reisbeurs in dienst van de Belgische koloniale propaganda. Het ministerie van Koloniën en de koloniale kunstenaars tijdens het interbellum. *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis* 21: 135-71.
- MELDRUM A
2006. Stealing beauty. *The Guardian* 15 March 2006.
- MITCHELL W J T
1994. *Picture theory: essays on visual and verbal representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- NOTEBAERT M
1952. De moderne richting in de schilderkunst te Brugge. *West-Vlaanderen* 5(5): 168-70.
- P M
1952. L'exposition Luc Peire. *L'Essor du Congo*, Elisabethville: 1 décembre 1952.
- PAUWELS P J H
2010. Maurits Naessens en Luc Peire. *Bulletin Stichting/Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire* 8 July 2010: 5-7.
- PEIRE L
1953a. Het bestaansrecht van de schilderkunst (1). *Band* 12(2): 57-60.
1953b. Het bestaansrecht van de schilderkunst (2). *Band* 12(10): 375-7.
- PEIRE M
2005. Luc Peire. An artist's life 1916-1924. Peire & Soetaert (eds) 2005: 79-121.
2008. Briefwisseling van Luc en Jenny Peire bewaard in het archief van de stichting. *Bulletin Stichting/Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire*, 6 juli 2008, Dutch section: 11-4.
2008. Correspondance Luc Peire: Alberto Sartoris fournit des compléments biographiques.

- Bulletin Stichting/Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire* 6 juillet 2008, French section: 8-15.
- [s a]. Teksten bij kortfilms rond Luc Peire. Typescript. Knokke.
- PEIRE M & E SOETAERT (eds)
2005. *Luc Peire. Catalogue raisonné of the oil paintings*. Tiel: Stichting/Fondation Jenny & Luc Peire and Uitgeverij Lannoo.
- PEIRE-VERBRUGGEN J
2001. *De ateliers van Luc Peire*. Ingeleid en geannoteerd door M Peire. Gent-Amsterdam: Ludion.
- PEMBENE
1953. Chronique de Jadotville [?] [copy in archives Luc Peire, Knokke].
- PENNYCOOK A
1998. *English and the discourses of colonialism*. London: Routledge.
- PHILLIPS M
2006. Visions of Africa. *The Guardian* 27 June 2006.
- ROOS E
1953. Het licht op de kandelaar. *Band* 12 (2): 61-4.
- SAID E
1978. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- SALOMON N
1999. Vermeer's Women. Shifting paradigms in midcareer. Bal (ed) 1999: 44-59.
- SCHAMA S
2010. Long live the pleasure principle. *Financial Times* 24-25 June 2010.
- SCOTT J C
1992. *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- SEUPHOR M
1965. *Luc Peire*. Brugge: Desclée De Brouwer.
- SEUPHOR M, M BILCKE, L SOSSET & J WALRAVENS
1963. *De abstracte schilderkunst in Vlaanderen*. Brussel: Arcade.
- SOLOMON-GODEAU A
1986. Going native: Paul Gauguin and the invention of primitivist modernism. Broude & Garrard (eds) 1986: 312-29.
- SPURR D
1993. *The rhetoric of empire: colonial discourse in journalism, travel writing, and imperial administration*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- STOICHITA V I
1999. *The self-aware image: an insight into early modern meta-painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- THORNTON L
2003. De Belgische Afrikanisten van 1940 tot 1960 en het Afrikanisme op de Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel in 1958. Guisset (ed) 2003: 253-80.

- VAN BEVER E
1949. Tien jaar schilderen in Kongo.
Band 8(12): 20-3.
- VANFLETEREN G & J VERMEULEN
2000. Barbara Hepworth en de open
vorm. *Vlaanderen* 49(5): 327-32.
- VAN SCHUYLENBERGH P & F
MORIMONT
1995. *Rencontres artistiques Belgique-
Congo. 1920-1950*. Louvain-la-Neuve:
Enquêtes et Documents d'Histoire
Africaine, 12.
- VERMEULEN J
1988. *De Centraal-Afrikaanse
woordkunst en de Nederlandse
Afrika-literatuur*. Gent: Africana
Gandensia.
- 2006a. *Laat mij maar doen. Vlaams
proza tussen tekstgenese en discursieve
identiteit*. Antwerpen-Apeldoorn:
Garant.
- 2006b. Where Belgians didn't fear
to trade: on narrative patterns in
Flemish colonial literature. *Dutch
Crossing. A Journal of Low Countries
Studies* (30)2: 252-75.
2009. La prose néerlandophone
sur l'Afrique centrale et la
littérature orale africaine. Stratégies
intertextuelles. *Etudes Germaniques*
(64)1: 117-36.
- VINTS L
1984. *Kongo, made in Belgium. Beeld
van een kolonie in film en propaganda*.
Leuven: Kritik.
- WESTERDAHL E
1953. *Luc Peire*. Puerto de la Cruz:
Instituto de Estudios Hispánicos.
- WILLIAMS P & L CHRISMAN (eds)
1993. *Colonial discourse and post-
colonial theory. A reader*. New York:
Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- WUIDAR L
1992. Luc Peire geïnterviewd door
Léon Wuidar. Typescript. Knokke.
- XURIGUERA G
1984. *Luc Peire*. Paris: OGC Michèle
Broutta.
- UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS
[Archives Stichting / Fondation
Jenny & Luc Peire, Knokke]
- Letter from Paul Fierens to Luc
Peire, 14 February 1956
- Letter from Maurits Naessens to
Luc Peire, 28 February 1956
- Letter from Paul Fierens to Luc
Peire, 8 May 1956
- Letter from Alberto Sartoris to Luc
Peire, 26 May 1958
- Letter from Maurits Naessens to
Luc Peire, 17 November 1960
- Letter from Maurits Naessens to
Luc Peire, 3 January 1962
- Letter from Luc Peire to Jaak
Fontier, 24 February 1984
- CD: motion pictures by Luc
Peire (Congo, Tenerife, Knokke),
Museum of Central Africa,
Tervuren [copy in Archives Luc
Peire, Knokke]
- Website: <<http://www.lucpeire.com>>