

## ÉRIC MANIGAUD

Born in 1971 in France  
Works and lives in Saint-Étienne

### exhibition

from 14th May to 22nd July 2023

### opening

Sunday 14th May  
2 pm - 6 pm  
Komunuma Openings

### galerie Sator Komunuma

43 rue de la Commune de Paris  
93230 Romainville

### opening hours

Wednesday - Saturday  
10 am - 6 pm

and by appointment

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# CEUX QUI CREUSENT

## ÉRIC MANIGAUD

In 1830, Belgium gained independence from the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1865, Leopold II, the new Belgian king, wished to strengthen the young nation both financially and politically. In contrast to large European states — particularly France and England— Belgium did not have colonies to exploit. In Africa, Europeans had mainly occupied coastal territories that were easily accessible for exchange. Between 1874 and 1877, Leopold II sent Henri Morton Stanley to the heart of the continent in search of new territories to conquer. On his behalf, the British explorer, who discovered the Congo River in 1860, bought millions of hectares.

The Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 ratified the division of Africa between the great Western powers. Leopold II claimed the Congo for himself. On humanitarian grounds, he undertook to abolish the slavery practiced by Arab-Muslim merchants at the time. In 1885, the independent state of Congo was created, owned by the Belgian sovereign.

The invention of the inner tube at the end of the 19th century and of pneumatics accompanied the growing development of the automobile and bicycle industries. The research and cultivation of rubber trees, used to manufacture rubber, became frenetic and generated fierce competition between the European plantations of Africa, South America and South-East Asia. The territory of the Congo was richly endowed with them. Leopold II set up a policy of massive exploitation of rubber in order to become considerably



wealthier. To take advantage of this exponential market, the farmers intensified production at all costs and resorted to violence to impose a working rhythm.

Predominantly non-Congolese Africans, the soldiers of the Civil Service working for the exploitation companies and for Leopold II attacked villages when the quantity of rubber delivered were insufficient, or when the local populations refused to work. Rape, whipping, crude executions, severing limbs and mass killings were commonplace. The European officers, in fear that the weapons would be used for hunting, imposed a system of ammunition control. Every bullet used had to be justified and correspond to the killing of a civilian. A severed hand taken from the body of the deceased proved the death. Meanwhile, in order for goods to reach the coastal ports and European industrial sites, a railway line was opened in 1898 at the cost of tens of thousands of deaths. Violence and terror reigned.

The first international denunciations took place in 1897 and intensified in 1902 due to the multiplicity of European observers on the spot. At the turn of the century, British Protestant missionaries settled in the Congo and became aware of these daily atrocities. Among them, Alice Seeley Harris lived there with her husband John from 1898 to 1905. Using photography for proselytizing purposes, she transformed it into a tool to denounce the daily violence and to broadcast it among European societies. The local population understood the importance of the image and what photography could bring them. Regularly, the Congolese victims went voluntarily to the missionaries equipped to have their crippled bodies photographed.

On May 14th, 1904, Ensalla, whose five-year-old daughter Bouali had been violently mutilated by soldiers of the Civil Service who felt she was not working fast enough, went to the Harris home. The missionary couple made Ensalla pose on the porch of their home with Bouali's foot and hand on the ground in a plantain leaf. This photograph quickly became iconic.

With the support of the newly formed Congo Reform Association, which included many writers and intellectuals such as Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad, the British Consul Roger Casement, the English

journalist Edmund Morel and Arthur Conan Doyle, the first worldwide humanitarian campaign to denounce modern history was launched. Hundreds of conferences and projections with the help of magic lanterns were held throughout Europe and the United States. To create a proximity between the viewer and the mutilated, the name of each victim was mentioned on the pictures for the first time in the history of photography. The framing was honed to reinforce the effect of violence. The number of spectators was estimated at nearly one million. The scandal erupted and the Belgian Parliament became involved.

For the Harris, it was not a question of denouncing colonisation per se, an enterprise that they considered "civilising", but rather of exposing the excesses of the one that reigned in the Congo. A counter-campaign by Leopold II was set up denouncing the falsified images edited by actors on European soil. This first great war of the image generated a widespread awareness of the power of the image and of photography in particular.

In 1908, Leopold II renounced his ownership. The independent state of Congo became the Belgian Congo, a colony under Belgian administration. In 1909, Leopold II died. Despite the change in sovereignty, violence continued, particularly due to the First World War, which required resources and wealth. It was not until the 1920s that the situation in the Congo changed.

In the KOMUNUMA exhibition, Eric Manigaud presents drawings from the photographic archives of the MRAC of Tervuren in Belgium and from his own collection of postcards. He is also currently exhibiting works related to the French colonization of the Congo in his Belgian gallery, Gallery Fifty One, in Antwerp.

In his now historical reference book « The Ghosts of King Leopold II » Adam Hochschild wrote in 1998 : « Forced labor, hostages, shackled slaves, starving porters, burned villages, paramilitary company guards, and snipers were everywhere. Thousands of refugees who had crossed the Congo River to escape the Leopold regime ended up crossing it again to escape the French. The population loss in the rubber-rich equatorial forest controlled by France is estimated, exactly as in Leopold's Congo, to be about fifty percent. »