

Museum of Contemporary Photography
Columbia College Chicago

Guy Tillim: *Avenue Patrice Lumumba*

January 10 - March 6, 2011



Guy Tillim, *Typists, Likasi, DR*, 2007, Ink jet print, 36 x 51 1/2 inches, Courtesy Kuckei + Kuckei, Berlin

Viewer's Guide

This guide, which contains a curatorial essay, information on the works on view, and questions for looking and discussion was created as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Guy Tillim: Avenue Patrice Lumumba* and may be downloaded from the museum's website at mocp.org/education/resources. Free docent led tours of this exhibition are available. For more information see mocp.org/education/viewings or contact Allison Grant at agrant@colum.edu. To learn about public programs related to this exhibition see mocp.org/events.

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The Museum is free and open to the public

Monday through Saturday, 10am – 5pm

Thursday, 10am – 8pm

Sunday, 12 – 5pm

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Guy Tillim: *Avenue Patrice Lumumba*

In his project *Avenue Patrice Lumumba* (2007–08), South African artist Guy Tillim (b. 1962) records the architecture and infrastructure of colonial and postcolonial Africa. Patrice Lumumba (1925–61) was one of the first elected African leaders in modern times. In 1960 he became the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo after his country won independence from Belgium. Only ten weeks after his speech at the independence celebrations, in which he listed various injustices and human rights violations implemented by the Belgians, Lumumba's government was deposed in a coup. He was imprisoned and murdered in circumstances suggesting the complicity of the governments of Belgium and the United States.

Lumumba became revered as a liberator of independent Africa, and streets that bear his name in western and southern Africa have come to represent both the idealism and decay of an African dream. Originally a photojournalist, Guy Tillim has spent a large part of his career documenting social conflict in Africa for media agencies including Reuters and Agence France-Presse. Yet Tillim seeks not only the action and drama typical of a journalistic approach, but also quieter scenes, allowing his work to straddle the media and fine art worlds. His images from the series *Congo Democratic* (2006) of the Congolese election, for example, were shown in Documenta 12 and also appeared in Congolese daily newspapers.

In *Avenue Patrice Lumumba*, Tillim avoids intense action entirely, and instead focuses on the architecture, landscape, and people in African countries where the legacy of colonialism forms a backdrop but does not capture the essence of individual lives unfolding. His pictures portray the crumbling institutional buildings—post offices, schools, hotels, and offices—that were built by colonial governments in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, and Mozambique. As Tillim explains, “There’s a ten-year period in the late modernist world where there was this grand colonial architecture built in Francophone Africa and Lusophone Africa. It was this strange contemporary mythological time. These buildings are impressive, for all their inappropriateness they nonetheless form part of a contemporary African stage. If you look at them in a certain way, they’re just kind of floating worlds.”¹

Printed in a muted palette, Tillim's photographs address the idea of faded idealism in an atmosphere that is both melancholy and dreamlike. Chipping paint, worn materials, toppled

statues, and makeshift repairs tell stories of modernist spaces that have been neglected. Yet Tillim was conscious of not wanting to become “a connoisseur of decay, or come up with some sort of Havana-esque vision.”² Instead, he includes people and their personal effects, reflecting the humanity within these shells. In his own words:

These photographs are not collapsed histories of Postcolonial African states or a meditation on aspects of late-modernist-era colonial structures, but a walk through avenues of dreams. Patrice Lumumba’s dream, his nationalism, is discernible in these structures, if one reads certain clues, as is the death of his dream, in these de facto monuments. How strange that modernism, which eschewed monument and past for nature and future, should carry memory so well.³

—Karen Irvine, Curator

¹Guy Tillim, interviewed by Colin Hirsch, a magazine, July 28, 2008, quoted on:
www.peabody.harvard.edu/exhibits.

²Ibid.

³Guy Tillim, introduction to Avenue Patrice Lumumba (Munich: Prestel Verlag, in association with the Peabody Museum, Harvard

For more information on Guy Tillim and this body of work see:

foto8.com/new/online/blog/816-guy-tillims-avenue-patrice-lumumba#

(audio interview)

lensculture.com/tillim.html

Postcolonial Africa

Postcolonial African nations, like those depicted in Guy Tillim's *Avenue Patrice Lumumba* -- Angola, Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, and Mozambique--have unique as well as overlapping histories. Each of these nations was ruled and occupied for a period of time by European powers that took natural resources from the land and were involved in the slave trade and or the forced labor of native peoples. When colonial rule came to an end in the years following World War II and these countries gained independence, high expectations and euphoria were soon followed by political unrest and wars stemming from internal conflicts and power struggles that often involved outside influences. In the decades following independence, ongoing turmoil and frequent changes in government have made it difficult for many Postcolonial nations to function or advance. More information on the histories of these countries can be found on the following pages.

The Landscape of Guy Tillim's *Avenue Patrice Lumumba*

Though colonial power officially ended in Africa decades ago, its legacy and influence is still felt and seen in many ways. Guy Tillim's photographs depict the clash of ideas and cultures evident in the postcolonial landscape such as structures built in the western modernist style-- government offices, hotels, and apartments--that were later abandoned by Colonial occupiers. While political and economic instability has caused these buildings to crumble, in Tillim's images we see that over the years, these structures have been absorbed into the culture, modified and put to new uses as the residents of these cities continue to make do with what they have. Few cars are present on Colonial era boulevards surrounding these buildings. Instead, residents walk in the streets. Several of Tillim's images depict government workers who appear diligent in their work despite the neglect and decay of their surroundings.

Sharing the landscape with these Western structures in Tillim's images we see statues depicting African leaders and heroes who have come to represent the promise and dashed hopes of independence, such as Kwame Nkrumah who was the first President and Prime Minister of Ghana and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast, from 1952 to 1966. Nkrumah was an influential proponent of Pan-Africanism, advocating for political and economic unity among native Africans. Two of Tillim's photographs depict monuments to António Agostinho Neto who served as the first President of Angola (1975–1979), leading the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the war for independence and the civil war. Other images show monuments to Colonial powers that have been toppled and left to decay in the landscape. Tillim's images suggest the complex and layered histories of these nations.

Postcolonial African Nations Depicted in *Guy Tillim: Avenue Patrice Lumumba*

Angola

For many centuries before European incursions, Bantu tribes inhabited the geographical area now called Angola. The Portuguese explorer Paulo Dias de Novais founded a settlement in this area in 1575 and the Portuguese subsequently established several settlements and trading posts all along the African coast. Portuguese colonial power in Angola lasted for close to five hundred years.

In the late 16th century the slave trade flourished here, and was responsible for the exportation of over three million native Africans to the Portuguese colony of Brazil. The exportation of slaves from Angola officially ended in 1835 but colonial rulers soon established and ran plantations here using forced African labor.

In the 1950s and early 60s rival guerrilla groups, and then a rebellion by oppressed workers destabilized Portuguese power. Opposing liberation movements declared themselves the ruling party and civil war erupted in 1961.

While other European powers ceded independence to their former African colonies in the late 1950s and 1960s, Portugal under right-wing Dictator Antonio Salazar, refused to do so. By 1974, half of Portugal's gross domestic product and the vast majority of its armed forces were engaged in wars in three of Portugal's African colonies leaving the country economically and politically strained. A revolution in 1974 ousted the Salazar regime and brought an end Portuguese Colonial rule. Between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Portuguese who had been living in the African Colonies soon returned to Portugal often as destitute refugees.

In 1975 the civil war in Angola intensified as the Portuguese withdrew without formally handing the country over to any succeeding government. The MPLA (Popular Liberation Movement of Angola), in possession of the capital and with guaranteed support from the USSR and Cuba declared itself the government of independent Angola. The FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) with backing from the USA and South Africa set up a rival government in the mountainous region of Huambo with the goal of ousting the Marxist MPLA. The conflict here becomes an extension of the Cold War and continues until 1991 agreement is reached on a new constitution.

This peace was tenuous and in 1992 civil war broke out again, even more violently than before. Despite many attempted peace negotiations and cease fires, negotiated with help from the United Nations, the civil war did not officially end until 2002. It is calculated that some four million people were driven from their homes (30% of the population) and as many as 500,000 people lost their lives in over twenty five years of fighting in Angola. More than twenty million land mines were planted here by the warring factions and many still remain.

Because of its oil reserves, and other natural resources including diamonds, Angola's economy has grown since the conflict ended in 2002, but it still faces huge social and economic problems. Most Angolans still live in deep poverty.

Benin

The country we refer to as Benin today was once the culturally and militarily powerful Kingdom of Dahomey. It was eventually nicknamed the Slave Coast due to significant trafficking through Dahomey of Africans to the Americas, specifically to the slave markets of Brazil and the Caribbean.

The Portuguese founded the trading post of Porto-Novo on what is now the Benin coast. They were followed by English, Dutch, Spanish, and French traders as the slave trade developed. The slave trade in Dahomey ended in 1848.

Dahomey became a French protectorate in 1892 and geographic expansion of Dahomey continued to the North. Colonial rule forced native peoples to accept a new system of central administration, heavy taxation, forced labor, and harsh laws. France conscripted men from the country to fight in both world wars. By the end of World War II, the economy was weak and growing discontent and rebellion against Colonial rule was difficult for the French to manage.

The République du Dahomey, was formed in 1958 and gained full independence from France in 1960. The country was renamed Benin in 1975. Between 1960 and 1972, a succession of military coups brought about many changes of government. The last of these brought to power Major Mathieu Kérékou as the head of a regime professing strict Marxist-Leninist principles.

Benin was the first African country to make a post-Cold War transition into a multi-party, democratic system. Kérékou himself abandoned in 1989 the Marxist-Leninist ideology that he had promoted in the mid-1970s. In December 1990 a new constitution was approved, guaranteeing human rights, freedom to organize political parties, the right to private property, and universal franchise.

Since 1990, the country's poor economy has seen improvement with an injection of investment from other countries but the economy of Benin remains underdeveloped and dependent on subsistence agriculture and cotton. Benin's weak economy and its history of fractured political alliances have limited its ability to fully realize the ideals of its constitution.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly called Zaire, is the third largest country on the African continent. The country is still the ancestral homeland for over 200 ethnic groups, most descended from individual kingdoms established long before the Europeans arrived in the late 1800s.

Commissioned by King Leopold II of Belgium, Henry Stanley was the first European to explore the Congo Basin area. Upon hearing Stanley's report regarding the indigenous natural attributes of the land, King Leopold subsequently took control.

The 1884–85 Berlin West Africa Conference recognized the Congo Free State with Leopold as its sovereign. The growing demand for rubber helped finance the exploitation of the Congo, but abuses against local peoples outraged Western nations and forced Leopold to grant the free state a colonial charter as the Belgian Congo (1908).

With increased demand for an end to Colonial rule following World War II, facing a possible coup, war, and loss of investment, Belgium granted independence in 1960 and Patrice Lumumba became the first democratically elected leader of the Republic of Congo. Civil unrest soon followed and Lumumba was deposed and brutally murdered by Belgian and local forces with complicity from other western governments, possibly including the US.

This coup brought Gen. Mobutu Sese Seko to power in 1965. He changed the country's name to Zaire in 1971. Mismanagement, corruption, and increasing violence devastated the infrastructure and the economy. Mobutu was deposed in 1997, and the country's name was restored to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Instability in neighboring countries, ethnic tensions, an influx of refugees from Rwanda, and conflict for Congo's mineral wealth fueled existing civil conflict in Congo and led to wars beginning in 1996, that involved several African nations and foreign armies. This is sometimes referred to as the "African World War." Despite the signing of peace accords in 2003, fighting continues in the east of the country. The war and its aftermath is the world's deadliest conflict since World War II, killing 5.4 million people many through disease and starvation. Millions more were displaced from their homes or sought asylum in neighboring countries.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is widely considered to be one of the richest countries in the world in regards to natural resources, however citizens of the DRC are among the poorest in the world, having the second lowest nominal gross domestic product per capita.

Madagascar

Madagascar, an island in the Indian Ocean off the southeastern coast of Africa, is the fourth-largest island in the world. Bantu, Mikea, and Anteimoro settlers probably crossed the Mozambique Channel to Madagascar at about between 200 AD and the Middle Ages.

In the 7th century Arabs and East Africans established trading posts along Madagascar's northwest coast. The island's kings began to extend their power through trade with their Indian Ocean neighbors, notably Arab, Persian and Somali traders who connected Madagascar with East Africa, the Middle East and India

Large chiefdoms began to dominate considerable areas of the island. Madagascar served as an important transoceanic trading port for the east African coast that gave Africa a trade route to the Silk Road. The wealth created in Madagascar through trade created a state system ruled by powerful regional monarchs.

European contact began in 1500, when the Portuguese sea captain Diogo Dias sighted the island after his ship separated from a fleet going to India. The Portuguese soon began trading with the islanders and exporting slaves from the area. In the late 19th century, Madagascar

concluded a treaty with the British governor of Mauritius to abolish the slave trade. In return, the island received British military and financial assistance.

France invaded Madagascar in 1883 in what became known as the first Franco-Hova War. In 1896 France annexed Madagascar ending the 103-year-old Merina monarchy with the royal family being sent into exile in Algeria.

On October 14, 1958, Madagascar was proclaimed an autonomous state within the French community. This provisional government ended in 1959 with the adoption of a new constitution and on June 26, 1960, gained full independence. The years following independence were marked by assassinations, military coups and disputed elections.

In a military coup in 1975, Didier Ratsiraka took power and ruled until 2001, except for a short period of time when he was ousted in the early 1990's. In the presidential elections in December, 2001, both Ratsiraka and Marc Ravalomanana claimed victory. Eight months later, following violence and economic disruption, a recount was held and Ravalomanana was declared president.

In January 2009, a power struggle began between Marc Ravalomanana and Andry Rajoelina, former mayor of the capital, Antananarivo. On March 17, 2009 Ravalomanana resigned and assigned his powers to a military council loyal to him. The military supported Rajoelina and called Ravalomanana's move a ploy. The European Union, along with other international entities, refuses to recognize the new government.

Two-thirds of the population of Madagascar lives below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day. In 2000, Madagascar embarked on a poverty reduction strategy. Its sources of growth are light manufacturing, tourism and textiles. It is the world's leading producer and exporter of vanilla.

Mozambique

The first inhabitants of what is now Mozambique were the San hunters and gatherers. Between the 1st and 5th centuries AD, waves of Bantu-speaking peoples migrated from the north into the region

Colonized by Portugal, in 1505, Mozambique provided mineral and agricultural products to Portugal while receiving few services in return. Following independence in 1975, Mozambique was torn by internal conflict as the Marxist government, supported in part by the Soviet Union and Cuba, battled anticommunist forces funded by South Africa and the former Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) for control of the country. The ensuing warfare displaced at least four million people and resulted in the death of perhaps a million more as a result of the violence, famine, and disease it caused. Violence and disunity further hindered economic development, especially the broadening of tourism, and discouraged foreign investment. The conflict formally ended in 1992, but its lingering effects are many. As many as one million unexploded land mines still remain along the country's trails and roads, and political strife continues between the major opposition forces and the central government.

Mozambique is rich in natural resources, is biologically and culturally diverse, and has a tropical climate. Its extensive coastline, fronting the Mozambique Channel, which separates mainland

Africa from the island of Madagascar, offers some of Africa's best natural harbors. These have allowed Mozambique an important role in the maritime economy of the Indian Ocean, while the country's white sand beaches are an important attraction for a growing tourism industry. Endowed with rich and extensive natural resources, Mozambique's present day economy is considered one of huge potential and has been among the fastest-growing in the world, with an average annual Gross Domestic Product growth of about 8%.

Sources:

africa.upenn.edu

Britannica.com

Worldatlas.com



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

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Questions for Looking and Discussion

1. As you look at the individual works in these exhibitions, or at any photograph, consider the following questions:

- Look slowly and carefully at the works in this exhibition. Describe what you see.
- What do these images have in common?
 - What types of places and people do we see?
 - What is emphasized in this work?
 - What is less apparent?
- What is the mood or feeling of these images? What in the work contributes to that mood?
- What can you tell about how the work was made?
- What do you think this work is about? Why do you think that?
- Can you tell how the artist feels about his subject matter? If so, how does it show?

Other questions to Consider

2. Though several countries are depicted in this body of work, the images and scenes appear quite similar. What factors might contribute to the unity among these images?

3. In this series, we notice reoccurring elements or motifs such as decaying modernist buildings, office workers, and battered monuments to African leaders and heroes. What might these elements suggest or represent?

4. What overall impression of these Postcolonial nations do you get through Tillim's work?

5. Tillim claims that there are many power struggles inherent in this body of work. What visual, political, cultural and historical conflicts do you notice or might be implied in this work?

6. Tillim originally photographed in the nations on assignment as a photojournalist. He thought that those images focused on dramatic moments and lacked context and depth, so he returned to create the images in this series.

- How are these images alike or different from photographs of Postcolonial Africa we might see in the news media?
- What are some of the challenges or limitations of trying to depict a place or a people through photography?

7. What knowledge, impressions, and mental images did you have of the Postcolonial African nations depicted in Tillim's work before you saw this exhibition?

- What sources of information might have contributed to what you know, think about, and visualize in relation to these places?
- How are Tillim's images alike or different from those impressions?
- Did you learn anything new from the works in this exhibition?
- What else would you like to know?