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Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part II

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This article is the second part of a three-part study of Belgian art nouveau as “imperial modernism,” created from Congo raw materials and inspired by Congo motifs. While Part I explored the lash, the vine, and the elephantine, Part II examines Henry van de Velde’s theory and design of modern ornament, finding as one of his sources the African body arts of scarification known as tatouage.

In the 1890s, when Henry van de Velde was preoccupied with defining a new language of ornament, a discourse of tatouage circulated in Belgium, which emphasized body scarification as a complex and living art form with a coherent set of styles and functions. The Congolese practice of repeated cuts in the flesh to create raised, abstract patterns corresponded closely to Van de Velde’s emerging conception of structural ornament. Scarification provided a central resource in his design repertoire for modernism; emulating the native artists he explicitly admired, Van de Velde fused material and surface in his ceramics, furniture, and women’s clothing.

The final part of this study, to be published in the next issue of this magazine, will focus on the history, visual culture, and ongoing renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa and highlight new research on expressive forms of violence, past and present, within Belgium and outside it.

Structural Ornament as Skin Scar: Henry van de Velde's Modernist *Tatouage*

In Part I, we traced how Henry van de Velde's conception of "line as a force" absorbed the wildness of the Congo jungle and the whiplash let loose there. His theory and his practice of modern ornament also have significant African sources never before examined. In his statement about fin-de-siècle artists seizing line as a cracking, lashing whip and following an "adventurous course" with it, Van de Velde imagined a weakened European line reactivated in a fantasy of domination—a *coup de fouet* splitting the epidermis of an "indolent public."¹ In his critique of debilitated European ornament, Van de Velde's imaginative resources again turned to the Congo, but in a more positive and constructive direction: he identified the ornamental body art of scarification, known in imperial Belgium as *tatouage*, as a model for design revitalization. Here the Congolese native shifted from victim to artist, providing Van de Velde not with a fantasy of domination but with an object of admiration and identification. Wielding a blade to the skin with dexterity and purpose, the native refigured the body to fuse surface and structure in dynamic patterns. Van de Velde's radical theory of structural ornament, defined as an integral union of shape and material, is rooted in his fascination with Congo *tatouage*, suggesting an unexpected origin of the international modernist canon of "form and function" in the abstract linear patterns of ornamental body scars that Van de Velde encountered in imperial magazines, photographs, exhibitions, lectures, world's fairs, and travel literature between 1885 and 1900. These sources offer an avenue of entry to the habits of mind and stylistic techniques that led Van de Velde to the startling conception that "ornament is the scarification of the object" ("l'ornement est le tatouage de l'objet").² A decade before Picasso and Matisse discovered formal solutions to problems of painting in West African masks and sculptures, Henry van de Velde was inventing a new language of ornament that was stimulated in part by his familiarity with the types of decorative patterns on the bodies of Congolese natives and their objects of everyday use.

Knowledge of the practice and types of *tatouage* among the Congolese natives circulated widely in the Belgium of the 1880s and 1890s that Van de Velde inhabited. The term—literally "tattooing"—was used by contemporaries to describe a specific form of ornamental body art: not the staining of the skin by colored dyes but the scarring of the body by incisions that bled and healed over, creating permanent patterns. The first form of tattooing left the skin smooth and indelibly tinted; the second left the flesh protrusive and molded, alternately flat and excrescent, likened by a number of explorers to relief sculpture.³

Among the early explorers whose works were published in Belgium, both Georg August Schweinfurth and Henry Morton Stanley marveled at the skill of native artisans in creating shields, baskets, canoes, chairs, and weapons, among other use objects, and they extended their discussions to natives' ornamentation of their bodies through "tatouage." Schweinfurth in *The Heart of Africa* wrote that he saw women's arms and men's shoulder blades marked with "zigzag or parallel lines, or rows of dots," all "brought into relief" as the result of carved, bled, and swelled skin designs.⁴ Stanley in *Through the Dark Continent* vividly described

Fig. 1
Detail of Charles Callewaert,
Babouende, Mussuco
Woman, Mayanga, 1882.
Watercolor and pencil.
Collection of the Royal
Museum for Central Africa,
Tervuren, Belgium.



how “tattooing” in different regions arrayed natives’ faces and chests with every sort of graphic pattern, from “curved wavy lines” to “ledges, squares, circles, . . . knots,” and “rosettes,” from thin rows of lines and points from “temple to temple” to “glossy tubercules” “as large as hens’ eggs.” Although he found some of these scarred physiognomies “deformed” and “unnatural,” he compared some of them to “hieroglyphic parchment charts” and affirmed tattooing as an art form. The body, he noted, “afforded broad fields upon which the native artist had displayed the exuberant fertility of his genius.”⁵ Charles Callewaert, a young commercial agent from Antwerp stationed in the Upper and Lower Congo in the early 1880s, filled sketchbooks and made drawings with meticulous renderings of the natives’ patterned bodies.⁶ His 1882 Mayanga drawing and watercolor present a “Mussuco woman” seated by her basket (fig. 1). Here the explorer–station agent turned artist expresses his absorbing interest in the body arts he encountered in the Congo, capturing in legible form the interplay of zigzag vertical lines etched in the woman’s chest and the V shape outlining her collarbone with the horizontal designs that also spread across her stomach. The plaited basket beside the woman echoes the interlocking patterns carried on her skin.

The founding of the Congo Free State as King Leopold’s domain deepened the fascination with and publicity about Congolese *tatouage* in Belgium. Stanley’s two-volume work of 1885 on the Congo, which covered the time that Henry van

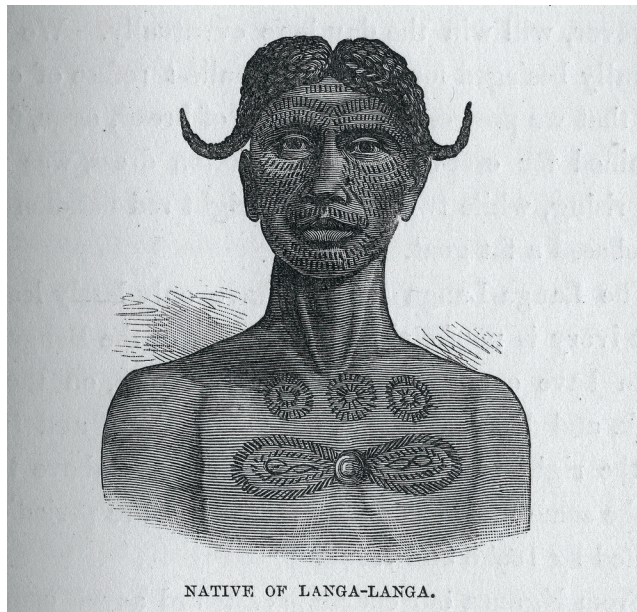


Fig. 2
Native of Langa-Langa.
From Henry M. Stanley,
*The Congo and the
Founding of Its Free
State: A Story of Work
and Exploration* (London,
1885), 2:101.

de Velde's brother Willy worked alongside the explorer turned royal reconnaissance agent, contained illustrations as well as descriptions of native crafts and scarification.⁷ Congolese types of "tattooing," such as the "Langa-Langa," "Iboko," and "Bangala" styles, were featured, with a focus on the faces and upper bodies of the natives and the distinctive designs in molded flesh. The depiction of a Langa-Langa native portrays striated arcs over the eyebrows and linear rows along the cheeks, a trio of concentric circles crossing the collarbone, and a sideways figure eight reaching across the breastbone, like a bowtie in flesh (fig. 2). Stanley's *Free State* book and the tattooed Bangala native were featured in A.-J. Wauters's magazine *Le mouvement géographique* in 1885, advertising at once the king's new Congo Free State, the new publication, and Stanley's visit and lecture tour in Belgium.⁸ The indefatigable Wauters himself gave lectures with lantern slides on Congo ethnography and crafts that year, and a book he published on the Congo in 1885 contained a section on the ubiquitous practice of *tatouage* among the indigenes, highlighting the way incision patterns followed bodily forms in swelling bands of skin scars in the shape of X's, curves, curls, and cascading linear bulges.⁹

A new influx of sources, discussions, and displays of Congolese *tatouage* in Belgium emerged between 1886 and 1897. Military officers and commercial agents reported on native life and customs as they established stations and mounted expeditions. Lieutenant Liéven van de Velde, an early army recruit to the Congo from Ghent, lectured on the "Nègres du Bas-Congo" to a geographic society and to industrialists on a trip back to Brussels in 1886; his presentation included a description of the variety of body scars that he had seen.¹⁰ Camille Coquilhat, another army "pioneer" in the Congo, not only lectured in Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, and Brussels but published one of the first books by an officer who had organized a region in the initial years of the Free State. Captain

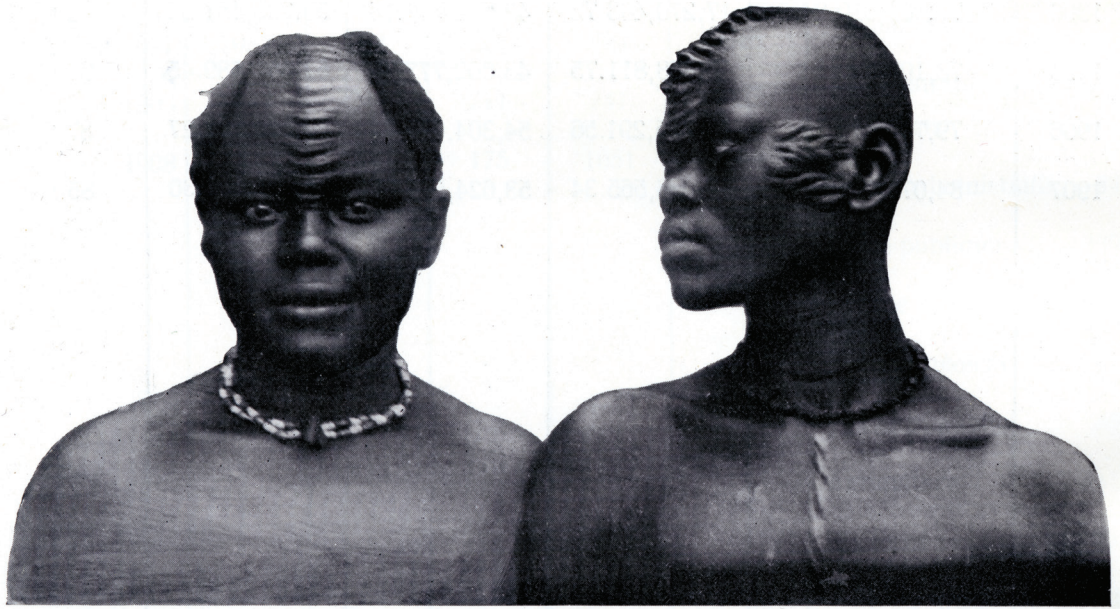


Fig. 3
Bangala *tatouage* types.
From René Dubreucq,
À travers le Congo
belge: Récit de voyage
de Banana au Katanga
(Brussels, 1909), 84.

Coquilhat's 1888 book, *Sur le Haut-Congo*, examined many aspects of native life, including "tatouages," which he described as flesh rising to form "loops, crests," and rectilinear ridges on natives' faces or swirling "arabesques" along the chest and stomach.¹¹ In 1890, an exhibition in Brussels displayed more than four hundred photographs taken during an exploratory commercial expedition along the Congo River led by Alexander Delcommune for a Belgian investment company. King Leopold and Queen Maria Henrietta inaugurated the show, which featured photographs of Congo topography and of many native types and their skin scars.¹² By 1894, citizens in Belgium could view some of the natives themselves: 144 were transported from Boma to Antwerp for the "Congo/Belgium" World's Fair. For the Tervuren Congo exhibition of 1897, close to three hundred Congolese arrived for the duration of the fair and were on view in model villages as well as in parades of the native troops, the Force publique, whose blue uniforms and military bands were cheered by the public, especially when the bands played "Brabançonne," the national anthem of Belgium. Many of the Congolese militia men were from the Bangala and Batetala tribes, and the illustrations and photographs of them at the exhibition showed the soldiers with their facial patterns clearly visible (fig. 3).¹³

Amid the diffusion of ideas and images about native ornament and scarification in the decade after 1886, one pivotal intervention set the conceptual framework in Belgium for understanding Congolese body art as a dynamic visual system. In 1892, Lieutenant Charles Lemaire, army officer and district commander of the vast Equator Station in the Congo Free State, published an article dedicated to "les tatouages" in Wauters's journal *Le Congo illustré*. Replete with a gallery of faces illustrated by his fellow officer Lieutenant Théodore Masui, Lemaire's article defined a taxonomy of scars and the natives who created them, establishing *tatouage* as a complex and living art form with a coherent set of styles and functions.

Lemaire conveyed four key principles of Congolese ornament as skin scar that shaped the discourse about it in Belgium after 1892. First, he characterized the *tatouages* as surface expressions of integral identity, both collective and individual. The seemingly infinite variety of skin scars appearing on native bodies throughout the Congo Free State had two purposes, according to Lemaire. One he called “*tatouage de race*,” a system of signs, inscribed on skin, that offered an immediately recognizable signal of membership in a certain group or tribe—a necessity for native peoples in situations of attack or expedition. Lemaire’s article thus referred each facial pattern he described, with an accompanying visual example of it, to a distinctive tribe and region, from Hauossas and Bayanzis to Mongos and Ouellés.¹⁴ The other purpose of scarring was decorative. “*Tatouage décoratif*,” as Lemaire called it, which could be even more varied, encompassed a desire to please, even “coquetry” aimed at members of the opposite sex. But Lemaire emphasized that this “decorative” purpose had a significant and legible function: it carved into the skin structure, especially in the case of women, key elements of the individual’s life cycle. Rows of lines alternating with dots on the stomach or thighs, for example, marked a stage of childbirth or marriage—they were what Lemaire called “cutaneous inscriptions of biography.” In both cases, then, as Lemaire emphasized, the widespread Congolese practice of scarification composed a language that linked surface to essence, exposing on the body the structural marks of tribal belonging and individual identity.

Lemaire’s second principle was that *tatouage* operated as an abstract, nonrepresentational visual system. No figural forms appeared here; Lemaire’s gallery of skin scars described and illustrated a repertoire of graphic markings in a range of linear, circular, and curvilinear patterns. Lemaire presented them as a vocabulary of dots, dashes, loops, ridges, circles, spokes, diamonds, zigzags, X’s, grooves, crests, and parallel arcs. The logic of these shapes provided Lemaire’s third principle: the ornamenting scars followed and enhanced the structure of the body parts from which they protruded. The Boussira female face shows a “veritable fan” that opens out from the nose across the temples; the N’gombé’s *tatouage* traces the brows and flows across the temples and down to the chin (fig. 4). Lemaire’s grammar of Congolese ornament takes into account scars that fully covered the skin or provided accent marks: they all framed and punctuated faces with vital and directional ornament. Lines, curves, and ripples etched and reemphasized facial structure as they made patterns over brows, under eyes, and along cheekbones, jowls, and foreheads.

A final element of Lemaire’s conception of *tatouage* solidified the other three: he stressed the skill, challenge, and seriousness of scarification as an art form. In his comments on the Bangala, the warrior tribes of the Upper Congo, all four of these principles converged. The Bangala were among the best-known groups in the Free State and in Belgium, having been encountered by Stanley and enlisted by Coquilhat as soldiers in the earliest phases of the “Ubangi-Uelle” district organization; they also were among the largest group of natives transported to Belgium for the world’s fairs in 1894 and 1897. The distinctively Bangala scar design, Lemaire explained, might seem hideous at first glance but could soon be seen as impressive and full of “cachet.” It consisted of a wide vertical band down the forehead filled with raised skin pulled and molded far off



Fig. 4 (left)
Sketches of *tatouage* types.
From Charles Lemaire, "Les
tatouages," *Le Congo illustré*,
1892, 155.

Fig. 5 (center, top)
Sketch of Bangala *tatouage*
type. "Les tatouages," *Le*
Congo illustré, 1892, 154.

Fig. 6 (right, top)
"Sketch of Abasango *tatouage*."
From "Les tatouages," *La*
Belgique coloniale, 1897, 91.

Fig. 7 (center, bottom)
Baluba *tatouage* pattern.
From "Les tatouages," *La*
Belgique coloniale, 1897, 378.

Fig. 8 (right, bottom)
Mutungu and Popoie
tatouage patterns. From
"Les tatouages," *La Belgique*
coloniale, 1897, 318.

the surface, and sometimes it included pulpy scales cultivated along the lips (see fig. 3). Lemaire emphasized that to produce these patterns, incisions had to be made, and carefully tended, "from the most tender young age." In the Bangala *tatouage*, then, Lemaire identified what he called one of the "purest" types of this body art. These formidable warrior-artists expressed their collective identity in designs that fused skin and structure to embody their bold and uniquely "martial" physiognomy (fig. 5).¹⁵

Lemaire's remarkable article had many reverberations in the subcultures of imperial Belgium; a series of five articles in *La Belgique coloniale*, for example, expanded on his native *tatouage* types and supplied accompanying illustrations. Written to coincide with the Tervuren Congo exhibition of 1897, these articles by an anonymous author multiplied the faces and abstract patterns of Congo tribes and suggested that the visual typologies of these "*tatouages de race*" be distributed to district officers in the Congo Free State to help them identity native populations.¹⁶ The representations of structural, abstract, and dynamic body ornaments included not only natives' faces with the fanning and open rounded-V frames of lines, curves, and dots classified by Lemaire but a few upper bodies, along with discussion. Here the directional and mobile lines of ornament were conspicuous and visually arresting. The "Abasango" native, for example, carried on the skin lines forming a dotted double-headed arrow across

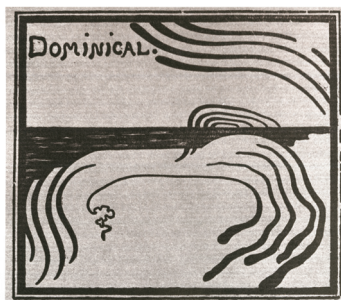


Fig. 9
Henry van de Velde, cover illustration for Max Elskamp's *Dominical*, 1891–92. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.

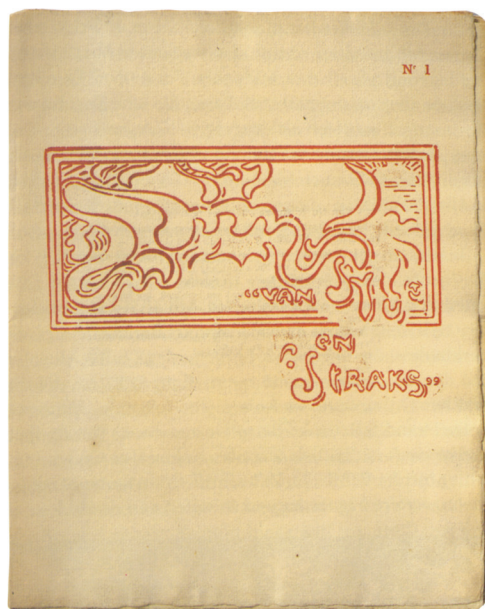


Fig. 10
Henry van de Velde, cover illustration for the magazine *Van Nu en Straks* (1892–93). © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.

his chest, marked at the midpoint with a bold X (fig. 6). Crisscrossing dotted lines swept across the chest and torso of the “Baluba” man (fig. 7), while the “Mutungu” man had rows of curving dotted lines with arrowheads at each end, a single arrowhead pointing down his upper arm and a double arrowhead pointing to his abdomen (fig. 8).¹⁷

The diffusion of ideas and images of *tatouages* left an indelible imprint on Henry van de Velde. Indeed, the years during which Congolese ornamental body art was publicized and exhibited as a visual logic in Belgium—1892 to 1897—coincided with Van de Velde’s turn away from painting to the applied arts, when he was engaged in developing his own theory and practice of art, craft, and modern structural ornament. Between 1890 and 1892, Van de Velde had struggled, unsuccessfully, to maneuver on canvas between two masters, Georges Seurat and Vincent van Gogh, and between two forms, the dot and the line, but realism kept slipping away from his representations.¹⁸ The graphic arts of woodcut and book design, and two projects in particular, liberated Van de Velde to experiment with the wave line inspired by ship and shore. In a book cover for *Dominical* (1891), a volume of poetry by his Antwerp friend Max Elskamp, flow of ink marks the domains of beach, sea, and sky; the distant horizon, brought near, is placid and laps in like a wave (fig. 9). The magazine cover for *Van Nu en Straks* (From Now On; 1893), by contrast, shows line let loose, rampant and bursting through the frame, propelled by a stylized ship, its sails at full swell, with sunlit rays peeking through in the upper right corner (fig. 10). After producing the pastel *liane* of 1893 (see Part I, fig. 37), Van de Velde relinquished the canvas altogether.

From 1893 to 1896, Van de Velde devised a set of courses on applied and industrial arts which he offered in both Antwerp and Brussels. And he wrote

a series of polemical articles championing a radical vision of reintegrating art and life, beauty and utility.¹⁹ At the center of courses and articles alike was Van de Velde's definition of modern ornament, divested of anecdotal realism and distinguished from mere surface "ornamentation." Van de Velde lambasted the flimsy excesses of existing commercial decoration as "lymphatic": devitalized and degraded. By contrast, modern ornament was to be dynamic, structural, and abstract; it was to express the inherent qualities of the materials being shaped, and it would fuse surface and essence. In a December 1895 article, Van de Velde's emerging ideas of modern integral ornament coalesced in a startling and vivid scene of an imagined African *tatouage*—a father carving the face of his very young child.²⁰

The article, "Une prédication d'art," in calling for a breakdown in the hierarchy of the arts, tied it to the British Arts and Crafts mentors who inspired Van de Velde. William Morris and Walter Crane both appear in the text as carriers of the democratization of the arts and the reunification of art and life. Van de Velde drew directly on Walter Crane's theory of ornament and the origins of art that appeared in his 1892 book, *The Claims of Decorative Art*.²¹ Crane argued that ornament originated in life and in the use objects of what he called "primitive" man. From the earliest hunter living in a cave to a "primitive clay potter," Crane noted, all humanity inheres with a "natural impulse" to mark the world with form. The child at play with clay exercises and recapitulates this impulse. Pressing stubby fingers into the soft surface charms the child, as it had the ancestral primitive; both made strokes and marks that they found to have a "pleasant and interesting effect."²²

Van de Velde turned Crane's ideas of primitive ornament in dramatic and unexpected directions; he followed the path of the *tatouage* culture available to him in imperial Belgium. In his 1895 article, Van de Velde introduced the origins of ornament, but not by referring to a generic and generalized "primitive man," as Crane had done. Van de Velde identified a particular primitive artist wholly absent in Crane's text: "le nègre." Crane's cheerful "natural impulse" to mark, bringing delight to both child and primitive potter, yields in Van de Velde's rendering to an irresistible "instinct" to invest the world with form. Van de Velde's *nègre* is a mature, masterful, and meticulous artist, not seeking the "pleasant and interesting effect" of Crane's primitive but initiating a solemn and portentous action of utmost "gravity" and virility. With nerves of steel and artistic skill, the "nègre/sauvage" of Van de Velde's vision unflinchingly applies his blade to slice and scar the skin of his crying child. Urgency, instinct, solemnity, and art as power come together in Van de Velde's description:

Instinct surely guides the *nègre* . . . who engraves the gourd that holds his drink, [and] ornaments the weapons . . . by which he defends himself. . . . Instinct guides [him] more certainly than any aesthetic doctrine. The desire for an ornamented life is so intense among the savage that, without hesitation, he takes his child from the arms of his companion and sits next to a river or on the threshold of his hut. In this solemn moment, inspired by everything around him, flowers, animals, ripples in the water, he cuts the skin of the child and tattoos it patiently [*entaille la peau de l'enfant, la tatoue*



Fig. 11 (top left)

Henry van de Velde, *Samovar*, 1897/1907. Silvered brass, wood (teak), 37.9 × 28.5 × 23.5 cm (14 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.). Gift of the Historical Design Collection; Mr. and Mrs. F. Lee Wendell and European Decorative Arts Purchase funds; Edward E. Ayer Endowment in memory of Charles L. Hutchinson; Bessie Bennett Endowment; Edward Chase Garvey Memorial; Walter C. Clark, Mrs. Oscar Klein, Mrs. R. W. Morris, and Mrs. I. Newton Perry, 1989.154. The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.



Fig. 12 (top right)

Henry van de Velde, ceramic jug with two handles and blue glaze, 1902. From *Der dekorativen Kunst*, 7 (May 1904): 324. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.



Fig. 13 (bottom right)

Henry van de Velde, three-legged wicker tea table. Fonds Henry van de Velde, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.

Fig. 14 (bottom left)

Henry van de Velde, wicker chair. Fonds Henry van de Velde, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.

patiemment], deaf to the cries that might tempt him to stop out of natural commiseration—if it did not concern a matter of such gravity—and then, with pride, he gives the child back to its mother, who is delighted.²³

Van de Velde's astonishing scene of ornament as scarification evokes the categories, images, and conceptual tools of Congolese body art that permeated his culture after 1885. The emphasis on the incisions on the very young child; the gravity and solemnity that Van de Velde underscores; the skill and imperturbability

of the native artist carving in blood and yielding new structure—all bear a striking affinity to Lemaire’s gallery of *tatouages* and the grammar of ornament from Africa constructed and circulating in fin-de-siècle Belgium.

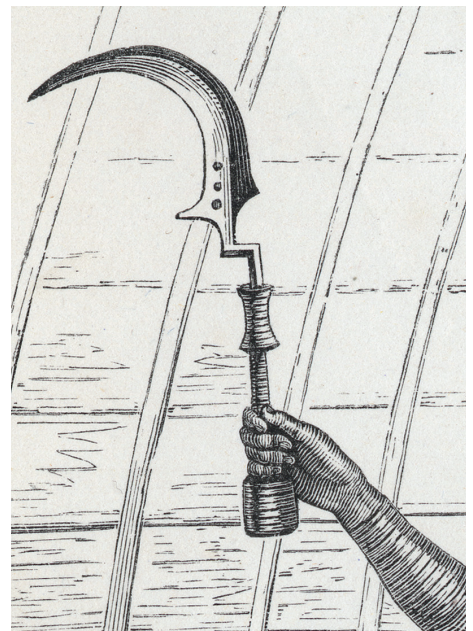
As Van de Velde’s theory and practice developed, ornament as skin scar provided a central resource in his design repertoire for modernism. The sprawling unpublished archive of his notes on line and ornament includes this explicit line, undated: “l’ornement est le tatouage de l’objet.” The simple words—“ornament is the tattooing [or, to be precise, “the scarring”] of the object”—crystallize both a habit of mind and an enduring visual technique. We can see how Van de Velde approaches the act of ornament as an integral structure, fusing surface and material, in a number of applied arts media. His samovar, for example, now in the Art Institute of Chicago’s collection, shows the artist’s carving of line and curve directly into the teakwood handle, which impresses ridges and indents on the hand that grasps it (fig. 11). Ivory letter openers cohere with similar deftly shaped forms scored, incised, and whittled to cross and curve (see Part I, fig. 19). A ceramic jug is etched with coiling patterns, linear waves, and rows of dots that protrude from its surface in a recapitulation of skin scar ornamentation (fig. 12).

Molding shape and material into surface and structural ornament also characterizes Van de Velde’s unusual and rarely discussed basket-woven furniture. Three- and four-legged tea tables carry “primitivist” overtones with African elements; the overall shapes suggest a jungle gazelle or an antelope, and the strips of stalk are bent to form bold rectilinear medallions (fig. 13). The fanning-out patterns on the back of a Van de Velde wickerwork chair bring to mind the dynamic directional pulse along the sculpted skin of natives, while nubs on the

Fig. 15
 Manufacturer: Meissen
 Porcelain Manufactory.
 Designer: Henry van de
 Velde, plate, 1904/05. Hard-
 paste porcelain, underglaze
 blue. Diameter: 26 cm (10¼
 in.). Gift of The Antiquarian
 Society, 1988.34. The
 Art Institute of Chicago.
 Photography © The Art
 Institute of Chicago. © 2012
 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
 New York / SABAM, Brussels.



Fig. 16
 Detail from frontispiece
 illustration of King Munza
 in Full Dress. From Georg
 August Schweinfurth, *The
 Heart of Africa* [in German],
 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1874).



front of the arms are raised to jut out in a series of wavy zigzag lines, recalling the scarified skin of the Bangala faces (fig. 14). A dinner plate in the Art Institute of Chicago's collection is adorned with a pattern of stylized Congo swords or knives as well as scarlike bubbles in the surface of the material (figs. 15–16).²⁴ Other protuberances bubbling up as scar patterns appear again in silver plates, boxes, and coasters designed by Van de Velde (fig. 17).



Fig. 17
Henry van de Velde, silver
bottle coaster, 1905. © 2012
Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / SABAM, Brussels.

Two final examples suggest the power of Congo *tatouage* in Van de Velde's artistic practice. Sometime after 1894, Van de Velde created a broad and low-slung armchair carved with tiered curving openings in varied woods, from oak and mahogany to cherrywood and padouk, a reddish wood from Africa. The 1897–98 version, now in the Trondheim collection, has a chair-back and seat-cloth decoration produced by Van de Velde's friend and collaborator the Dutch artist Johan Thorn Prikker, who was fascinated by the forms and techniques of batik fabrics from the Dutch East Indies and worked to re-create them in Europe (fig. 18).²⁵ In completing the chair, Van de Velde tacked brass points to fix the batik upholstery to the colored padouk wood. The studded surface surround, along with the abstract linear patterns on the cloth, recall the framing V patterns on the scarred faces of Congolese natives, and the motifs on the back and seat of the chair compose almost-smiling faces (fig. 19).

It is in Van de Velde's experiments with women's clothing in 1899–1900 that modernism and *tatouage* converge most clearly. His call for the simplification of line and the removal of the clasp of external ornamentation from women's heavily layered dresswear led him, aided by his wife, Maria, to design his own series of outfits for modern women.²⁶ He applied his ideals of dynamic and abstract ornament to the clothes, marking the surfaces with linear and curvilinear shapes that melded with the material as much as possible and accented the bodily forms that they covered. Arabesques ripple down the back of the outfit worn by the model in figure 20. Other clothing in this group reemphasizes the shoulders and upper back with zigzagging, curving lines and abstract patterns that settle and frame exactly those areas preferred in Congolese *tatouage* (fig. 21). In one coat Van de Velde drives a line of simple brocade from collarbone to legs in the front and from shoulder blades to legs in the back, re-creating a directional motif that echoes a convention of scar ornamentation. In another garment, a bodice, he designs parts that link across the chest with rectilinear and circular forms. The yoke at the neck and the cuffs on the sleeves, embroidered and worn by Maria van de Velde, limn the skin with bold and simple lines that bend and bow, recalling the shapes and mobility of lines and waves on Congolese bodies, where women, as Lemaire noted, showed their biographies on their ornamented skin (fig. 22). The protruberant spiral waves covering a woman's short jacket designed by Van de Velde provide a visual field of modern structural ornament like the grooves and ridges molding the skin of some of the *tatouage* faces in the Congo gallery of empire in 1890s Belgium.²⁷

The dynamic pulse of “line as a force” and of integral, structural ornament echoing the patterns of Congolese body art come together in Van de Velde's “*écritoire de dame*” (lady's writing desk, ca. 1897; fig. 23). A showpiece of his early furniture production in Belgium, this desk appears in the newly renovated

art nouveau displays in the Musée d'Orsay. By comparing it with a desk from the same period by Emile Gallé, exhibited nearby, we find a dramatic expression of divergent approaches to nature and modern design in Belgian and French art nouveau of the 1890s. The comparison also reveals a reliance on two very different languages of ornament. Gallé's work depicts in wood form and décor the motifs of a particular regional naturalism considered as luxuriant prompts to release a symbolist dreamworld. Divested of any pictorial program, Van de Velde's desk propels his wood material as linear structures whose arcs and movement follow the zigzag stripes and directional marks of African skin scars, exemplifying the visual logic of ornament as *tatouage*.

Gallé entitled his Orsay desk "La Forêt lorraine" (fig. 24). The glass and furniture maker from Nancy here created a work combining rococo elegance and what I would call visionary regionalism. The lakeside oak wood is inlaid all around with a scenic and painterly landscape that unfolds in multiple frames like a panorama; the marquetry panels on the sides, lid, and back show specific types of local orchids in different positions, at various stages of growth, and with distinctive foliage and flower heads. The Orsay catalogue calls the panels "veritable hymns of praise to the orchids of Lorraine" and their natural habitats. Yet for Gallé this representation in wood of his local area's hillsides and flowers was intended to transport the desk user to a realm beyond nature, inducing a dream state. The fragile fullness of the Lorraine orchids on the panels, bending, bowing, erect, and budding, offered evocative forms of a "voyage intérieur."



Fig. 18 (left)
Henry van de Velde, oak chair, and Johan Thorn Prikker, batik upholstery, 1897–98. Nordenfjeldske Kunstinstitut / National Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.

Fig. 19 (right)
Tatouage on a Kapilika woman. Collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium. Photo: A. Hutereau, 1913.



Fig. 20
Henry van de Velde,
design for women's
clothing, ca. 1900.
© 2012 Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York /
SABAM, Brussels.



Fig. 21
Henry van de Velde, tea
gown, ca. 1902. © 2012
Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / SABAM, Brussels.



Fig. 22
Tatouage on a Mangbele
woman. Collection of the
Royal Museum for Central
Africa, Tervuren, Belgium.
Photo: A. Hutereau, 1912.



Fig. 23 (left)

Henry van de Velde, desk, 1897. Mahogany and leather, 0.910 m × 1.335 m × 0.650 m. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo: Hervé Lewandowski. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.



Fig. 24 (right top)

Emile Gallé, "La Forêt lorraine" desk, 1900; displayed in the 1900 Paris Exposition. Sculpted lakeside oak with moldings and patinated bronze. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo: Patrice Schmidt. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 25 (right bottom)

Henry van de Velde, illustration for a chapter heading in his book *Die Renaissance im modernen Kunstgewerbe* (Berlin, 1901). © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SABAM, Brussels.

The top lid of the Lorraine Forest desk is inscribed, in delicate and fluid script, with the words "Forêt lorraine" and a passage from Baudelaire's poem "L'invitation au voyage." Gallé thereby links the celebration of his regionally specific landscape to the immaterial suggestion of the dreamworld in a palette of pressed colored wood:

Forêt lorraine
Tout y parlerait
À l'âme en secret
Sa douce langue natale.

(Lorraine Forest
All would speak
Secretly to the soul
In its sweet native tongue.)²⁸

Van de Velde's "Écritoire de dame" is molded and carved from bird's-eye mahogany and has a leather inset on the writing surface. The deft and simple design forms a network of solids and voids, with exposed structural parts of the solid wood material shaped into a rectilinear crossbar, splayed legs, and an arcing girder that joins the whole in a rhythmic zigzag flowing from one side to the other as it supports both drawers and central desk top. Where Gallé created a desk brimming with poetry and painted with a palette of woods to capture the fullness of local flora and the Lorraine Forest that generated them, Van de Velde proceeded by hollowing out and stripping down, concentrating on the solidity, pliability, and force of the wood material that was his medium. Gallé

composed a scenic naturalism, celebrating a topography of place; Van de Velde formalized not a scene in place but lines in space, lines of dynamic movement that, in his words, do not inhabit the site they are given, but create and constitute a new one, thereby “taking possession of it.”²⁹

Clues and traces of Congo ornament appear in the Van de Velde desk, as in the scooped and curved wood pieces set at the back of the drawer columns, which resemble the shields and knives illustrated in the many editions of Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent*, where native body arts were also featured. But the main impact of the Van de Velde desk is created by the curved girder that swoops through the object, supporting the writing surface and the drawers. By 1897, Van de Velde had developed this type of arc, formed by a flow of lines meeting as one across a swath of space; he used it, for example, in his elephantine design for the book cover honoring Secretary of State Edmond van Eetvelde, and he also transferred this format to the medium of graphic arts in his book illustrations (fig. 25). In the Orsay desk, the zigzag lines in Van de Velde’s wood girder bear a striking affinity to the lines and patterns that molded the skin of the Congolese natives. Callewaert’s *Mussuco Woman* shows these particular striations on her upper body (see fig. 1), and the Bangala warriors revered for their martial spirit carved their faces with similar forms (see fig. 5).

Van de Velde’s springy girder line animates the desk as it pushes through the frame set by the straight edge of wood on each side of the desk top. The boundary-breaking exhilaration that began with Van de Velde’s *Van Nu en Straks* cover, showing a ship in billowing sails bursting through its frame (see fig. 10), finds a new medium of expression here, recapitulating the distinctive forms of creativity unleashed by the expansionist line let loose over the map of Africa by King Leopold. Multiple frames, by contrast, mark and contain the marquetry orchids and landscapes on the surfaces of the Gallé desk; the individual scenes unite as a panoramic picture. In Gallé’s vision, a Baudelairean voyage sets off, commingling Lorraine Forest nature with murmuring voices speaking secretly to the soul in their sweet native tongue. Van de Velde’s imperial modernism fills his inner world with fantasies of another forest, distant, unseen, and reimagined in a Congo lexicon in his visual style. Here was a nature far from Gallé’s fragile orchids and tame meadows; this was, in Stanley’s words, the “ruthless forest,” packed with astonishing richness and dense with aerial, gripping *lianes*.³⁰ No sweet secret voices sounded here; the air was split by the crack of the flogging whip—the *chicotte*—and by the blast of the steamer horn and the explosions of dynamite brought by Bula Matari, the Rock Breaker.³¹

The Congo, then, provided Van de Velde with not only a structural force to his art nouveau line but a native source of modern ornament. Solemn, grave, and brave, in Van de Velde’s rendering, the faraway *nègre* skillfully and impassively cut into flesh to mold integral abstract patterns. The patient native artist inspired Van de Velde’s modernist vision of “scarring the object,” fusing form and function, surface and essence, in the body of his design.

The 1897 series of articles on Congolese *tatouage* in *La Belgique coloniale* noted that officials expected the progress of civilization in the Congo Free State to

lead to the decline of the culture of scarification, although state administrators might find it a useful tool at present.³² King Leopold and his civilizers did not foment a waning of this culture, but they did act to destroy it, along with countless native communities. The heart of Africa nonetheless gave life to the Art of Darkness that was Belgian art nouveau, and from it international modernism flowed with the lash, the vine, the elephantine, and the skin scar.

Henry van de Velde designed the wood plinth and the glass-and-iron display case for Charles van der Stappen's *Mysterious Sphinx*, the chryselephantine showpiece of the 1897 Tervuren Congo exhibition (see Part I, fig. 9). The *Sphinx* now takes its place in the new ivories gallery in Brussels without the original stand and case that Van de Velde built for it. One rare photograph shows the original display in the Gallery of Honor of the first Royal Museum in 1898, where the *Sphinx* in Van de Velde's case is set just behind the bust of King Leopold by Thomas Vincotte (fig. 26): the Sphinx appears to be beckoning to the king. A second photograph shows the *Sphinx* with the Van de Velde case and stand in 1910, now moved to a corner of the new Tervuren Royal Museum's Gallery of Honor (fig. 27). Nearby are other art nouveau furniture pieces composed of the Congo bilanga wood that Van de Velde used; above the glass box are wall mounts of Congo textiles. Van de Velde sealed the case with four strips of metal, which split at the top with knobby serpentlike heads echoing the open-mouthed silver snake of the ivory Sphinx inside.³³ Bracing the forms is a series of visible rivets at each corner, which accent the rampant figures while echoing in a visual pattern the dotted points on the swatches of Congo cloth above them.

We do not know what happened to the Van de Velde case and plinth, nor when they were removed from the Van der Stappen ivory figure. The *Sphinx* remained in the Tervuren museum until 1967 and was displayed there for decades; photographs after 1930 show the object without Van de Velde's case and stand. Although we have lost track of some artifacts, reconnecting the history of art nouveau to the Royal Congo Museum, where it flourished in its formative period, has brought many gains: a host of objects to revisit and analyze; the discovery of networks of patronage in Belgium, where modernism, imperialism, and liberalism interacted, linking prominent statesmen like Edmond van Eetvelde to industrialists like the Solvays; and a Congo lexicon of art nouveau as "Style Congo." Distinctively imperial visual forms, social circles, and cultural mentalities coalesced there in architecture and design.

A forgotten article by Henry van de Velde that gives a view of the collective psychology of expansionism in Belgium and the cultural dynamic that sustained it provides a link to the Royal Museum, past and present, which is my topic in the next article, about violence and colonial memory in Belgium (Part III). Writing in *Wallonia* in 1902, Van de Velde lamented the debilitated forms of modern design and celebrated, in contrast, the new work of his art nouveau colleague Gustave Serrurier-Bovy. He peppered the piece with general assertions about the nation of Belgium that echoed many voices of the period: he pointed to a nation beset by timorousness, incuriosity, and soul-sapping industriousness, a nation shaken to the core (*secouée*) by centuries of foreign conquerors and

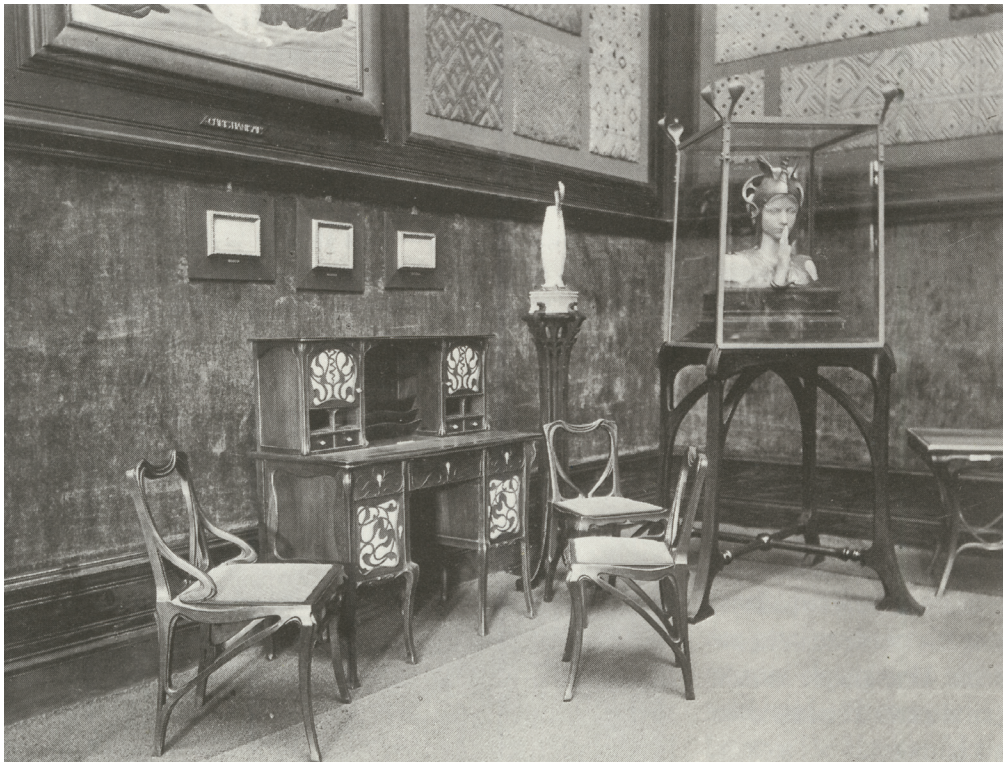


Fig. 26 (top)
Ivory bust of Leopold II
by Thomas Vincotte with
Charles van der Stappen's
Mysterious Sphinx in the
background, in a photograph
of the Gallery of Honor in
the Royal Congo Museum,
Tervuren, taken ca. 1898.
Collection of the Royal
Museum for Central Africa,
Tervuren, Belgium.

Fig. 27 (bottom)
Furniture by Gustave
Serrurier-Bovy, *Mysterious
Sphinx* by Charles van der
Stappen, and an ivory vase
by Philippe Wolfers in a
photograph taken in the new
Tervuren Royal Museum
in 1910.

domination, then confined to narrow frontiers and forced to be neutral in the decades after a hard-won independence.³⁴

In Van de Velde's view, three sources of vitality coexisted at the century's turn to redeem Belgium with equal portions of militancy and "passion." He exalted these sources at the end of his article: the militant avant-garde, breaking through the lethargy of stylistic inertia; the militant socialists, breaking into mass demonstrations and organizing public agitation; and the king, breaking beyond the boundaries of a Belgium constricted by European fiat by establishing "colonies" across the globe.³⁵ The trio of regenerative powers was essential, and it redirected legacies humiliatingly prohibited from expression. As Van de Velde suggested, militancy discovers compensatory arenas "in a country that cannot wage war [*dans un pays qui ne peut faire la guerre*]."

In the 1880s, after fifty years of peace and prosperity, many of Van de Velde's avant-garde comrades embraced the task of cultural renovation; as second-stage liberators for Belgium, they transmuted the political emancipation achieved by their "grandfather" patriots in 1830 into the quest for artistic and literary independence. Van de Velde developed this generational theme, adding to it the twin forces of political and imperial radicalism. His statement of 1902 is a rare contemporary articulation of the interdependence of the three.

■

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1 Debora L. Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part I," *West 86th* (Fall–Winter 2011): 170, 181.

2 Henry van de Velde, quoted in A. M. Hammacher, *Le monde de Henry Van de Velde* (Paris, 1965), 132.

3 For a recent and suggestive examination of inked tattooing and primitive ornament in the British world of William Morris, see Caroline Arscott, *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings* (New Haven, CT, 2008), chapter 6. My thanks to Alex Potts for mentioning this book to me and for his

helpful comments on the Belgian case.

4 Georg August Schweinfurth, *The Heart of Africa: Three Years of Travels and Adventures in the Unexplored Regions of Central Africa*, 2 vols., trans. Ellen E. Frewer (New York, 1874), 1:297–98.

5 Henry M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent; or, The Sources of the Nile around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean*, 2 vols. (1878; New York, 1988), 2:222–23.

6 Sabine Bompuku Eyenga-Cornelis, “Capteurs d’images: Dessinateurs, peintres et aquarellistes amateurs au Congo (1880–1908),” in Jacqueline Guissert, ed., *Le Congo et l’art belge, 1880–1960* (Tervuren, 2003), 79–84.

7 Henry M. Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, 2 vols. (New York, 1885).

8 A.-J. Wauters, *Le mouvement géographique*, 1885, 45–46, 79–100, 105, 108.

9 A.-J. Wauters, *Le Congo au point de vue économique* (Brussels, 1885), 37–46, esp. 40; the lecture and slide shows are noted in *Le mouvement géographique*, 1885, 8, 16. For more on Wauters’s ideology and publications on the Congo Free State, see Part I, 163 and nn51–53.

10 Lieutenant Liévin van de Velde, “La région du Bas-Congo et du Kwilou-Niadi: Usages et coutumes des indigènes,” *Bulletin de la Société belge de géographie*, 1886, in M. G. Alexis, *Le Congo belge illustré; ou, l’État indépendant du Congo sous la souveraineté de S. M. Léopold II, roi des belges* (Liège, 1887), 171–88.

11 Camille Coquilhat, *Sur le Haut-Congo* (Paris, 1888), 153. On the lectures, see Wauters, *Le mouvement géographique*, 1885, 96, 105.

12 Alexandre Delcommune, *Vingt années de vie africaine: Récits de voyages, d’aventures, et d’exploration au Congo belge, 1874–1893* [note the incorrect title of the Congo Free State], 2 vols. (Paris, 1922), 2:346. Photographs from this show and after it are scattered throughout Delcommune’s book. Joseph Conrad encountered Delcommune, one of two explorer-officers from Belgium in the Congo, at the start of Delcommune’s expedition to the Katanga region, completed in 1892. See “Les fêtes du Katanga,” *Le Congo illustré*, 1893, 80; and “Alexandre Delcommune,” *Le Congo illustré*, 1892, 121. Delcommune’s younger brother, Camille, was the manager of the station where Conrad worked briefly in Leopoldville. Conrad later immortalized Alexander Delcommune and the Katanga mission in *Heart of Darkness*. He cast Delcommune as the leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, named by Conrad to recall the lust for gold that galvanized the Spanish conquistadors, whom he called those “pertinacious searchers for El Dorado.” See Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford, 2002), 133, 211; Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life* (Rochester, NY, 2007), 155–66. The newly explored and occupied Katanga region had both a short-term and a long-term impact on American history: In 1906, King Leopold offered a valuable monopoly concession for operations in the copper mines there to a consortium of American investors, which included John D. Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, and Daniel Guggenheim. Leopold’s generous offer was known to be an attempt to silence the vociferous criticism of Congo Free State policies; by then there was an international movement with American politicians as vocal participants, along with Mark Twain, who wrote his stinging satirical indictment of King Leopold in 1905. The Katanga concession agreement mobilized pressures to defuse some of the criticism, especially among congressmen and senators beholden to the elite economic group; it also led to the suppression of discussion of the Twain pamphlet in the major newspapers under their influence and with financial backing. Resource-rich Katanga later provided the uranium used in the US atomic bomb. See Stefan Heym, introduction to *King Leopold’s Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule* (1905; New York, 1994), 11–27; and Robert Wuliger, “America’s Early Role in the Congo Tragedy,” *The Nation*, October 10, 2007.

13 Maurits Wynants, *Des ducs de Brabant aux villages congolais: Tervuren et l’Exposition coloniale 1897* (Tervuren, 1997), 52–57, 119–30; Dr. V. Jacques, *Les Congolais de l’Exposition universelle d’Anvers* (Brussels, 1895); Maarten Couttenier, *Congo tentoongesteld: Een geschiedendis van de Belgische antropologie en het museum van Tervuren (1882–1925)* (Leuven, 2005), 132–59. On page 137 Couttenier includes an archival photograph of Bangala women from the 1894 Antwerp exhibition showing the scarification patterns on their faces and naked bodies.

14 Lieutenant Charles Lemaire, “Les tatouages,” *Le Congo illustré*, 1892, 154–55. Other writers, such as A.-J. Wauters, echoed this idea, referring to the distinguishing scar patterns as “tatouage national.”

15 Lemaire, “Les tatouages,” 154. The warrior Bangalas, the first local natives recruited by Lieutenant Coquilhat for the state Force publique, were concentrated in an area the Belgians named Nouvelle Anvers, “New Antwerp.” See, for example, Henry Wellington Wack, *The Story of the Congo Free State: Social, Political, and Economic Aspects of the Belgian System of Government in Central Africa* (New York, 1905), 165–88.

16 “Les tatouages,” *La Belgique coloniale*, 1897, 89–91, 113–14, 316–18, 377–78.

17 *Ibid.*, 90, 91, 318, 378.

18 On the early emulation of these two masters, and the tension between them in Van de Velde’s emerging nonfigurative style, see Susan M. Canning, *Henry Van de Velde (1863–1957): Schilderijen en Tekeningen / Paintings and Drawings* (Ghent, 1987). Interestingly, Van de Velde characterized Van Gogh’s active, vigorous handling of line and paint in specific, violent terms which would have been alien to Van Gogh. Van Gogh defined his brushwork and his painting of peasant subjects and others as a form of “agir-créer”—that is, he worked the images of work on the canvas. Van de Velde

considered Van Gogh's handling as wound, not work—as what he called “balafré,” an act of slicing or slashing the canvas and its figures. On Van Gogh's *agir-créer* and labor, see Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York, 2000). Van de Velde's statement on Van Gogh's *balafré* is quoted in Susan M. Canning, “The Symbolist Landscapes of Henry van de Velde,” *Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 130–36.

19 For a full list of the courses, lectures, pamphlets, and articles of 1893 to 1896 and their venues, see Hammacher, *Le monde de Henry Van de Velde*, 112–13; and Leon Ploegaerts and Pierre Puttemans, *L'oeuvre architecturale de Henry van de Velde* (Laval, 1987).

20 Henry van de Velde, “Une prédication d'art,” *La société nouvelle* 132 (December 1895): 733–44; and Van de Velde, *Aperçu en vue d'une synthèse d'art* (Brussels, 1895).

21 Amy Ogata, “Artisans and Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle Belgium: Primitivism and Nostalgia,” in Lynda Jessup, ed., *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto, 2001), 171; Walter Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London, 1892).

22 Crane, *Claims of Decorative Art*, 107.

23 Van de Velde, “Une prédication d'art,” 736. Emphasis his.

24 I explore the curved sword from the Congo both as artifact in collections and as image of native culture and society from 1876 to 1908 in my book in progress. Van de Velde's fascination with the bladed arabesque, adapted from Congo weaponry familiar to him, appears in his early wallpaper patterns as well as in the illustrated Chicago plate (see fig. 15). The Los Angeles County Museum of Art has a full set of this dinner service.

25 M. H. (Marjan) Groot, “Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau and the Dutch Gallery Arts and Crafts,” *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 1–19.

26 Van de Velde presents his critique of women's fashion and his alternatives to it (including one ensemble designed by Peter Behrens) in two key texts: his pamphlet *Die künstlerische Hebung der Frauentracht* (Krefeld, 1900), and “Das neue Kunst-Prinzip in der modernen Frauen-Kleidung,” *Kunst und Dekoration* 3 (1902): 363–71 and unnumbered full-page plates. Maria van de Velde wrote her own article on the topic, also with photographs of the new designs: “Sonderausstellung moderner Damenkostume,” *Die Kunst* 4, no. 1 (1901): 41–48.

27 The jacket (ca. 1898) can be seen in Erika Gysling-Billetir, *Objekte des Jugendstils: Aus der Sammlung des Kunstgewerbemuseum Zurich* (Bern, 1975), 140; see also the vest shown in Hammacher, *Le monde de Henry Van de Velde*, 198; in both designs the raised curves circle and mold the shape of the breasts they cover.

28 Musée d'Orsay, “Emile Gallé, Lorraine Forest Desk,” under Collections, Works in Focus, Decorative Arts, <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/decorative-arts.html>, retrieved 4/4/12. On Gallé's ideas and practice of the decorative arts, the rococo, symbolism, and the psyche, see Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), 229–69.

29 Hammacher, *Le monde de Henry Van de Velde*, 134.

30 Henry M. Stanley, *In Darkest Africa: On the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria*, 2 vols. (New York, 1891), 2:75–111; see also Part I, 163–65, 172n6, 180nn58–60.

31 Stanley reported that the name Bula Matari was given to him by the natives because he used dynamite to make his way through some of the Congo terrain in 1878–85. By 1890, the term had been transferred to King Leopold as sovereign of the Congo Free State, with journals like *Le Congo illustré* describing military exercises and ceremonies for the Force publique troops during which they saluted their ruler, the king, as “Bula Matari.”

32 “Les tatouages,” *La Belgique coloniale*, 1897, 89–90.

33 The double-headed serpent was also featured on the 1897 book cover that Van de Velde designed for Van Eetvelde's *Liber memorialis* celebrating the secretary of state's work at the 1897 Tervuren Congo exhibition, as well as on the large doorway mural in Van de Velde's Export Room for the fair. See Silverman, Part I, p. 158 and n42.

34 For expressions of the themes of “beset masculinity” and national torpor among the 1890s literary and legal avant-gardes, and expansionism in Africa as a redemptive response to these conditions, see Debora Silverman, “*Modernité sans frontières*: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of the Avant-Garde in King Leopold's Belgium, 1885–1910,” *American Imago* 68, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 707–97.

35 Henry van de Velde, “Un ingénieur-décorateur liégeois, M. G. Serrurier-Bovy,” *Wallonia: Recueil de littérature orale, croyances et usages populaires* 10, no. 12 (December 1902): 285–86, 295–96 (quotations). Van de Velde's passage on page 295 about shaking off the torpor in Belgium compares this condition to the cover of heavy dark clouds that dominate the country in the winter months; his rhetoric about dispersing the dark clouds recalls the early public statement of King Leopold about opening up Africa to civilization. Leopold said, in often-repeated phrases, that “penetration” of Africa would “open it up for civilization” and bring light by banishing dark shadows: “penetration” would “pierce the darkness that envelops whole peoples [*percer les ténèbres qui enveloppent les peuples entiers*].” This last statement circulated widely and was inscribed permanently on the gallery walls of the new Tervuren Royal Congo Museum that opened in 1910.