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| **Tshelantende** |
| **Djilatendo** |
| Tshelantende was an artist, tailor, and hunter born before the turn of the 20th century in Luluaburg, today’s Kananga, and lived until 1950s in Ibanshe in the Kasai region of the Belgian Congo colony. As an artist, Tshelantende was known for his mural paintings depicting scenes of day-to-day colonial life which later on served as references for his oeuvre of watercolor paintings. As an amateur and autodidact in the field of art, Tshelantende was free to choose his subjects and to develop his individual style of visual representation, combining local traditions with appropriations of European imagery in a realistic manner. Visualisation served as means to objectify and hence distance oneself from the ongoing process of transformation and at the same time bring attention to certain topics. |
| Tshelantende was an artist, tailor, and hunter born before the turn of the 20th century in Luluaburg, today’s Kananga, and lived until 1950s in Ibanshe in the Kasai region of the Belgian Congo colony. As an artist, Tshelantende was known for his mural paintings depicting scenes of day-to-day colonial life which later on served as references for his oeuvre of watercolor paintings. As an amateur and autodidact in the field of art, Tshelantende was free to choose his subjects and to develop his individual style of visual representation, combining local traditions with appropriations of European imagery in a realistic manner. Visualisation served as means to objectify and hence distance oneself from the ongoing process of transformation and at the same time bring attention to certain topics. Therefore, his murals were not made for European connoisseurs of art first of all, but were visual comments on contemporary life for people passing by. Comparable to street art today, the murals provided public access to colonial discourse, a possibility to become involved, make comments and start discussions. In this sense, the 1930s watercolors can be ‘deciphered as an intellectual and artistic form of reading the colonial West’ according to Bogumil Jewsiewicki. Tshelantende entered the discourse of modernity, characterised by shifts between local and global issues and negotiated between the poles. Appropriation was not a one-way street.  In 1930, the Belgian colonial officer Georges Thiry who was excited about Tshelantende’s murals, commissioned him to transfer the motifs with watercolors on to paper. Besides being delicate works of art, the watercolors offer today’s spectators an insight into the Congolese perspective on colonial times. They depict situations of day-to-day life such as a colonial officer with a typewriter and a bottle to his side, soldiers of the Force Publique, a European couple walking hand in hand, a missionary with a pipe, a doctor distributing medicine (see illustration), a lady with an umbrella, technical achievements like an aeroplane, a car, a bicycle, a motor vessel and attributes of European lifestyle such as tables, chairs, flowerpots, bottles, and dogs on leashes. Furthermore, Tshelantende illustrated scenes of hunting and animals in the forest, distinguished by their pugs, in some cases referring to local tales. The negative spaces between figures are often filled with bands and areas of ornament, for which the Congo was known.  The watercolor paintings were sent to Brussels, where the recipient, Gaston-Denis Périer, a connoisseur of the arts in the ministry of colonial affairs, made extensive efforts to exhibit them within the context of European modern art. But at the time, Périer failed because gallery owners, curators and spectators were not ready to accept the paintings from the colonies as art on an equal footing. Today, the about 250 watercolor paintings of Tshelantende are mostly archived in museums in Brussels as well as seventy more in Belgian private collections plus seven in the collection of the Iwalewa Haus, Bayreuth, Germany. An overall exhibition is still missing.  File: Tshelantende.jpg  Figure 1. Untitled. Watercolor on paper, 73.0 x 101.5 cm. Collection: Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth. Catalog #: G00204 ZK  Source: contact Sigrid Horsch-Albert <sigrid.horsch-albert@uni-bayreuth.de> |
| Further reading:  (Jewsiewicki)  (Langenohl)  (Langenohl, 'Repeat when necessary' - zum Verhältnis von Tradition und Moderne im malerischen Werk Tshelantendes (Djilatendo)) |